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BETTER TOGETHER:  
LEADERSHIP THAT ENHANCES MINISTRY COLLABORATION

by

KRISTINE K. BJORKE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*Better Together:  
Leadership that Enhances Ministry Collaboration*

by

Kristine BJORKE

This project is an exploratory case study research project of three different collaborative efforts consisting of one or more congregations working together or a congregation and agency working together. Each entity operated independently prior to working together. Collaboration was understood through the theoretical lenses of adaptive leadership and collaboration theory as well as a biblical and theological understanding of the body of Christ and *perichoresis*. Qualitative research using interviews and focus groups was used to identify how leadership enhances ministry collaboration. Three findings emerged with regard to leadership: flexibility, proactive communication, and external support, each with internal and external indicators.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1*

Never in a million years would I have thought that I would be part of participating and doing a Doctor of Ministry program. It was an impulsive decision over conversation and beverages at the ELCA Youth Ministry Extravaganza. Doctoral work would still not be in reach if it not for the surrounding of a *great cloud of witnesses*. This was truly a group effort.

To my family, Emily, Julia, and Scott: For encouraging me and believing in me and trusting this process. When I started the DMin process, both of my girls were still in high school. Now both have since graduated and are creating lives of their own. Our family is my cozy spot. I love you all! It is because of each of you that I have dedicated my life, work, and attempted to manage all the crazy hours.

My extended family: You were the first to teach me about what it means to work together. To truly collaborate. Being the youngest of eight in a blended family when I was eight years old took both great effort and ease in learning how to work together and love each other even though at times we might not have liked each other. Through it all my parents; Karen, Chuck, Wayne, Linda, and my in-laws, Bud and Kay, have been this undergirding of support. I am so grateful and blessed. My brother and sisters and their families still continue to inspire.

To my cohort and professors: I have said it before and I will say it again, if it was not for each of you I would have quit a long time ago. Your passion for the Gospel, your wisdom and play astound me. We have laughed, cried, and poured our hearts out to each other on this journey. I have been imprinted by your encouragement along the way, as well as by our many late-night outings, conversations and even karaoke.

To InterServe Ministries, the nonprofit that Sue Megrund and I founded and developed fourteen years ago: What a ride! To the many congregations who have trusted us with your ministries and your young people. THANK YOU! To our associates who give of themselves often thanklessly: know I am indeed grateful.

To the endless cloud of others: colleagues in ministry, churches I have served in interim, my home church Lord of Life in Maple Grove, Minnesota, transcribers, editors, friends texting me words of encouragement, spiritual directors, ministry coaches, plus many others. It may have been a four-year process, but in "DMin Years" it felt like a little more like twenty.

Finally to God: THANK YOU for making all things possible and for setting me on a trajectory in high school to pursue one of the most rewarding careers imaginable. Working alongside teenagers and their families in congregational settings has been truly inspiring to me. The opportunity to assist God's congregations in transition through InterServe Ministries has only enriched this calling. To God be the glory!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELCA            Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

NRSV            New Revised Standard Version

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

**Introduction**

As the mainline American church prepares to enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, it has found itself at a crossroads, facing the questions "How much longer can we survive this decline?" and "How much longer can we keep the status quo before something drastic has to change or we cannot continue?" Speculations have been made around the reasons for this downturn. A Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study found that 14.7% of United States adults are affiliated with the mainline Protestant tradition. This percentage is down from 18.1% in the last Landscape Study conducted in 2007.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, giving within churches is down. In 2011, professing Christians gave 2.3% of their income to the church. During the Depression era, when not giving to the church would seem most likely due to economic and home budgeting, the giving average was 3.3%. Perhaps even more troubling is that 50% of church members report that they give nothing at all to the church.<sup>2</sup> Christian ministry is in a stage of transition and facing severe turmoil.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Lipka, "Mainline Protestants Make Up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults", *Pew Research Center*, May 18, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Burgess, "Religion New Service" *The Washington Post*, October 24, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 23.

The double dose of lower congregational numbers and a decline in giving creates the perfect storm. Perhaps within this storm is an opportunity--one that will encourage congregations, if not force them, to find more cost-effective ways to address ministry needs. In other words, churches are at a point in history where, if they have not already, they will be forced to change or die. Having change on the horizon invites the local congregation to discover the power and energy of the Holy Spirit who is always actively innovating, as demonstrated through the Scriptures. In the creation story, God calls out light from darkness; the world is created, and the Spirit is hovering over the waters of the deep. In John 16, Jesus reassures the disciples that the Holy Spirit will be sent in his name to teach them and remind them what was told to them. Of course, the ultimate expression of innovation is found in the Spirit raising Jesus from the dead. One might even say that the entire Bible is a record of the Spirit's innovative and collaborative work amidst God's people. This time in our history is no different.

One of the common elements of the Spirit's innovative work in the Scriptures is the work of collaboration. Research at the University of Tennessee has found innovation and collaboration are not mutually exclusive; they feed upon each other. In fact, one might argue that innovation and collaboration correlate and parallel one another because innovation rises out of collaborative conversations. It is not an either-or situation. Innovation happens through collaboration. Additionally, a Nielsen study on how collaboration drives innovative success found ideas developed by teams of three or more people have 156% greater appeal to those who would benefit from the idea than those developed by teams where just one or two people have played a hands-on role. Organizations that consistently achieve high levels of collaboration on product concepts

can substantially improve competitive advantage and revenue.<sup>4</sup> It is arguable that the church is different than products. However, the focus in the church arena is on working together to provide ministry to more people by utilizing the gifts of the many. When people come together to think, to wonder, and to invite God into their conversation, innovation can happen.

### **Research Topic and Question**

When I first began this thesis, I started with a different angle on leadership. I was planning on looking at faith practices, like prayer and discernment, that leaders utilized when collaborating in ministry. In the middle of searching for faith practices, I discovered that it might be more. The characteristics of the leader and the practices of the leader were more towards what I was actually looking for. Scripture tells us in Matthew that where two or three are gathered in his name, Jesus is there among them. The collaborative ideas and possibilities of God become clearer and more focused as they are discussed and brainstormed in partnership with others. The objective of collaboration is to share the work, discovering more possibilities together than what could have been done individually. In the end my research question emerged: *"How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?"*

While discovering a topic that piqued my interest, I wanted to think about how two or more individual entities come together to work on a common purpose utilizing the resources from both financial or otherwise to make something that benefits all parties.

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<sup>4</sup> "How Collaboration Drives Innovation," The Nielsen Company, accessed March 2015, [www.nielsen.com/content/dam/niensenglobal/kr/docs/global-report/2016/how-collaboration-drives-innovation-success-march-2015.pdf](http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/niensenglobal/kr/docs/global-report/2016/how-collaboration-drives-innovation-success-march-2015.pdf)

Given smaller congregation sizes, pastor shortages, and lower giving, it seems reasonable that there is ripeness for ministry organizations to find ways to share resources in an effort to maximize ministry efforts. When I think about the shrinking size of mainline churches, the church is poised with an opportunity to consider how they might live out their call as a church within the community where they are connected. It is the shrinking that makes each church poised to wonder about how to faithfully move forward.

### **Introduction to Methodology, Method, and Design**

For my research, I conducted three case studies. I looked for two (or more) separate entities that chose to work together. At least one entity needed to be a church. The other entity could be another church (or churches) that came together, or the entity could be an independent organization that chose to partner with a church or churches. My curiosity focused around how the initial conversation about working together led to their current places in the evolution of the shared ministry. The first case study, CAMP, utilized a youth worker that worked half-time with seven different churches. The second case study, AGENCY, included a large suburban congregation who discovered they had space and volunteers, and the local chapter of the Salvation Army who needed office space. This started the conversation, which led to a collaboration of needs-based services for the community and, eventually, the county. The third collaboration, PASTOR, was an effort in a rural area to hire a full-time pastor. Ten churches worked together to discover how they might remedy the challenge of affording a pastor.

Collaboration at its core is a means of coming together to create something. This happens all the time in nature, homes, cities, countries, and the world. There are many

different ways to come together. It is my work with InterServe Ministries<sup>5</sup> over the last fourteen years that has led me to wonder how we might be less independent in our ministries and become more interdependent, sharing resources. At InterServe I have seen congregations that once hired staff for children, middle school, and high school ministries no longer be able to sustain individual staffing and so combine children and youth ministry into one full-time position. In more recent years, children and youth ministry have combined into one half-time position. These congregations are grieving a more numerically fruitful time in their history as a congregation yet are adapting to new realities.

Could a new mindset open congregations to new possibilities? In particular, my question with regard to collaboration revolves around how leadership is shared and negotiated. Churches have a deep emotional ethos surrounding them, so how can we help churches reach outside themselves and work with others? Could the Spirit be at work integrating, refining, and urging entities to work together in this economic climate? How do we address or set aside theological differences for the sake of working together for a common mission or purpose? What type of leadership provides the best chance for the collaboration to be effective? These are the questions I explore in this thesis.

One must acknowledge that even with the best of intentions, collaborative partnerships do not always work. Some partnerships succeed while others fail, and others land somewhere in the realm of mediocrity and slowly die away. As a result, innovation is not realized. What is the difference between those that succeed, those that grow

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<sup>5</sup> InterServe Ministries is a non-profit organization-providing ministry to congregations in times of children, youth and family ministry transition. Founded and directed by Kris Bjorke and Sue Megrund. [www.interserveministries.org](http://www.interserveministries.org).



stagnant, and those that do not work? I believe the difference is what I call the practice and presence of leadership. How leadership enhances ministry collaboration at this juncture of the church is less clear, which led me to my research question.

The goal of my research was to identify leader characteristics and practices that create environments for collaboration. From those collaborations, I have been able to identify characteristics and practices of leadership that stand in contrast to established church leadership habits. In turn, these patterns can point the church toward a hopeful future that very well could assist the church through this time of massive transition. It is my fervent hope and prayer that as we lean into the twenty-first century, the church, in an effort to reform or die, will take the opportunity to look into the faces of other churches and agencies and wonder how God might be calling us to work together.

### **Variables**

There were several variables as I began the work of researching *how does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?* I am looking at how leadership contributes to an environment where people working together can flourish. Because of the individualistic tendencies of the congregations, the extent to which one provides leadership, and how that leadership is executed, will be an independent variable. Congregations tend to keep many of their ministry endeavors within the context of their church. The dependent variable is success in the collaborative effort. What effect does leadership have on the ability of the collaboration to be perceived as a successful venture?

After studying the relationship between the independent variables, leadership characteristics and practices, and the dependent variables of the collaborative effort, there

are numerous intervening variables. One is the health of the organizational system of the congregation. Organizations with unhealthy systemic histories will bring those unhealthy patterns into the collaboration.

### **Importance of Research Question**

There are many reasons this research question is important, but three take priority. Mother Theresa said, "I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot: together we can do great things." It may sound extremely idealistic, but I believe with my whole heart it is true. The first reason this research is important is I believe when we work together we can do great things. Is it easier to collaborate? Probably not. We know that when we work together it can be more difficult to manage people and expectations, making progress may take longer with no guarantees. Yet the church is called to be one body engaged and connected to the work. Collaboration is essential to this calling. What will it take for the church to look outside its own entity and engage the world in ways that it could not on its own?

In my work with InterServe, our mission is to provide interim staff leadership in the area of children and youth ministry during times of transition. We are constantly working with churches that recognize that they are struggling to survive financially. The ability to move beyond survival to thriving is not even on their radar. Therefore, the second reason this is an important question for me is because I want to follow the alternative ways God might be calling us to be church.

Finally, there is a collective mainline belief that things will get better without serious strategic innovation and by continuing to do the same thing we have always done. This leaves us bereft of the joy and energy that comes from trying new things. It is like

saying the communication challenges we have in our world of technology could be fixed by ridding ourselves of Facebook and smart phones. Church leaders talk about their days of larger worship attendance and attribute that perceived success as the recipe for success in the twenty-first century. Could it be that God is inviting us in to a new way of being church, different than what we have known? These technical adaptations will leave us more frustrated than the adaptive work it will take to make significant contextual shifts. Because I live in a Midwest metropolitan area, there is a plethora of mainline churches. I believe working in collaboration with others is a valuable and efficient means to accomplish ministry to all ages. The motivation that brings people together will be varied. Some strategic partnerships will be based on congregational mission. Others may reach out due to necessity because of diminishing resources and for the purpose of utilizing each other's strengths in ministry. Could it be that coming together is part of God's vision for the church to meet the needs of the community? Whatever the reason, leadership plays an important role. Collaboration offers hope for these churches, and this research has given me a new set of skills to empower my work with InterServe and wherever else I may be called to serve in the future.

### **Theoretical Lenses**

Theoretical lenses that I use throughout this work include adaptive leadership and collaboration theory. The biblical and theological lenses I am using to view my research are the image of the body of Christ and *perichoresis*. Combined, these lenses will provide a rationale for considering the successful qualities of a collaborative effort based on leadership styles.

## Adaptive Leadership

Pastors, by the nature of their call, are placed into leadership. How pastors and lay leaders come to work together varies. In their book *The Practices of Adaptive Leadership*, Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow invite readers to act courageously and engage in continuous reflection as they seek to become agents of change. To the authors, leadership is "the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive."<sup>6</sup>

Many leaders in congregations recognize the need for renewal in their approach to ministry. There are numerous books and strategies that have trended throughout the last thirty years. How does a church choose one? Leaders have often been notorious for grabbing the latest trending book and working to infuse it into the life of the congregation. The difficulty here is that different gifts, ministry contexts, or congregational culture are not taken into consideration and the theory is then difficult to authentically replicate.

Adaptive leadership recognizes there are challenges that arise that do not have an answer. If there was a question such as which color carpet to put in the youth room the answer is technical, meaning an answer already exists, it is just a matter of picking a color. The adaptive challenge is acknowledging an answer does not exist, but the leader can bring the group through conversation that provides opportunities to experiment with multiple ideas.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14.

Through all of this, one must have a deeper understanding of three things: one's gifts including congregational assets, understanding the uniqueness of your ministry context, and a deep understanding of the current situation so you can discern what theory or practice is most helpful. This is hard work and leaders need help doing this.

