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A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY: PARTICIPATIVE DECISION-MAKING
IN FOUR BLACK INDIANA CHURCHES

A THESIS PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE
IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

BY
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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
MAY 2020

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I wish to thank the members of Mount Pleasant who gave me an opportunity to serve them as their pastor. They have allowed me to fail with grace. The space to fail at leadership was the single-most important factor leading to this research study. The learnings hopefully will be as much of a blessing to them as they have been to me. I also want to acknowledge Gina Westbrook who proofread an earlier draft without charge and gave important feedback. Lastly, I thank Deacon Doug Young who encouraged me along the way having completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree himself at the University of Purdue ten years or so earlier.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to look at factors in participative decision-making that would balance congregational polity and pastoral authority. Empirical research that connects participative decision-making (PDM) theory to congregations is scarce. As a result, a multiple-case study was conducted with four Black Baptist churches in central Indiana. Fifteen participants were interviewed across cases and organizational documents such as constitutions and job descriptions were reviewed. The interviews and documents were analyzed and coded. Four themes emerged. They included effectiveness, unified involvement, decision parameters, and trusted leadership. Effectiveness related to making decisions people would support. Unified Involvement was about members having a sense of belonging. Members felt they were truly a part of the community when they participated in meetings and were able to cast votes. Parameters involved areas where certain groups had discretion in decision-making and could choose their own preferred approach. Lastly, trusted leadership pertained to the calling of a pastor and the confidence members placed in that calling. Members undergo an internal process of validating a pastor's calling and based on what conclusion they draw determines whether or not they grant him or her additional parameters.

What this research found as it related to trusted leadership in particular is that PDM played a significant part in increasing members' trust. This study also found that organizational documents do provide some guidance in determining when a pastor should include members or exercise discretion. However, the issue arose in those moments when

those documents were not clear or members had expectations that exceed the limitations of those documents. This study led to the development of a tool the researcher refers to as Decision Involvement Guidelines (DIG). Pastors and leaders can filter an issue through a decision tree and receive a recommendation concerning the type of PDM to exercise in that situation.

In loving memory of

my mother Ida Mae Johnson (May 29, 1943 – August 1, 2010)

who always believed in me

and my sister Jessie Mae Johnson (December 11, 1964 – October 27, 2017)

who showed me through her life how to keep pushing forward.

In honor of

my beautiful wife Kristie Smith Johnson

who has been supportive of me throughout this journey.

CHAPTER ONE: BALANCING PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH

Introduction

Baptist churches are congregational in polity. In general, this type of polity places authority to make decisions in the membership. Members attend business meetings where various topics related to church affairs become the subject of discussion. How often a church conducts a business meeting varies by congregation. It can range from monthly all the way to occasional. Nevertheless, when there is a meeting and there has been a time of debate, a proposal is generated for addressing any issues needing a resolution. To try and reach a decision about a proposal, Baptist often engage in the act of voting. This gives all members an equal level of authority in the decision-making process. All of this is the result of priesthood doctrine, which says every believer is a priest and has equal access to God.¹

Yet, every believer is not at the same place in their Christian development. Some believers look and act more like those outside of the church than someone following Christ. The reality of church membership is the fact that there are some members who have misunderstood the gospel and are not true Christians. Other members are Christians who still resemble non-Christians in their attitudes and behaviors. There are members who are sincerely growing in their faith but are struggling in too many areas to be considered mature. Then there are those who have reached a place of maturity in their development and can be held up as models of the Christian faith. It is not unrealistic to

¹ Paige Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church: Four Views on Church Government*, Counter Points, ed. Steve B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 140-141.

find Baptist churches where leaders would locate the majority of their membership between worldly and growing Christians. In fact, this should be expected since the mission of the church is making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). However, when worldly and growing Christians are brought together to decided important matters for the church, sometimes it can lead to unnecessary conflict, poor-quality decisions or indifference toward decision-making altogether.

Some members have come to expect inclusion in every decision affecting the church no matter whether it is small or great. In these churches, the pastors may feel as if they have no power to truly lead their congregations. When a pastor does try to make a decision on his own or in a smaller leadership group, it has the potential to create hurt feelings and suspicion about the pastor's motives.

Some Baptist churches have moved away from involving the congregation in most decisions. The senior leaders have gained a great deal of authority to devise their own preferred strategies for decision-making, which may limit inclusion to a very small group of trusted leaders if at all. That Baptist congregation then takes on a corporate-style of governance found mostly in for-profit organizations. In this type of structure, it appears as if power resides at the top and members have almost no say in what direction the church takes. The senior pastor acts as president, board-chair, and CEO of the church and is perceived to operate with very little accountability. However, there have been numerous high-profile stories where leaders in corporate-style churches have fallen from grace. The damage their fall caused left an indelible mark in the minds of many Christians. The failure of those leaders only add to any reservations Christians may have about allowing their pastor or pastoral teams to make decisions for the church body

without including the membership.

The issues facing the church in the 21st century are too complex for one leader to handle on his or her own. Pastors must bring in other voices to find appropriate resolutions to those problems. But congregations must also recognize that pastors have been called by God to lead and cannot include the membership on every decision. The challenge is knowing when to include others and who to include when an issue presents itself.

The Research Problem and Subproblems

The problem this research sought to address was the need to strike a balance in participative decision-making (PDM) between pastoral authority and congregational polity. In response to this problem the researcher examined the factors used in three different decisions in the early church: the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15-26), the selection of seven table waiters (Acts 6:1-7), and the application of the law of Moses to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:6-22). It was not entirely clear at the beginning of this research if the way Baptist congregations made decisions was consistent with the models seen in the Early Church. Therefore, exegetical research into these three passages provided several identifiable patterns, which could be compared to present practices.

The research also looked for themes in two different literature streams: participative decision-making and priesthood doctrine. Most of the empirical research on PDM has been done within for-profit organizations. This created a gap in the research literature that the present study attempted to close. It was also the reason for looking at literature on priesthood doctrine. This doctrine is a foundational teaching in the Baptist church, which leads some members to believe they should be included on all decisions.

The literature review tried to show an intersection in thought between the empirical data on PDM and this particular theology.

Lastly, a multiple case study was conducted using the researcher's own ministry context as the main case and three other churches as secondary cases. One of the goals for this study was to bring all three data streams together leading to a decision approach that balances PDM practices with biblical models. The belief was that this research would help pastors and members, in these churches and similar ones, know when and how to include the membership in decision-making processes. It was also a goal for members and pastors to maintain unity and find peace with each other through the application of this new template.

Study Limitations

This study was limited to four Black Baptist churches in central Indiana. No steps were taken to bring together churches who share the same national affiliations. Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, which was the main case, is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches, USA and the other churches are loosely associated with state and local bodies that are linked to the National Baptist Convention, USA. The size and organizational structure were the main connections each of the churches had to one another beyond their ethnicity.

The field study examined the perception members and pastors have about their role with decision-making in Baptist congregations. There perceptions were used to corroborate concerns with priesthood doctrine but no attempts were made to clarify the meaning of this doctrine with the field participants. Furthermore, the literature examined the doctrine mainly for what it said about PDM. Some connections were made historically but an in-depth analysis of historical concerns was not the focus.

As it pertains to the biblical material, only three passages were chosen in the book of Acts. A more systematic investigation of the Bible was not done because the researcher desired to understand the emergence of decision-making practices. The three passages that were chosen provided a similar case-study approach to the field research. Because they are narratives, they offered a rich description of decision-making events.

While the purpose of the study did seek to alleviate conflicts in the church and help the church maintain unity, the study was not a pursuit in conflict resolution approaches. Conflict was only discussed in reference to the impact it had on PDM. Instead, both the field research and literature review focused on the positive and negative effects PDM has on organizations.

Finally, the research was limited to examining the amount of autonomy pastors are given to make decisions as organizational leaders. The researcher did not set out to investigate pastoral or congregational abuses of power. Future research should consider these issues as well as ways to guard against them.

Assumptions

This study was based on a number of assumptions. For example, it was assumed both pastors and congregants were willing to work together and respect each other's roles in the church. Consequently, abuse is a known phenomenon in nearly every industry. Therefore, the expectation of some form of abuse was no different for churches including the ones in this study. The researcher knew he would find evidence on both sides where participants felt someone (the pastor or congregation) had overstepped their boundaries. It was assumed by the researcher that conflict and disunity are not God's will for any church. God wishes for all believers to be clothed "with humility towards one another" (1

Pet. 5:5).² Each congregation must work to overcome conflict.

Other assumptions were made in the field study as well. For instance, it was assumed every church member did not participate in business meetings even when they had an opportunity. Either they were disinterested members or had time-restraints preventing their involvement. Moreover, it was assumed pastors and members possessed a personal understanding of their roles and functions. One more assumption of this study was that pastors felt called to their ministry and carried a burden for the spiritual well-being of the members.

The Main Case Description

The setting for this research was the researcher's own ministry context, Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church. The church is located in Indianapolis, Indiana, which has an estimated population of over 800,000 people.³ The church is situated on the northwest side of Indianapolis in the Pike Township area. This "is a residential suburban community of approximately 72,000 people and ... is home to families with diverse social, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds."⁴ For this community, "the median age is 32" and the ethnic makeup is "comprised of 58% Caucasian residents, 32% African American residents, 6% Latino/Hispanic families, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islander."⁵ However, Mount Pleasant is predominant African American. There are a few

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The New Interpreter's Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with The Apocrypha*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

³ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Indiana," accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/indianapoliscitybalanceindiana,IN/PST045217>.

⁴ "Community Overview," Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.pike.k12.in.us/content/community-overview>.

⁵ Metropolitan School District of Pike Township, "Community Overview."

Caucasians, but they represent far less than 1% of the congregation. The total membership of Mount Pleasant is about 700 but only 320-340 attend on any given Sunday.

Another detail about the makeup of the church is that it has two worship services—one at 8:00 a.m. and the other at 10:30 a.m. Sunday School is in between the two services. Before the new pastor took office in August of 2012, the church had consolidated its two services to one. A new church-goer might assume the pastor made all the decisions based solely on the Sunday morning experience. This is because the church revolves around Sunday morning worship as is the case in many predominantly African American churches. The pastor is the most authoritative and charismatic figure during such times. However, Mount Pleasant is similar to other Baptist congregations. It has a democratic style of governance and members vote on large and some small issues. In fact, prior to the new pastor assuming leadership, the church met monthly to hold business meetings and cast votes on even the smallest matters.

The church has a diaconate and a board of trustees who are assigned to help with congregational care and the upkeep of the property. These two groups are made up of long-standing members who have served in these capacities for at least a decade or more. Though there are a few middle-aged members of both groups, most of the board and deacon participants are seniors or approaching senior status. They are professionals in their jobs who hold middle management positions and are well educated. A few are entrepreneurs. One of the main problems that led to this research study was concerning how some of the deacons and trustees saw their roles. Several of the more vocal members considered their group to have supervisory responsibility over the church and the pastor.

They believed this authority was given to them by the congregation when the church was established. Many conflicts occurred in the time the pastor has served this congregation. Many members felt the pastor's approach to decision-making did not meet their standard of inclusion.

Mount Pleasant is approximately 126 years old. It was founded in 1893 and named after Isaac Pleasant who was one of the founding pastors. About 16 pastors have served this congregation prior to the current senior pastor. The longest-serving pastor served the church 27 years before developing lung cancer and passing away in September of 2010. The church went nearly two years without a pastor after his death. They used associate ministers as pulpit supply while the deacons and trustees handled administrative affairs. The church also hired an interim pastor who provided leadership for one of those years. Again, the researcher became the senior pastor in August of 2012 after serving for seven and a half years as a youth pastor in a different congregation. This was the researcher's first senior leadership position.

Admittedly, the researcher felt he did not use the best wisdom during the period of transition from youth ministry to serving as a senior pastor. Early in his pastorate, many decisions were made (e.g., adjusting worship times) without respect for the culture and practices of the church. Such decisions only exacerbated the trust between the congregation and the pastor. There have been many contentious meetings between board members and the pastor as a result. Disputes have also arisen at church business meetings. Although tensions seemed to have subsided at the time of this research study, some questions still remained in the minds of the members about the decision-making processes of the church. The problem was determining which issues the pastor should

decide rather than the congregation.

Additionally, a concern for the church when it called its new pastor was the size. The new pastor was on staff at a megachurch with three multimillion-dollar campuses around the city and a membership of over 12,000 people. A little over half attended every week. Mount Pleasant, on the other hand, has one campus and several hundred members. Many of the members expressed fear when the new pastor was called. They assumed his goal was to transform their small church into a megachurch. They worried hundreds of members from the megachurch would follow the new pastor to their church and outnumber them in votes at business meetings essentially changing the makeup of the church overnight. The members of Mount Pleasant have traditionally seen themselves as a close-knit family where almost everyone is known by one another. This was how they desired for the church to remain. None of those fears have been realized up to this point. No significant number of members from the megachurch joined Mount Pleasant. While the church has added hundreds of new members over the last seven years, it remains a medium-sized congregation. This is because some of the former members left the church for one reason or another.

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The task of leading a church that just came through a traumatic experience prior to calling a new pastor was overwhelming. Significant mistakes were made in judgment, which may have caused a decline in membership. Many of the members who stayed became suspicious of the new pastor. They felt his style of decision-making was leading to a radical change in the culture of the church. Repeated assurances that he was not seeking to do this were drowned out by frequent comparisons of new changes in worship style to the type experienced in larger churches. Therefore, this investigation was

important to the researcher to help him regain trust among members so that he could help them become more grounded in the church's mission.

Another reason this study was important was in how it forced personal reflection on leadership approaches. The pastor understands himself well enough to know his own personality type and leadership style. He is an introvert who tries to take a situational leadership approach.⁶ However, the pastor has been accused of being too autocratic at times. To be clear, his belief is that some situations require autocratic leadership. Nevertheless, it was not hard for the pastor to understand how he might be viewed as an autocratic leader given his introverted personality. He has been told in the past he seems angry when he felt normal. He has been characterized as unapproachable because of his body language. These factors may all contribute to the tension in his present leadership role. Furthermore, the pastor learned Mount Pleasant functioned in a greater democratic fashion than other Baptist churches.

The prior churches where the researcher served were less democratic. They only came together to decide issues as a whole when it pertained to large matters like constructing a new sanctuary, calling a new pastor, or making some major financial investment. In the megachurch where the researcher served for seven years just before coming to Mount Pleasant, the church only came together twice to discuss building a new multimillion-dollar campus. In several other churches, the congregations only came together once or twice a year. Therefore, the researcher was under the impression this was how it would be in his new ministry context. The researcher assumed he would have the authority and autonomy to make daily operational decisions without bringing those

⁶ Paul Luizzi, "Situational Leadership," *Fire Engineering* 170, no. 8 (August 2017): 65.

matters before the entire congregation for a vote. He was mistaken.

Mount Pleasant held a business meeting every month and expected to be consulted on every matter. Anytime something was decided without a vote it caused tension and conflict. This also became a motivating factor for this research project. This study helped the pastor discover guidelines for balancing inclusion and authority.

The Value of this Research to the Immediate Context

When the researcher first arrived at Mount Pleasant, he reviewed every available document pertaining to the organizational structure of the church, including the constitution and past business meeting minutes from previous years. The pastor also read several histories that had been written about the church and tried to find information through the library from old newspaper articles. What the pastor discovered was how ineffective these documents were in helping him understand his role. It did not specify a decision-making process though it did establish the governance of the church as congregational. Congregational polity allows for each individual church to establish how it wants to be governed and operated. For example, in the book, *Who Runs the Church: Four Views on Church Government*, several views around varying congregational models are explained.⁷ Therefore, just because a church has been established with congregational polity does not automatically determine how it would go about making decisions. It has been previously noted how other Baptist churches function with varying degrees of democracy.

In the immediate context, the research helped Mount Pleasant consider a new

⁷ Paul Engle, ed., *Who Runs the Church: Four Views on Church Government*, CounterPoints (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004).

model for decision-making and evaluate its governing instruments. Because of this study, the church can now move forward with revising the constitution and creating a set of by-laws, which takes into account all of the discoveries.

In many cases, the researcher already serves as the decision leader. Consequently, this does not mean he makes every decision on behalf of the congregation but simply that he initiates structures and processes for making decisions. The researcher has established new committees and teams to handle issues that would have been impossible to address with the whole congregation. The researcher himself continues to make some decisions in the best interest of the congregation without necessarily casting votes even though he seeks input.

The Importance of the Project to the Broader Community

This investigation would be important to other Baptist pastors and congregations. The contention between pastoral authority and congregationalism is not new. In the new wave of social media, congregants lament about the abuse of pastoral power. The findings can provide a way forward for those Baptist churches who are fearful of giving too much control to their pastors while at the same time allowing the pastors to have some discretion in what decision strategy he uses. Challenges with decision-making are not exclusive to Baptist churches; hence this study may benefit even churches of other denominations.

CHAPTER TWO: DECISION-MAKING IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The church has moved far beyond the days of Pentecost when she was endowed with the gift of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Looking at the organization of the church at her inception in Acts and the ways in which decisions were made, may provide insights that help churches today critique their present models of decision-making.

This research proposes the way decisions were made in the early church was important to maintaining unity. However, it was not just the process of decision-making that was important, whether through a vote or consensus, but other factors as well. Those factors may have included problem identification, determining who needed to be a part of the decision-making process, and even setting the criteria and processes for decision-making. The discovery of these factors and any others would demonstrate their importance to decision leadership as well as the overall decision-making process.

There are three cases in the book of Acts that are of particular interest: the decision to replace Judas after his demise (Acts. 1:15-26), the decision to add a new layer of leadership to address disunity and conflict over widows (Acts 6:1-7), and the decision to establish how Gentiles could be integrated into the current group of Jewish disciples (Acts 15:6-22). These passages were chosen precisely for what they contribute to the discussion about decision-making processes in the church. They give the Christian community a look into how the church was organized around her mission. They also show the reader the type of leaders who emerged and what was involved in the decision-

making process. The following sections will give a brief synopsis of the historical background of Acts, draw out the important details of each decision as well as their application to the modern church and conclude with a synthesis of the three examples.

Historical Background

The Book of Acts is a continuation of the third gospel with a single author.⁸ David Barr writes concerning the internal evidence, “The two volumes share a common understanding of Christian life, a common literary structure, style, and vocabulary; both are addressed to the same person, both open with a distinct prologue—the second making explicit reference to the first—and the second volume takes up exactly where the first leaves off.”⁹ Furthermore, external evidence establishes “Luke, the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14) as the author.¹⁰ Christians from the second to the fourth century attributed these writings to Luke and since he was not an apostle or eyewitness it seems unlikely any historical figures would recommend him as the author without a viable reason.¹¹

The Book of Acts may have been composed sometime after AD 80.¹² Furthermore, the audience and purpose of Luke’s writing is stated in the first volume: “I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an

⁸ C. Kavin Rowe, “Literary Unity and Reception History: Reading Luke-Acts as Luke and Acts,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 4 (June 2007): 451; David L. Barr, *New Testament Story: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (Australia: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002), 339; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 402.

⁹ Barr, 339.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington, III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 56-57; Keener, 412.

¹¹ Keener, 410; Witherington, III, 56-57.

¹² Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2006), 12.

orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:3-4). This preface along with scholarship indicate Luke-Acts is more than likely in the form of an “apologetic historiography.”¹³

Detailed Analysis

The Decision to Replace Judas: Acts 1:15-26

According to David Peterson, Acts chapter one would be consistent with Luke’s “apologetic narrative in which [he] seems to promote the leadership integrity of the Apostles.”¹⁴ He argued Judas’ betrayal and departure not only jeopardized the mission of witnessing “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), his association with the rest of the apostles shined a negative light on them.¹⁵ This would have been the issue with integrity Luke was guarding against in his narrative. However, the replacement of Judas restored both the circle of apostles and their mission.¹⁶ It was how the Christian community went about replacing Judas that is of special concern. An investigation of this passage uncovers exactly who was involved and how a decision was reached.

The Involvement and Deliberation of the Congregation (vv. 15-20)

Sometime after Jesus ascended, 120 believers gathered together in Jerusalem (v. 15). Peter appeared to be the leader among the group which is indicated by his actions of

¹³ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 15; Carl R. Holladay, “Interpreting Acts,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 66, no. 3 (July 2012): 246, accessed December 4, 2017, EBSCOhost; Keener, 115.

¹⁴ Peterson, 120.

¹⁵ Peterson, 119-120.

¹⁶ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1994), 2:93-94; Robert W. Wall, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 10:48; Peterson, 120.

standing and giving a speech (v. 15). From the rest of the passage, there is no indication of a debate. In fact, this group may have been brought together by Peter for the purpose of hearing arguments resulting in the selection of a new apostle.¹⁷

It is not entirely clear whether this group was indicative of the whole congregation or a special assembly. Although, several scholars affirm the former position.¹⁸ A comparison of verse 15 with Paul's words in 1 Corinthians demonstrate there were more Christians at this time than 120. Speaking of Jesus, the apostle Paul writes, "He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died" (1 Cor. 15:6). The group in Acts may very well have been a smaller deliberative body apart from the wider community. The way a person interprets this group is important to this investigation. If these 120 believers are, in fact, the entire congregation then the selection of a new leader was a decision-making parameter for the whole body. However, if they were a smaller group, it would mean the apostles did not see participation in leadership selection as a right or responsibility for every member.

The dilemma of how to understand the community referenced in chapter one rests on the translation of one word, *adelphoi*. The Greek term is translated "believers" in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). However, it is a masculine term that means "brothers."¹⁹ The context of a passage would determine whether *adelphoi* is applied to all

¹⁷ Wall, 49.

¹⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 222; Wall, 49; Barrett, 95; Beverly R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 69; Peterson, 121.

¹⁹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., s.v. "*adelphoi*."

believers or just the men in the community. C. K. Barrett, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Peterson all believe the word should be applied to the whole community in this context.²⁰ As such, the leadership selection was made by the congregation who chose a person to fill a position in the single most important group within the Christian community. There are many Baptist churches today whose practices are consistent with this model. Those churches involve the congregation in the selection process of senior leaders. However, it is also not uncommon for Baptist churches and churches within other traditions to limit the selection of senior leaders to a small board or someone outside of the local congregation. Any number of reasons could be used as an explanation ranging from distrust of the body of believers by executive leaders to political motivations seeking to concentrate power in the hands of a few.

Peter began his speech in verse 16. The speech however, is interrupted by explanatory material related to the death of Judas (vv. 18-19). This material is for the benefit of Luke's audience and not the one Peter addressed.²¹ After all, it had only been a few weeks since the events surrounding Judas' death occurred.²² The speech then resumes in verse 20 and concludes in verse 22.

Peter's speech can be viewed in two parts: the prophetic witness in Scripture and the proposal for successive leadership. The Scripture substantiates the plan of succession. On the surface, it appears that Peter simply uses two references to the Old Testament as a proof-text. For example, in verses 16, he says, "Friends, the Scripture had to be fulfilled,

²⁰ Barrett, 95; Fitzmyer, 222; Peterson, 121.

²¹ Peterson, 124; Barrett, 98.

²² Barrett, 98.

which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas.” This prefatory statement reassures his audience that everything was transpiring according to God’s plan. Having then referenced David in verse 16, Peter quotes Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 in verse 20. However, Peter’s use of Scripture is more than a proof-text. He is skillfully using the poetry of the Psalms and an exegetical method known in rabbinic literature to make his case for new leadership.²³ The poetry is intended to do “what the prose does not,” that is, connect the audience to the “theme of place” also mentioned in verse 25.²⁴ Another view in the literature is that disciples of Christ followed his pattern of teaching which used a portion of “texts to refer to whole passages and themes.”²⁵ Conversely, Barrett approaches the context issue from a different perspective. He writes, “It is important to note the authority ascribed here to OT scripture, and the way in which it is used. It cannot be said that any attention is given to the context, still less to the original meaning and reference, of the passages cited.”²⁶ His comment reveals that the authority of Scripture may have been the most important reason for Peter’s use of those text.

Understanding Peter’s use of Scripture is important in this investigation. It shows that in a Christian meeting where important matters have to be decided, a biblical foundation may need to be laid. This foundation may help to gain acceptance of a proposal and orient the members, who will decide, to the plan of God. It also demonstrates the importance of members having a high view of Scripture in that they

²³ Tzvi Novic, “Succeeding Judas: Exegesis in Acts 1:15-26,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (2010): 797-798; Matthew G. Whitlock, “Acts 1:15-26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 1 (January 2015): 89, accessed December 4, 2017, EBSCOhost

²⁴ Whitlock, 105.

²⁵ Peterson, 125.

²⁶ Barrett, 100.

accept its authority. Nowhere in this passage do one see members of the community disavowing the legitimacy of Peter's use of Scripture in his appeal. This does not mean that members did not engage in some sort of internal evaluation of Peter's accuracy with interpreting those text. Consequently, anyone who does not think appeals to Scripture should be used in deliberations leading up to a decision, may be disqualifying themselves from inclusion.

The Proposal and Decision Process (vv. 21-26)

After covering the biblical material, Peter transitioned into his proposal, which was a resolution to the problem presented in the previous verse: "Let another take his position of overseer" (v. 20). At this point, Judas' position was still vacant. Therefore, the proposal set out the criteria to use in selecting a new apostle. The criteria in verses 21 and 22 included gender, fellowship, duration, and witnessing. Robert Wall only sees fellowship and witnessing as requirements but leaves off gender and time.²⁷ Peter however, states gender as the very first requirement and references duration third. Fitzmyer includes everything but duration, which he folds into fellowship as a subordinate clause in verse 21 explaining the type of fellowship necessary for apostleship.²⁸ Still, it is more convincing to the researcher to see Peter's statement about time as a separate criterion.

At this point it is important to once again emphasize Peter's role. In addition to taking the lead on recognizing the problem, and connecting both the problem and proposal to the Scripture, he was the one who formulated the criteria. By all accounts,

²⁷ Wall, 50.

²⁸ Fitzmyer, 226.

Peter is acting as the decision leader. He will not be the one who makes the final decision but he manages the process.

The four requirements—gender, fellowship, time, and witnessing—were necessary only for consideration. As the next verse reports, more than one person met the criteria to fill the leadership vacancy. Therefore, the criteria alone were not enough to base a decision. The community of believers needed to take additional steps to reach a final decision. Verse 23 says, “They proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias.” The word “proposed” denotes the physical action of raising someone to their feet.²⁹ Notwithstanding, a gap exists between verse 22 and verse 23. There must have been some deliberation on the part of the community to determine who met the criteria in order to produce “a short list.”³⁰

Furthermore, Peterson finds the third person pronoun, “they proposed,” unclear because it could “refer to the apostles or to the larger group of disciples.”³¹ On one hand, if it referred only to the apostles, the conclusion could be drawn that this was an open-apostolic meeting and not a congregational meeting. On the other hand, if it referred to the entire community, then the congregational polity of this meeting was unaffected.

Another important step for reaching a final decision was prayer. The content of their corporate prayer reveals their belief in God acting as the chief decision-maker. They said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart” (v. 24). The believers could only judge the appearances and actions of other members in the community. They were incapable of

²⁹ G. Abbott-Smith, *Abbott-Smith Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “histemi” accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.studydrive.net/lexicons/greek/2476.html>.

³⁰ Barrett, 102.

³¹ Peterson, 127.

judging the human heart. That kind of knowledge, which only God has, is crucial to making a high-quality decision. For this reason, prayer was of utmost importance. Even if believers could know someone's heart, hypothetically speaking, prayer would still be one of the most important actions taken in the decision-making process in order to know God's heart. There prayer continued, "Show us which one of these two you have chosen" (v. 24). By the use of the past tense with the word "chosen," it indicated the decision was already made. Whatever process the community was going to use was simply a way of discerning what God had already decided.

In the final verse, two decision approaches were taken: casting lots and voting (v. 26). The practice of casting lots is illustrated in 1 Samuel 14:41-43. A particular object was thrown out between Jonathan and his father Saul on one side and the Israelites on the other. The object fell toward Jonathan and Saul indicating one of them were guilty of violate a direct order given by Saul himself but the lot cleared the Israelites of wrongdoing. The lot was cast again and this time it indicated Jonathan was guilty. Casting lots was often used in the Old Testament to discover God's will (Lev. 16:6-10; Num. 26:55-56; Neh. 10:34; 11:1; Prov. 16:33; Jon. 1:7).³² In Acts 1:26, it was used to determine who God has chosen to be the next apostle— "and the lot fell on Matthias."

Consequently, casting lots was not the only way the decision was reached. There was also a voting aspect in the community. The word "added" in verse 26 can mean "a vote" but not in the strictest sense of the word.³³ The choice had already been made and

³² Gaventa, 71; Peterson, 128; Barrett, 104; Wall, 51; Fitzmyer, 228.

³³ Barrett, 105; Fitzmyer, 228.

revealed by God. The vote was simply a human way “to ratify God’s evident choice.”³⁴ Thus, it was not a purely democratic process.

Barrett and Peterson have pointed out casting lot and/or voting in this way has not been used in any other occasion in the New Testament.³⁵ Peterson writes, “The apostles were using a practice that was sanctioned by but belonged to the old era. It took place before Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out in a way that signified a new kind of relationship between God and his people.”³⁶ On the contrary, Gaventa suggests the believing community does not have to dismiss such human practices in discerning the Lord’s will because it is shown to the community “in a multitude of ways, no one of which appears to be normative.”³⁷

In the final analysis, this first meeting among the Christian community following the ascension of Christ identifies a couple of important points about decision-making. First, senior leadership selection is a decision parameter that probably should be handled by the congregation. Second, decision leadership in a congregational setting requires a person to lead in not only identifying problems but connecting the Bible to the problem and solution. Third, since any decision made in a church demands knowledge of God’s will, prayer must not be an optional element but the fulcrum on which the entire decision-making process rests. Finally, there may not be a definitive and normative strategy for human participation yet, the belief should be that whatever strategy is used (casting lots,

³⁴ Wall, 51.

³⁵ Barrett, 104; Peterson, 128-129.

³⁶ Peterson, 129.

³⁷ Gaventa, 71.

voting, etc.), it is only to affirm what God has already determined.

The Decision to Select Seven Table Waiters: Acts 6:1-7

The material in Acts 6:1-7 conforms to a particular pattern, which Joseph Tyson outlines as follows: peace (6:1a), threat (6:1b), resolution (6:2-6) and restoration (6:7).³⁸ This type of structure is found in “dramatic episodes” because such narratives “heighten the dramatic conflict just before a resolution.”³⁹ This dramatic episode is another example of decision-making in the early church. The resolution and the way it was reached provides a rich description of how unity can be achieved in a congregation using certain approaches to decision-making. This narrative is also helpful in exploring the roles leaders took in the decision-making process as opposed to the congregation.

The Development of a Problem in Jerusalem (v. 1)

Luke begins this narrative with a brief mention of growth and success: “Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number” (v. 1). However, he immediately thrust his audience into the conflict occurring in Jerusalem. Verse one continues, “the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.” This issue was between Greek-speaking Jews and Hebrew-speaking Jews. Moreover, it is precisely the languages that characterize Luke’s use of the terms “Hellenists” and “Hebrews.”⁴⁰ It also may have

³⁸ Joseph B Tyson, “Acts 6:1-7 and Dietary Regulations in Early Christianity,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 10, no. 2 (1983): 152.

³⁹ David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 128.

⁴⁰ Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church*, Mazal Holocaust Collection (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23; Richard I. Pervo and Harold W. Attridge, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 154.

contributed to the nature of the conflict, which could explain why Luke makes the distinction between languages in the first place.

According to Luke T. Johnson and Daniel Harrington, “Widows were being slighted [*neglected* in the NRSV]: The verb *paratheoreo* can mean ‘overlook,’ but in this context, the note of discrimination suggested by ‘slighted’ is appropriate.”⁴¹

Consequently, the issue was not just with food. The use of the word “food” may be too narrow of a translation for the Greek term *diakonia*, which could refer to money as well as any other support a person needed.⁴² Johnson and Harrington support this argument when they write, “The allusion to the ‘daily distribution’ corresponds with what we know of an organized Jewish charity in local communities. Each community would offer a daily ‘soup kitchen’ for transients and the destitute, and a ‘chest’ for meeting long-term needs.”⁴³ Acts 6:1 shows that by this time, the Christian community had established a program of benevolence to the most vulnerable, namely the widows.

The internal conflict over resources became known to the apostles through grumbling. It is not clear whether the Hellenists approached the apostles with their complaint or grumbled among themselves loud enough and frequent enough that the apostles could not ignore the situation. The apostles seemed to be more focused on their mission than recognizing what was happening until the complaint reached them. Such grumbling over material resources like food carries allusions to stories of grumbling in

⁴¹ Luke Timothy Johnson and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 5 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 105.

⁴² *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, s.v., “*diakonia*.”

⁴³ Johnson and Harrington, 106.

the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 15:24; 16:2-3; 17:1-4; Num. 11:1-6; 14:2-4).⁴⁴ It is not clear if this intertextuality was a motive of Luke or not.

So far, the church is faced with several problems: a threat to unity, a threat to the witness of the church, and the unfair distribution of resources. As just stated, these issues do not appear to have been recognized by the apostles at first. Rather, they were confronted with them and almost compelled to place their attention on them by the complaint. The next verse brings this into sharper focus.

Up to this point, the apostles themselves were the decision-makers for the benevolence of the community (4:35).⁴⁵ However, this neglect of the most vulnerable threatened to undermine their leadership.⁴⁶ The concern for benevolence was now more than the apostles could handle without some sort of assistance.

A comparison with Acts 1:15-26 shows a difference in how problems were identified in the church. This is illustrated in Figure 1. In chapter one, the problem originated with the apostles, was first recognized at the apostolic level, and brought to the congregation by an apostle. In this passage, the problem also originated with the apostles through their handling of resources but was recognized as a problem at the congregational level. Furthermore, both problems affected the mission of the church and, for that reason, warranted a resolution.

⁴⁴ Barrett, 307; Peterson, 231.

⁴⁵ Phillip Sell, "The Seven in Acts 6 as a Ministry Team," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 665 (January 2010): 60.

⁴⁶ Gaventa, 113.

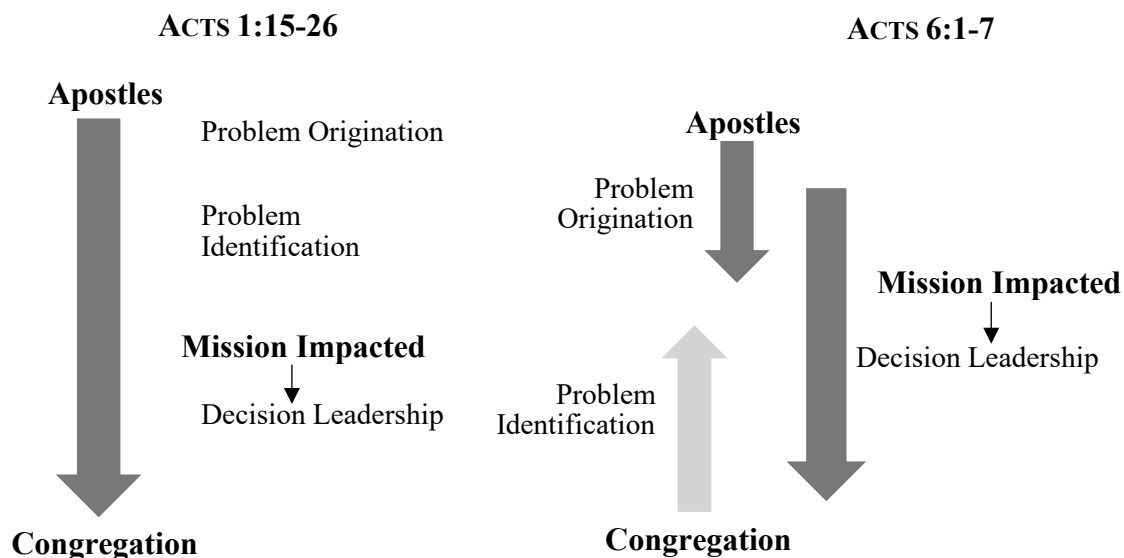


Figure 1. Problem Identification in the Early Church

Two Meetings: Apostolic and Congregational (vv. 2-4)

Though the twelve had their focus on the mission, once they knew there was a problem, they took action to address it by calling “together the whole community of the disciples” (v. 2). The word translated “called together” is used nine times in Acts. In every instance but one, the call or summons seemingly comes from one with authority to another in a subordinate position (2:39; 5:40; 6:2; 13:2, 7; 16:10; 23:17-18, 23).⁴⁷ Their action demonstrated their leadership in the decision-making process. They determined at the apostolic level that a congregational meeting was necessary.⁴⁸ Without a doubt, other options were available to them. For example, the apostles could have conducted a smaller meeting with just the complainants. Perhaps they could have created a system of fair distribution without the input of the congregation. Johnson seems to think this group of

⁴⁷ *Old and New Testament Greek Lexical Dictionary*, s.v., “προσκαλέομαι,” accessed June 28, 2019 <https://www.studydrive.net/lexicons/greek/3101.html>.