### Collaboration Theory

There is little doubt that something needs to change, adapt, and evolve in the coming decades for congregations to live into God's mission. Adaptive leadership may be one piece of the puzzle. Collaboration is defined as any on-going interpersonal interaction not characterized by a significant power imbalance, with the express purpose of achieving common goals. When a church or organization chooses the path of collaboration, it is to focus on aligned or complementary interests instead of opposing interests. Collaborators view the others' interests as being worthy of respect and of equal treatment. When negotiating and communicating with such a collaborative mindset, the aim is to truly understand one another and to reach a mutually acceptable outcome. The next chapter will go into more depth about the nature of collaborative work. We work in natural collaborations all the time. Whether a grade school party, assisting someone on the side of the road with car trouble, or working on a team project, there are endless opportunities to work together.

### **Biblical and Theological Lenses**

#### Body of Christ

I am using the biblical lens of the body of Christ as a way to look at ministry collaboration. In First Corinthians, Paul writes about Spiritual gifts, which were poured

out on the Corinthian church. This variety of gifts are given by God and intended for the building up of God's world. Paul makes the connection of the various gifts in reference to a human body, in which all the members have a mutual relation and each has its purpose. Each person brings a unique gift and each gift is just as important as another. Working together, the gifts become integral for the body to operate as one unit.

### *Perichoresis*

The theological lens I will be using in this thesis is the perichoretic understanding of the Trinity. Worshipping a Triune God is the aspect that distinguishes Christianity from other world religions. As Christians, we confess that God is Triune or, more specifically, that God is one God existing as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is separate in and of itself yet is always in a common symbiotic relationship with the other two. Father is separate from the Son and the Holy Spirit, yet never exists outside of the relationship that the Father shares with the Son. And the same is true for the the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God, by definition, is relational. This relationship embodies working together. Including each of us, the Triune God seeks to be in relationship with the whole world, whether they are part of a worshipping congregation or not, or are Christian or not. Part of this lens includes the work of the Triune God on behalf of the church and noting that God's activity is not limited to the church. Rather, the Trinity flows and extends to invite each of us to participate in God's work in the world. We are gathered and sent into the world. It makes sense, then, that as congregations feel called, they would enter into relationship with other organizations, utilizing prayer and discernment to discover ways

to affect change in the world. As Matthew 18:20 prompts us, “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used for this research was exploratory case studies using qualitative methods. I was an outside person meeting with willing participants for the research. I chose this methodology because as a researcher I have a curiosity about people working together and I sought to understand more about what leadership characteristics and practices keeps them together over time. The questions used for the interviews and focus groups were field tested on colleagues that work in a ministry profession.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Adaptive Leadership** A practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is being able, both individually and collectively, to take on the gradual but meaningful process of change. It is being able to address challenges that arise, not with technical solutions that already exist, but with adaptive lenses that provides insight to new innovation in the midst of challenges.

**Agency** An organization that exists on its own, independent from other organizations. In this thesis agency is considered a non-profit organization.

**Collaboration** The action of working together with another group to create something that could not be attained by oneself.

**Congregation** A community of faith led by a pastor and people who voluntarily meet together on a regular basis for worship.

**Innovation** The action of something new or different being introduced.

Introduction of new things or methods. Not always new ideas, but can also include adopting new ideas in the organization in some way.

***Perichoresis*** A Greek term referring to the relationship of the three persons of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to one another.

**Practices** To perform an activity or skill regularly in order to improve or maintain one's proficiency.

### **Conformation to IRB Standards and Ethical Considerations**

As this is a qualitative research project, one area of ethical concern is my own participation as the person asking the questions and as the researcher. I was careful to not ask leading questions that could lead participants to specific answers in either the interviews or focus groups. The questions were field tested on colleagues in ministry and questions were modified by priority, what I most wanted to learn from the collaborations. The protocols are reflected in appendices D and E. I followed my designed questions and the order in which they were placed, and I made good use of coding and journaling to ensure that my analysis of the data was as unbiased as possible.

Since my research consisted of qualitative case studies, information was gathered through interviews and focus groups conducted with the designated leaders of the congregations and organizational leaders. Every participant being interviewed was made aware that, as the researcher, I would be asking the questions, observing, and digitally recording each interview and focus group. While I provide individual quotes in my research paper, the individuals are not identified by name. Locations remain anonymous and pseudonyms are used for names. Participants were informed that by participating,



they were research subjects. Each interview was recorded with permission of the individual or individuals that participated in accordance with Luther Seminary's IRB informed consent form.

No sensitive information was discussed or collected as part of this research, and participation was completely optional. There were no benefits or rewards for those who participated. The signed IRB forms are stored in a secure area in my home office. The digital recordings are password protected and stored on my personal computer. All data will be destroyed after three years according to Luther Seminary's IRB policy.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have introduced the research topic, discussed its implications for the mainline church of today, and introduced the theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses through which I have designed and implemented the research. The mainline church is in a state of confusion after realizing that conventional ways of being church have not led to growth but rather decline. I believe this downward trend will continue if those who lead the churches are not attentive to the changing landscape of ministry and the contexts in which they find themselves. Utilizing adaptive leadership is the only option for moving the church forward, and collaboration provides one option for innovation to take root during this confusing time. Applying the theoretical lenses of collaboration theory and adaptive leadership, I use the theological lens of *perichoresis* and the biblical lens of the body of Christ to show God as the active agent in the work that congregations and organizations wish to do together. Chapter two will explore in depth the theoretical lenses through which my research was analyzed.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL LENSES

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I provided my research question as well as a brief introduction of the qualitative research I conducted. I also introduced the theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses that informed my research. This chapter provides a deeper understanding of the theoretical lenses of collaboration theory and adaptive leadership, which informed the research.

#### **Collaboration Theory**

There is an old adage, "Do what you do best and partner for the rest." This adage recognizes there are limits to what we can accomplish on our own, but also captures the positive energy essential for successful collaboration. Collaboration is defined as any on-going interpersonal interaction not characterized by a significant power imbalance, with the express purpose of achieving common goals.

Collaboration at its best brings together the people it benefits. Collaboration is not just the latest trend to draw others in and break down silos; it is the way to get results.<sup>1</sup> Results within the context of the church are about being able to provide ministry for the needs of the congregation and drawing on the resources available for the people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Morten T. Hansen, *Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Create Unity, and Reap Big Results* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14.

There has been much less written about collaboration than leadership. Collaboration implies group participation that may or may not be tied to a hierarchical structure.

In 1980, 20% of work was team-based; whereas, by 2010, 80% of work was team-based.<sup>2</sup> These changes in the nature of work, from individual to collaborative, will more than likely be with us for the foreseeable future as knowledge increases, specializations narrow, and the need for the integration of expertise across multiple areas grows. That being said, new skills will need to be garnered to make collaboration happen. These skills can be, but are not limited to, active listening, negotiation, and consensus building. Anyone who has been a part of a group project in a school or work setting knows the challenges of working as a team to accomplish a goal. Some people work harder than others. Some people like to work on projects immediately, while others take their time or wait until the end. All these pieces are part of what it means to engage in a collaborative spirit.

According to a study conducted by Rodger Adair and published in the *Journal of Leadership Education*, there are two broad categories that frame the concept of collaborative theory. One category is *individual first*, which is composed of three causal themes: turn-taking, observing or doing, and status seeking. This category is the individual's observed influence on the team or themselves. The second is *team first* which also has three themes: influencing others, organizing work, and building group cohesion.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> J. R. Hollenbeck, B. Beersma, and M. E. Schouten, "Beyond Team Types and Taxonomies: A Dimensional Scaling Conceptualization for Team Description," *Academy of Management Review* (2016), 82-106.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Colbry and Cabrini College and Rodger Adair, "Collaboration Theory," *The Journal of Leadership Education* (2014): 63-75.

The *team first* approach is usually connected with management and leadership. It is more characterized by the team's influence on its members.

Another way to think about collaboration is to think about each party coming together by their level of formality, players, and purposes. Some of the most common types of collaboration include networks, coalitions, movements, and strategic alliances. It can sometimes be difficult to differentiate among them and know which might be the best fit for certain situations. For this reason, I will provide a brief explanation of each.

- **Networks:** People connected by relationships, which can take on a variety of forms, both formal and informal.
- **Coalitions:** Organizations whose members commit to an agreed-upon purpose and shared decision making to influence an external institution or target, while each member organization maintains its own autonomy.
- **Movements:** Collective action with a common frame and long-term vision for social change, characterized by grassroots mobilization that works to address a power imbalance.
- **Strategic Alliances:** Partnership among organizations working in pursuit of a common goal while maintaining organizational independence. This could mean aligning programs or administrative functions or adopting complementary strategies.<sup>4</sup>

I believe identifying the purpose of the collaboration is essential to how the group proceeds with accomplishing the defined mission. When taken in the Christian context, collaboration must be central to the mission that is understood by all parties. Sterling

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<sup>4</sup> Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, last modified August 21, 2017, [www.geofunders.org](http://www.geofunders.org).

Huston provides a framework for collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership provides a foundation upon which a mission can be built. It must also cast a daring vision that must be bigger than any of the single groups involved. Every party must also have confidence in the method that is being utilized, knowing that it will produce results and being willing to innovate within the context of those results. There must be confidence in the leadership that is representative of the collaborative.<sup>5</sup>

“This means knowledge and experience is no longer the primary commodity. Instead, what is far more valuable is to have the ability to learn and to apply those learnings into new and unique scenarios. It's no longer about what you know, it's about how you can learn and adapt".<sup>6</sup> To hold this contemporary way of thinking in tension with a twentieth century approach to knowledge makes collaboration efforts tricky. This is where leadership approaches can make or break a collaborative.

Genuine collaboration is different from delegation. Delegation is about getting a predetermined course of action accomplished. There is delegation within collaboration, but collaboration is not only delegation. Collaborative ministry, also referred to as 'Cluster Ministry' in other parts of the world, is another way to express the expanding community at the heart of the Christian movement. It is not a movement about being insular, which isolates, but a movement that reaches out to include others.<sup>7</sup>

One reason for the encouragement of collaborative ministry in many churches is undoubtedly pragmatic; it is hard to see how else to take action responsibly given the

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<sup>5</sup> Sterling Huston, "Principles of Effective Collaboration," last modified October, 2017. [www.ym.christianleadershipalliance.org/page/effectivecollaborate](http://www.ym.christianleadershipalliance.org/page/effectivecollaborate).

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Morgan, *The Future of Work: Attract New Talent, Build Better Leaders, and Create a Competitive Organization* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2014), 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

current state of the local church. Although there are many models throughout the world for leading congregations, the predominant model in the United States for the last few decades has been through paid staff. This brings up the issue of stewardship and stewarding the assets, resources, and people God has given to us. How might we find new models and be open to new models of ministry leadership in this century? How might we also be proactive in pursuing these new models instead of reacting due to financial or other reasons?

In the short term, one move into a new model of ministry is the sharing of professional ministry between two or more congregations. This is already well underway, especially in rural areas. However, if the underlying understanding of ministry as emanating primarily from a paid individual is not altered, then this strategy seems likely to see the decline of congregations continue to accelerate as each parish is able to utilize less and less professional time.

### **Adaptive Leadership**

Adaptive leadership is a method of facing challenging situations whereby an organization can adapt and thrive within the context of a challenge. By its nature, leadership refers to both the organization of people resources and how an organization faces and makes progress on the difficult problems it encounters.

Being able to lead in the twenty-first century will require adaptation to complex situations. Sharon Daloz Parks contends that our current practices of leadership can solve technical problems, but leaders must be able to adapt to new problems where solutions do

not already exist.<sup>8</sup> To prepare to lead in a way that can find solutions to problems that do not currently exist requires looking at habits and assumptions that have existed for decades. Developing and learning new behaviors is what is needed to respond to adaptive challenges. Church leadership throughout the past has been built on a hierarchical model with the pastor as the resident theologian or expert. Although efforts have been made to step out of this model, decades of old muscle memory make it difficult, if not impossible, to break through. All too often when encountering a problem in a congregation, a technical solution is used to address an adaptive challenge. This is often done because the leaders, in an effort to alleviate anxiety, will make a change with the hope of eliminating a perceived problem.

Leading is dangerous. It is a lofty idea expecting people to naturally embrace new ideas and follow another into an unknown future, and it is difficult. The truth is that leadership means taking risks, and to go where you have not gone before. Just because you are a boss or have supervision over a subordinate does not mean you are a leader. Sometimes the two are interpreted as synonymous. A boss, perhaps in management, tells the subordinate what to do to accomplish a goal. People are inherently subordinate to a boss and, as such, do what they are told. This works well if you have a problem that already has a solution. To lead is to go beyond being in charge and telling others what to do. To lead goes beyond material gain or personal advancement. To lead requires high values, as it causes unresolved conflicts to surface and can make a difference in a person's life. To lead is actually about accomplishing a goal or mission. Additionally, Heifetz and Linsky add in their book, *Leadership on the Line*, there is a cost to

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<sup>8</sup> Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), 127.

leadership. While all leadership comes with a cost, adaptive leadership is even more risky and challenging. To mobilize adaptive work, leaders must engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations rather than trying to satisfy them with a technical remedy. The authors write that leaders must counteract people's "exaggerated dependency and promote their resourcefulness." This requires an extraordinary level of presence, time, artful communication, and trust.<sup>9</sup>

According to Heifetz and Linsky, there are two types of problems that can easily confuse a person in search of a solution. The one type is a technical problem and the other is an adaptive problem. Personally, I prefer the word *challenge* over *problem* and I will refer here to technical and adaptive challenges for the remainder of this chapter.

Technical challenges are easy to identify and solve by known or knowable approaches. Many day-to-day challenges are technical. For example, if a church building is in need of physical repair, there are technical solutions to fix the parts of the church in need of repair. If, however, a church needs to figure out how to approach declining worship attendance, this represents an adaptive challenge and will need to be solved or managed by adaptive leadership. What type of leadership is most helpful for the current situation? One or more technical changes may also be involved here in an attempt to solve the current challenge. This is where misdiagnosis of a technical versus adaptive change can occur. It is easy to approach the earlier example of a church facing declining membership solely as a technical challenge, citing reasons such as inflexible worship times, not having Sunday school options during worship, or others. A wider view, however, would take a look at trends in mainline worship attendance, issues within the

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Kindle edition, location 97.



church that have been neglected or overlooked, or a variety of other broad, subjective challenges.

Adaptive challenges are hard to identify and must be solved by the people facing the challenge. Adaptive challenges have no recognized or available experts, no defined set of procedures, no previous experiences to draw from, and no development of adequate responses. The first step for leadership is to define the challenge at hand, since the challenge is unclear, and technical fixes do not appear available or sufficient. The role of leadership is to maintain norms and manage conflict to facilitate people to find effective solutions. An important aspect of adaptive leadership is the organization shares responsibility for its future success, not individual leaders.

Take the earlier example of a church facing declining membership. Many see it as a solely technical challenge. Taking a wider view, however, shows the many challenges facing institutional membership and church decline for any number of reasons. Some may be internal, like having a new pastor, or a contentious building project. Some reasons may be also external, families bringing children to sport events, or the perception of being part of a church as less valuable to individuals or even not relevant.

Adaptive leadership is a concept and approach designed to assist both organizations and individuals to adapt and thrive within challenging environments. In adaptive challenge situations, the persons in leadership orchestrate the process of bringing people with differing views and definitions of the challenge together to observe, evaluate, and learn from one another.

The distinguishing differences between technical challenges versus adaptive challenges are laid out in table 1.

**Table 1 Technical Problem versus Adaptive Challenges<sup>10</sup>**

<b>Technical Problem</b>	<b>Adaptive Challenge</b>
It is easy to identify	It is difficult to identify
Most of the time has quick and easy solutions (tried and tested)	It requires changes in the way things are done (changes in approach to work)
It can be solved by expertise or authority generally	People who are working from where the problem is generated are able to solve it.
Requires small changes that are within organizational boundaries	Requires changes which may cross organizational boundaries
People are receptive to technical solutions	People resist to acknowledge adaptive challenges
Solutions can be implemented fast and by authority	Solutions emerge from experimentation and discovery, take a long time to implement

The table shows how easy it can be with a technical challenge to see the challenge and make a decision on how to remedy it. This remedy is usually a top-down authoritative decision that has been part of how our corporate structures have been organized. The adaptive challenge appears to be less interested in a quick solution and more often than not realizes a solution does not already exist. Instead of a top-down model shown in the technical challenge the model for an adaptive challenge is less decision making and more trying experiments to address the present challenge. Clearly, the real challenge is to diagnose the presenting issue. Is the presenting issue a technical challenge with a solution that already exists or is it an adaptive challenge where the approach to addressing the challenge itself needs to change.

<sup>10</sup> Sandra Bloom and Brian Farragher, *Destroying Sanctuary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7.

Being called a "leader" assumes there are others that will follow, and that one has the role of leader either by position, power, or both. A systems approach to leadership, however, understands that power does not necessarily go to whoever gets paid to do the work or is assigned the task, but sometimes to the person who has contextual longevity. Edwin Friedman in his book *Failure of Nerve* suggests organizations primarily adapt themselves to appease the most dependent, noncompliant, and anxious members rather than to "the energetic, the visionary, the imaginative and the motivated, often called the designated leader."<sup>11</sup> It falls on where the power lies within a system, be it council, staff, or volunteers. Adaptive leadership is collective; not only one person.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the theoretical lenses that provided a framework through which to view this project. The lenses of collaboration theory and adaptive leadership have been examined. The next chapter will look at the biblical and theological lenses and lift up the explanation of this work.

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<sup>11</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, Margaret M. Treadwell, and Edward W. Beal, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 10th anniversary revised edition (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), 54.

## CHAPTER 3

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

#### **Introduction**

The last chapter highlighted the theoretical lenses. The lens of collaboration theory showed the philosophy by which people and organizations come together. The lens of adaptive leadership addressed the approach needed to navigate emerging challenges. This chapter will describe the biblical and theological lenses. Combined with the theoretical lenses, these will shape the focus of this project and inform the research methodology described in the next chapter. The first lens will highlight the body of Christ as a lens that is inclusive of the work of the Spirit. The other lens is *perichoresis*, which is an understanding of the relational nature of the Trinity. Together, these lenses creatively explore the relationship of coming together in collaboration and the ways in which God is already leading the way.

#### **Body of Christ**

In the New Testament there are a variety of images used to describe the church in its early stages of development. Some images include people of God, households of God, and the temple of God. The image of the church as the body of Christ is one of the images that best relates to my research regarding collaboration.

## Unity through Diversity

First Corinthians states, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many."<sup>1</sup> In these verses, Paul is talking to a church that had become divided because some of the people thought that they were more gifted than others. Paul is writing to correct a problem. Gordon Fee deepens the thinking regarding this passage: "The body of Christ language is set within the context of Paul's emphasis on 'the need for diversity of gifts and manifestations in the unity of the one Spirit.'"<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Fee writes, "Paul's primary concern with this imagery is not that the body is one even though it has many members, thus arguing for their need for unity despite their diversity. Rather, his concern is expressed in verse 14, that even though the body is one, it does not consist of one member but of many, thus arguing for their need for diversity, since they are in fact one body."<sup>3</sup> This Scripture relates to the beauty of the ways in which Christ is at work in a variety of ways. Not all gifts need to look similar to be important. The uniqueness of each gift gives opportunity for the fullness of Christ to be applied.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are from NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) I Corinthians 12:21-26.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 572.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 601.

### Interdependent Parts

Each person brings their individual contribution to the body and each piece is important to make the whole body of Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."<sup>4</sup> This verse emphasizes the depth and assortment of gifts needed for the fullness of Christ. Fee states, "This means that individually they are members with a variety of 'assigned' parts."<sup>5</sup> A violin playing alone can sound beautiful, but it is nothing compared to what the whole orchestra can do together. When each individual is bringing their assigned parts to the whole, there is unity, and the body is whole. Yale Divinity School professor and theologian Paul Minear says, "Paul's basic concern was to restore the sense of unity in the Corinthian congregation by restoring the sense of interdependence among the believers."<sup>6</sup> This idea is so countercultural to the Western world in which we live that it is easy to overlook the importance of what Paul is saying. Each person needs to bring the gift they have been given, and they need to be different. Having diversity of all sorts represented is what truly makes it unity.

### Diverse Organizations

Not only are congregations called to be one body with diverse gifts, so also are different, diverse communities of faith called to work together on behalf of society. If diversity is broken down into its individual members, then different organizations that work together can be a work of the Spirit. Romans 12:4-5 states, "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are

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<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 12:27, NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 618.

<sup>6</sup> Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 624.

many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." Minear writes "Each person is not only a member of the one body of Christ; he is also, within the same body, a member of all the other Christians and all of them are members of him. Paul wants to stress the interdependence of the members," whereby the church is "building up the church by building up one another." The work of the church is to build one another up; there is no competition, but acknowledgment of the gifting of the Spirit.

### Through the Spirit

What unites the body of Christ? The body of Christ is united by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is the power of Christ. German Catholic priest and theologian Gerhard Lohfink writes, "The thing that binds together what otherwise would drive to disunion is *agape*. This is something not possible from human beings alone, but a gift of the divine Spirit, and that Spirit is released through Jesus' surrender of his life."<sup>7</sup> *Agape* is the unifying piece through which the Spirit can act, thanks to the death and life of Jesus. Continuing on, Lohfink writes, "The differences between people that normally destroy every community will become its wealth. For from the reality that people who are quite different and remain different can desire the same thing through Christ and the power of his Spirit can arise a variegated and multiform entity."<sup>8</sup> The work of the Spirit will encourage our uniqueness to represent the full body of Christ on earth. The Spirit underscores our differences as a beautiful gift at the same time minimizing our divisive ways. Finally theologian Michael Welker concludes, "The unity of the Spirit becomes a

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<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, *Does God Need the Church?: Toward a Theology of the People of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 261.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

reality not by imposing an illusory homogeneity, but by cultivating creative differences and by removing unrighteous differences.”<sup>9</sup> This is such hopeful news in a world which attempts to divide people by differences.

### *Perichoresis*

*Perichoresis* is a Greek term used to describe the relationship of the three persons of the Triune God. Each person of the Trinity is separate yet connected. The relationship of the three persons is shared, interdependent, participatory, and subject-to-subject. My specific tradition, the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), teaches the Triune God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The preaching and teaching of the ELCA trusts the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Our Western culture does not often hear the emphasis of the Trinity in a way that exemplifies its power and uniqueness. In *The Missional Church In Perspective*, Van Gelder and Zscheile write, "When we lose the Trinity, we lose our way of conceiving of God's missionary presence in creation."<sup>10</sup> The way we understand the Trinity has a direct impact on the way that we understand the work of God in collaboration. Specifically, this is seen in the Western understanding of the sending view of Trinity versus the perichoretic view of the Trinity.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 104.



## The Sending God

The Western concept of God has been primarily focused on the sending God. The Trinity is active and sending. The Father sends the Son, who both then send the Spirit, who then send the church.<sup>11</sup>

This understanding based in the idea of the being of God as one which is primary and the Triune persons as secondary. This goes back to the heritage of Augustine, and the psychological model of the Trinity, based on the triad of the internal being, knowing, and willing of God. Later in Western theological development, this took the form of the mind, the self-knowledge, and its self-love.

This understanding is challenging. It is modalistic, breaking up the Trinity into separate and individualized entities which downplays their relationality. "The sending movement from Father to Son to Spirit to church to world can result in making the church primarily an instrument and rendering the world a mere 'target' of mission."<sup>12</sup> This makes the church look like it is only *doing* something, and the idea of *being* is not given due acknowledgement. Our work on earth is not to analyze the spiritualness of individuals but rather to participate in the work that the Triune God is already doing. They go on to say, "The church is not a collection of individuals who choose to associate primarily to have their spiritual needs met or do some good in the world. Rather, the church is a community of mutual participation in God's own life and the life of the world,

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<sup>11</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

a participation characterized by openness to others."<sup>13</sup> The Trinity is nothing if not interdependent, and so the focus is on the other.

### The Social Trinity

The Eastern concept of the social Trinity emphasizes that God is inherently a social being. Instead of starting with one God in his essence who is then three persons, the Eastern understanding begins with three persons who in their love are in complete oneness. It is communal, equal, and mutual within the three persons of the Trinity. Jürgen Moltmann argues "trinitarian unity which goes out beyond the doctrine of persons and their relations: by virtue of their eternal love, the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another, and in one another that they constitute themselves in their unique, incomparable and complete unity."<sup>14</sup> This unity we are drawn into by the Spirit.

### Conclusion

This chapter looked at the biblical lens of the body of Christ through scripture in First Corinthians 12 where the metaphor of the body is used to invite us into the need for each other to share our gifts in order to be unified. Additionally, the theological lens of *perichoresis* is applied to show how the three persons of the Trinity are intertwined into oneness and how this oneness is a model for how we work in relationship with each other. These lenses continue to inform how the research has been utilized throughout the forthcoming research. The next chapter explains the research methodology that was used in preparation for conducting the research.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Crossroad. 1992), 86.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The question that is presented for this research projects is, "*How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?*" It is my argument, that as the landscape of ministry continues to change, it will be helpful to look at the way leaders lead in an adaptive manner to effectively share ministry with others. Collaboration will be critical as ministries and ministry leaders address adaptive challenges. For this research project, my methodology was exploratory case studies and my method was qualitative using interviews and focus groups. John Creswell calls for exploratory research to investigate an idea qualitatively before it can be measured and tested.<sup>1</sup> The case study approach is purposeful in gaining an in-depth understanding of the situation. My interest lies in the process rather than the outcomes and learning from others who have already been doing collaborative work. The case studies that were eventually chosen and studied did not have to have an actual or perceived amount of success from the collaboration effort. Their information could be helpful to contribute to this research as well. I also set out to

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. Creswell, V. Plano Clark, M. L. Gutmann, and W. E. Hanson, "Advanced Mixed Methods Research Designs," in *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, eds. A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003).

understand what leadership characteristics work toward fostering an environment for collaborative ministry.

Utilizing the theoretical framework of collaborative theory and adaptive leadership helped narrow the case studies. The biblical lens of Paul's reference to the body of Christ along with the depth and breadth of *perichoresis* exemplify the interplay of ministry based on the Triune God and provides a logical framework for understanding the research question.

### **Theological Grounding for Methodology**

The essence of collaboration is relationships. Relationships are integral to all of life, including our life of faith. The heart of Jesus' ministry was done in and through community. In sending the disciples out, Jesus sent them two-by-two, never alone (Luke 9:1-8). Paul uses the 'body of Christ' image in First Corinthians 12, which highlights the interdependence of our common mission in ministry because all of the parts are mutually dependent for the common mission. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor martyred for his resistance to the Nazi regime, said, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it is a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Understanding more about this interdependent, communal approach to ministry is what this research sought to discover.

The *perichoretic* God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shows us community in the three distinct persons of the Trinity coming together for the sake of the world. We were

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<sup>2</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* [1st ed.]. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 10.

created in the image of God for being together in community. Christian community calls us into relationship with one another to accomplish God's work on earth. A key part of the divine plan is the creation of a church community as a reflection of the supremely relational nature of the Trinity. A church that echoes God's Trinitarian life will be working towards engaging in partnerships of many kinds – young and old, rich and poor, people of differing educational training, laity and ordained – accepting all, in their difference, as having vitality and equal value.<sup>3</sup> This is as a way of participating in God's mission in the world.

Our contemporary North American church culture and people under age 35 according to Christine Pohl, “hunger for models of authentic Christian life in which glimpses of the Kingdom can be seen”.<sup>4</sup> There is a biblical injunction (Romans 12:13, Hebrews 13:2) to practice hospitality. The offering of hospitality is a way to share ourselves, not out of responsibility or duty but rather as a response of love and gratitude to God's love and welcome to us. Although it involves responsibility and faithful performance of duties, hospitality emerges from a faithful heart”.<sup>5</sup> Pohl continues, “Hospitality challenges us to work through our attitudes to our property...some things will be broken or disappear when our lives are open to guests and strangers.”<sup>6</sup> Pohl concludes, “Offering hospitality in a world distorted by sin, injustice and brokenness will rarely be easy. We need a combination of grace and wisdom, spiritual and moral

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<sup>3</sup> Robin Greenwood, *The Ministry Team Handbook* (London: SPCK, 2000), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

intuition, prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit, the accumulated wisdom of a tradition, and a pragmatic assessment of each situation.”<sup>7</sup> Thus collaboration will take openness to the Spirit's work. If sharing ministry is about the work of the Triune God, and if the work is about community and partnering with the mission of God on earth, then our work is about providing a trusting and hospitable environment for collaboration to take shape. After all, whose mission is it, God's or ours? If it is God's mission and God engages the world through relationships, we not only join in what God is already doing, we see cultivating relationships and creating a trusting and hospitable environment as our key work. Let us begin to see how the research design was set up to provide insights about how to make this happen.