⁴⁸ Fitzmyer, 348.

disciples were a smaller representative and deliberative body coming together for the purpose of discernment and that it was not the entire congregation.⁴⁹ However, the text itself refutes this idea in the use of the phrase, “whole community.”

Another revealing statement at this juncture is the consensus in the proposal speech (vv. 2-4). The beginning of verse two and five indicate that all the Twelve were in agreement (“And the twelve,” v.2; “What they said,” v. 5). The title “twelve” distinguishes the apostles from the other disciples and is a designation for their office.⁵⁰ Obviously, all twelve apostles were not speaking at once. Therefore, it would be safe to assume they had a spokesperson who conveyed the mind of the whole. Such a consensus would require a bit of deliberation and decision-making before a congregational meeting. To put it plainly, there are two meetings hinted at in verse two: the prior apostolic meeting (implied) and the present congregational meeting (explicitly stated).

Decisions and discussion topics at the apostolic meeting can be extrapolated from the proposal speech. First, the proposal speech indicated some discussion and decision-making around prioritizing missional effectiveness and roles. Two keywords in the apostles’ statement are important here: “right,” which has the sense of being “pleasing to God,”⁵¹ and “neglect,” which means “to set something aside” (God’s word) “in the interest of something else” (table service).⁵² In other words, the apostles came to the conclusion that God would not be pleased if they gave up the service of the word for the

⁴⁹ Johnson and Harrington, 106.

⁵⁰ Barrett, 310-311.

⁵¹ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, s.v. “arestos.”

⁵² *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., s.v. “kataleipo.”

service of tables. There are scholars who assert that Luke is critical of the apostles for prioritizing the word over the care of the poor.⁵³ However, the apostles' proposal "reminds the community (and the reader as well) that the fundamental apostolic task is that of witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus (1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32)."⁵⁴

Second, it seems from the proposal that the apostles discussed and decided on a new level of leadership. Seven men were to be chosen by the congregation to serve widows (v. 3). Seven was, more than likely, a designation like Twelve and not just the identification of the number of servants (cf. 21:8).⁵⁵ Moreover, Seven is a more fitting title than deacons though some have perceived them to be the first.⁵⁶ The opposition to identifying the Seven as deacons is based on the absence of *diakonos*—the Greek term used to designate the office.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, it is difficult to know why only seven men were chosen and not eight or the same number as the apostles. Michael Livingston assumes the term "Hellenist" is a reference to Gentiles and therefore, "the Seven must be understood in relation to that Hellenistic world...The Twelve represented the Hebrews, twelve men for twelve tribes. The Seven represented the world."⁵⁸ However, Livingston's assertion is

⁵³ David W Pao, "Waiters or Preachers: Acts 6:1-7 and the Lukan Table Fellowship Motif," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 1 (2011): 142-143; F. Scott Spencer, "Neglected Widows in Acts 6:1-7," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1994): 729.

⁵⁴ Gaventa, 114.

⁵⁵ Fitzmyer, 344.

⁵⁶ Sell, 62; Norman E Nagel, "The Twelve and the Seven in Acts 6 and the Needy," *Concordia Journal* 31, no. 2 (April 2005): 113–26.

⁵⁷ Sell, 63.

⁵⁸ Michael Livingston, "The Seven: Hebrews, Hellenists and Heptines," *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 6, no. 1 (1999): 33, 45.

circumstantial at best. No one knows exactly why seven men were chosen simply because Luke does not tell his readers.⁵⁹ One reasonable conclusion is “seven being a prime number and an odd number (important if decisions had to be made by a vote), is often used for crucial matters in the OT and developed into a customary number in Jewish society (Josh. 6:4; Jer. 52:25; Esth. 1:14).”⁶⁰

Third, the apostles set the standards for the new administrative group. On this point, Pervo and Attridge write, “The process follows the conventions of civic life: the leaders ... determine the number of officials and the criteria for the position. The ‘commons’ nominate an appropriate number of qualified persons, after which, when all is functioning smoothly, the leaders accept these nominations and induct the candidates into office.”⁶¹ Thus, the criteria the apostolic leaders set for the Seven were they had to be “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (v. 3). The list of qualifications is a particular literary form in and of itself; it demonstrated how important the character of leaders was to a community.⁶² In addition, the qualifications further established how serious the apostles took the work of caring for the poor.⁶³

The apostolic meeting indicated a need for a smaller group to meet in order to make decisions not suited for a large congregational meeting. In that meeting, a consensus model was used to reach decisions. The parameter or content by which the apostles were deciding consisted of settling on a proposal. The proposal included

⁵⁹ Fitzmyer, 349.

⁶⁰ Fitzmyer, 349.

⁶¹ Pervo and Attridge, 160.

⁶² Keener, 1274.

⁶³ Peterson, 233; Pao, 160.

establishing a new level of leadership, developing the criteria for inclusion in the new leadership group, and a setting forth a division of duty—the apostles will appoint the Seven to the task of table service while they focused on prayer and preaching (vv. 3-4).

There can be little question that these were the topics of the apostolic meeting. Verses two through five however, expresses what took place in the congregational meeting. The apostles' proposal was presented to the congregation (v. 2), their role and the apostles' role in decision-making were explained (“select from among yourselves,” and “we may appoint to this task” v. 3), and the missional responsibilities of the apostles were clarified (v. 4). The process the congregation would use to find and settle on candidates is not mentioned by Luke. From Luke's choice of the word “select,” it appears this meant the congregation was to “seek out” or “make a careful inspection” of members within their midst.⁶⁴ One could speculate that the congregation prayed, deliberated, offered up recommendations, sought consent from willing participants and a host of other steps to come to their final decision. Drawing on the term “chose” used in verse five, Keener writes,

The term for choosing (*eklegomai*) does not by itself specify a vote (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:2), but it refers to some corporate selection mechanism (Acts 6:3; cf. 15:25) other than drawing lots (1:24, which also uses the term). In view of Luke's Greek audience, a vote would be the most likely inference; Greek individualism and emphasis on equality made voting common among them. Many Greek offices were elective; although some decisions used ballots (cf. Acts 26:10), many probably required simply raising hands, no exact count being necessary if a majority was obvious.⁶⁵

Keener also suggests that a democratic polity was used in some but not all decisions.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, s.v. “*episkeptomai*.”

⁶⁵ Keener, 1280.

⁶⁶ Keener, 1281.

Luke simply does not go into much detail about how the seven were chosen. Either his audience was expected to know the details or it simply did not fit his goal. Consequently, narrative gaps are common place in storytelling.⁶⁷

In any case, once the selection was made, the apostles would “appoint” them (v. 3). This particular verb “echoes the parable of Jesus in Luke 12:42, ‘Who then is the faithful household manager, the sensible one, whom the master will set over (kathistēmi) his household slaves to give them their rations at the appointed times?’”⁶⁸ Thus, the ceremony in verse six was symbolic of this action.

The congregational meeting needed a framework (a proposal, criteria, divisions of responsibilities) for decision-making, which could not be worked out among the congregation itself. This work had to take place in a separate meeting of just the apostles. The framework for the congregational meeting was determined among that group and not by a single individual even though it is more than plausible one apostle served as the chairperson for the whole group.

The Decision by the Congregation (vv. 5-7)

The proposal “pleased the whole community” (v. 5). The word “please” is another important word for this discussion. It suggests approval and acceptance of the proposal. Again, there are no details given about how this was done. Modern readers are left wondering if there was a vote, verbal affirmation, or some other action taken to accept the proposal. There is also some ambiguity about the amount of authority the apostles had

⁶⁷ Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 42.

⁶⁸ Johnson and Harrington, 106.

as opposed to the congregation. It is not known what would have happened if the congregation did not accept the proposal. According to Peterson, “since the verb pleased (*ēreson*) is an echo of the word translated ‘right’ in v. 2 (*areston*), the implication may be that the people were pleased because they recognized that the proposal was in agreement with God’s will.”⁶⁹ A reflection on Peterson’s statement may cause a modern reader to think of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). While it cannot be explicitly stated in this text, the key to acceptance may be in the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the apostles to the proposal and causing the congregation to recognize it as God’s will. Luke, however, is more interested in showing how the church overcame conflict and disunity.⁷⁰

As it relates to the names of the Seven, Fitzmyer points out that even though their names are Greek, this should not be used to assume the Seven were Gentiles; Greek—speaking Jews in the diaspora held Greek names and these types of names were common.⁷¹ Of the seven names, three are of note: Stephen, Philip, and Nicolaus. The belief is that Stephen and Philip occupy the first two positions in the list because they are the subject of the next two chapters.⁷² Nicolaus, who is mentioned last, is of note because of his conversion to Judaism prior to becoming a disciple. As discussed earlier, selecting these men were the responsibility of the congregation— “They chose” (v. 5).

These men had to “stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (v. 6). It is concluded this was an ordination service.⁷³ Both Gaventa and Barrett

⁶⁹ Peterson, 234; Barrett, 314.

⁷⁰ Keener, 1279.

⁷¹ Fitzmyer, 350.

⁷² Gaventa, 115; Fitzmyer, 350; Peterson, 234.

⁷³ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3 H-J, s.v. “Hands, Laying On Of.”

seem to believe that the laying on of hands was done by the whole congregation.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it is hard to accept this as the meaning since thousands of people belonged to the church at this time. It might be better to understand the ceremony in the following way: “The people presented the candidates to the apostles, who then prayed and laid hands on the Seven.”⁷⁵ It makes more sense for twelve people to lay their hands on seven men than for thousands to do it. Moreover, this act was symbolic of “the transfer of power. It appears in sacrificial rites (Exod. 29:10, 19; Lev. 1:4, 11; 4:15; 16:21) and in Numbers 8:10.”⁷⁶ The final verse shows us that all is well again with the Christian community: “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem” (v. 7). The reader now finds himself back where he began, with the increase of the church (v. 1).

The investigation into this brief passage demonstrated that from the beginning there were challenges to the spread of the gospel. But, through decision leadership, those challenges were overcome and unity was maintained. Unlike chapter one, the issue was brought by the congregation to the apostles who could not ignore it. Under their decision leadership, a congregational meeting was called where the apostles shared a plan that had been developed in a separate meeting among the apostles themselves and to which they all were in agreement. Thus, in the congregational meeting, the apostles delegated roles and responsibilities. The congregation was directed to search among their group for men who fit a set of criteria decided on by the apostles. The number of people who could be a

⁷⁴ Gaventa, 115; Barrett, 315-316.

⁷⁵ Pervo, 161.

⁷⁶ Johnson and Harrington, 107.

part of this new leadership team was also decided upon by the apostles in advance.

The apostles could be said to have demonstrated the very wisdom they were asking of the Seven. That wisdom was shown in a number of ways. First, they gave the congregation a role in selecting the leaders who would lead them. The genius of this, in the researcher's opinion, is that the congregation could not come back and project blame on the apostles if there were any problems with the men chosen. The apostles simply affirmed the congregation's choice. Furthermore, because the apostles decided the framework for selection in advance, it gave them some control over who would be selected. There was also wisdom displayed by the apostles making the final appointment.

The importance of this passage to the present research study is that it gives the researcher a way to identify how significant shared decision-making is among congregational churches. It is important to look for commonality in present models of decision-making with the shared approach found here. If the churches are following this model it would mean senior leaders present proposals not final solutions to their congregation. The senior leaders would need to settle on those proposals before taking it to the larger meeting. The congregation would receive an opportunity to impact the final decision in so much as it directly affects them. Finally, leaders would need to be clear about their mission and what is most important.

The Decision Concerning Gentile Assimilation: Acts 15:6-22

Acts 15:6-22 fits perfectly into Tyson's structure of dramatic narratives (peace, threat, resolution, and restoration) outlined above when you place this passage in its larger literary context. That context begins in 14:21 and concludes in 15:35. Acts 14:26-28 constitutes a time of peace for the Antioch church. Acts 15:1-5 illustrates the threat to the Antioch congregation. Acts 15:6-29 provides the resolution, and 15:30-35 concludes

with restoration and a return to peace.

Arthur Just sees Acts 15 as a critical moment for the church. He writes, “The public council of Acts 15 was the watershed event in the early Christian church, the most significant decision in the church’s history up to that point.”⁷⁷ Johnson offers another view on this chapter. He says,

Acts 15 witnesses to the church concerning the way it reaches decisions, not by prescription, but by way of a paradigmatic story. The church is not challenged by its hearing of this witness to imitate mechanically the steps taken by the characters in the story. The narrative, rather, invites us to consider the dynamics of decision making themselves, and to use the consideration when reflecting on the practice of the church wherever it exists.⁷⁸

In other words, Acts 15 provides an informative guide for the church but it is not a rule the church has to follow. Still, this investigation assumes the guidance from this passage should receive serious attention. When taken together with the two other passages, it reveals a pattern of steps church leaders would do well to follow.

There is considerable material focused on affirming Acts 15 as the meeting in Galatians 2 or refuting it. The objective of this investigation is not to wade into the mire of that debate. After examining a few of the arguments for and against Acts 15 and Galatians 2, the researcher settled on the position offered by both Just and Witherington which places Acts 15 after Galatians 2 and links the Galatians passage with events found in Acts 11:1 and following.⁷⁹ This examination, however, focused on how each member or group was involved in the decision-making process during the council meeting.

⁷⁷ Arthur A Just, Jr. “The Apostolic Councils of Galatians and Acts: How First-Century Christians Walked Together,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74, no. 3–4 (July 2010): 276.

⁷⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 79.

⁷⁹ Just, 276; Witherington, 445-449.

As previously mentioned, the issue needing to be resolved started a few verses before this passage. Luke reports, “Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (v. 1). In the next verse the reader learns “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them” (v. 2). A decision was made by the Antioch church to send a delegation to Jerusalem in order to discuss their concerns over Gentile assimilation (v. 3). This delegation included Paul and Barnabas. It is also important to note the problem was identified in one congregation and was brought to the leaders in another city to address.

The Separation of the Council from the Congregation (v. 6)

When Paul, Barnabas, and the other delegates arrived in Jerusalem “they were welcomed by the *church* and the *apostles* and the *elders* [emphasis added]” (v. 4). This last group first appeared as a part of church leadership in Acts 11:30. These types of leaders were also installed in newly formed churches during Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). Elders may have been a variation of a leadership model used in synagogues; in that model, they were a part of a council.⁸⁰

Luke, however, only identified the apostles and elders who “met together to consider” the implications of the law on Gentile believers (v. 6). It was important in the exegetical research and the study overall to understand if this was a private meeting away from the larger congregation, a public meeting with the entire congregation, or an open meeting between the apostles and elders, which the congregation could witness.

⁸⁰ Keener, 2223.

Knowing who was involved in the council meeting would be a key factor in this study. Seeing what group had the authority to reach a decision pertaining to this issue can be compared to who makes similar types of decisions in churches today. There is, however, no shortage of opinions. Bruce Malina and John Pilch understand the apostles and elders as the initiators of a congregational meeting in verses six through twenty-two and suggest that as a “collectivistic culture ... individuals always yield to the group consensus.”⁸¹ This seems inconsistent, however, with the text. Luke is careful to delineate the groups in the congregation—church, apostles, and elders. The church appeared to be anyone not in leadership but they are left off of the list in verse six. The church, separate from leadership, reappeared in verse twenty-two. Pervo interprets verse six in light of verses twelve and twenty-two and he concludes, “A plenary session is in view.”⁸² In other words, Pervo thinks that since Luke referenced the “whole assembly” in verse twelve and the entire body is referenced again in verse twenty-two then they must be in view throughout the entire meeting. Notwithstanding, Luke seems to have no problem stating when the church is involved and when they are not by their inclusion in verse four and twenty-two.

The conclusion drawn in this evaluation is expressed by Barrett who stands opposite of those mentioned above, that is, this meeting is just among “the apostles and elders who gather for discussion and evidently assume the authority to make a decision.”⁸³ Furthermore, Barrett writes, “The serious business of the Council is to be

⁸¹ Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts*, Social-Science Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 106.

⁸² Pervo, 372.

⁸³ Barrett, 709.

done by apostles and elders.”⁸⁴ Peterson’s position is an alternative possibility. He says, “If the council was called and led by the apostles and elders, others were present to hear the arguments and be persuaded.”⁸⁵ This last point would be far more acceptable than simply inserting the church in places where Luke did not. The meeting in verse four permitted the congregation to hear reports of how Gentiles were coming to faith but in verse six a smaller meeting took place, which did not include the wider body of believers.

Deliberations Among the Apostles and Elders (vv. 7-11, 13-18)

Peter’s speech (vv. 7-11). The meeting held by the apostles and elders included “debate” (v. 7), but this was unlike the debate that took place in Antioch. The Antioch debate was characterized by “no small dissension” (v. 2). Although the word translated “debate” in both verses does imply tension or conflict, with the absence of dissension, the Jerusalem debate seemed a bit more civil.⁸⁶ Then “Peter stood up” (v. 7), which gave him the floor and ended the debate with everyone now focused on him.

When Peter began to speak, he appealed theologically to God’s actions in the past, (“in the early days God made a choice”). These early days pointed to the entrance of Cornelius and his household (Gentiles) into this new movement (cf. Acts 10—11).⁸⁷ That event is now a part of the distant past and something assumed to be common knowledge (v. 7; 11:1ff). For Peter, the example of Cornelius and his household was a prime case of

⁸⁴ Barrett, 712.

⁸⁵ Peterson, 422-424.

⁸⁶ *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, s.v., “zetesis.”

⁸⁷ Barrett, 713-714; Witherington, 453.

God's acceptance of Gentiles who had not been circumcised.⁸⁸ First, God chose Peter to preach to the Gentiles (v. 7), which is reflected in his vision on the roof of Simon the Tanner and his sermon in the house of Cornelius (10:9-16, 28, 34-43; 11:5-14). Second, God knows the human heart (v. 8), something Peter recognized before sharing the gospel with Gentiles (10:34-35). Third, God confirmed his grace upon the Gentiles by giving them the same gift that was given to Peter and the other Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost (10:44-47; 11:15-18; cf. 2:1-4). Finally, God cleansed them (v. 9), which was God's plan in the vision he gave to Peter all along (10:15; 11:9).