### **Research Design**

The research methodology for this project was exploratory case studies using qualitative methods with interviews and focus groups. This research was conducted during the summer months of 2017.

In the effort to study how leadership enhances ministry collaboration, my research methodology included using exploratory case studies and qualitative research methods. I looked at collaborative ministries and their leadership. All participants were over the age of 18 and volunteered to participate either in an individual interview that lasted approximately thirty minutes or in a focus group that lasted no longer than ninety minutes. I interviewed the primary leaders from each of the three case studies. In the case where there were more than five congregations, I interviewed those that were able to attend the day I visited, so in some cases there were churches that were not interviewed. I

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 149.

then conducted a focus group of the volunteers that assisted with the collaboration. There were a total of ten interviews and two focus groups.

### Research Design Figure

Below is a diagram representing how the research project was conducted. I will break down each of the phases that were employed to create the method by which I was seeking information.

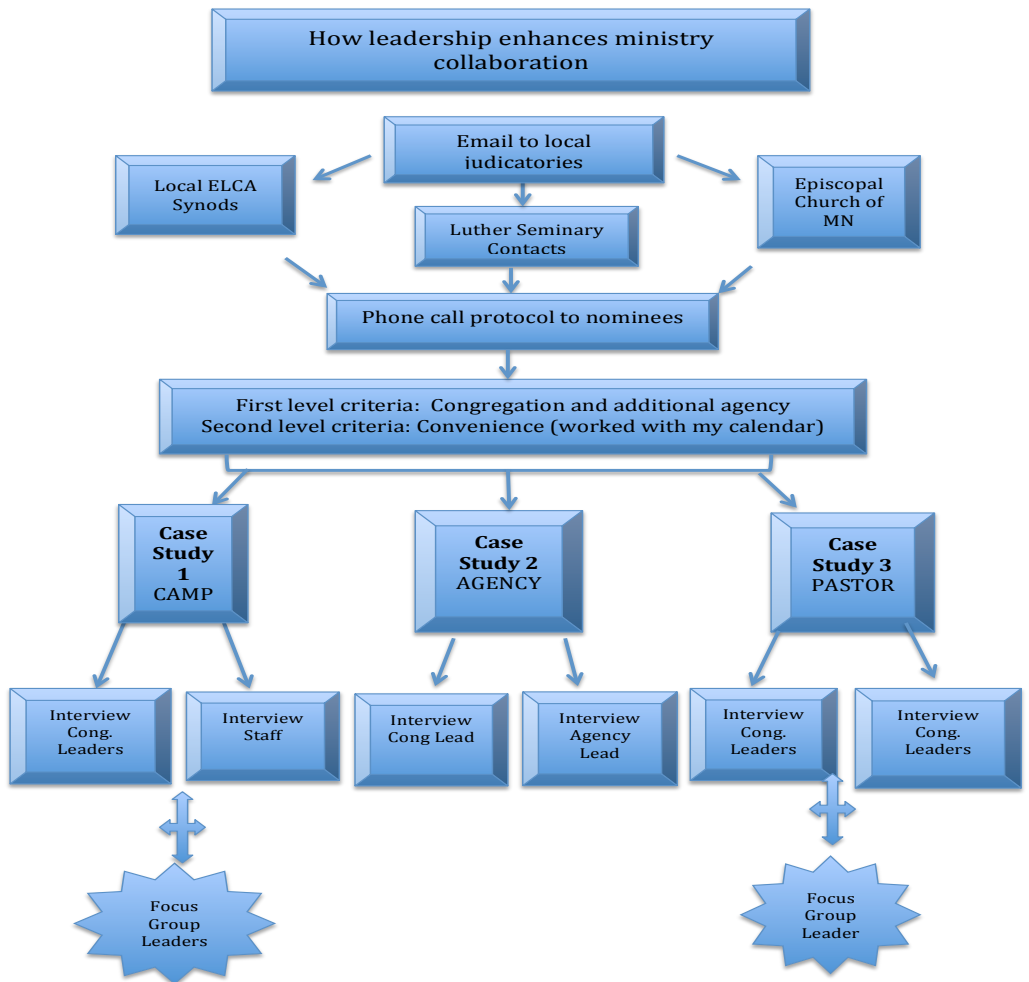


Figure 1 Research Design

## Identification of Study Subjects

### Phase 1: Identification of Research Question

After several revisions, the question for this thesis emerged, “*How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?*” The question made me curious about how entities that have existed on their own decide to work together and how that working together is negotiated. Therefore, I identified initial criteria to determine which collaborative efforts to study. One criteria was at least one of the partners needed to be a congregation from a mainline denomination and a second was that one of the partner entities had to have operated independently as a congregation or agency prior to the partnership. The other option could be multiple congregations working together.

### Phase 2: Identification of Study Subject Nominations

There are many different congregations and agencies that have been doing collaborative work already, but I needed to identify them. I wanted to cast a wide net to get a sense of how prevalent these collaborations were. An initial email communication was sent to the Midwest synods of the ELCA, the Episcopal Church of Minnesota, and Luther Seminary, inviting recommendations of congregations who fit the study criteria. A sample of the email is included in appendix A.

### Phase 3: Prescreening Possible Subjects

After finding collaborative subjects that met the initial criteria, the next step of research was to determine whom to interview. First, I created a spreadsheet of all of the potential collaborations, their location, and any information I knew about the type of collaboration based on the email submission. If the submission matched the study criteria



(at least one congregation along with an agency or another congregation), I called the main contact provided and asked each of the prospects a few screening questions to ensure they met my research criteria.<sup>8</sup> The questions asked included:

1. Who are the partners in this collaboration?
2. How did this collaboration begin?
3. Where are you now?
4. Where are you hoping to go as a collaborative effort?

After discussing these questions, I inquired if they were open and willing to be studied, have me come, and interview each leader of the collaboration, followed by a focus group with key leaders that were a part of the collaborative effort. If the group was willing, we talked about dates that would work for a site visit and interview. I only considered collaborations that worked within my schedule and were in close proximity geographically. Did the potential case study reside in an area that was within driving distance for me? Ideally, each of these case studies would be a slightly different configuration to provide a variety of objectives while allowing me to study the commonalities within the scope of leadership practices.

#### Phase 4: Identification of Case Studies

After putting the relative information into the created spreadsheet, there were three individual collaborative efforts that fit the criteria and worked for my schedule. These three were relatively close driving distance from me, and they were willing to be interviewed.

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<sup>8</sup> See appendix B.

## Phase 5: Individual Interviews

Now that the collaborative ministries had been identified, I worked with the designated leader of each of the three case studies to set up interviews and focus groups and to plan an on-site visit. Each interviewee was provided information through the informed consent form, encouraged to ask questions, and invited to sign.<sup>9</sup> I explained the nature of the research and that by signing the individual was consenting to being recorded and possibly quoted. The same process was used for each of the focus groups that were conducted later. I shared the information with the group, invited them to sign the informed consent form and, after signing, collected informed consent forms. All interviews and focus groups were recorded.

There were three groups to interview, and each group had several people. Over the three case studies, there was a total of eleven interviews each lasting approximately thirty minutes. The interview protocol can be found in appendix D.

In an effort to differentiate between the case studies, I gave each one a one-word title. The first case study I entitled CAMP. This was an effort of seven different churches that were sharing a twenty-hour-a-week youth ministry person. In the CAMP case study, I conducted five interviews with congregation leaders as a subset of all of the congregations.

The second case study I called AGENCY. This was a collaboration between a large suburban congregation with extra space and a large volunteer base and a local Salvation Army in need of office space and volunteers to assist in their efforts. Two interviews were conducted. One interview was with the staff person in charge of mission

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix C.

and outreach for the congregation. The second interview was with the case manager of the local division of the Salvation Army whose offices are housed within the church.

I will refer to the third case study as PASTOR. Ten congregations in a rural area came together in search of a way to find a pastor to serve their small congregations. I was able to participate in an already scheduled meeting and was able to conduct five interviews with lay leadership from the group.

#### Phase 6: Focus Groups

Phase six was conducted the same day after interviews were conducted in each case study. Due to time constraints and availability, I was only able to conduct a focus group with the first and third case studies, CAMP and PASTOR case studies. The second case study was limited to one-on-one interviews.

Each site visit began with a one-on-one interview with the designated leaders of both the congregation(s) and the partnering organization. I invited the designated leaders from each of the partnering organizations to identify key leaders of the initiative to participate in a focus group. When leading the focus group, I offered to conduct the focus group over lunch at my expense. My rationale was to provide a space and location for generative conversation and observe how the group participants interacted with each other.

#### **Interpretation of Data**

All data were digitally recorded and all participants received, reviewed, and signed an informed consent form as standard protocol for the Luther Seminary Institutional Review Board in accordance with their requirements. Along with recorded audio, I also took notes during the interview or focus group and immediately following.

All interviews and focus group recordings were then transcribed into Word documents. After transcription, I utilized an analysis process most similar to Rubin and Rubin<sup>10</sup> by interpreting the data going line-by-line through each interview and focus group and coding the information collected. I then grouped the codes based on themes and incidents. Themes were then analyzed and grouped according to similar words and meanings.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described the research design from how study subjects were identified to how the data were interpreted. The three case studies were entitled CAMP, AGENCY, and PASTOR. I also provided details about the research methodology that was utilized for this research project. It includes a diagram of each step along the research process. The next chapter will discuss the results and interpretation of the research.

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 115.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS OF STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

#### **Introduction**

Chapter four provided a description of the methodology and design for the research that was conducted. Moving forward, this chapter will provide results of the research and report the analysis of the data collected.

The project utilized a qualitative research method using case studies as the methodology. My research question is, "*How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?*" Interviews and focus groups occurred during the summer of 2017.

#### **Study Description**

There were three distinct case studies involved in the research. Each case study hosted one-on-one interviews and two included focus groups. Collaboration efforts had to fit two criteria; the first, the collaboration partner or partners had to be an existing agency, congregation, or nonprofit ministry. Second, each entity had to have been operating independently before the collaboration.

Curiosity led me to wonder several things. How do two separate, independent agencies come together; what kind of give and take exists, and how does leadership from both sides happen together? How do leadership practices play a part in the partnerships' potential for success or failure? What motivated the two entities to partner with each

other? How does each entity see God as an active participant? How clearly defined is their mission to collaborate and how is leadership negotiated?

A total of eleven people across the three case studies were interviewed. Two focus groups were conducted. Due to time constraints and summer schedules, a focus group was not an available option for the AGENCY case study. Table 2 shows the number of participants across the three different case studies.

**Table 2 Case Study Participants**

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b># of interviews</b>	<b># of focus group participants</b>	<b># of those interviewed and were part of the focus group</b>
CS 1	Camp	5	5	2
CS 2	Agency	2	0	0
CS 3	Pastor	4	5	2

The first case study, which I call CAMP, took place in June of 2017. A nearby Bible camp that had a part-time staff person partnered with a number of local congregations to provide youth ministry. In this case study, I interviewed a sample of the pastors and the camp staff person using the interview protocol<sup>1</sup> to understand more clearly how leadership is shared. How is one person able to do all this work and what makes this collaboration work? Each interview lasted anywhere between thirty minutes to an hour. After all five interviews were conducted, interviewees were invited to stay and eat lunch together while going through the focus group questions. Two persons who were interviewed individually participated in the focus group as well as three persons who had not been part of the interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix B.

The second case study is entitled AGENCY. There were two interviews conducted. Each interview lasted about forty-five minutes and I interviewed the staff person who runs the mission area of ministry of the church and secures the volunteers for the various ministries that the collaboration conducts. The other person interviewed is the staff person from the agency that offices in the church building and partners with the mission area of ministry of the church. Due to time and availability I was unable to conduct a focus group with the board of the agency and congregation working together.

The last case study involved a group of rural congregations who were working together to share ministry and pastoral staff. This case study is called PASTOR. There were a total of four interviews conducted with representatives from the congregations involved. Due to the nature of the effort, there were lay members of the congregations (mostly council members) who came together to accomplish the goal of securing staff for their churches. After interviews were conducted there was a boxed lunch and a focus group conversation utilizing the focus group protocol.<sup>2</sup> Two of the people who were interviewed individually also participated in the focus group.

## **Case Studies**

### **Case Study 1: CAMP**

For the past five years a Bible camp located in the Midwest has joined seven Lutheran churches to create Midwest Collaborative.<sup>3</sup> It started as part of a weekly text study. The gathered pastors kept asking what more could be done specifically for the

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix C.

<sup>3</sup> All titles of collaborations and individual names are pseudonyms.

young people of their communities. That led to trying a quarterly event of the churches together. Meanwhile, the area Bible camp, which is about an hour's drive away from this group of churches, already had a 20 hour-a-week, year-round staff person. Wanting to create a full-time position, the camp proposed an agreement with the seven churches to share an additional 20 hours a week from this staff person, Dan, to provide youth ministry opportunities for the young people of these congregations. This is how the Midwest Collaborative started.

Dan, a youth worker from another part of the Midwest, accepted the position and entered into an agreement with the camp and churches to provide this ministry. The agreement was more structured in the beginning and reviewed yearly. Each year the review included what could be improved, what needed to change, and how to make the agreement better for Dan, the camp, and the churches. Pastors from each of the churches invited feedback from volunteers prior to each yearly review.

I invited conversation through the interviews and focus group about the characteristics that Dan has to do this ministry. The list included flexibility, giving more of his time, youth oriented, responsible, energetic, tries new things, reaches out, is relational, and is consistent.

Dan serves as a role model for the young people, volunteers, parents, and other adults. The churches agreed and acknowledged that it is difficult to find someone who has Dan's combination of talents and commitment.

One volunteer leader that I interviewed said it this way: "Dan just has a really great way of making it work. He just makes that work, somehow. He makes it seem so



easy where others would get flustered and everything else; he just handles it. He was perfect for this job and he was the only person who applied for the job."

I asked the interviewees and the focus group participants what characteristics and personality traits it takes to do this work. The group said those who want to do this work need to have a teachable spirit, relational energy, Holy Spirit charisma, organization skills, and be willing to work nights and weekends. These skills have similarities, yet many differences, in comparison with pastoral leadership. One in this position must be able to do continuous communication about what is happening and what has happened. It is best to utilize as many different ways to communicate with each of the seven churches as possible. Dan utilized announcements for the bulletins, monthly newsletters, posters for the churches, a Facebook page, and texting as part of his strategy.