After his theological reflection, Peter uses a rhetorical argument to prove "it is absurd to expect Gentiles to put up with what ... Jews cannot endure."⁸⁹ The last verse in his speech draws it to a close: "On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (v. 11). It is not clear what is meant by the word "saved" here as in verse one. However, Luke probably has in mind hope and expectancy for the fulfilment of a promise.⁹⁰

Probably the most significant aspect of Peter's theological discourse was how it ended debate. Whatever was being discussed prior to Peter's speech was not worth continuing when Peter took the floor. For the audiences of Peter and Luke, it was important to remember God's activity in the past especially when it involved who can be included in the church. Peter's audience in particular needed this information to factor into their decision-making process. Theological reflection was not deliberate in the

⁸⁸ Barrett, 717.

⁸⁹ Barrett, 717.

⁹⁰ Barrett, 720.

previous narratives therefore, it may not seem as important as other elements. Yet, to reference Just again, this was the most significant decision in the history of the church to this point. As a result, major decisions might be grounds for the church to stop and reflect together as a community over God's actions.

James' speech (vv. 13-18). There is a space between Peter's speech and the one James delivers. In that space, Paul and Barnabas offered testimony that supported Peter's reflection. They spoke about "all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles" (v. 12). After Paul and Barnabas finished speaking, James called for the attention of the council (v. 13). He briefly affirmed Peter's theological reflection by saying, "Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name" (v. 14). James then gave a biblical justification for Peter's theological reflection in verses 15-18.

Neither Peter's personal theology nor the testimony of Paul and Barnabas were sufficient to reach a decision. According to Richard Bauckham, the matter the leaders in Jerusalem was discussing related to a "halakah (a legal ruling for conduct)," which made Scripture the ultimate authority in the decision-making process.⁹¹ Peter had employed Scripture in the past, which made him the only one to give a speech in the decision-making process (Acts 1:15-26). It is as if Peter thought the matter would be settled on his theological argument alone. Nevertheless, James' discourse does for the audience what Peter's remarks did not do.

⁹¹ Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 4, *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 452; C. Bennema, "The Ethnic Conflict in Early Christianity: An Appraisal of Bauckham's Proposal on the Antioch Crisis and the Jerusalem Council," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 4 (2013): 759.

For James, Peter's speech "agrees with the words of the prophets" (v. 15). He then quotes from the Old Testament (vv. 16-18). The primary citation is taken from Amos 9:11-12; however, it is conflated with other references from the Old Testament.⁹² The various proposals given for the other references include Jeremiah 12:15, Isaiah 45:21, and Hosea 3:5.⁹³ According to J. Paul Tanner, "James was probably not just thinking of Amos 9:11-12, though that is the primary passage he cites. In saying 'the words of the Prophets' (plural), he had in mind a number of OT passage that anticipated God's great work of salvation among the Gentiles."⁹⁴

The use of these texts in Acts, however, is perceived as "a Lukan adaptation of the Septuagint."⁹⁵ Pervo believes since the citation differs from the Masoretic Text, which "has nothing to do with the inclusion of gentiles," it "rules out the possibility that the historical James (who would never have cited the LXX) utilized the passage."⁹⁶ He supposes "Luke selected the citation and composed v. 14 in accordance with it."⁹⁷ Tanner, however, offers the possibility that the translators of the Septuagint may have been working with a "text that resembled the MT" and was "influenced to understand the text in such a way as to harmonize it with the following dangling phrase ... 'and all the Gentiles.'"⁹⁸ Thus, James' understanding of the Masoretic Text may have been similar to

⁹² Barrett, 721.

⁹³ Bauckham, 454; Barrett, 721; Malina and Pilch, 108.

⁹⁴ J Paul Tanner, "James's Quotation of Amos 9 to Settle the Jerusalem Council Debate in Acts 15," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 1 (March 2012): 77.

⁹⁵ Malina and Pilch, 108.

⁹⁶ Pervo and Attridge, 376.

⁹⁷ Pervo and Attridge, 376.

⁹⁸ Tanner, 72.

the Septuagint translators. At the very least, Tanner does not go as far as Pervo in rejecting any idea that James quoted the Old Testament in the manner Luke recounts.

Theories about the authenticity of the text tradition underlying James' use of the Old Testament will continue. Nevertheless, no one can argue the impact Scripture had on the debate. The appeal to Scripture showed God's plan always included the Gentiles.⁹⁹ It "proves James' case ... the Gentiles are included in the eschatological people of God as Gentiles, without having to become Jews."¹⁰⁰ Thus, James appealed to the greater authority in his speech. According to W. Edward Glenny, the conflation of Old Testament sources used in Acts 15:16-18 shows

how extensive the foundation of the argument at the Council really was. James was referring to what the "prophets" said about the Gentiles, and Acts probably only gives a summary of his speech. He connected several contexts in order to bring out their meaning in light of the Christ events and the inauguration of the new covenant.... However, it is important for modern interpreters to remember that the meaning of the "prophets" as they were understood at the Council, would not have been obvious before the coming of Christ and the events that followed from it....The decision made at the Council was based on Scripture interpreted by other Scripture, but it was also based on Scripture as it was interpreted in light of recent events, especially the conversion of Cornelius's household and their subsequent reception of the Spirit (Acts 10—11, 15:6-15).¹⁰¹

The use of Scripture is the last word. It is so authoritative that it brings the debate to a close and resolves the issue.¹⁰² The use of Scripture in deliberation has been demonstrated in all three cases as an important factor in decision-making. In the second case addressing service to widows (Acts 6:1-7), an appeal was not made from Scripture

⁹⁹ Barrett, 714.

¹⁰⁰ Bauckham, 456-457.

¹⁰¹ W Edward Glenny, "The Septuagint and Apostolic Hermeneutics: Amos 9 in Acts 15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 22, no. 1 (2012): 14-15.

¹⁰² Witherington, 457.

because it was the very topic of discussion (Acts 6:4). Such consistency would mean appealing to the authority of Scripture in Christian meetings is more than a recommendation. It must be included in deliberations and a true understanding of it must serve as the final authority on what proposal is accepted. Consequently, the authority of leaders rests in their proper handling of Scripture.

The Final Decision with the Goal of Unity (vv. 19-22)

Whereas Peter concluded his speech with a doctrinal assertion (v. 11), and Paul and Barnabas simply finished speaking (v. 12), James declared “I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God” (v. 19). Here, James is acting as the final decision-maker, the person with the most authority in the room.¹⁰³ However, not all scholars accept James’ authority. For example, Malina and Pilch see James’ conclusion, not as a formal decision or judgment but an opinion.¹⁰⁴ While Barrett agrees with this possibility, he admits that his words in verse 19 “may very naturally be taken as the judgment of a judge, who has the right to declare a final verdict.”¹⁰⁵ The issue seems to be over how to interpret *dio ego krino*, which is translated “I have reached the decision” by the NRSV.¹⁰⁶ The interpretation can “range from ‘I therefore conclude’ ... to ‘I therefore decree.’” In the weaker option, James makes a recommendation; in the stronger alternative, he pronounces a decision.¹⁰⁷ This

¹⁰³ Witherington, 457.

¹⁰⁴ Malina and Pilch, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Barrett, 729.

¹⁰⁶ Pervo, 376.

¹⁰⁷ Pervo, 376.

examination favors the stronger alternative. James was a key figure if not the final decision-maker when one considers that no further discussion took place, and the proposal was consented to without rebuttal (v. 22). On this point, Just writes, “If the apostles now represented the movement of the gospel from its center in Jerusalem into the outermost parts of the earth, that center would be held in place by James, who assumed the position of bishop of Jerusalem as the significant stabilizing Christian presence in the city.”¹⁰⁸ He also writes, speaking of the apostolic council, “At this climactic moment in church history, when the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch met in Jerusalem, Peter was in charge of the apostles, and James was in charge of the elders, with James leading the Jerusalem church.”¹⁰⁹ Regardless of James’ authority, the final decision appeared to be agreed upon unanimously. The council letter sent to Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia read in part, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (v. 28).

At this point, the question of how should the Gentiles assimilate into this new movement and whether or not they needed to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses is resolved in the four prohibitions James laid out in verse 20: “We should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.” The origin of these prohibitions is not certain though there are several strong proposals. The most convincing proposal is offered by Charles

¹⁰⁸ Just, 263.

¹⁰⁹ Just, 265.

Savelle who asserts that since Moses is mentioned in Acts 15:21, the prohibitions probably point to Leviticus 17—18.¹¹⁰

It is also worth noting James may have proposed these prohibitions as a mediation between “the sect of the Pharisees” (v. 5) and the Petrine/Pauline perspective as a way of maintaining unity. Savelle asserts, “On the one hand, the decree freed the Gentiles from any obligation to be circumcised.... On the other hand, the Gentiles would be required to refrain from activities ... that deeply offended Jewish sensibility.”¹¹¹ Just alludes to unity in the following statement: “The implication for the Jerusalem perspective is that eucharistic table fellowship is possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians.”¹¹² Maintaining unity is a goal of this research study when considering involvement from the congregation in decision-making processes. The model presented in this passage implies issues pertaining to unity may not be best suited for congregational meetings. Neither is a single leader capable of devising a proposal that will achieve unity on his or her own without deliberating with other leaders.

Finally, there is a return to the entirety of the church—the apostles, elders, and church (v. 22). This verse rounds out the discussion on decision involvement. James was the decision leader who, after careful deliberation, determined what plan would best serve the church. However, Keener, Malina, and Pilch are of a different opinion. They believe the congregation in verse twenty-two ratified the proposal of James.¹¹³ Witherington and

¹¹⁰ Charles H. Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15,” *The Bibliotheca Sacra*. 161, no. 644 (2004): 458-459.

¹¹¹ Savelle, 467.

¹¹² Just, 277.

¹¹³ Keener, 2280; Malina and Pilch, 110.

Barrett affirm the view taking in this investigation. For instance, Witherington writes, “Verse 22 is about the decision to send representatives of the Jerusalem church with Paul and Barnabas with the decree. It is not about a confirming of the decree by the assembly's consent.”¹¹⁴ In fact, allowing the congregation to choose their own representatives appears to be the purpose of the congregation’s involvement in Acts 6:1-7 as well. Barrett posits, “It goes too far to say” the congregation approved of the resolution since they were not part of the deliberations and there was no vote.¹¹⁵

Synthesis

A cross-textual analysis of each of the passages in Acts reveal two distinct concerns for decision-making in the early church: the process of reaching a decision and the parameters around who they involved. An aggregate of all the elements used in each of the passages yield six aspects of the early church’s decision-making process, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Elements of Decision-Making in Acts

	Acts 1:15-26	Acts 6:1-7	Acts 15:6-22
<i>Problem Identification</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Use of Scripture</i>	Yes	Not Directly	Yes
<i>Separate Meetings</i>	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Prayer</i>	Yes, for discernment	Yes, for affirmation	Not Reported
<i>Theological Reflection</i>	No	No	Yes
<i>Voting</i>	Yes	Not Reported	No
<i>Consensus</i>	The vote was unanimous	Yes	Yes

Three of them dealt with spiritual practices: theological reflection (Acts 15:7-11), use of

¹¹⁴ Witherington, 451.

¹¹⁵ Barrett, 738.

Scripture (Acts 1:16-20; 6:4; 15:5-18), and prayer (Acts 1:24; 6:6). Theological reflection relates to thinking back on God's activity and linking it to present situations. Use of Scripture is concerned with bringing in relevant themes from text to a discussion to illuminate how God's will is applied to a particular problem and proposal. Prayer was employed either to set the stage for discovering God's will or affirming God's will.

The other three elements were problem identification (Acts 1:20; 6:1; 15:2), separate meetings (implied in Acts 6:2-4; and 15:6), and voting and consensus referred to here as a decision approach (Acts 1:26; implied in 6:2-5; and explicitly stated in 15:22, 28). Separate meetings were held away from the congregation in one situation to decide on matters that would make the larger meeting more effective. In another situation, a separate meeting was held from the congregation because the authority to make a decision rested with the leadership. The congregation was brought in to help decide matters, which seemed to directly affect them. In all of the passages unity was reached and displayed even if the way a decision was made was through a special type of vote.

As far as the parameters around who could be involved in certain decisions, the analysis of the three passages resulted in five of them as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Decision Parameters in Acts

Decision Parameters	Group Responsible
Apostolic Leadership Selection (Senior Level)	Congregation
Benevolence (Material Resources)	Apostles (Delegated to the Seven)
Membership	Apostles and Elders
Serving-Leader Selection	Congregation and Apostles
Doctrine	Apostles and Elders

Those five parameters included: leadership selection at the senior level (Acts 1:21), benevolence (Acts 6:1), leadership selection at the serving level (Acts 6:3), membership, that is, how people are to be included in the family of God (Acts 15:1-2, 11), and doctrine

(Acts 15:20-21). Membership and doctrine were areas handled exclusively by senior leaders. Leadership selection was decided by everyone, both leaders and members alike. The one distinction however, was serving-leaders were selected by the congregation but final approval rested with the senior leaders. In this way, the decision was shared. Also, benevolence was within the purview of the senior leaders but was delegated to the serving-leaders.

Summary

This investigation sought to demonstrate how much authority leaders had in not just making decisions but deciding who should be involved in the decision-making process and to what degree. There is still much to be learned about the three biblical case studies that more research may expose but a few things are evident. First, leaders did not make decisions in isolation. They included the congregation at different points and excluded them at other times depending on what impact the issue had on the mission. Second, there seemed to be a hierarchal leadership structure consisting of a council at the top and the congregation who followed. The council at the very beginning was made up of just the apostles but later included a newer group referred to as elders. Third, as far as the decision-making process itself, the consensus was most often sought and achieved through prayer, debate, speeches that included theological reflection and exposition of the biblical text.

CHAPTER THREE: PARTICIPATIVE SYSTEMS AND LEADERSHIP

Baptist churches, operating under a congregational polity, tend to limit the authority and power of pastors in the decision-making process. The belief surrounding this practice equates pastors with their members—they are considered one priest among other priests—and since all are equal, all should have equal say in what happens among the congregation. However, pastors often feel a special burden to see the church thrive which is not always shared by every member. Yet, this does not mean that pastors have a right to make decisions in isolation or to become dictators. Many pastors will agree that part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to act in community. As such, it stands to reason that if the Father does not act apart from the Son and Spirit then members of a Christian community should not act alone either. Therefore, this research study did not sanction pastors and organizational leaders who think that their individual decision-making is superior to others and/or usurps the congregational or group decision-making process. Conversely, this research sought to address strategies that can be employed to effectively balance the concerns of pastors about organizational success with the rights of members to participate in the decision-making process.

Having already examined biblical texts that show the role and authority of church leaders in decision-making, this research turned toward two literature streams—priesthood theology and participative decision-making (PDM) within other organizations—to provide a framework for decision-making in the church. This review

drew out themes and also attempted to bridge the gap between these two disconnected streams of literature. What follows is a discussion of the literature as it relates to this participative framework, including its rationale, characteristics and outcomes, a discussion pertaining to power and authority structures in decision-making, and how inclusion of members in the decision-making process function in participative systems. Theological material is found primarily in the section addressing power and authority.

Participative Decision-Making Framework

Rationale for PDM

Participative decision-making (PDM), as it relates to businesses, can be defined as “joint decision-making with managers on work activities and other aspects of organizational functioning traditionally considered to be the responsibility or prerogative of management.”¹¹⁶ Similarly, when it comes to the church, the role of managers in this definition can be interchanged with the role of pastors within a church.

It is important for leaders to have a sufficient understanding of why PDM is necessary if they are going to be committed to implementing and benefiting from PDM practices. In this context, the basis for participative systems in the literature is a moral one. The belief is “that people have a right to have input into decisions that affect their lives.”¹¹⁷ Others, however, would counter this moral argument by suggesting the only basis for the support of PDM is the opportunity for businesses to “function more

¹¹⁶ David Seibold and B. Christine Shea, “Participation and Decision-Making,” in *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*, ed. Fredric M. Jablin and Linda Putnam (Sage Publications, 2001), 666.

¹¹⁷ David P. McCaffrey, Sue R. Faerman, and David W. Hart, “The Appeal and Difficulties of Participative Systems,” *Organization Science* 6, no. 6 (December 11, 1995): 606, accessed September 9, 2019, EBSCOhost.

efficiently.”¹¹⁸

Organizational changes are often the catalyst for organizations embracing PDM. Research reveals that once some companies have reduced the varying levels of leadership, the paradigm shifts to a model of increased employee participation.¹¹⁹ Mark and Cynthia Lengnick-Hall posit four factors necessitating increased participation by employees.¹²⁰ First, decision makers are uncertain of how to appropriately respond to an increasingly demanding landscape of situations that require decisions and information sources. At its core, PDM is vital when an issue is too complex for a sole person to address individually. Second, organizational concerns require that distinct areas function interdependently. For example, a marketing department could not function independent of a sales department at a car dealership. Third, when companies diversify their products, markets, and methods of production, decision-making also becomes more diverse. Fourth, the volume at which decisions have to be made demand an increase in stakeholder participation. Once organizations reach their capacity to respond to and make decisions, they must increase the number of decision makers, decrease the need for decision-making, and/or accept lower levels of performance.¹²¹ The latter two options are unappealing if an organization is to remain competitive.

¹¹⁸ Edwin A. Locke and David M. Schweiger, “Participation in Decision-Making: One More Look,” in, *Leadership, Participation, and Group Behavior*, ed. Larry L. Cummings and Barry M. Staw (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1990), 138-145.

¹¹⁹ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 608; Mark L. Lengnick-Hall and Cynthia A. Lengnick-Hall, “Effective Participative Decision-Making: A Joint Responsibility for Success,” *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 5, no. 2 (1992): 105-106; accessed August 1, 2019, WorldCat.

¹²⁰ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 105-106.

¹²¹ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 106.