Dan always references that this is God's work and how fortunate we are to be able to participate in it. Creating a shared experience for young people is important and often sets up situations so that young people can see glimpses of what it means to be the body of Christ. One example is a monthly ministry program he started called *Faith and Film* that brings together people of all ages. Once a month people meet at the church. They watch a movie together and share snacks. Afterwards, they have intentional conversation about the movie and how it relates to faith and life situations. It is easy to have conversations about a movie and build trust with each other.

The churches also take responsibility to make the collaborative work. The church has to "buy in" to what the staff person wants to do. Coming together was a way to be able to afford a paid youth ministry leader. Each of the seven churches contributes an equal amount of money into the collaboration regardless of the number of youth that

participate. Church volunteers and pastors who were interviewed expressed nothing but gratefulness on behalf of their congregations that this position exists. They know they would not be able to do this alone. The mutual cooperation makes this work. Active volunteers also make it work. All of the churches are treated equally, but not everyone needs the same type of ministry. Therefore, Dan flexes as he needs to.

When asked about challenges that have occurred during this five-year collaboration the group mentioned there were not as many challenges as they thought. There are external challenges however; youth are very busy, especially in smaller rural areas where youth tend to layer on multiple activities. There are challenges with things always changing and being in a state of flux. There are challenges with volunteers within each of the different churches who might not be up to speed with what is going on. There is also the challenge of being able to find volunteers in each of the churches.

An additional challenge presented itself about two years into the collaborative. After living at camp for two years, during which time Dan was married, Dan and his wife no longer wanted to live at camp, but instead be closer to his wife's work. Part of Dan's salary up to this point was the ability to be housed at the Bible camp. Upon Dan's request for additional monies for housing, the churches met and realized they needed to provide more funding in order to keep Dan. So, they did.

The local Bible camp had an investment here as well. They were willing to stick their neck out and offer this position in hopes of a win-win scenario. In a lot of ways, if the collaboration went well, it is great advertisement for the camp. During this research project, it became evident that other camps offer similar staffing options to neighboring congregations, yet most are one year long. The Midwest Collaborative was intentional

about trying to create a partnership that would last more than one year. This provides a continuation of leadership and relationships. Dan believes longevity is important.

The recipe for this collaborative is almost too simple. Weekly, Dan participates with the other pastors in the text study where they get together to eat, share conversation and work on the text for the upcoming Sunday worship.

Three times a year, the pastors and Dan meet to plan. Dan comes to the meeting with ideas he presents and they work together to set the plan into motion. At the beginning of each year, Dan holds two identical meetings to give parents and youth an overview of the ministries for the year and to solicit other suggestions from the families involved. Volunteers are sought from each of the churches in an effort to handle logistics for events as needed. Delegation in partnership makes this sustainable. Additionally, Dan is in one to two congregations every week and therefore sees every congregation within a six-week time frame. According to Dan this 'face time' is critical. It is all about building relationships and trust. During the summer months, when camp is in its busy season, Dan works primarily at the camp only.

Interviewed persons acknowledged the youth have grown in their faith expressions. The students are generally more verbal about their faith and congregation members expressed seeing the difference in their young people as a result of the Midwest Collaborative. Youth are able to experience something they would not be able to get without a collaborative effort because no one has the resources to do this on their own. Youth also get to experience the sense of a larger community of faith and get to know other people their age within a faith perspective.

Interviewees and focus group attendees have seen God at work through the mission trip where young people encounter others, give of themselves, and live in intense community for a week. Youth see other people who live in challenging situations and realize their lives are not so bad. The youth provide local service projects as well and have been overwhelmed by the appreciation of adults for their service to the community.

For the future, the Midwest Collaborative wants to continue to keep youth involved in ministry and therefore continuing as part of a faith community in their church. When others from neighboring areas have heard about the work they are doing together, many want to emulate what the Midwest Collaborative has done. They have amazed themselves by the ministry that has been done over the last five years. Other churches would like to match what the Midwest Collaborative has done in their area. The Bible camp is open to staffing additional people to create more collaborative ministries in the area. Probably the biggest challenge is finding a person with the leadership characteristics and temperament it takes to be able to do this work. They know they have not used the current ministry to its full potential and will continue to work towards the continued imagination of what they could do together.

When asked about the future of the church in general and what it will look like as we continue in the twenty-first century, this group thought that what they are doing with the Midwest Collaborative will be the future of youth ministry in smaller churches, if not the way for pastors in the future. "We are going to need to do more collaborations like this for synodically authorized ministers," an interviewed pastor stated. Other pastors who were interviewed acknowledged the forthcoming pastor shortage and are intentionally choosing not to retire when they can but to continue to serve the church. The

future of lay and pastoral church leadership is difficult to predict, and training for ministry is expensive. Additionally, the payment for people serving in ministry is minimal. We must address this gap for our future. Dan says that, although he has received raises over the last five years, it is still difficult to make ends meet financially. "When I just started, I was a year out of college and so willing to take less money than what, like, a 30-year-old would, and so there's a little bit of difference there. I had to ask the camp and the churches for what I needed if I was going to stay in this long-term." Children, youth, and family ministry is often marketed as a young person's job and therefore the pay often reflects this supposition. As budgets for churches become tighter, affording ministry with young people, even in a collaborative model, is difficult. As the Midwest Collaborative continues, they know the benefits of working together far outweigh the price tag and the challenge of give and take that accompanies working together. As Dan so eloquently stated, "With this collaboration, this feels like what I feel like the church should feel like. When one is weaker, another one steps up, and when tragedy strikes we all feel it and come together." All the churches feel like home.

Dan is off for another adventure and left the Midwest Collaborative in the fall of 2017. A replacement has been found to continue this work.

### Case Study 2: AGENCY

In a suburban part of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul resides Trinity Lutheran, a large church that for the last 20 to 30 years has been considered the big church in the suburb, if not in the Twin Cities itself. Many well-known pastors and lay ministry people have served at this congregation throughout the years. They have discovered in the last decade or so that they have a little more space than they once did.

James, the staff person from the congregation who serves as the director for mission and outreach, describes how they began serving people at the church.

The first thing we did was a couch. We got a couch donated and my coworker at the time said she knew someone who needed it. So she and her husband went and picked up the couch and delivered it. It never even came to our property, all in one evening, done deal. And that was the beginning of what we now do. It was just a logical, sure, why not? Why wouldn't you? Sometimes those nudging from God that I think that really tiny, but they can really turn into a big deal. I don't know how one discerns that, but I will say that I blindly, completely blindly, just said, "Sure, go for it." It made logical sense and that was just the beginning of something quite significant. I didn't have a clue. Still not sure I do.

In the same suburb resides a small Corps of the Salvation Army. They have been restructured and re-organized many times with staff people coming and going, and found themselves in a need of office space. The Salvation Army is not only an organization that does good things for people in need, but they are also a Christian church with a mission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a need for the Salvation Army to share a spiritual component with the people they serve. Faith is important. I interviewed Cindy, the full-time case manager who has been in that role for a few months. Prior to that position, she was the team leader at the site for two-and-a-half years. Through restructuring, the position was eliminated and another person retired, so the Salvation Army just moved people around in an effort for everyone to keep their jobs.

This collaborative case study is about how each entity brings its own strengths to make each one better. Many years ago, Trinity made decisions based on their capacity about what they would do and not do in a partnership. Before the partnership with the Salvation Army, Trinity mainly did furniture and clothing. It considered this work charitable gifting. Since that point in the past, a lot of possibilities presented themselves, from car care to rent assistance to utilities. James admits he came to the conclusion after doing some research that providing financial assistance was outside the capacity of the

church. Then the Salvation Army came along, and that is what they do. They have support staff, they have federal grants, and they can do it all in one place so that families experiencing hardships do not have to go to yet another location to receive services. They can do it all in one location. The Salvation Army does a lot of things that Trinity cannot do, and Trinity can do a lot of things that the Salvation Army cannot do; it fits together nicely.

The initial conversation with the Salvation Army did not start out well. The leader of the social service literally sat with his arms crossed, wondering why the leadership of Trinity wanted to meet with them. Trinity talked about what they thought they could offer by providing volunteers and a location, and the Salvation Army needed office space and a place to provide services to those in need. At the end of the conversation, the person's arms uncrossed and he said, "Normally everyone wants to partner with us because they think we have a lot of money." James just shrugged his shoulders and said "No, I figured it would be a cool thing, too." That was seven years ago.

A simple Memorandum of Understanding between Trinity and the Salvation Army set up the partnership. Trinity in no way holds a lease agreement for space with the Salvation Army. Finances are also separate. The Salvation Army and Trinity do not put their money together as part of their arrangement. Each operates financially independent from the other. The volunteers are unified and no one knows if they are there for Trinity or for the Salvation Army, and it does not matter. Clients experience hope and wholeness where they can receive food, clothing, prayer, and support from caring individuals. After picking out food, while volunteers are boxing it up, the client can shop in the clothes closet. Then, they pick their own produce and deli items. They can shop for themselves.

The client also has the opportunity to participate in the county intake, which helps with medical assistance, food stamps, and emergencies services. Trinity and the Salvation Army have teamed up with the county so that they can do all the necessary paperwork right on site.

The philosophy is simple. James says to volunteers, "Your smile and your presence make the difference." Most of the families that visit Trinity know that James is a staff person, but the client most often encounters the volunteers. This is the great part about the volunteers; they are the evangelists because clients know they are volunteering their time and giving of their heart and gifts. James continues, "We want to treat people different, in a way that provides dignity and respect to each person, client, volunteer, or staff." Trinity is open to having a group from any church, corporation, or special organization come to volunteer. They need about two hundred volunteers every week. When a group comes to volunteer, James or another staff person gives the group a twenty-minute orientation about who they are and how they got to where they are, and how the volunteers make a difference. Additionally, as volunteers participate, ideas are generated. "Someone says this 'cause' needs to happen. If we believe in it too and it fits our mission, we assemble a leadership team, determine what other resources are needed, people and financial ramifications, and give it a try."

Although a lot of things work well, a challenge on the Salvation Army's side of the partnership is that they have recently changed their computer system and currently there is a lot of paperwork. In addition, they were restructured without notice while in the midst of interviewing new staff. Then all the position descriptions changed. This has made things difficult for Cindy as she leads this organization while tending to all the



paperwork necessary to serve clients. From time to time there are some struggles with volunteers who do not understand why they do what they do and want to circumvent the system that is set up. So sometimes volunteers are assertive in making decisions that are not theirs to make, and the staff people need to handle those situations delicately. Cindy equated it to marriage where both people have to be willing to change and to work and to discuss, and neither has total control.

From the Trinity side, they too had a time when there was a new staff person and it did not go well. The new person tried to make a lot changes to the current systems. It was not contextualized and the individual was making the decisions on their own and not in a group. This did not work out well, and the staff person ended up resigning after six months. Likewise, if people, even volunteers, take too much ownership or are too ingrained in the system, you stop seeing the big picture and end up getting in your own way.

When asked about problems within the leadership of organizations working in relationship with each other, neither party could think of an example of a problem that they have experienced. "We definitely communicate a lot formally and informally. We listen to each other, discuss, and come to a consensus. We are small enough to do that." Trinity and the Salvation Army also have staff meetings together and then a separate meeting for volunteers. In those meetings, they engage in devotions and prayer.

What makes this partnership work is Trinity's focus on mission. Cindy says, "Really, their (Trinity's) heart and our heart is the same. I think when it comes down to it, the big picture is the same for both of us. We want to provide basic needs and go beyond that. They have many volunteers ready to assist and we have the capability to do

casework with support. Right now the Salvation Army is fielding 40 to 50 calls per day with people asking for help with car repair, rent, utilities, gas cards, and all different things. In some ways, our work is a bit like a short-term emergency service.”

What kind of leadership does it take to make this partnership work? It takes leadership that is flexible and non-controlling, team based, mutual respect, trust building, intentional with volunteers, attentive to God stories, prayerful, community building, and awareness of God's work throughout. It also requires equipping the volunteers, humility, a willingness to be held accountable for your work, a focus on strengths, and a refusal to be territorial.

I asked both parties if they believe the kind of leadership listed above can be taught. Cindy believes it is partly the way a person is wired and can partly be taught. She feels that if the person is willing to take feedback, they can definitely learn more and they can learn the benefits of doing things a certain way. Another way to consider training for this work, in James' opinion, is determining the difference between business leadership and volunteer leadership. Probably the most important item to teach is the ability to be self-aware. When you are not self-aware, it makes it really difficult to connect with people. Once you build trust with volunteers you need to release them. People who do this work on a staff level have to engage others; if they cannot (because they need it to be about them) or if they will not, then they need to do something else.

God is at work in many different ways. Cindy has seen God at work through something as small as a person who requested a certain piece of furniture that they rarely get. The item was put on the list and less than two weeks later somebody donated that exact item. "It is like we know God is here. We are able because we are the Salvation

Army and they are Trinity and when everybody is gathered waiting to go in for the food shelf we will pray to start our day. We also offer a chance for others to pray in their own language. We have lots of Hispanic and quite a few Russian families. People will pray and then we will finish in English and it all feels very united. I hope everyone feels that they are not discriminated against when they are here." The volunteers here are also a community. "They put in more hours than the staff does sometimes. They are here before we arrive in the morning and sometimes they're here long after we leave."

"God is active when the logical answer is that we should say no," James says. "For example, it makes no logical sense that a church would have a dental clinic<sup>4</sup> in it. It is easy to say no, because you know how much work it will take to accomplish it. The idea just sounds crazy or a staff person wants to be in control. We do ask our volunteers to reflect when we gather, 'What is God up to? What is God doing in your world? It could be at home or at church.'"

When asked what sustains them in this work, Cindy acknowledges she likes to be a learner and is currently studying for her Master's degree in social work. She likes learning in small groups with colleagues that can assist her in thinking of new ways of doing things. An added benefit to the work is the ability to get an intern, so they have hired one to work at the partnership. Interns provide energy for them. Another thing that sustains Cindy is having a client or volunteer express their thanks. She says it goes a long way. James says hearing their God stories and watching the volunteers connect in a deep way with each other sustains him for ministry. There is a group of men that meets every Tuesday to volunteer. After volunteering, they drink coffee, discuss real life and current

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<sup>4</sup> A dental clinic was added at the AGENCY as a way to provide care to families with no dental insurance and experiencing mouth pain.

events, knowing two of the men have wives with significant health problems. “You cannot orchestrate this. It happens over time and it gives meaning to what we are trying to accomplish at Trinity.”

What advice would they give to someone else wanting to partner in this way? During each separate interview, both Trinity and the Salvation Army said partnering is the best of both worlds coming together. They use each other's strengths. Partnering takes the pressure off of having to do everything on your own. To her knowledge, Cindy is not aware of any other partnership between the Salvation Army and the separate church that is happening in this way. James adds, "We are called to connect so we always need to be inviting the question, 'How do we do this with others?' Bring them in. We must acknowledge that God is alive and well and working in 2017. Just because churches are declining does not mean that God has gone away. It just means it might look a little bit different from what we have known." For those who would like to partner, other advice is given: trust in God's abundance, choose your battles, provide flexibility for your volunteers, do not start with the answer being 'no' first. “Someone comes with an idea to do something don't say 'no'. You can say ‘maybe’ or ‘why should we do that?’” It is easy to say no but you are squelching a possible deep meaningful idea to the person presenting it. Just consider if it fits in your boundaries and the scope of the work you are doing. Find ways to partner with churches across denominations. Do not do all of it on your own; it is more about what can be done better together. A congregation will have expertise in one area and another in another area. Bring them together. The Salvation Army did this with Trinity, and Trinity had to get over the idea that it is not all about them. People can do a

lot more if they can do it together. God calls every church to do something. Everyone can play together.

The future of this partnership looks bright. The Salvation Army is looking at what their needs are and what other organizations are doing, and working to stay relevant in the current context. Both partners said they are developing ways to make the services they provide for families more sustainable. After a family participates in their services to assist in meeting their immediate needs, how might the partnership take another step forward for the sake of the families they serve to help provide sustainability? The next level of engagement is the deeper issue of family sustainability for the city. Whatever they come up with together, they can have volunteers in place immediately and Trinity has the space for additional services to be housed.

At the end of my interview, James shared a poignant example from scripture and a summary of leadership in this age.

There is a key scripture that was given to us by our leader or supervisor at the time from Exodus 18. Jethro comes to meet Moses. Jethro, the father-in-law says "You're doing it all wrong." Moses is like, "you're kidding? Things are growing. It's doing great, look at this." And Jethro says, "No, it's all-wrong. 'Cause you're the center of the universe here. You can't be the center of the universe. If you're the center of the universe, it only grows as much as you can lead it. So, Moses, your job is to get the next layer of leadership around you and equip them to do the work." That was huge for us! Then, when Stephen appoints the seven in the Book of Acts, there are some really key leadership principles. The thing is that this cannot be about a staff person. This work cannot be about me. Whether I'm the leader or not, it cannot be about me. I have to be willing to learn to let go of it. Some days the direction with volunteers might go a little skewed, and I have to determine whether it's too skewed or if it's all right. Or I'll have to reel it back in, and get it into here again. But, you know, I always have the impression that my job is to work myself out of a job. Either I equip so many volunteers that I'm not needed, or we are able to solve the poverty problem. We're not going to solve the poverty problem. It isn't going away. The reality of it is my job isn't going to go away because my job is to equip others. I think the downside that I've seen is a lot of staff in the church world, it becomes about them. How many volunteers, how many kids, how many adults, how many...you name it. My measurement that I've

had to work with our leadership and redefine what we measure. "How many God stories do we get out of this? How many stories do we get to share?" I don't care about headcount. That's easy to count. You can do all kinds of things with that. I work really hard at that. To say, "What's God up to?" And let's share those stories; let's make it a part of Sunday morning or a story in the bulletin or on the web or whatever. That needs to be our measurement. It is a bit wishy-washy, and I get it. But that's what this is about from my vantage point. Partnership is a dance we do together.

### Case Study 3: PASTOR

In a rural part of the state made up of farmland and small towns, Combined Rural Ministries (CRM) was created nearly three-and-a-half years ago. It was born out of a conversation that happened in the local coffee shop where a council president from one church and the congregational finance person from another church met often. In addition to many other topics, they discovered they had something else in common. Their area churches were struggling not only with finances, but also with finding pastors to serve the various churches within the small churches in town. They began to wonder if they might be able to do something together. They also wondered if neighboring churches were experiencing the same thing and if they might want to partner as well. The group asked around to see if there were others in a similar situation, and there were. There were not just Lutheran churches, but also two Methodist churches and two Presbyterian Churches as well. In total, they discovered ten churches that were in need of a pastor. About this time, Tom, a newly retired businessman, spearheaded CRM. He approached the local synod office to help them navigate the possibilities of sharing pastoral staff among these churches. CRM was not sure of the configuration, but they did know they needed help. The synod was eager to assist as it could, and had a five-step process for those exploring collaboration. That was the good news. The not-so-good news was that, between finances and availability, they would find it difficult to acquire a pastor. The most they could

afford was someone coming straight out of seminary, but there were not many people coming out of seminary.

A meeting was called between the ten churches that were experiencing these challenges to see if there was interest. One hundred percent of the churches showed up. They had a great meeting and were charged with going back to their appropriate councils and asking for an endorsement to work together. They all received the endorsements, asked for one hundred dollars from each congregation as a start-up fund, and got a website started. The dream was "the five strong ones would take care of and provide ministry services to the five weak ones based on population."

Shortly after the group meeting, the judicatories began sending applicants for churches with vacancies. Three of the initial ten congregations called pastors on their own and the energy for the CRM was somewhat defeated. Ideally, everyone wanted their own pastor for their own congregation. Most dug into their congregational reserves in order to pay a pastor in the hopes that they could grow their church by having their own pastor. The remaining people in CRM claimed stubbornness kept them going. Then two more churches called pastors. As the remaining congregations without pastors approached the idea of working together, it was discovered that two of the churches actually could not afford their agreed upon portion, which in the end was frustrating and felt like another setback. They really could not even be part of the conversation moving forward because they were unable to commit to the funding portion of the shared ministry.

In the end, two of the remaining churches from the initial conversation in the coffee shop began exploring working together. They did their church profiles and ended

up having three of the five top priorities the same for both congregations. They took that as a sign.

Meanwhile, the CRM continued to meet in hopes of doing other ministry together. Possibly they could join together to provide youth ministry to all the churches or maybe work together for a service project in the surrounding communities. At the time of my interviews, I asked them about their reasoning to continue with the collaboration when what they set out to do has been done, even though it did not look like they originally thought it would. Either two-point parish scenarios or lay leaders currently cover all the churches that needed a pastor. They were unable to answer the question other than to say they already have spent so much time and energy that they might as well keep going.

There have been and are many leaders in this effort. Tom was the first to serve as convener of the group. He led the meetings, worked with churches, and cast the vision for this group. After two years, Tom thought he had taken the CRM as far as he could. There was key support along the way. Henry, the finance person, and Martin, a council president from another church, took part. At one point near the beginning of the CRM, a pastor was called and continuing the development of CRM was part of her job description. Tied to the job description was the idea that the success of the CRM would add to the sustainability of her tenure. Challenges arose during her duration as pastor, where she took over as the leader of the group and was decisive about how the collaboration should be run. It quickly became evident to the leadership at the church that called her that this was not going to work out and, with assistance from the synod, she and the church parted ways within a year and a half. At the point when Tom walked away from the leadership, pastors were already being called in the original ten churches.



The next iteration of leadership came from a young lay leader who had a part-time job as a physical therapist and was studying in the lay school training. Lay school training equips people in areas that need pastors to be trained to serve in their own congregation in service of the Word, but not Sacrament. That is what she is doing. She ended up the next leader because she came to the meeting with a pen and paper and took notes. She typed up the notes, handed them out, and suddenly she was the leader. Now she sets meetings, takes minutes, and sends out the minutes of their meetings. The individual interviews and focus group that I conducted believed that the role of the leader is to share the direction of the group, set the meetings, take notes, get others on board, pray, ask the right questions, articulate a vision, be mindful of finances, and demonstrate the value added for whatever they undertake.

There were a number of challenges the group encountered along the way. Martin, one of the council members, put it this way,

We would talk about all our pastors retiring and how we are having some issues and wondered if we could ever work together or if that might be a possibility. Looking at all the churches in the CRM, our two churches were probably the closest in proximity to each other and maybe it could be done. We had just gone into endless talking stages at that point, not much more than that until things really started happening: our pastor left and then before she left we had already started a call committee and I think everybody still has the same idea that realistically you'd like to have your own pastor. We were three years from celebrating 150 years of our congregation and we had never shared a pastor. So, for a lot of older members, bringing up the idea of sharing a pastor was tough for them. They would ask, "Do we really have to do this?" We decided to move ahead with a call committee to start the process, knowing that we probably would not be able to afford a pastor. So, the supply and demand, and cost, and health care: it was all really hard to figure out.

Another challenge was trying to get direction from the synod. There were conflicting opinions about how to move forward. The synod, for the most part, was very supportive and excited about the effort to come together and figure this out, but there

were challenges. For example, a pastor could only be called to one church, not multiple churches. This means that one church is ultimately responsible for the finances, call, and all the other details. The church wanting to partner needed to pay the other church, which led to some confusion between the churches if they were going to be the afterthought of the pastoral ministry. Lots of communication was needed. The CRM also felt they were getting mixed messages from the synod. As Henry said, "In part you are on your own and in part the synod was telling us what to do."

When asked what advice they would give to other congregations that would like to create a collaborative ministry, the main answers came from the focus group. They included, "Get a pledge of honesty; if money is a problem, say money is a problem so you do not operate on false assumptions; do not be afraid to step outside the box; take risks to do things that are different; get the congregation to buy in and get a leader who can punch and make those things happen." They also said that even though they may not like collaborating, it is the best for the group right now.

What is the future they see for CRM? The pastor of the now two-point parish, in his third week at the time that this focus group was conducted, mentioned that during the time he was interviewing, the CRM was never brought up as part of his job description or as part of what the churches were involved with. To him, having two churches to work with and being new, there was plenty to do. The council person and the finance person, Martin and Henry, who served in the beginning, in the end were the critical impetus for the new pastor being in place. They believe they are in a holding pattern for now.

The original convener of the CRM, Tom, said, "I'm done. I've done what I can do. They can do whatever they want to do." He has a different mission to focus on now. He is

now using his energy to invite churches to a benefit concert for local homeless people in need of housing.

Annie, the lay leader said, "Frankly, when I came on board, I was under the impression that the pastors wanted to step out and not come to any of the meetings. It was kind of like they were asking 'Do you want us at the next meeting or do you not want us at the next meeting? It was our understanding that lay people would take over to get us out of the pastor conversation.' I guess that was in part because maybe I'm just one of those leaders. It just sort of defaulted towards me and that was the impression that I got. That the clergy didn't have the desire to be the leader or have a leader at this point."

I asked whether this group had run its course, to which Tom responded, "I think that's fair." At the end of my day with the leaders from the CRM, they decided that their work for now would be suspended since their original mission had been accomplished and a new vision was not fully embraced. They agreed to bring together the group one more time to put their work officially on hold. During that meeting they want to acknowledge, thank, and bless the work that has already been done.

The gift of the CRM was the relationships between the church leaders, which led to partnerships that would not have normally happened. There have been a lot of twists and turns that took place during their three-and-a-half year history together, and what looked like it would be one case study in reality could have been six. I have tried to convey the key points of their work together in an effort to glean learnings from them. Within this case study I conducted a total of four interviews and one focus group of five people.

One of the observations I would lift up is that in all this time together, a total of five hours of interviews combined, only when I mentioned the idea of God being a part of this collaboration was it mentioned. Maybe from their part it was implied, but I had statements in the focus group time that led me to think otherwise. As I reflect on this case study it has different energy than the previous two case studies. I would say given the shifts of the congregational dynamics (some churches getting pastors yet agreeing to participate in the collaboration) and the changing leadership and energy made it difficult to have a unified vision.

### **Data Findings**

There were three distinct case studies, separate from one another, culminating in eleven individual interviews and two focus groups. These two focus groups from the CAMP and PASTOR case studies had a total number of ten participants. My research question throughout this work was, *"How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?"* Data were coded looking for common themes, grouping similar kinds of information into categories, and relating different ideas and themes to one another.

There were many ideas that surfaced as data were analyzed. For the purposes of the research question, I sought to focus the information into themes. Based on the interviews and focused groups, I put grouped similar words. Words were put into categories and from there three themes that stood out either as present or notably missing from the data. This research is through my eyes as the interpreter, and exploratory research in many ways is subjective analysis. I have made every attempt to make this as unbiased as possible.

Based on my coding and based on the notes that I took, there are three themes that seemed to be common in my research. These themes, when cultivated, added to the ethos of the work the collaborative was attempting to do. These themes are flexibility, proactive communication, and external support. I will write generally about each of these in this chapter, but will go more in depth in chapter 6, the conclusions chapter, and how each of these relate to the biblical and theoretical lenses.

The first theme is *flexibility*. Flexibility in the research conducted is about the openness to see things from another person's perspective. This includes being self-aware, noticing the work of other people—particularly volunteers—who are giving of their time in an effort to assist the designated leaders, whether they are a staff person or volunteer.

The second theme that emerged from the research is *proactive communication*. The leader, again, could be paid or volunteer. They are continually communicating information to the participants of the collaborative and the greater community. Sometimes this information is purely linear and sometimes this information is in story form, sharing the activity or results of what the collaboration has been doing or will be doing in the near future. This continual communication happens not only to keep others informed, but also to preemptively keep people from being either uninformed or misinformed.

Third, *external support*, when present and engaged, cultivates an environment where innovation and mission can be supported and nurtured. External support in these case studies looks like a Bible camp, a church, and a synod, respectively as the case studies were presented. Having support that is not ingrained in the work the collaborative is attempting to establish seems to be important according to the research.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter took an in-depth look at each of the three case studies, CAMP, AGENCY, and PASTOR, which were researched. A brief overview was provided for the data findings as well. The sixth chapter will look at the conclusions to be drawn from the research.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I presented case studies of the three collaborative efforts and introduced three themes that emerged from the research: flexibility, proactive communication, and external support. These themes also had an internal component and an external component. In this chapter, I will explore and advance these themes and propose some new directions for collaboration. This chapter is based around these three findings and the energy of the Spirit that plays into the case studies.