Characteristics of PDM

There is general agreement in PDM literature about what properties make up a participative system. Three of the properties are described in either-or scenarios. For example, the literature describes PDM as either forced or voluntary, formal or informal, and direct or indirect.¹²² A forced program may be mandated, more or less, through bargaining agreements negotiated by unions whereas voluntary systems invite workers to participate but do not penalize them if they opt out.¹²³ The literature suggests a formal component is indicated by established rules, protocols, and procedures on the one hand. Informal programs, on the other hand, occur when there are no rules governing the interaction; yet, there are discussions that lead to an agreement taking place, for example, between a manager and his subordinates.¹²⁴ Participative programs can also be direct or indirect. According to the literature, members can be directly involved in decision-making or elect representatives who represent their views in deliberations.¹²⁵ Furthermore, PDM involves degrees of influence.¹²⁶ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall suggest the following six levels of influence:

It can range from (a) no advance information is given to employees about a decision, to (b) employees are informed in advance, to (c) employees can give their opinion about the decision to be made, to (d) employees' opinions are taken

¹²² McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606; Seibold and Shea, 667; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104; Locke and Schweiger, 147.

¹²³ Seibold and Shea, 667-680.

¹²⁴ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 147.

¹²⁵ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606; Seibold and Shea, 667; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104; Locke and Schweiger, 147.

¹²⁶ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606; Seibold and Shea, 667; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104; Locke and Schweiger, 147.

into account, to (e) employees can negatively or positively veto a decision, to (f) the decision is completely in the hands of employees.¹²⁷

Another key component of PDM programs is that they set content parameters around issues. There are typically four areas that employees are able to make decisions around: routine personnel functions, work itself, working conditions, and policy issues.¹²⁸ It is important to note that since these parameters pertain to for-profit organizations, they are not entirely transferrable to churches. Therefore, this present study sought to understand the parameters related to congregations.

Finally, PDM practices seek to establish some type of criteria for who will be included in the decision-making process; specifically, they help to determine whether key individuals, groups, or the entire organization will engage in the process.¹²⁹ Beyond these generally agreed upon properties of PDM, McCaffrey and others include an additional aspect which is the use of a consensus decision rule because they feel it is improper for a minority group to be subjected to the decisions of the majority¹³⁰

Positive and Negative Outcomes Associated with PDM

There are places where PDM researchers agree concerning positive and negative outcomes, places where the observations of one might help to explain the observations of another, and places where a scholar proposes something unrelated altogether. This is because those writing about and researching PDM enter the field from different sides. The goal here, however, is to show these nuances and accumulate them in one place.

¹²⁷ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104.

¹²⁸ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606; Seibold and Shea, 667; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104; Locke and Schweiger, 147.

¹²⁹ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606; Seibold and Shea, 667.

¹³⁰ McCaffrey Faerman, and Hart, 606.

The literature is careful to note the benefits of participative systems. There appears to be a correlation between the productivity of workers and the use of participative decision-making programs. For instance, Richard Kearney and Steve Hays maintain there is a positive impact of PDM on workers such as growth and development, job satisfaction, and change.¹³¹ They place the benefits of productivity in two, discrete categories: human resource-related benefits and task-related benefits. The human resource outcomes are related to an increase in commitment, a lower degree of conflict, low turnover, and fewer absences.¹³² The task related outcomes are improvements in job performance and problem solving, and a higher quality and quantity of output. Daniel Levi would explain the last benefit to be the result of “process gains” where members of the group “pool their knowledge through group discussion” thereby producing ideas no one person would have crafted alone.¹³³ Because of this, a participative system mitigates improper solutions and produces higher quality decisions.¹³⁴ Furthermore, there is a greater level of commitment by each member once the group makes a decision.¹³⁵

These positive aspects of PDM would make such practices desirable for leaders who want to make high-quality decisions and improve the overall ministry environment. However, leaders should also consider the negative impact PDM may have on their organization before moving forward with a program of inclusion.

¹³¹ Richard C. Kearney and Steven W. Hays, “Labor-Management Relations and Participative Decision-making: Toward a New Paradigm,” *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 1 (1994): 44–51, accessed September 9, 2019, WorldCat; Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 102-106.

¹³² Kearney and Hays, 46.

¹³³ Daniel Levi, *Group Dynamics for Teams*, 3rd ed. (SAGE, 2011), 148.

¹³⁴ Levi, 148.

¹³⁵ Levi, 148.

For example, not all members of an organization are motivated by PDM. Though the literature suggests a benefit of PDM is job satisfaction, some members are dissatisfied with it, particularly members who want to be told what to do and members who are accustomed to more directive leadership styles.¹³⁶ Moreover, if implemented incorrectly, there can be just as many downsides to PDM as there are positive outcomes. When PDM is used incorrectly, it can lead to wasted organizational resources, slow responses to significant events, costly mistakes, opportunity costs, group think, and pressures to conform.¹³⁷ Take for example, speed and time costs: A group can spend too much time on unimportant matters or not enough time on important ones. The results of this time inefficiency are poor quality decisions. Group think or group polarization are other examples of disadvantages of PDM. The phenomenon of group think happens when members of the group value their relationships over the quality of decisions.¹³⁸ Group polarization occurs when groups make decisions that are riskier or more conservative than any member of the group would make on their own, an event known as “risky shift phenomenon.”¹³⁹ Again, any one of these phenomena can lead to poor-quality decisions in a group decision-making process.

Another challenge to PDM is unequal involvement or an imbalance in power between decision makers. If it can be said that one of the goals of PDM is to decentralize

¹³⁶ Locke and Schweiger, 192.

¹³⁷ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104.

¹³⁸ John E. Tropman, *Making Meetings Work: Achieving High Quality Group Decisions* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 186; Levi, 156; Locke and Schweiger, 193.

¹³⁹ Levi, 155-156.

leadership and to give voice to members, the exact opposite can occur when some members wield more influence than others. John Gastil writes,

Regardless of their intentions, if one or two members of a democratic group become relatively powerful more than the equality of final decision-making authority is at stake. Imbalances in influence and expertise can limit less powerful members' ability to obtain and understand information relevant to group decisions. In addition, the more powerful individuals are more likely to take away others' opportunities to talk by dominating both the establishment and discussion of the agenda.¹⁴⁰

Therefore, even in a participative approach, if one member gains more influence, decisions can still end up being autocratic simply because influential group members dominate discussions while others consent or remain silent concerning the ideas presented.¹⁴¹ This, too, leads to poor-quality decisions. Perhaps leaders would need to control the meeting format to ensure everyone receives a chance to talk. A leader might even need to nudge non-participating members to express themselves when they see certain group members dominating discussions.

Furthermore, participative leadership is actually harmful when leaders possess the most knowledge and better knowledge than the participants since members have the ability to out vote the leader.¹⁴² Moreover, "increasing participation does not decrease accountability."¹⁴³ Put another way, "A CEO generally cannot deflect praise or blame for

¹⁴⁰ John Gastil, *Democracy in Small Groups: Participation, Decision-Making, and Communication* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1993), 106.

¹⁴¹ Levi, 136; Locke and Schweiger, 190.

¹⁴² Locke and Schweiger, 192.

¹⁴³ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 107.

organizational performance regardless of the decision-making practices used in the firm.”¹⁴⁴

Thus, the literature shows that leaders are presented with two possibilities: positive or negative outcomes of PDM practices based on how well they implement them. Depending on how a PDM program is designed and executed, disparate opinions of group members can lead to either creative ideas or “hurt feelings and restrict future communication;” diverse interests can lead to either “broaden perspectives and help identify more alternatives or cause dysfunctional intergroup conflict;” time delays can either result in high-quality decisions or “undermine first-mover advantages in the marketplace.”¹⁴⁵ Studies show there is no direct link between participative systems and its benefits.¹⁴⁶ In other words, just establishing a participative program is not enough to reap the benefits of that system. Instead, there are mitigating and nuanced factors that are important to PDM success.

One of the factors that effects success rates is information sharing. Catherine Lam, Xu Huang, and Simon C. H. Chan conducted two studies that tested how participative leadership and information sharing affect employee performance.¹⁴⁷ They posit that employees internalize a set of criteria for what constitutes participative leadership behavior.¹⁴⁸ When management invites employees to participate in decision-

¹⁴⁴ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 107.

¹⁴⁵ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 108; Levi, 148-155.

¹⁴⁶ Catherine K. Lam, Xu Huang, and Simon C. H. Chan, “The Threshold Effect of Participative Leadership and the Role of Leader Information Sharing,” *Academy of Management Journal* 58, no. 3 (June 2015): 836–849, accessed August 1, 2019, EBSCOhost; Kearney and Hays, 46.

¹⁴⁷ Lam, Huang, and Chan, 836–849.

¹⁴⁸ Lam, Huang, and Chan, 839.

making but do not demonstrate other behaviors typical of participative leadership then the net effect is a nonresponsive employee.¹⁴⁹ Meeting this criteria or “threshold” leads to increased performance because the employee perceives his or her leader as demonstrating consistent participative behaviors.¹⁵⁰ Huang, Lam, and Chan’s research directly addresses the discrepancy between participative leadership and performance. Their study helps to illuminate that it is not just participation but information sharing along with participation that rises to the level of meeting a worker’s internal threshold (personal expectations of a participatory leader) and which produces the organizational benefits of increased performance. Consequently, there is a causal relationship between participative leadership and its outcomes when information is limited rendering participation alone ineffective.

Within this context, literature centered on the “cognitive models of variables mediating participation-outcome relationships” is particularly illuminating.¹⁵¹ This model suggests that the “flow of information” is impacted through participation programs when workers provide better information about their work to management and learn more about the company from management; this exchange effects PDM outcomes.¹⁵² However, this exchange is negatively affected if the worker is being asked to participate in areas he or

¹⁴⁹ Lam, Huang, and Chan, 847-849; Cindy Zoghi and Robert D. Mohr, “The Decentralization of Decision-making and Employee Involvement within the Workplace: Evidence from Four Establishment Datasets,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 49, no. 4 (December 2011): 688–716, accessed, September 19, 2019, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵⁰ Lam, Huang, and Chan, 837.

¹⁵¹ Seibold and Shea, 667.

¹⁵² Seibold and Shea, 667.

she is not interested in or knowledgeable of.¹⁵³ Therefore, when employees are able to participate in decision-making around areas of interests and leaders share pertinent information with their employees, then employees will likely increase their performance.

Although information exchange is crucial to understanding the success of PDM, it is not the only factor that can either railroad participation or cause it to be successful. An accumulation of factors in the literature show at least four other conditions that work in favor of participative systems or against them. First, a member's prior experience and attitude toward participation can affect a program.¹⁵⁴ Second, the organization of the program must be sufficient for participation; that is, "collaboration is more likely when the power of the various parties is approximately balanced and when the number of parties involved is sufficiently small."¹⁵⁵ Proper organization leads to acquiring agreements, relationship building, and less posturing between decision-makers. A third component is the shared incentives, issues, and values pertaining to members and their interests. McCaffrey and his colleagues assert, "Collaboration can appear more easily when (1) other purposes do not weigh heavily against it; (2) when parties mutually face a crisis unless they resolve a problem successfully, and (3) when deeply held values do not have to be compromised or traded off."¹⁵⁶ Finally, the investment made by leaders in making participation work is a major factor in the success of PDM.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Seibold and Shea, 668.

¹⁵⁴ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 614.

¹⁵⁵ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 614.

¹⁵⁶ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 616.

¹⁵⁷ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 613.

Power and Authority in Participative Decision-Making

A thorough discussion about power and authority is important to this research for two reasons. First, one must consider how the authority of those with leadership positions are affected by participation. Subsequently, participants must be willing to acknowledge whether or not their leadership structure is best suited for the participative decision-making process. Naturally, PDM implies that leaders surrender a portion of their power and control in order to make participation work. In doing so, decisions may not reflect the will of the leader. Nevertheless, pastors and leaders cannot simply resign themselves to the wishes of the group. PDM requires someone taking “responsibility for ensuring its appropriate situational application and proper functioning; otherwise effectiveness will be left to chance.”¹⁵⁸ This, in essence, is the crux of decision leadership.

In order to further delineate what decision leadership is, it is necessary to consider two categories of power: personal power (expert, referent or likeability, and information), and positional power (legitimate, reward, and coercive or ability to punish).¹⁵⁹ Participative systems and decision leaders will tend to rely more on personal power than positional power.¹⁶⁰ Added to this trajectory is the fact that no one leadership style fits all situations, especially in the context of the church. On the continuum of leadership approaches are anything from submissive leadership (*laissez-faire*) to aggressive leadership (autocratic).¹⁶¹ James Means argues that neither extreme of leadership fits the

¹⁵⁸ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104.

¹⁵⁹ Levi, 133.

¹⁶⁰ Levi, 133.

¹⁶¹ James E. Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 79-81.

characteristics of spiritual leadership, which is participatory.¹⁶² Therefore, in this congregational study, it was important to investigate literature pertaining to the roles that power and authority play in PDM from both a business and church perspective.

Organizational Structures

PDM is not just successful when there is an ample supply of information flowing from leaders to workers and back, which is what the studies above demonstrated. It is most effective when there are flatter organizational structures. As already alluded to, leaders have to give up some authority so that PDM can be successful. A study conducted by Ricardo Alonso, Wouter Dessein, and Niko Matouschek compared two organizational structures, one decentralized and the other centralized, concerning decision-making.¹⁶³ Under the centralized structure, the researchers learned that managers communicated vertically to a senior leader who made decisions on his level as well as the manager's level. Communication was always more informative in this manner because both the manager and the senior leader had more closely aligned objectives than did the manager with his peers. In other words, the manager held "own-division bias" —he wanted his department to succeed without regard to the success or failure of another division.¹⁶⁴ However, their research discovered that when it comes to coordination, "decentralization always outperforms centralization when the division managers' incentives are sufficiently aligned" and the need for coordination increased.¹⁶⁵ In fact, when the need for

¹⁶² Means, 80.

¹⁶³ Ricardo Alonso, Wouter Dessein, and Niko Matouschek, "When Does Coordination Require Centralization?" *The American Economic Review* 98, no. 1 (2008): 168, accessed August 29, 2019, JSTOR.

¹⁶⁴ Alonso, Dessein, and Matouschek, 168.

¹⁶⁵ Alonso, Dessein, and Matouschek, 168.

coordination increases, centralization worsens communication between community members.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, poor communication leads to poor quality information which, in turn, leads to poor decision-making. Thus, the research conducted by Alonso and others implies that decentralization in decision-making is most effective when coordination between all parties is emphasized.

In a congregational setting, Alonso, Dessein, and Matouschek's research could imply that in ministries where coordination of resources such as money, volunteers, and space, among other things, are crucial to the success of the ministry, decentralization and power sharing would serve to achieve that success since communication improves under decentralized power structures. The one caveat would be that ministry workers across different ministries would need to link the success or failure of their ministry to the success or failure of other ministries.

George Romme's study challenges Alonso and his colleagues' research to not go too far in leveling out authority structures. His research suggests organizational structures do not have to be completely flattened or decentralized to achieve success in PDM. Some hierarchy can remain. Romme's research examined how unanimity breaks down when decision-making pressure reaches a critical threshold in large group settings.¹⁶⁷ Romme advocates for unanimity because it "is most likely to produce pareto optimality."¹⁶⁸ Pareto-optimality is a theory that states a decision or proposal is ideal when no more alternatives exist to improve the position of some without worsening the position of

¹⁶⁶ Alonso, Dessein, and Matouschek, 147.

¹⁶⁷ A. Georges L. Romme, "Unanimity Rule and Organizational Decision-making: A Simulation Model," *Organization Science* 15, no. 6 (2004): 705-708, accessed, August 1, 2019, WorldCat.

¹⁶⁸ Romme, 705.

others.¹⁶⁹ Romme's research suggested that using smaller groups in decision-making processes can maintain unanimity despite the pressures of time and other factors. These smaller groups are referred to as "democratic hierarchies."¹⁷⁰ Such hierarchies flatten the pyramid shape of an organization by creating teams at the top level. Everyone participates directly or through representatives, and maintains the right to make personal decisions affecting one's self. The top circle would establish decision parameters for all lower circles.¹⁷¹ Similar to the findings of Alonso and his colleagues, coordination among organizational members is important to make Romme's approach successful.

Romme's model is similar to a Presbyterian model of governance which relies upon presbyteries, synods and a general assembly to practice shared governance for its churches. For a Baptist congregation, however, this model could also be applied. There could be a pastoral team or council of elders at the top of the congregational chart followed by a group of deacons or stewards. After that, the next circle could consist of a team of ministry leaders and then the congregation as the collective body. A representative from the lower circle could participate in the next higher circle as well as a member from a higher circle who would be selected to lead the circle below. The representative would be the voice for the circle below and everyone would be able to contribute to decisions indirectly. The foreseeable drawback to Romme's model in the Baptist church is the widely held belief and practice of congregationalism, which is mainly democratic, and embodies the priesthood-of-all-believers doctrine. Gastil, who

¹⁶⁹ Romme, 705.

¹⁷⁰ Romme, 707.

¹⁷¹ Romme, 707.

often writes from a business point of view, asserts that in a democratic group, “all members must ultimately have equal power with regard to group policies.”¹⁷²

Pastoral Authority, Priesthood Doctrine and Decision-Making

Whereas the overwhelming majority of literature hones in on business models, PDM literature may be beneficial in addressing the function of the church body and the role of the pastor. PDM should be considered by pastors and churches who desire congregational success. The moral grounding of the church juxtaposed with the complexities of decision-making situations embraced by the church provide succinct parallels between churches and businesses. However, it is worth noting that the moral ground (members having a right to help make decisions for matters that directly affect their lives) must be tempered by theological concerns.

Unlike businesses, Christians must conform their desires to what they believe to be the will of God. Moreover, pastors must also consider the costs associated with PDM, particularly whether or not members have adequate information and knowledge in a situation to contribute to a high-quality decision. There may be times, specifically, when the pastor or pastoral team possess all the necessary knowledge (including knowledge of the Bible) to make a decision for the sake of the congregation and the involvement of members who lack that information would only harm the mission of the church, rather than advance it. Pastors and church leaders need to consider whether or not there would be too much conflict to produce a high-quality decision while also maintaining unity. Furthermore, members may not be skilled enough to avoid group think and group polarization. There also may be one or two influential members who could regress the

¹⁷² Gastil, 17.

group decision-making process by their influence and produce decisions that are essentially autocratic.

In addition, before pastors and church leaders adopt PDM practices as they are used in the business sector, they must keep in mind that business leaders are ultimately driven by profit motives and PDM is only useful to for-profit organizations to the degree that it helps increase the bottom line. The mission of the church is not money, but the development of its people into Christ-like followers. Therefore, it is important to turn toward the offerings of theology to further inform pastors of factors to consider when determining how to employ PDM. The roads of pastoral authority, priesthood doctrine, and decision-making all intersect and are conversant with one another.

It has long been understood by members of Baptist churches that the form of governance practiced in these churches is congregational and decisions are made through the democratic process of voting by the members. The doctrine driving this congregationalism has to do with the priesthood of all believers, which emphasizes equality among all members including the pastor or pastors.¹⁷³ The meaning of the priesthood of all believers is that all persons are capable of accessing God directly without an intermediary and sharing in the work of ministry.¹⁷⁴

This doctrine has its roots in the reformation and was seen as a reaction to clericalism and sacerdotalism (a “religious belief emphasizing the powers of priests as

¹⁷³ Clifford Hill and Monica Hill, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *International Congregational Journal* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 126, accessed April 24, 2018, EBSCOhost; Tobias Brandner, “Authority in the Church: Some Reformation Based Reflections about the Ministry in the Church, Also with Regard to the Churches in China,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (April 2007): 137, accessed April 24, 2018, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷⁴ J. Terry Young, “Baptists and the Priesthood of Believers,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 20, no. 2 (1993): 131–46, accessed July 7, 2016, EBSCOhost.

essential mediators between God and humankind”).¹⁷⁵ Martin Luther is referenced the most as the central figure in promoting this doctrine. However, there is no agreement on what he meant by it or what authority it gave to members compared to pastors. For example, Mark Rogers compares and contrasts the beliefs of Martin Luther and E. Y. Mullins. Mullins was a Southern Baptist and proponent of “soul competency,” which has often been conflated with priesthood theology.¹⁷⁶ According to Rogers, Mullins’ idea of priesthood argues for individualism whereas Luther focused on interdependency.¹⁷⁷ In other words, no one member should think that he or she is participating in church without some reliance on other believers. Likewise, other believers must also rely on that believer in order to function as well.

Furthermore, Mullins believed a “democratic church government was the only valid option” for the priesthood of all believers in a congregation.¹⁷⁸ Luther, on the other hand, held to a “hierarchical ecclesiology” despite belief in a common priesthood.¹⁷⁹ Romme’s concept of democratic hierarchies is a similar in theory to Luther’s hierarchical ecclesiology. Luther’s view was that senior ministers carry out priestly duties on behalf of the congregation with delegated authority coming from the common priesthood, if for

¹⁷⁵ Hill and Hill, 126; Mark Rogers, “A Dangerous Idea? Martin Luther, E. Y. Mullins, and the Priesthood of All Believers,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 119–34, accessed, July 14, 2016, EBSCOhost; Jeff B Pool, “Baptist Infidelity to the Principle of Religious Liberty,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17, no. 1 (1990): 17, accessed, July 13, 2016, EBSCOhost; Curtis W Freeman, “Mediating Ministry and the Renewal of the Church,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2012): 400, accessed, July 12, 2016, EBSCOhost; Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 291-292, accessed, July 13, 2016, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷⁶ George, 284.

¹⁷⁷ Rogers, 130-131.

¹⁷⁸ Rogers, 132-133.

¹⁷⁹ Rogers, 127.

no other reason than to maintain order.¹⁸⁰ The general membership exercised their priesthood role in the community.¹⁸¹ These differences indicate how those who interpret Luther's doctrine are not consistent with his understanding. Roger admits that Luther's view evolved over time and what those who reference Martin Luther's ideas may be drawing from is the pre-1525 Luther.¹⁸² Thereafter, Martin Luther started to see dangers connected to immature Christians operating without ministerial accountability.¹⁸³ Luther would not be a good advocate for the modern expression of priesthood theology, that is, democracy in the church.

Another view of history challenges beliefs about priesthood doctrine and its implications for congregational decision-making. Proponents of priesthood doctrine, as it is understood by Mullins and other Baptists, maintain that this doctrine is drawn directly from the Bible.¹⁸⁴ One of these proponents, Samuel Mikolaski, notes when the so-called shift from the biblical doctrine may have occurred. He references *I Clement*, which was a late first century document from the church at Rome to the church at Corinth distinguishing the roles of high priest, priests, and Levites.¹⁸⁵ Equally important, from the second century forward, the church was largely governed by a monarchical episcopacy.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Rogers, 123.

¹⁸¹ Rogers, 123; Pool, 17.

¹⁸² Rogers, 126.

¹⁸³ Rogers, 126.

¹⁸⁴ Hill and Hill, 128.

¹⁸⁵ Samuel J Mikolaski, "The Contemporary Relevance of the Priesthood of All Christians," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30, no. 2 (1988): 6, accessed, July 14, 2016, EBSCOhost.

¹⁸⁶ Paul Valliere, *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 49.

Certain issues that threatened the church were responded to by a council of bishops.¹⁸⁷ Each bishop was the monarch of his local congregation but an equal peer on the council.¹⁸⁸ But if this was the organization of the church, then those living closer to the New Testament period never understood priesthood in the way it is being expressed today.

Still, for those who argue for priesthood as Mullins sees it, the pastor is equal in authority with the rest of the membership.¹⁸⁹ His or her role “should be the coordination of vision and strategy and the creation and maintenance of unity within the community of believers.”¹⁹⁰ Understood this way, “the role of the leaders should not be one of making decisions for others but one of working with them.”¹⁹¹ As priests themselves, Baptist pastors are only meant to have an advisory role with other priests.¹⁹² This literature does not take into account the fact that everyone may not be spiritually mature or possess the necessary skill to participate in decision-making which may lead to poor-quality decisions. Pastors and leaders must not simply go along with whatever the congregation decides. There may be times when they have to assert their position for the sake of the mission.

Some proponents of priesthood doctrine grant more authority to pastors than just

¹⁸⁷ Valliere, 50-55.

¹⁸⁸ Valliere, 55.

¹⁸⁹ Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, Rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1991), 110; Hill and Hill, 129.

¹⁹⁰ Hill and Hill, 129.

¹⁹¹ Hill and Hill, 129.

¹⁹² Patterson, 140-141.

that of an advisory role. Tobias Bradner, for instance, holds the view that priesthood theology positively encourages criticism of hierarchal authority because the pastor is just as fallible as any other member and in need of supervision.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, he regards the role of a pastor as proclaiming the word and serving alongside other pastors and elders to direct the church administratively.¹⁹⁴ This last point implies a team or group decision-making concept rather than a whole church model. Herschel Hobbs, another proponent of priesthood doctrine, illustrates pastoral authority in the following way:

If the people in the congregation have one idea for a church program and the pastor has another and if the difference cannot be resolved, the people should give way to the pastor's idea. The reason given is not that the pastor has a divinely bestowed authority or the only pipeline to God but because the Lord has entrusted the pastor with responsibility for the souls of the congregation.¹⁹⁵

Hobbs deferral to the pastor in his remarks indicate the pastor's view supersedes the congregation when there are differences. Deliberation does not lead to a vote to determine whether the congregation will support the pastor's idea over their own. Instead, there is an acknowledgement of his or her role.

Chiara Cordelli makes a profound argument for decentralization and democracy among Catholic organizations that actually favors greater authority in decision-making among Baptist pastors and less inclusion among membership. Her rationale is centered on the Catholic church as an employer, but it is not limited to the Catholic church in application. She suggests that the Catholic church, as an employer, is "second only to

¹⁹³ Bradner, 137-138.

¹⁹⁴ Bradner, 139-142.

¹⁹⁵ Herschel H. Hobbs, *You Are Chosen: The Priesthood of All Believers* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 87.

Walmart and McDonalds.”¹⁹⁶ Therefore, the decisions that are made by leadership affects employees unequally and impacts their basic interests in a profound way. She writes, “Due to the special legal status accorded to religious organization, in virtue of the separation between church and state, in many countries churches’ employees are covered by a much softer form of labor law compared with regulations that apply to secular employers.”¹⁹⁷ These workers cannot simply exit the institution without great cost.¹⁹⁸ Because of this, at least the Catholic church and any church or religion that carries this kind of impact on their agents should be democratized to that extent.¹⁹⁹

Her argument favors greater pastoral authority and less democracy in Baptist churches for several reasons. First, if the amount of cost (burden) a person suffers for exiting the organization is a factor in determining whether power is shared then a full-time Baptist pastor should definitely have a significant amount of authority to make decisions. He or she relies on the church for a living and cannot exit without great cost. Since his or her basic support depends upon the congregation, if poor quality decisions are made that cause a decline in membership and donations, the pastor will suffer as a result. Second, and by extension of the first rationale, an employed minister would have a greater stake in the success of the church than a congregant because membership is voluntary. Members can enter and exit congregations at will, join or quit ministry work on a whim, and give or withhold financial support at their own discretion with little to no

¹⁹⁶ Chiara Cordelli, “Democratizing Organized Religion,” *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 2 (April 2017): 576, accessed, April 24, 2018, EBSCOhost.

¹⁹⁷ Cordelli, 576-577.

¹⁹⁸ Cordelli, 579.

¹⁹⁹ Cordelli, 576.

personal suffering. Finally, what makes financial losses for Baptist ministers so significant is the fact that serving as a minister in one congregation is not a transferrable position in the same way that an employee might transfer from the San Antonio Walmart to the Miami Walmart or being reassigned to another diocese or district by a bishop in the Methodist church. Pastors are essentially thrust back into the job market if the church has to close her doors due to declining membership or insufficient funding. This is not to say that pastors are motivated by money or should be, but these are pragmatic concerns pastors weigh when considering decision strategies, even if it is in a minimal capacity.

There are many viable arguments to be made for why the pastor or pastors should be given the ability to make decisions on behalf of the church within limits. The expression of priesthood doctrine in the form of democracy in the church may be reactionary, however, to instances of historical abuses of ministers exercising too much authority over their congregants.²⁰⁰ At one time, national and business leaders, students of the Bible, and everyday people would not decide matters for themselves without the word of the preacher.²⁰¹ Even in present times, some churches have given too much authority to their leaders while others have not given enough. Means' identification of the problem with balance cannot be stated any better than what he says in the following:

A delicate balance between two equally clear lines of biblical teaching must be maintained. The church's leaders are to be overseers, but not lords over God's heritage. The church is to obey and submit, but is not to be blindly obeisant or servile. Leaders are not to dominate and control church decisions or the personal lives of members, but neither is the church to be hostile and resistant to the counsel of its leaders. The church is advised to obey its leaders, but it is also instructed to "test everything" ... and "watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way."... While the church and its members must not be

²⁰⁰ Daniel J. Ott, "Church, Community and Democracy," *Political Theology* 12, no. 3 (July 2011): 350-351, accessed April 24, 2018, EBSCOhost; Rogers, 120; Means, 92.

²⁰¹ Means, 92.

recalcitrant, the church must be spiritually discerning.... The church must be spiritually discerning enough to reject the counsel of its leaders when that counsel is wrong. It is unrealistic to think that spiritual leaders are always right or that responsible positions are always filled by wise leaders. For their part, leaders have the authority of overseers, examples, teachers, and guides, but none of this gives them license to be dictators or “lord it over” ... the church. The church has always struggled with these truths, and today's church is no exception. An appropriate balance is essential, but it is not easy to attain. Many leaders err—some toward autocracy, others toward servility. Many churches err—some toward blind deference to leaders, others toward disrespect or defiance of leaders.²⁰²

Biblical research does not support the idea of a pure democracy in the first century church. Furthermore, an analysis of the New Testament does not provide any evidence that all major decisions were brought before the congregation for a vote or the congregation held “veto power over all leadership decisions.”²⁰³

What has been shown in the literature, to this point, is that organizational leaders must exercise leadership in the decision-making process if it is to be effective. The moral justification for PDM argues for the right of members to participate in making decisions concerning matters affecting their lives. The theological justification argues that all believers have direct access to God. None of this, however, is justification for diminishing leaders' authority and equating them to just another member of the organization. Not all members of an organization or church are mature and possess the ability to deliberate equally. Furthermore, priesthood doctrine, in its purest sense, was not intended to simply make the pastor an advisor. With that being said, the literature reveals that only rarely should a pastor or organizational leader make decisions in isolation from others. Instead, he or she should work within smaller groups or teams.

²⁰² Means, 93-94.

²⁰³ Means, 94.

The modern expression of priesthood doctrine may be just a reaction to pastoral abuses. Nevertheless, both leaders and members must find balance when sharing power and making decisions. Members must work toward trusting their leaders and leaders must work toward earning that trust by not “lording over” others and failing to include members in the decision-making process when it is appropriate. Together, members and pastors would do well to establish guidelines to help determine when PDM is necessary and at what level it should be used as a model. This is precisely what this study sought to accomplish.

Christina Braudaway-Bauman provides a compelling summary of the intersection between pastoral authority, priesthood doctrine, and decision-making. In her view, authority can be granted, earned, claimed, borrowed, and or shared.²⁰⁴ These five forms of authority can be used as an evaluation for pastors to assess what type of authority they have in a congregation with any given issue. When authority is granted, this is usually because a congregation had a healthy relationship with the previous pastor and is willing to grant a new pastor the permission to make decisions on his or her own.²⁰⁵ Earned authority happens on the basis of personal integrity. Over time, the pastor demonstrates that he or she is capable of leading through relationship building and calming well-differentiated leadership which builds trust.²⁰⁶ When members grant this type of authority, they are allowing the pastor to go beyond prescribed decision parameters in

²⁰⁴ Christina Braudaway-Bauman, “Dimensions of Pastoral Authority: What It Means to Become a Congregation’s Pastor,” in *Leadership in Congregations*, Harvesting the Learnings Series ed. Richard Bass; (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2007), 128-134.

²⁰⁵ Braudaway-Bauman, 128-129.

²⁰⁶ Braudaway-Bauman, 130.

order to make decisions on their behalf. However, a pastor must know when to claim authority that is inherent in his or her position. This is a learned skill that often takes time to develop.²⁰⁷ Simply put, there are times when a pastor must assert him or herself in order to preserve the missional effectiveness of the congregation. Borrowed authority is ultimately what any pastor has been given “from Christian tradition, from the church, from the Gospel, and from Jesus himself.”²⁰⁸ Finally, pastoral authority is shared. It is a “communal project” between the priesthood of all believers to which the pastor is among yet, “the role of the pastor needs to be defined in relation to the particularity of the congregation he or she has been called to serve.”²⁰⁹

Inclusion in Participative Systems

Since participation in decision-making does not mean everybody participates in every decision, there must be some basis for determining when to include, who to include, how many to include, and ways to include. Leaders must also consider inclusion dynamics such as the potential for conflict if a group is poorly formed and developed. Moreover, decision leadership requires a person or group to identify issues designated for group deliberation and decision-making. In addition, a decision strategy must be determined before any deliberations commence. These issues related to inclusion in the literature can be placed in two categories: means of inclusion and decision process.

Means of Inclusion

Involvement literature proposes factors that should be considered for when to

²⁰⁷ Braudaway-Bauman, 130-131.

²⁰⁸ Braudaway-Bauman, 133.

²⁰⁹ Braudaway-Bauman, 129.

include participants. One of those factors is based on innovating. John Parnell and Michael Menefee conducted a study that analyzed the link between business strategy and employee involvement.²¹⁰ The results of their study found that innovative business strategies were not independent of participation from employees, and management was better served by aligning strategy with employee involvement.²¹¹ In other words, an organization which seeks to innovate and constantly adjust to changing markets would need greater levels of participation to be successful compared to a company seeking to maintain stability and maximize efficiency. The latter would not be served well by high employee involvement. The innovation factor applied to churches mean that when churches are trying to reach new people in a constantly changing world, leaders would be better served by including more voices in the decision-making process.

In addition to innovation, John E. Tropman gives leaders another factor to consider, which is decision quality. When high-quality decisions are necessary, a group process will win over individual decision-making.²¹² Individuals are prone to mistakes in judgment such as “selective perception error,” which assert individuals have blind spots and cannot see every factor pertaining to a situation.²¹³ Another type of error made by individuals is the “review for proof only error,” which leads a person to “review the situation with the perspective of seeing if they can verify” his or her predetermined

²¹⁰ John A. Parnell and Michael Menefee, “The Business Strategy-Employee Involvement Contingency: The Impact of Strategy-Participation Fit on Performance,” *American Business Review* 13, no. 2 (June 1995): 90-96, accessed September 19, 2019, EBSCOhost.

²¹¹ Parnell and Menefee, 96.

²¹² Tropman, 171.

²¹³ Tropman, 171.

assessment.²¹⁴ A third type of error made by an individual in decision-making is “premature commitment error” where a person proceed on with a decision having developed it and checked it.²¹⁵

Means provides the most comprehensive assessment about when to involve members in a decision-making process. He lists six factors for consideration: type of issue, degree of importance, availability of data, efficiency requirements, leadership vacuum, and group cohesiveness.²¹⁶ These considerations are helpful to the present research study because they give pastors a way to internally evaluate whether an issue requires inclusion or not. Considering the type of issue and degree of importance are uncomplicated. The availability of data relates to Tropman’s decision-quality factor. The leader may not have sufficient information to make a decision on his or her own. The efficiency factor relates back to costs or disadvantages of PDM explored previously in this research. Some issues can waste organizational resources, including time, when decent quality decisions can be made quickly and independently by a leader.²¹⁷ Moreover, when there is adequate leadership, pastors can step back but where leadership is lacking, pastors need to be more aggressive.²¹⁸ This is what Means refers to as the leadership vacuum. Finally, a leader has to weigh the impact of PDM on organizational cohesiveness. Unity is of utmost importance to the church.²¹⁹ It is not the case in every

²¹⁴ Tropman, 171.

²¹⁵ Tropman, 171.

²¹⁶ Means, 83-87.

²¹⁷ Means, 86; Levi, 149.

²¹⁸ Means, 86.

²¹⁹ Means, 87; Valliere, 49.

situation but “church cohesiveness is more important than any possible decision on an issue. The loss of church unity is disastrous to public testimony and to interpersonal relationships.”²²⁰

Furthermore, involvement literature discusses ideas about who to include in the decision-making process and how many people to include. The knowledge of the worker has already been stated as a benefit of PDM. It is also a factor in determining who leaders should seek to bring to the table of deliberation. For example, Andrew Timming applies an Aristotelian approach to PDM to explain who managers should invite to be a part of the decision-making process.²²¹ These employees possess an Aristotelian excellence, that is, “they possess insight that is highly valued” by management and are able to drive solutions upward.²²² Timming’s research implies everyone may not possess enough decision skills and knowledge to participate in the decision-making process. There are times when group members “are not the best representatives of their own interests or are incapable of effectively participating in democratic deliberation.”²²³ When this is shown to be the case, members need an advocate or representative to express ideas and concerns on their behalf. At the very least, members who are not capable of participating because of a lack of decision-making or conflict resolution skills would need some development or training beforehand.