#### **Flexibility**

There were three themes that emerged from the research about how leadership enhances ministry collaboration. The first finding is the characteristic of flexibility. There is openness to see things from a different perspective than one's own. This type of leadership draws upon the knowledge of the leader and their ability to not have a predetermined way of doing things. They are not rooted in their own ideas, and they are willing to compromise. In the research conducted, the word, flexibility, was speckled throughout the first two case studies.

In the second case study, AGENCY, the director of mission and outreach, James, shares how they embodied flexibility:

So we had a new staff person who is no longer here, she was here about six months. We found out that when we were gathering the volunteers she took the reins and found out that she wasn't able to connect with people. So we try to do the dance a little bit with her, trying to shift and all that stuff. In the end she changed as much as she was able to but ended up just resigning. So it kind of resolved itself if you will. We take volunteer ideas all the time because for food and clothing, the volunteers make the food menu every single time we open. I don't even look at it, I have that much trust in you. I'm like, "you got it, you know it better than I do. Clothing recommendations, you know how much we give away, how little we give away." Every once in a while we have to put a little heavier hand. So, for example, we do not have storage for winter clothing right, actually, right now, and so we had to go through this whole story about we need to trust in God's abundance that we will have enough clothes for winter, that we cannot take it now 'cause we can't store it. The person started saving again, she's on the leadership team. So I sent her an email because I didn't see her, otherwise I would have addressed it personally. I said "as a leadership team member, will you help make sure that the volunteers remember that we're not keeping these things, and so to stop taking them." She was part of the issue. So, it doesn't always work, but we have to choose our battles, and we have to be flexible because our volunteers' lives are flexible. I would say the other thing that we've added that is critical is the notion that we don't have anyone to sign up for volunteer. Nobody signs up to volunteer. Every day that we open is a leap of faith that we trust that God will provide volunteers to make it happen. Fifteen years, fourteen years. I tell that to people, and not as a bragging point, but it's a fact. We get 200 volunteers, or plus or minus, every week because of that. So why? What God is up to that was this: Volunteers said, "well first of all I don't want time sheets, been there, they have done that." Because who are the ones that volunteer? Much of them are retired or, if they work in the evenings, "I do that at my day job, I don't want to do it at my evening job. So I don't want to do timesheets. I want to be able to go to the cabin in the summer. I want to be able to go on a trip. I want to be a snowbird." So we'll say to them, "alright, here's the deal. Come join us. You can come for one week, two weeks and three weeks, take the next eight off, come back again. And you may not do exactly what you did, but we're still going to be here and we're still going to welcome you with open arms and have you serve with us." Most people are like "you're nuts." But, so I would say in a given 30 day window, one day a month it's like, "we're a little tight today," but it works. And when staff person that came here, she was here about six months, and that just sent her through the roof. She couldn't handle that. It was just too much. It was added to her reason for resigning. I get it I absolutely get it. One of our current teammates is like "we've got to change this," and I'm like "if it isn't broke, don't fix it." Now, if you want to have a sign-up sheet over here that kind of has that going, that's fine, but we're not going to dive in and say "here's the deal. You have to sign up."



This account illustrates how the collaborative effort did not develop along a straight line that might be defined according to a strategic planning process. They have the ability to read the signals of what the Spirit is doing through other people and then respond accordingly.

In the first case study, CAMP, I asked one of the volunteers in an interview about characteristics a person needed to fill the position held by Dan in order to do this collaborative work. She said:

I think they have to be very flexible. I think they have to be willing to give much more of their time than what their contract probably says that it is. I think, well, definitely youth-oriented, of course. They have got to be very responsible. He always handled things well, but he's gotten better at handling maybe some difficult situations when kids don't behave, or whatever the case may be. Or sometimes it's the parents who don't behave, because they just drop off their kids and leave and we're supposed to show some support for him too. Not just be there and drop the kids off and go. So I think flexibility is a very big one, you've got to have lots of energy, you've got to be willing to try new things, and really reach out to the people that you are a part of. Become familiar with them, and what's the word I want there relationally.

My work with InterServe Ministries has taught me that youth ministry in general requires a high degree of flexibility. It is just the nature of working with young people and their parents. However, when working with many different churches and a camp, a propensity to flexibility is even more important.

One of the critical reasons that flexibility is important for any ministry in general, but specifically to any collaborative effort, is knowing the Spirit of God not only creates the church by calling it into existence, the Spirit of God also leads the church by sending it into the world to participate fully in God's mission in all of creation. This means congregations are missionaries and missional by nature. This also means the Spirit creates and recreates. We as listeners and discerners are adjusting according to the direction of the Spirit. As we are flexible, we are able to better understand what the Spirit

is doing and respond accordingly. The following seven aptitudes, created by Craig Van Gelder, represent dimensions of how the Spirit-created church is to live out Spirit-led ministry. I believe these aptitudes provide a rationale for flexibility.

Aptitude 1. Spirit-led, missional congregations learn to read a context as they seek their contextuality. It is critical that congregations develop the ability to read a context. This is where the faith-and-discernment task of answering the question, 'What is God doing?' comes into play. This analysis of the context also brings the other responsibility into focus, that of wisdom and planning, which asks the question, 'What does God want to do?'

Aptitude 2. Spirit-led, missional congregations anticipate new insights into the gospel. The gospel engages new cultures within various contexts by anticipating new insights into the gospel just as the congregation is always forming within their context. This is illustrated in the New Testament when the gospel was translated into a Hellenistic worldview at Antioch. In doing so, fresh resources for understanding the faith are often released.

Aptitude 3: Spirit-led, missional congregations anticipate reciprocity. One of the interesting things about the ministry of the Spirit is that over time the gospel often brings about reciprocity. Reciprocity occurs when the cultural group that brings the gospel into a different context is itself changed over time by those who received the gospel.

Aptitude 4: Spirit-led, missional congregations understand they are contextual and, therefore, are also particular. Our language illustrates this point whenever we refer to a congregation as a local church. As contexts change, the church should expect to change, even as it attempts to live out the tension inherent in being faithful to the gospel while also being responsive to the context. This point introduces the important issue of how models function in relation to congregations.

Aptitude 5: Spirit-led, missional congregations understand that ministry is always contextual and, therefore, is also practical. Missional congregations understand that the practice of ministry is always normed by Scripture, but they also understand that this takes place in the particular contexts that they serve. Just as a congregation is always contextual, so also its ministry is always contextual. In reality, there can be no common program that works the same in each congregation and context. While a basic programmatic framework might inform the development of ministry, each congregation is best served by thinking carefully about how such a program needs to be adapted to best fit its particular ministry and the context being served.

Aptitude 6: Spirit-led, missional congregations understand that doing theology is always contextual and, therefore, is also perspectival. Historical, confessional perspectives shape this understanding, but Spirit-led, missional congregations understand that these perspectives have embedded within them elements of the culture and context in which they were formulated.

Aptitude 7: Spirit-led, missional congregations understand that organization is always contextual and, therefore, is also provisional. A Spirit-led, missional congregation develops organizational forms to carry out its ministry and to structure its life. This is part of the good news of the gospel that congregations are able to relate to any culture and to any context. The challenge is to allow the leading of the Spirit to give birth to forms that are informed by the historic Christian faith, while also reflecting the realities of the context in which congregations are located. Polity needs to focus more on guiding principles rather than prescribed practices. This is because polities need to be adaptive and flexible in consciously taking context and culture into consideration in the midst of the ongoing processes of forming and reforming.<sup>1</sup>

The flexibility exhibited, or not exhibited, generated an environment for developing these aptitudes, and as a result, it has been creating new paths for churches to participate in God's mission. This is connected to the lens of adaptive leadership.

#### Flexibility: Internal and External

It is also important to mention that within the overarching theme of flexibility there is a sublevel which incorporates the characteristics, or internal, components of flexibility and practices, or external components of flexibility. What it looks like to be internally flexible as a leader takes what the leader brings to the effort; life experience, training, and competencies they bring into the environment. The external dimension of flexibility takes the leader to the logistics of how the collaborative parties are going to work together. How will they organize what they will do together? They do not come in with the prescription in hand, so to speak, but invite the community to come together and work towards a common mission where all are connected. Collaboration is an adaptive challenge, to say the least. First, the challenge is such that a predetermined formula cannot address it. There is no predetermined path that can be copied, no plan that can be

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<sup>1</sup>Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 63-67.

reproduced. Secondly, collaboration is not fully understood; it must be discovered as the work of collaboration is being done. As with adaptive challenges, collaboration is not the work of an expert. It is stopping to reflect communally, evaluating and moving forward. My research demonstrated that the stakeholders, the common people of the church, do this work. Flexibility and adaptation work together.

### **Proactive Communication**

Communication is always important in any leadership endeavor. However, one of the key factors to the energy created in these collaborations is the degree to which there was proactive communication. They were not just relaying the necessary information normally communicated by a church. They were communicating above and beyond the minimum. Some might even claim that they were over-communicating. How many times in a ministry event have we heard someone after the event say, "Oh that event happened? I had not heard anything about it." Yet you know the event was communicated many times. By over communicating you are really trying to avoid miscommunication. Of course, because collaborations involve organizations that have not worked together, there is plenty of opportunity for miscommunication. The PASTOR case study illustrates this. When the groups first met to talk about the idea of sharing pastors, many committed to the idea. Assumptions were made and plans were based on those assumptions. Along the way, individual churches came up with their own solutions and left the collaboration as it was being formed. This happened until only two churches were left. In times of anxiety or when working on something creative such as a group project, it is important to communicate often in order to avoid miscommunication. Something is going to go

wrong. It requires a lot of adjustment to respond to the challenges. This is where it can be helpful to over communicate. Communication takes forms and many layers.

There was not a uniform way of way of communicating. This study focused on cases that involved rural churches and a city church. The communication patterns are different because the cultural norms for communication vary. The point is not to adopt a communication technique for proactive communication. The point is to develop appropriate communication methods along these lines. There are a couple ways in which communication appeared to become most helpful.

### Consistent Communication

The first is *consistent* communication. The first practice of proactive communication is consistency. When the collaborators communicated regularly, energy was generated. This constant contact did not depend upon whether there was something that had to be communicated. In other words, it was not merely based in communicating the necessary facts needed to pull off the collaboration. They communicated regularly in order to maintain the relationships. They did not just do this communication in an effort to market themselves or for information sharing, but for relationship building. It was participating in a text study, eating together, newsletter articles, emails, group Facebook page, and texting. A lot of these communication methods have a timeframe built into them, or if they do not, the leader can put them into a format that allows consistency to their constituency. Text studies are weekly, newsletter articles are monthly, for example. Having these consistency markers built in made people know when they would get information.

### Communication through Story

The second practice of proactive communication is sharing *stories*. One of the common themes that emerged is the importance of sharing stories about the collaborative efforts. The stories themselves were told because of the energy experienced, but telling the stories to others increased the energy. The stories went beyond the facts and the plan. They sparked hope and confirmed that their work was actually worth the effort. The AGENCY case study illustrates this. They were constantly talking about how God was opening doors to serve those in need. These stories are generative and created momentum and more creativity in those who hear them.

On the other hand, in the PASTOR case study, there was not the same level of energy. They focused on the facts and the strategy. Upon reviewing the experience through the research interviews, they recounted what did not work and even expressed blame toward others. Their communication pattern de-energized their collaboration. They had a good idea and good strategy, but they did not proactively communicate with stories.

### Communication, Conflict, and Adaptive Leadership

Working through conflict is a difficult challenge. One of the keys to addressing adaptive challenges is the ability to orchestrate conflict. Collaboration naturally results in conflict because it involves bringing together at least two different organizations that operate and communicate in different ways. Conflict produces stress and energy, and the natural response to this stress is fight or flight. If the level of conflict rises too high, the knee-jerk reaction will be to do everything possible to get back to one's comfort zone. The conscious and unconscious persons involved will try to revert to a normal state also called homeostasis. In the CAMP case study, Dan's housing might not have turned out in

his favor, but it did. Why? Perhaps his consistent communication with the other churches coupled with a new life phase, being married, was why the churches came together to figure out how to accommodate a request of a person who was willing to share what he needed to continue this ministry and maintain a personal life.

### Mutual Trust

Mutual trust between the collaborators is crucial. When even a hint of not being able to trust your collaborators that is shown in the third case study happens, the breakdown of communication begins. The leaders of this endeavor expressed how their efforts began on commitments that were not trustworthy. However, trust is not merely about not doing certain things. It is about actively trusting and being trustworthy. Trust is inherently connected to proactive communication. As one party effectively communicates, it endears trust, and that trust leads to more proactive communication. There seems to be reciprocity between the two, something that is worth further research.

### Proactive Communication and *Perichoresis*

Proactive communication also relates to the lens of *perichoresis*. God is a shared love between Father, Son, and Spirit who are in constant communication with one another. They are not merely communicating in order to get work done. They are communicating in love. This is the same love in which the church participates. It is excessive, over communication that reflects the life of the Trinity. Therefore, this proactive communication is not just a way to make a collaborative effort effective. It is a way to enter into the life of God. As we proactively communicate—being consistent, sharing stories, addressing adaptive challenges through conflict, cultivating mutual trust—we are entering into God’s nature, participating in God’s mission.

### Proactive Communication: Internal and External

After looking at the various ways communication plays a role in collaboration, a deeper look at communication produces a couple factors. First, the internal characteristic of proactive communication revolves around how the leader or leaders will communicate. It is part of reminding the people why we are doing what we are doing and why we believe God is in the midst of it. It is around mission, not structure, when done well. Picture a spiral that goes deeper with the interplay of the self, the other, and God in the middle. The external, or practices, of proactive communication revolve around the actual communications that are sent out in a way that relays to the audience pertinent information in a timely matter.

#### **External Support**

In addition to flexibility and proactive communication, a third finding emerged that resulted in energy. I am calling this *external support*. There has been a larger entity that is outside the collaborative work that is not directly involved but gives its blessing, undergirds the process, and is helpful in creating an ethos and safe place to collaborate. In most cases, entities that are collaborating do not work in isolation, but there is larger entity providing support.

In these three case studies external support came in different and not always overt ways. The CAMP case study had external support through the Bible camp itself and from the council and pastors who partnered with the camp to make this effort happen. The AGENCY case study received support from its larger structures, the church from its senior leadership and council and the Salvation Army from its district leadership. In the PASTOR case study there was external support from the synod.