²²⁰ Means, 87.

²²¹ Andrew R. Timming, “The ‘reach’ of Employee Participation in Decision-Making: Exploring the Aristotelian Roots of Workplace Democracy,” *Human Resource Management Journal* 25, no. 3 (July 2015): 382–96, accessed August 29, 2019.

²²² Timming, 389.

²²³ Gastil, 9.

Timming's research coincides with Tropman's four basic types of members who should be a part of a decision-making group. Since many of the reasons poor-quality decisions are made stem from the wrong people being brought together and being empowered to make decisions, Tropman recommends bringing together those with knowledge of the problem, those with solutions to the problem, those who control resources, and those to whom the responsibility of the decision rest.²²⁴ For the church, Means takes the qualifications even further. In his view, no one should "be selected and entrusted with authority merely because of their expertise or skills as evaluated by secular standards."²²⁵ If persons do not possess "personal spiritual authenticity" that is, the Word and Spirit personally reflected in their lives, they should not be considered for a decision-making group.²²⁶

After determining who should be a part of the decision-making group, one has to consider how many members should be a part of the decision-making group. If the group grows too large, the decision process becomes hard to manage and can lead to poor quality decisions.²²⁷ Group members must share power, be committed to the process, develop healthy relationships with one another, and take responsibility for participating.²²⁸ Increased group size decreases the positive effects of such groups.²²⁹ Furthermore, larger teams may develop "free-riders," people who do not truly participate

²²⁴ Tropman, 186-187.

²²⁵ Means, 109.

²²⁶ Means, 109.

²²⁷ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 615; Locke and Schweiger, 194.

²²⁸ Gastil, 6, 127-128.

²²⁹ Romme, 704.

in deliberations or who are committed, but simply consent to what a smaller group within the larger group has decided.²³⁰

If unity and consensus is the goal, smaller groups can achieve this much easier than larger ones.²³¹ In a congregation facing an issue where the cost of making the wrong decision is high, yet, not including members in the process would threaten unity, a congregational meeting may not be the ideal situation for decision-making since these meetings invite every member to join in regardless of decision-making skills. At Mount Pleasant, the site for the researcher's own ministry context, there could potentially be 100 or more people involved in the decision process. For matters of a smaller scale, there are about 40 to 45 persons who are involved. In fact, in congregational churches where every member has the opportunity to participate in meeting, many do not come.²³² A good decision-making group would be more than two and less than 30.²³³ Above this number is where the breakdown begins to occur.²³⁴

Beyond the scope of just numerical participation, inclusion literature touches on the potential conflict dynamics of group decision-making. As previously analyzed, conflict has already been mentioned as a possible downside to PDM. However, leaders should be aware of the potential for conflict by the mere pursuit of PDM or the construction of poorly developed and poorly managed groups. Conflict may be unavoidable when different personalities are brought together and members are strongly

²³⁰ Romme, 706.

²³¹ Romme, 711.

²³² Alan Argent, "The Importance (and Dangers) of the Church Meeting," *International Congregational Journal* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2013): 95, accessed, April 24, 2018, EBSCOhost.

²³³ Gastil, 127-128.

²³⁴ Gastil, 127.

advocating different solutions to a shared problem. In a congregational setting, conflict is likely due to adversarial democracy manifested through voting paradigms particularly when a decision is implemented based on a simple majority (51 to 49 vote).²³⁵ While leaders cannot prevent conflict among group participants, they should be aware of how their role as the leader or head may contribute to such conflict. S. B. Pierce demonstrates one way this occurs. He uses Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory to explain some of the inclusion dynamics that can lead to conflict in a congregation. Under this theory, strangers enter an organization and undergo a sort of trial where the relationship is tested. This is referred to as “a type of ‘cash and carry,’ where the offer of an ‘in-group’ relationship is reciprocated by the offer of support, for example, by means of the promise of a much-valued vote.”²³⁶ The in-group, which would normally include the pastor, has access to information and resources not afforded to those in the out-group. This relationship between leader and follower has the potential to grow toward a mutual partnership.²³⁷

LMX has positive and negative effects on congregational decision-making. On the negative side, a congregation exercising a majority rule as its decision approach can have votes split between in-group (those closest to leadership) and out-groups (those not trusted by leadership and who do not trust leadership in return).²³⁸ On the positive side, if

²³⁵ S. B. Pierce, “Baptist Leadership: Democracy, Kakistocracy or Adhocracy,” *Praktiese Teologie in Suid-Afrika* 23, no. 2 (2008): 164-165; Valliere, 108-109.

²³⁶ Pierce, 166; George B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory of Leadership over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level Multi-Domain Perspective,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1995): 230-232, accessed, August 22, 2019, <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/1048984395900365>.

²³⁷ Pierce, 166.

²³⁸ Pierce, 165.

a leader works to build relationships and extend invitations to all to join the in-group, it will increase his or her influence and authority.²³⁹ Under the positive effects of LMX theory, members would have greater opportunity to participate in decision-making which could build trust among followers and leaders.²⁴⁰ Therefore, leaders need to be aware of these in-group/out-group dynamics, and intentionally try to create a culture of trust and mutual respect. Leaders should build healthy relationships with as many members as possible to mitigate any negative side-effects that could result from leader/member dynamics.

Decision Process

Before any decision can be made through PDM, not only does decision leadership necessitate determining who will decide, it also requires establishing how the group will decide, that is, what decision rule will be used in reaching a final decision. In addition, more clarity is needed around the particular parameters limiting the scope of a group's decision-making responsibility. To further complicate this discussion, group members must be committed and engaged throughout the process. Much of these components have been discussed throughout this literature review but warrant a separate discussion.

The method and governing principles that dictate how a group decides on an issue is known as a decision rule.²⁴¹ The two most popular rules are either majority rule or consensus. In a majority rule approach, group members deliberate until members are

²³⁹ Pierce, 172.

²⁴⁰ Pierce, 165.

²⁴¹ Tropman, 92.

confident they have enough information to make a decision.²⁴² A proposal is put forth and members cast a vote by raising their hands, verbal identification, ballot or standing. The majority can be simple, that is, 51 to 49 or overwhelming, requiring two-thirds or greater.²⁴³ Simple majorities, however, pose a greater risk for conflict and division. Conversely, the researcher thinks the consensus model has the greatest potential for strong commitment and unity amongst decision makers. This approach relies upon deliberation, persuasion, and members looking for a common ground.²⁴⁴ If members cannot all agree, the dissenters can stand aside for sake of unity while logging their disagreement for official records.²⁴⁵ The setback to consensus is that it gives significant authority to individuals to block the majority in the group. It also slows down the overall decision-making process. Nevertheless, the goal of unity and high-quality decisions may demand a consensus approach. In turn, consensus and unanimity is best sought in smaller groups, not during large congregational meetings.²⁴⁶

Outside of these approaches, four other rules worth noting and referencing may be found in group decision-making: minority rule or proportional outcome, involvement rule, expert rule and power rule.²⁴⁷ The last two can be lumped together under the title of influence. Under minority rule, concessions are made for those who are consistently in

²⁴² Gastil, 53-55.

²⁴³ Gastil, 53-55.

²⁴⁴ Jill Tabart and World Council of Churches, *Coming to Consensus: A Case Study for the Churches*, Risk Book Series; No. 103 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003) 21-22; Gastil, 50-52.

²⁴⁵ Gastil, 51; Tom Beers, "Consensus: A Different Way to Make Decisions" (Workshop, Nehemiah Leadership Network, Mount Bethel, February 7, 2018).

²⁴⁶ Romme, 711.

²⁴⁷ Tropman, 93-94; Gastil, 55.

the minority, involvement rule gives power to those left with the responsibility of carrying out a decision, and both of the influence-based rules delegate decision-making to others, either to the expert or the group crafts a plan that aligns with the wishes of the supervisor.²⁴⁸

It has been noted that PDM systems set content parameters around issues. Those issues revolve around routine personnel functions, work itself, working conditions, and policy issues. These parameters work well for businesses but do not fully relate to a Christian congregation that exercises congregationalism. Alan Argent identifies the election of ministers and church officers as one parameter without limiting the church to this option.²⁴⁹ Means takes it further by asserting congregations should “retain certain decision-making authority under the headship of Christ,” which is entirely appropriate.²⁵⁰ Yet, a fundamental concern is raised in what Means says next. He itemizes some of the issues in which congregations should decide rather than a pastor or pastoral team making a decision. He lists doctrinal positions, by-laws, incurring debt, large purchases, accepting or denying membership, adopting budgets, election of key leaders and professional staff as examples that lend themselves to this decision-making process.²⁵¹ He states, “beyond these things, and perhaps a few others, it seems prudent for congregations to invest their leaders with authority to act on their behalf.”²⁵² A couple of the items on his list have theological implications, particularly, doctrinal positions and

²⁴⁸ Gastil, 55; Tropman, 93-94.

²⁴⁹ Argent, 98.

²⁵⁰ Means, 116.

²⁵¹ Means, 116.

²⁵² Means, 116.

excommunication, which members may not possess enough knowledge to address. Moreover, Means included decisions about the removal of professional staff. Without being certain as to who exactly constitutes the staff, this may or not be something that a pastor can simply relegate to the congregation. If the professional staff are the pastor's direct reports, it would seem better for the congregation to grant the pastor the authority to recruit or dismiss those he will have to supervise. After all, the congregation will not be the most-informed on the staff's performance, especially if an employer/employee model is in practice.

Summary

It is evident from this review that PDM provides many benefits for organizational leaders and their members alike. It gives participants a voice; it allows them to find satisfaction in their work; and it helps leaders achieve success by producing high-quality decisions. Many of the downsides to PDM can be avoided if leaders are committed to implementing a well-planned PDM program that brings together the right people. If leaders are not committed to the process or they are not really interested in acting on the recommendations or decisions made by a group then PDM is likely to fail. Furthermore, if members feel as if the PDM program is a means to control others then the program will also fail.

PDM in congregational settings is a little more difficult to execute than in a business and other organizational setting because of the belief that all members have a right to be a part of every decision. However, PDM does not require the whole group's involvement. Many decisions are better made in smaller groups where a consensus would be easier to obtain. This, in no way, diminishes the priesthood of all believers because whatever authority smaller groups are operating under has been delegated to them by the

congregation. Congregations must recognize that every member may not possess the requisite maturity or skill to participate in decision-making and by doing so, the group may still end up making bad decisions. Perhaps the best model for the church is a representative structure (democratic hierarchy) that uses consensus as its decision rule, limits groups to less than 15 participants per circle, and provides assessment and training for each group member to strengthen their ability to engage in group discussions and make effective decisions.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

The goal of this research project was to determine a strategy for fostering balance between the senior pastor and congregation of Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church. If lines of authority or parameters in decision-making can be clearly identified between the senior pastor and congregation then harmony might be realized more often than not. The on-going challenge faced by the researcher, however, has been the uncertainty around his decision-making authority and the type of issues he should work on with the congregation in order to reach a solution.

Though the project was designed with Mount Pleasant as the main case, the research design would allow the findings to serve the interests of other churches with similar ministry conditions. In the following sections, this chapter will cover how the researcher approached investigating this problem, the type of evidence collected, and how it was analyzed and interpreted.

Method and Methodology

The research topic was investigated using a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative or mixed-methods design. Quantitative methods might seek to find a cause-and-effect relationship by conducting controlled experiments, quantify a pattern of behavior by rating its intensity or counting its frequency, or understand characteristics of a large group by using survey data and statistical models.²⁵³ Mixed-method research

²⁵³ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 10th ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2013), 184-185, 226.

combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative research.²⁵⁴ One reason for using a mixed-methods research design might be to use qualitative research to build a hypothesis for testing in an experiment or explaining results collected in a quantitative study.²⁵⁵ Rather than fulfill any of those purposes, this investigation sought to understand the nature of decision-making within a narrowly defined ministry context. The researcher also looked for new insights into this phenomenon and tried to evaluate the effectiveness in which decision-making is currently handled in his ministry context. Such purposes are in line with what Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod say are the typical purposes of a qualitative study.²⁵⁶

Multiple Case Study

Within the broader category of qualitative research, this project was a multiple case study which looked at several churches' decision strategy. Those churches were Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, New Baptist Church, and Westside Missionary Baptist Church all in Indianapolis, Indiana, and Second Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana. Case study is one of five approaches in qualitative research. Case study research looks at a phenomenon in an in-depth way and draws upon multiple sources of evidence in data collection, which all converge toward a generalized conclusion.²⁵⁷ This approach best fit the research objective for understanding the decision strategy of the aforementioned churches. Furthermore, because this was a multiple case

²⁵⁴ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 63; Leedy and Ormrod, 258.

²⁵⁵ Leedy and Ormrod, 259; Yin, 21.

²⁵⁶ Leedy and Ormrod, 140.

²⁵⁷ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Roth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, Sage, 2018), 96; Yin, 15-16.

study, the external validity was increased. Validity was the principle reason for designing this project as a multiple case study and not a single case study. In fact, Robert Yin writes,

If you can do even a ‘two-case’ case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design. Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put ‘all your eggs in one basket.’ More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial.... Analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single-case (or single experiment).²⁵⁸

The findings from this investigation led to particular generalizations. These generalizations would be useful in advancing theoretical concepts related to participative decision-making in churches of a similar make up as the ones in this study. John Creswell and Cheryl Poth states, “To best generalize...the inquirer needs to select representative cases.”²⁵⁹

To further strengthen the external validity of the multiple cases, the researcher followed a literal replication in each case. Unlike a theoretical replication, which looks for contrasting results, a literal replication “predicts similar results” and duplicates the exact approach in each case.²⁶⁰ Therefore, each church was selected because of the similarity it held with Mount Pleasant (the primary case) and the prediction of similar results. Yin states, “If all the individual case studies turn out as predicted these...would have provided compelling support for the initial set of propositions pertaining to the overall multiple-case study.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Yin, 61.

²⁵⁹ Creswell and Poth, 99.

²⁶⁰ Yin, 55-56.

²⁶¹ Yin, 55.

Data Collection

Sources of Data

There were two main types of data collected: semi-structured interviews or what William Meyers called open-ended interviews,²⁶² and organizational documents, which consisted of job descriptions and church constitutions. The reason for collecting data from multiple sources was to strengthen the findings through triangulation. The type of triangulation used in this study is referred to as data triangulation and aids in what Leedy, Ormrod, and Yin refer to as construct validity, that is, qualities not directly observed but emerging as a pattern across different sources.²⁶³

Interviews. To gain knowledge through interviews the researcher established an interview protocol, which included briefing the participants about the nature of the interview and giving them an opportunity to read and sign an informed consent.²⁶⁴ Participants were informed the interviews would be recorded. This notification was done both verbally and through the written informed consent. The participants were also asked if they had any questions before starting the interview. Another aspect of the protocol included a set of research questions drawn from subproblems three and four of the overall research. Those subproblems addressed descriptions of decisions each church made in the past together or by their pastor, how involvement of the congregation or lack thereof were perceived by members, how senior pastors viewed their authority in decision making compared to their congregants, and the positive and negative effects such

²⁶² William R. Meyers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2000), 50.

²⁶³ Yin, 128; Leedy and Poth, 90.

²⁶⁴ Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 156; Creswell and Poth, 164.

involvement strategies were perceived to have on the congregation as a whole. These research questions were used to develop a set of interview questions illustrated in table 3. In qualitative studies “interview questions are often the sub-questions” but rephrased.²⁶⁵

Table 3. Research and Interview Questions

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
1. What decisions did particular churches in this study make collectively in the past and, what decisions did they leave up to their Pastor? How was this approach generally viewed?	Can you describe a decision the church made in a congregational meeting in the past (as far back as you can remember)? Do you feel the congregation should have made that decision? How would you have felt if the decision was made by the pastor alone or a smaller leadership group?
2. How do other black Baptist pastors view their authority in making decisions versus their congregations?	When do you think it would be appropriate for a pastor to make a decision on his own that may affect the congregation? What beliefs or experiences guide you in determining whether the church as a whole should be involved in making a decision rather than leaving it up to a pastor or team of leaders?
3. What approaches do black Baptist churches take in determining who to involve and what positive or negative effects do those approaches have on the organization?	Are there types of decisions that you feel you or others in the congregation are not equipped to make? Do you think there are any negative outcomes with the congregation making all the decisions? Do you think there are any positive outcomes with the congregation making all the decisions? Have you ever witnessed any negative behavior during a meeting where an important decision had to be made? Are you familiar with any approach to decision-making besides voting? Do you feel that voting is the best way to make decisions? Why? Do you believe there are any positive outcomes with the pastor making a decision that affects the church? Do you believe there are any negative outcomes with the pastor making a decision that affects the church?

The questions themselves were a mixture of open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. However, if a closed-ended question was asked it was followed up by an open-ended question requesting more information. In addition to both the research

²⁶⁵ Creswell and Poth, 164.

questions and the conceptual questions, four opening questions were developed to gain some background on the participants and help them settle into the rest of the interview. The information gathered from the opening questions were used to establish demographic descriptors for the participants in order to conceal their identity in the findings.

Since the interviews were semi-structured, there were moments where clarifying or additional questions were asked in order to draw out more information about a recollection or event described by a participant. In this way, the information was more useful in the analysis phase.

The final aspect of the interview protocol was a debriefing with the participant. At this point in the interview, the participants were asked if he or she had anything else to add to the topic of decision involvement. The researcher also asked the participant about his or her experience with the interview. Moreover, the researcher shared some of the main points he learned from the interview. If new topics and important content were added by the participant in the debriefing or post conversation, the researcher would seek the permission of the participant before including that material in the research process. Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale considers it an ethical issue that the researcher must take into consideration before including material discussed after the recorder has been turned off and the interview declared over.²⁶⁶

Organizational documents. Another source of data collected was organizational documents. These documents included job descriptions of the senior pastors in each church and the churches' constitution. Such documents were used to supplement

²⁶⁶ Brinkmann and Kvale, 155.

interviews.²⁶⁷ Myers referred to these kinds of documents as “found documents” because they “are not intentionally developed by the researcher.”²⁶⁸ Yin distinguishes two classes of documents: documentation (emails, calendars, minutes, reports etc.) and archival records (public government files, personnel records, charts and so on).²⁶⁹ The documents used in this research fell under archival records. The original proposal for this study referenced minutes and written histories of the church as well as constitutions. However, during implementation it was discovered the churches had almost no records pertaining to minutes. They met too infrequently and produced too few minutes for those documents to truly be compared with Mount Pleasant. Obtaining copies of the churches’ written history was also difficult. All of the churches in this investigation are historic or their history predates the time when they began electronic storage and established sufficient bookkeeping. In many cases, senior pastors and church administrators were unable to locate their written histories. Therefore, in an effort to maintain a literal replication with the primary case, the researcher decided to collect documents that would match the type and scale of documents he could produce from Mount Pleasant. The senior pastors and church administrators were able to retrieve the senior pastors’ job descriptions and churches’ constitutions with relative ease when asked. Because of the relationship the researcher has with the senior pastors, there were no trust issues with allowing the researcher to utilize these documents for his investigation.