### Permission and Authority

If the synod says collaborating is a good thing to do, it gives authority to the local leaders that this is a good option to consider. Instead of one person coming up with this idea and convincing others, there is an outside organization that is giving its consent. This is a way to introduce change because you are relying on an outside authority. It comes with implied trust. This is about authority as well, recognizing each entity lives within a larger system. It notes that the leaders within the larger system not only support, but also give their approval either formally or informally, and will assist in some way. Maybe it is giving space, maybe holding back forces or removing obstacles, or offering wisdom.

### Resources

In both CAMP and AGENCY case studies, the issue of resources is brought to the table. Resources are filtered through the collaboration. In the case of AGENCY, resources were externally navigated and with the CAMP case study, congregational offering dollars are funneled through the work. Each partner has different resources, but being honest about those seemed to matter more. In the PASTOR case study there were two different financial attempts. The first was to hire a designated pastor who would steward the mission of the collaborative effort and her response was to over control the collaboration knowing her job depended on the success of the collaboration. The other attempt was having each of the parties be responsible for a certain portion of the finances. By the time decisions were needing to be made, the realization that some churches did not have the money and were having to step away frustrated the remaining congregations that wanted to collaborate.

### External Support: Tangible and Intangible

In each of the other two findings; flexibility and proactive communication, there was an internal characteristic stated and an external practice stated. External support is a bit different. How is support for a collaboration tangible or intangible? The fact of the matter is all of us find ourselves located within systems. Collaborations are no different. These systems can be cities, denominations, financial, personal, and the list goes on and on. There are tangible ways external support can be helpful: resourcing as needed, providing physical space, or providing additional funding.

The other part of external support is the intangible ways, cultivating an environment where innovation is invited knowing that it does not need to be figured out all at once. It can be creating opportunities that invite collaboration or removing obstacles along the way.

In the end, the finding of external support is like planting a garden, where collaboration is the vegetable. It is important to find the right area to place the garden, till the soil, wait for the right time of the year to plant, remove the weeds, provide water, all in an effort to nurture the environment for the plant, or collaboration, to grow.

### **Energy, The Spirit's Work**

Three findings in this research project helped answer the research question, "*How does leadership enhance ministry collaboration?*" Those three findings are flexibility, proactive communication, and external support. Within each of these finding are elements of internal characteristics and external practices that are associated with each.

Finally, these three findings are brought together with the work of the Spirit. Two of the three case studies had a very tangible sense of energy. As the first focus group

(CAMP case study) assembled to have lunch and conversation, I took note of how I felt as a stranger to this group of people who know each other quite well. I noticed an energy in the room. It was hard to quantify. You could hear it in their voices. It was light, and it was warm and friendly. I was welcomed in and just their presence made me want to know each of them better. There was friendly banter about upcoming things, asking questions about each other's family members, light-hearted, creative solutions about how to officiate a wedding but not go to the reception—all were characteristics of the meeting. The conversation turns to me, and I explain my presence and the group engages as though this was their own question. To me, I feel validated, like my question matters. To the group, they took my questions seriously, wanting to give me the information I sought and also wanting to share what they have learned by being part of this thing, this collaboration, that is bigger than the sum of its individuals. I could only describe what was happening as ethos. It was an energy all its own. This feeling was obvious in their description of the youth that participated in the collaborative. The youth minister put it this way,

The interesting thing I've noticed is that I don't think our youth necessarily think of themselves as being a part of one church, I mean, they'll say yes, I go to this church or that church by name, but I don't think that is their primary identity when they talk about their youth stuff. I think it is the Midwest Collaborative where they see their identity.

The key finding of my research fell under the overarching sense of energy. This ethos was hard to describe but perhaps it is the Spirit at work in and through the collaborations. It is hard to describe this energy other than to say it is the impetus to continue to propel things forward. There was just a sense of momentum to continue moving in a positive direction. There may be set backs, but they were considered mere obstacles or redirection. Of course, energy is not always positive, and in contrast the third

case study, PASTOR, had a much different sense of energy. Consider this conversation from the third case study:

Congregational Representative 1 (CR1): Yeah, yeah. We'll figure it out. That's part of the helpful thing for me is that I thought about the call a lot. Actually both churches, which were still keeping things going and things just didn't stop. There was a pastor, I thought, they're still doing a lot of ministry; these churches and they were not just waiting for the pastor to do it. That was a positive thing for me, it is like they are holding the ministry here and keeping things going.

New Pastor: The downside of that one is that after a while, it gets tiring. You get burnt out, yes.

Henry: Yes, lots of people get burnt out.

CR1: I look across on Sunday morning, and you know, I can pull out twenty ... It's just tiring.

New Pastor: Yeah. The old eighty twenty rule. Twenty percent of people do eighty percent of the work.

CR1: So in other words, it's kind of a reality though I'm living with, I just get tired.

Interviewer: It gets frustrating to see people, for the lack of better word, complain about things but never do anything to help out with it either.

CR1: The frustrating thing for me is that apparently this shared ministry concept works some place. Or so I've been told.

Henry: It does it has to, we've gotten samples.

CR1: North Dakota has them. What is the big deal? Why are we different than other areas? What makes it such a big mountain to climb when it looks like other people have figured it out?

New Pastor: Yeah, you had others that figured it out.

CR1: Yeah, then I get kicked on myself for saying; I should be smart enough to figure this out.

New Pastor: Because it is working somewhere else?

CR1: Yeah and I'm not smart enough to do that and I feel badly about it.

In this example from the third case study, the energy is also palpable, but in a different way. The agency is on the person to figure it out and not on what God is doing, has done, or where God is leading. It is almost as though the person was saying, if I would have had more energy, worked harder, I should have been able to figure this out. Being missional in our motivations places the *perichoretic* God as the primary actor. Our goal is then to answer the questions, "What is God up to here?" and "How are we being invited to participate in what God is up to?" "If local churches are to have a future today

and beyond, space must be made for new expressions of Christian life and witness to take shape in the native cultures of new generations and populations. Such expressions must carry forward the best of earlier traditions, embracing rather than forsaking the wisdom of the past."<sup>2</sup>As we consider the contrast in how energy can differ, and how this energy processes, there were three characteristics that were present in the three case studies that are contributing factors in ministry collaboration.

Dwight Zscheile, in one of our first doctoral classes, had us list on the chalkboard how we were doing within our current contexts in ministry. While our answers varied, most of what we shared related to being exhausted and frustrated while serving in congregations that appear tired and uninterested. Dwight then said something profound. The hallmark of the Spirit is energy. If leaders are not experiencing energy, then is it possible that what they are doing is not of the Spirit. The question for me then is, what exactly contributes to this energy of the Spirit in these collaborative efforts? The answer according to the research I conducted for this project includes flexibility, proactive communication, and external support. These three, along with an umbrella of energy, appear to foster an environment where the Spirit has greater freedom to energize collaborative efforts. The following suggests directions to explore these three themes further.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The limits of generalizing these findings come from a small case study sample. Three examples of collaboration over the thousands of possible cases to study only

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<sup>2</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, *Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 2014), Kindle edition, location 144.

provide a small glimpse of the greater breadth of what collaboration can encompass. My hunch and experience in being in ministry for twenty-five years is that the concepts of flexibility, proactive communication, and external support are key longevity factors across most collaborative efforts, but that has yet to be quantified. There are probably other hidden gems in continued research that would also rise to the top along the way.

Other questions for future research that have grown out of my study are many. When starting this research, I had a different question. The previous question was focused around leadership practices. It was an attempt to look at what congregations did in an effort to make collaboration work. When asking the questions about practices or how groups went about doing their work, I discovered I was hard pressed to find any practices. I was thinking about things like discernment, prayer, communal discernment, and intentional listening. These would be interesting experiments to conduct on already existing collaborations and then quantify the difference before inserting a practice and then measuring it afterwards.

I would also like to continue the qualitative research I have been doing. It would be energizing to continue to meet with established collaborations around the country to see if there are trends that are particular to different parts of the country. It would also be interesting to see how much collaboration exists specifically by denomination or across denominations. As collaboration is not a new concept, I believe it is in its infancy, particularly in the Midwest as congregations have been typically autonomous. Our resources for congregations have been vast. I wonder what it is like for areas that do not have as many congregations in such a geographically close location. My guess is they are ahead of the curve on imagination and innovation. If necessity is the mother of invention,

then those that do not have a wealth of resources have to have come up with ways to meet the spiritual needs of their constituents. If religion and spirituality are important to our society in the years and decades ahead we will need to catch up with where God already is. It may not be a congregation, at least as we know it. I pray we will have the courage to go where God is leading.

### **Conclusion**

This research project began with curiosity about how congregations and other established entities come together for the benefit of each other. Although independent at first, how do they figure out how to work together? The qualitative research focused on three ministries in the Midwest, but I believe the information gleaned from the case studies is more universal in nature. Flexibility, proactive communication, and external support are going to be important in any ministry or collaboration. This importance takes place both in the characteristics or internal nature of the leader(s). This importance also takes place in the practices or external nature of the leader(s). This cannot be done by sheer willpower or applying old solutions to a new problem, but rather by digging into adaptive leadership practices and embracing the gifts provided by the body of Christ in all of its fullness.

The work and energy of the Spirit in general is a dance between our agency and God's agency. This dance we do together requires us to put forth our voice, step in, listen, and make space for the Spirit. In two of the cases they have found a way to live in the collective space interplay of each individual's agency. They create space for God and others. The *perichoretic* move is in its fullness. It is less of a math equation where one plus one equals two, because there is a multiplier effect, more of an artistic expression of

a creative flow. In the third case study, the Spirit felt different, almost stale or flat. I would have to do more research to figure out why.

Think of creating a painting. You start with a canvas, then paint the background, then you paint the object in the painting. Each of these layers is important to the whole. The layers of flexibility, proactive communication and external support create a sweet spot in the portrait that is more than the sum of its parts. It builds upon each other. Energy is the hallmark of the Spirit, and at some level it is these three layers with the work of the Spirit that, coupled with our agency, the agency of others, and the agency of God, provide a masterpiece.



## EPILOGUE

It always seems to happen this way. By the time I hit my stride and gather what is needed and necessary, the project is over. This project is the culmination of four years of learning and studying with people I believe are some of the smartest, most compassionate, wise, fun-loving, ministry people I know. It has been a wonderful journey that I did not think I would ever undertake.

This research and DMin process has influenced me as a person as I was really curious about collaboration. Engaging in ministry together has always been a richer experience for me, but it tends to have its own unique challenges. I feel like collaboration is one direction churches can go as they evolve to another iteration. I wonder what it will be like to train people specifically to do collaborative ministry in an adaptive way.

## APPENDIX A

## EMAIL REQUEST FOR COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY NOMINATIONS

The following is an example of an email that was sent out inquiring for recommendations for potential collaborations to study:

As a Luther Seminary candidate for the Doctor of Ministry in Congregational Mission and Leadership (CML) Program, I am looking for congregations in your synod to study. My name is Kris Bjorke and I'd like to identify congregations in your area that are engaged in some kind of collaborative ministry. My study criteria include at least one congregation and the other needs to be another entity (agency, nonprofit, for-profit, shared ministries within area, congregation, or something I may not have thought of) that was on its own entity prior to engaging with a congregation. These entities also do not need to be particularly 'successful' as the question that I'm studying is, "what leadership practices enhance missional collaboration?"

My research is case study based and I will be identifying 3-5 congregations who are involved in collaborative efforts. If you could think of a couple congregations in your area that are doing some kind of collaborative ministry as described I would love to know the name of the congregation and a contact name. I would be happy to connect with them. Each congregational point person will receive a call from me and I will let him or her know I received their name from you and will prescreen them for being a potential site.

If you know of congregations I could reach out to or if you have any questions, please email or phone. I, too, will follow up with a phone call as well as the majority of my research needs to be conducted in the next couple months.

Thanks for your consideration.

Together in Christ,  
Kris Bjorke  
Doctor of Ministry Candidate, CML, Luther Seminary  
xxx-xxx-xxxx

## APPENDIX B

## PHONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Potential congregations and agencies that were candidates for site visits were asked the following questions to see if they would be considered for researching.

1. Who are the partners in this collaboration?
2. How did this collaboration begin?
3. Where are you now?
4. Where are you hoping to go as a collaborative effort?

## APPENDIX C

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM***What Leaders Characteristics Cultivate Ministry Collaboration?*

You are invited to participate in a research study about the strengths, weaknesses and processes that you either led or participated in within the context of collaboration between a congregation and an agency. You were selected because of your role within the context of the collaboration. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Kris Bjorke as part of my Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to aid in understanding what factors of leadership are involved that make collaboration between entities possible.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you participate in an interview or focus group discussion about your experience as part of the collaborative effort and how others can learn from your experience. The discussion will last no longer than 90 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no special risks involved by being a part of this study, aside from normal life risks.

There are no direct benefits of participating in this research.

Indirect benefits to yourself or the general public by participation are the contribution and imagination of your experience shared with others and contribution to future vision for collaborative ministries in other areas.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, any information given will not identify you individually. All data will be kept on my personal computer; only my advisors Dr. Daniel Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any digital recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

The interview and focus group discussions will be digitally recorded, and the files will be stored on my computer. Only I will have access to this raw data.

Raw data will be destroyed by June 1, 2021. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.)

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/ or this collaborative effort. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Kris BJORKE. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at xxxxxx, Minneapolis, MN 55404 or by email at xxxx@luthersem.edu  
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Advisors:

Dr. Daniel Anderson

Dr. Alvin Luedke

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions I asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be audiotaped:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document without my name attached.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW QUESTION PROTOCOL

Each interviewee reviewed and signed the inform consent form.

Interview questions for the designated leaders representing the individual entities of the collaboration.

- Who are the partners in the collaboration and their role?
- How did this collaboration begin?
- Where are you now? What are your challenges?
- Where do you see God in this collaboration? How does this collaboration relate to your mission?
- What leadership style (or leadership practices) have you used?

## APPENDIX E

## FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Each participant of a focus group reviewed and signed the informed consent form.  
Focus group primary questions asked and secondary questions as time allowed.

- What were the motivating factors for you to consider being part of this collaboration?
- What were/are the challenges that you faced?
- What advice would you have for others who are going to try this collaboration?
- How have you seen God at work in this collaboration?
- How do you communicate what is happening to a broader audience?
- Where would you like to see it go?
- Other things you would like me to know?

## Secondary questions

- What were the strengths and weakness of the plan along the way?
- How long do you see this entity existing?
- Where did the vision come from?
- How long did it take to go from concept to implementation?
- How did you get to this point?
- What are the relationships among the partners?
- What makes this collaboration work?

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