²⁶⁷ Creswell and Poth, 162.

²⁶⁸ Myers, 44.

²⁶⁹ Yin. 113-117.

Sampling Strategy

There were three strategies used in the selection of cases and interviewees: typical or purposive, intensity, and convenience. According to Creswell and Poth, it is not uncommon for researchers to “use one or more...strategies in a single study.”²⁷⁰ A purposeful sample selects “those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation.”²⁷¹ Therefore, the researcher looked for and chose churches that were typical of black Baptist churches in Indiana who experienced the positive and negative effects of congregational decision-making in the recent past. Participants who best represent the type of congregants who attend congregational meetings and participate in decisions were also chosen. For the researcher’s own church, he chose the candidates who best fit these criteria. The researcher then asked the senior pastors from the other cases to identify three members in their church who fit these criteria whom the researcher could approach for an interview.

Sites and participants were also chosen for their intensity in reference to the problem under investigation. The researcher was able to determine to what degree churches experienced difficulty in balancing decision authority through informal conversations with the pastors of those churches. This led to the third strategy employed for sampling, which was convenience. Convenience sampling “takes people or other units that are readily available.”²⁷² The churches and people selected were those the researcher had prior knowledge of and or could access easier than others. Fifteen people were

²⁷⁰ Creswell and Poth, 158.

²⁷¹ Leedy and Ormrod, 152.

²⁷² Leedy and Ormrod, 214.

selected across four churches. This number of interviewees seem to be common with interview studies.²⁷³

Data Analysis

The data analysis phase of the research followed Creswell and Poth's data analysis spiral, which "engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach."²⁷⁴ The process began with the preparation of data. The interview recordings were transcribed using a transcription service. Once each transcription was completed, the researcher listened to the recordings and edited them for greater accuracy. This accomplished two things in the analysis phase. First, it allowed for a form of reliability checking. Brinkmann and Kvale states, "Regarded technically, it is an easy check to have two persons independently type the same passages of a recorded interview and then list and count the number of words that differ between the two transcriptions, thus providing a quantified reliability check."²⁷⁵ Though what Brinkmann and Kvale recommend was not done entirely, the independent transcription and the researcher's review and edit of the transcription accomplished the essence of checking for reliability. All of the data were organized in Dedoose, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for the purposes of storage and general management.²⁷⁶

Secondly, reviewing the transcriptions led to the second stage in the data analysis

²⁷³ Brinkmann and Kvale, 140.

²⁷⁴ Creswell and Poth, 185.

²⁷⁵ Brinkmann and Kvale, 210-211.

²⁷⁶ Creswell and Poth, 210-214.

spiral, “reading and memoing emergent ideas.”²⁷⁷ The researcher made notes of thoughts in the margins of transcripts and organizational documents. These memos would later aid in developing codes, categories, and interpretations of the data.

The next level down in the spiral dealt with “describing and classifying codes into themes.”²⁷⁸ Initially 12 codes were developed to capture important thoughts and ideas. These codes were later reduced to approximately four themes. Code names were taken from the literature review and created by the researcher “to best describe the information.”²⁷⁹ After preparing, memoing, coding and classifying the data tentative interpretations were made about the information and patterns that emerged. All of this analysis was first done within-case starting with Mount Pleasant and compared across cases, the other churches. Yin refers to this type of analysis as “cross-case synthesis.”²⁸⁰

Summary

The findings in the chapter that follows were based on the methods and methodology outlined above. The researcher sought to make the findings generalizable beyond the cases in this investigation by designing a multiple case study. A three-tier sampling strategy was employed for selecting the cases and participants. This sampling approach allowed participants and churches to be selected who were typical of the research problem. Moreover, the researcher acknowledged the restraint that limited the amount of data collected and slightly altered the research design. That restraint was the inability of the senior pastors and administrators to access preferred documents.

²⁷⁷ Creswell and Poth, 186.

²⁷⁸ Creswell and Poth, 189.

²⁷⁹ Creswell and Poth, 193.

²⁸⁰ Yin, 194-199.

However, the documents that were able to be retrieved (job descriptions and constitutions) provided enough usable information to contribute significantly to the analysis phase and support the interviews. The CAQDAS aided in the analysis by helping to organize data, apply and manage codes, and a few other supplemental tasks but the interpretation of data detailed in the next section remained in the hands of the researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Brief Multi-Case Profile

Those churches that were a part of the field research included Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church, Second Baptist Church, Westside Missionary Baptist Church, and New Baptist Church. The oldest of the churches is Second Baptist, which was organized in 1872. Westside is the youngest but its actual origination date is not certain. An article in the *Indianapolis Recorder* shows it may have been organized in the early 1960s.²⁸¹ Mount Pleasant was organized in 1893 and New Baptist in 1908. Each of the churches could be characterized as a small to medium-sized church having no more than 700 members on the high end and 120 members on the low end. Since a thorough case description is presented in chapter one, a brief description of the secondary cases is offered here.

New Baptist exists in a part of Indianapolis that was once a thriving African-American community. The area is now surrounded by Indiana University-Purdue University (IUPUI), a consortium near downtown. Just blocks from the bustling campus on one side of the church are remnants of the old neighborhood now occupied by low-income residents. The church itself is historic in its appearance. It has a redbrick structure reminiscent of old-style churches in the early 50s and 60s. The researcher has preached at this church in the past two-years and from this exposure, he is aware the church has an

²⁸¹ Willa Thomas, "Church Events," *The Indianapolis Recorder*, August 5, 1967, accessed January 7, 2020, Hoosier State Chronicles.

aging congregation. It also appears to be declining in membership, which may be due to its location.

Second Baptist is located in Lafayette, Indiana about 63 miles from Indianapolis. Lafayette is a college town. It is where Purdue University has its main campus. The church attracts students from Purdue which means a percentage of the membership is transient. The researcher has also preached at this church in the last two-years. Upon visiting the church during the field-study, the researcher was taken on a tour of the newly renovated sanctuary and redesigned platform. Apparently, the church had just completed phase-one of a three-phased project. Moreover, a conversation with the pastor and several members revealed the church has increased its diversity by adding Caucasian and Caribbean members. This church also runs a daycare through the week.

A third church in this multi-case study was Westside Missionary Baptist Church. This church is unique in that the entire congregation relocated from a low-income neighborhood known as Haughville, to a middle-class neighborhood two blocks from the researcher's church. This relocation took place in the last two years. The congregation purchased and renovated an old office building and turned it into a 500-seat sanctuary, daycare, ministry center with offices and rooms leftover. The church experienced significant growth in the past six years growing from under 50 members to over 300.

The field research sought to explore how these four churches approached decision-making and why it was approached in this manner. The field study also looked for perspectives on decision-authority, that is, how authority is distributed among pastors, groups, and the congregation as a whole. Interviews and organizational documents were collected from the four churches. Within-case analyses were done first. What follows

however, is the cross-case analysis. There was a total of fifteen codes used across these four cases. Out of those codes, four themes were developed. Those themes are effectiveness, unified involvement, parameters and trusted leadership. Patterns emerged across cases showing similarities and differences in perspectives, specifically in how churches viewed pastoral authority and congregational involvement.

Effectiveness

Commitment to the Decision

Effectiveness relates to making a decision people will support. It is important for leaders to have member-support when the decision affects a significant portion of the membership and necessitates their involvement in implementation. A decision may provide the best course of action to resolve an issue but is rendered useless when there is no cooperation. Three of the four cases reflected the importance of member-commitment. In the fourth case, commitment was a factor but it was not stated as explicitly as in the other cases. Instead, commitment was overshadowed by stronger factors like unity.

The term “buy-in” was a key phrase used to express commitment. For example, members were asked to describe a decision the congregation made. Participants in one case described a decision the church made to keep the current pews rather than replacing them with chairs in the sanctuary. The pastor assumed a decision had already been made in favor of chairs. At a meeting two years prior there was a considerable discussion about the benefits of chairs over pews. The pastor asked if anyone had any objections. There were none. The pastor concluded that a consensus had been reached and there was no need to call for a vote, which was the typical decision practice. Two years later, when it was time to implement, many of the members did not see the so-called “consensus meeting” as a decision and wanted to have a vote. Therefore, the participants reflecting

on this situation expressed their feeling about member-support. “Anytime that a decision affects 50% or more of the active members ... they will want to have some sort of input one way or the other,” said P-Z11. Another key informant, P-Z7, said “If it affects me as a member ... I would think I should have buy-in.”

Other participants like P-Z11 talked about a decision’s impact on the congregation. They differentiated between major decisions and minor ones. A major decision is one affecting a large number of people in the church or requiring a large dollar amount.

Interviewer:

A person needs to have some other people there to share ideas with so that they’re not making bad decisions. Am I hearing you correctly?

P-Z14:

Yes, but not in all decisions. For something like a big decision or a major decision that will affect everybody.

Interviewer:

Okay. How would you personally have felt if that decision was made by a smaller leadership group rather than the congregation or even the pastor himself?

P-Z16:

Personally, I would have probably been upset about it because sometimes we make jokes of like, “Oh, where did that come from? I’m going to have to start writing electricity on my tithe.” And so, I think that big decision should be made as a congregation because we are supporting of the church.

These two excerpts are taken from participants in different cases. In the first interaction, P-Z14 was clarifying a response to an earlier question about what beliefs the participant uses to determine when inclusion is necessary. In the second interaction, P-Z16 was asked a follow up question after describing a congregational decision where \$75,000 would be used for church renovations.

Decision Quality

Another factor to be weighed by decision-makers is decision quality. This factor relates to whether or not the best decision is being made for any given issue. Important to making good decisions is the level of knowledge decision-makers possess. The main reason members do not want pastors making decisions alone is because they believe pastors will not have all the necessary information needed to make good decisions. Members' desire for high-quality decisions were evident through interviews and organizational documents. Consider the following lines in the employment contract and job description for the researcher-pastor of Mount Pleasant:

Decisiveness. Good, sound decision-maker; evaluates all available information objectively and makes good timely and effective decisions.

Problem Solving. Uses all available resources including Church leadership in analyzing problems and exploring alternative solutions.

These two lines show that the representatives for the congregation who constructed this job description wanted the pastor to be a good decision-maker. For him to achieve this goal, they felt he needed to gather information from others. That is reflected in the inclusion of church leaders. Furthermore, when the job description says "all available information" it implies the inclusion of information from other groups within the church in addition to church leaders. Consider also the words of P-Z8: "You can't make a decision if you don't have knowledge of it. You can make a decision but it wouldn't be a good decision." This participant's statement goes straight to the heart of decision-quality—good versus bad decisions separated by knowledge.

A good illustration of the concern that members have with poor-quality decisions was shared by P-Z15. One of the interview questions asked participants about negative outcomes experienced by pastors making decisions on behalf of the congregation without

much input from them. The informant shared an example of bad decision-making from a former leader. This leader obligated the church financially by purchasing a large piece of office equipment. The equipment was far more than what the church needed or would ever use. The leader did this without consulting anyone.

If he had talked to somebody instead of making a unilateral decision, it could have been talked through. [They could have asked], ‘Why do we need this type of machine? Maybe we should scale back.’ But because he made a unilateral decision then it ended up affecting the church. The church had to take the hit for that decision. That’s where I feel . . . having a committee of people can help you brainstorm.

An interesting aspect of decision-quality the researcher found was the concern members had for the pastor. Participants’ comments reveal that members do not want to see the pastor blamed for a poor decision. This is true in at least three of the cases. The three following statements were made by one participant from each case:

P-Z12: If anything goes wrong, they can say “You see, if you had . . . let us be a part of this it wouldn’t have happened.”

P-Z15: I don’t know everything and I need to filter some things through a group of people who are maybe smarter than I am. . . . Even if a decision is bad it wasn’t just, ‘[He] made a terrible decision.’

P-Z14: If you got someone else there like your sounding board where you could hear other people’s opinions and input about past experiences . . . or what they know to be fact, that can help a lot and that would take them off the hot dog stand so to speak.

In each of these statements, participants suggest the pastor would not have to take full responsibility for a bad decision if he included others. Therefore, inclusion would serve as a benefit to him because it lightens his load.

Decision Rule

All of the cases use majority rule in group decision-making. This type of decision rule is spelled out in each church’s constitution or by-laws. In one case, majority voting is

spiritualized. Westside Missionary Baptist Church states in their by-laws,

The purpose of voting is not to simply obtain a “majority rule” consensus. Rather, all voting in this church is designed to show God’s leading within the flock on an issue. Unless specifically indicated differently within the By-laws, two-thirds that regularly attend and vote in favor of an issues shall make the vote binding and shall signify to the church leadership that the flock agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being voted on. If the two-thirds that regularly attend vote and no agreement has been reached the leadership will reevaluate the situation. No steps will be taken on any issue that requires a vote without the two-thirds regularly attending vote.

For this congregation, voting is a way to discern God’s will. One participant even sees a resemblance with voting and the practice of casting lots in the book of Acts. Her connection of the modern practice of voting with the practice of casting lots in Acts indicates what she believes is the spiritual aspect of voting. Because voting is viewed as a spiritual practice, the by-laws make clear leadership must take note when they do not have a majority in favor of a proposal and accept that it may not be God’s will. Leadership is prohibited from taking any action on a proposal for this reason.

Based on their experience, participants feel voting is a good way for congregations to make decisions. Voting “gives everyone a chance to be heard,” according to a key informant. The belief is voting equals voice. The question was posed to participants, “Do you believe voting is the best way to make a decision?” P-Z12 answered in a way that represents the view of the participants: “Yeah because everybody gets their opinion and if you don’t vote ... you have no right to complain.” This participant goes even further by saying, “When it comes to the congregation, I really believe that it’s because it affects us all that it should be a vote in some kind of way.” Consequently, taking away an opportunity to vote either through unilateral decision-making or smaller committee processes equate to taking away voice for this participant.

However, the cases in this study conduct congregational meetings where votes are called for in varying degrees. Second Baptist Church and Westside Missionary Baptist Church operate mainly through a board. Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church holds quarterly meetings with the congregation but only takes a vote on average once or twice a year. New Baptist Church holds two meetings a year in which issues requiring a vote are rarely taken.

Participants may feel voting is a good way to make a decision because they are unaware of any other approach to decision-making. All participants were asked about their familiarity with other decision rules. The overwhelming majority were unaware any other rule existed. A few were able to describe a consensus model they used in other settings outside of congregational meetings but were unaware it was known as consensus.

Discipleship and Development

Discipleship and Development were used together as a single code for comments participants made through interviews. This sub-theme relates to the need for participants to be taught Christian principles in order to engage in a congregational meeting or produce a high-quality decision that is in-line with biblical teachings. For example, P-Z15, who is a leader and teacher in the church, discussed an amendment added to their church's constitution a few years ago. The amendment addressed the church's stance on homosexuality and leadership. The issue was brought to the church by this participant and the church voted in favor of the amendment. The researcher asked the participant a line of hypothetical questions to figure out what would be done if there was a "no" vote on the amendment.

Then if that's the case, I would have to come back again the next year.... If I didn't get the vote, it's because I did a poor job of teaching on the issue. So, instead of me getting mad at the congregation, I have to get mad at myself

because I didn't do an adequate job of preparing them to say yes to it. And so, we're going to revisit this again next year. By that time, I'll make sure that I've really laid the groundwork to get a yes.

The response revealed how the participant sees the impact of teaching on congregational meetings. If the issue needing a congregational decision is centered on a biblical teaching, getting a favorable response would require the membership to learn what the Bible says about it. A part of the interview with a key leader in a different case led to a discussion about the various influences on his particular style of leadership and decision-making. After recounting experiences in previous churches, P-Z20 shared a desire for the people in the participant's present ministry: "I've tried to teach . . . people right and wrong in order to make decisions. If it don't [*sic*] sound right, don't [*sic*] look right . . . you don't have to go with it." The participant was referring to teaching biblical principles in a way that help members make quality decisions whenever they are involved. P-Z8, a member in this same case, remembered how one of the former pastors of the church taught members about loving one another. She attributes his teaching around love as the cause for positive meetings in the search for a new pastor. "I think we had good, good meetings because he had taught us to love one another," she said.

Speed

Speed or how fast a decision can be made was of smaller concern to effectiveness however it still registered as a factor. It was acknowledged by participants across all cases that the involvement of a large group in decision-making will slow down the process. "You'd never make any progress waiting on the whole church to vote" as one participant said. The employment contract for the researcher-pastor mentioned above also places on the pastor an expectation to make "good timely and effective decisions."

Speed is most important when there is a crisis. A senior leader in one case

recounted a situation of this nature. A bat had flown into the church. It would cost the church \$4,000 to have the bat removed. The only problem was the church's constitution stipulated that any expense over \$2,000 had to be brought to the church and decided by a two-third's vote. The leader felt this was an urgent matter which could not wait for a congregational meeting to be scheduled since the church also runs a daycare. The leader remarked "It was a pressing issue.... It's a safety issue, an issue ... that's going to hurt our business." Therefore, the leader took action without following the guidelines of the constitution. It should be noted that all of the constitutions and by-laws are older than the tenure of the pastors. They also do not follow a regular schedule of review and revision. As a result, some of the stipulations found in them do not adequately address circumstances like this one. When you consider the cumulative effect of these five factors, they present a realistic picture of what the cases describe as effectiveness, which is also illustrated in Figure 2.

Not all of these factors have the same level of importance when considering effectiveness. Given a particular issue, one or more factors might outweigh the importance of others. Returning to the example above concerning the bat, speed outweighed all other factors. Another example was shared by P-Z6. This informant shared an issue the church had with its building. The ceiling in the entrance was sagging. Apparently, the church had been having water issues for a number of years. The issue was brought to the congregation who voted to have the repairs made. This participant felt the decision had to be brought to the congregation because of the church's constitution but should have been allowed to be handled among the leaders who encountered the problem more frequently than the membership. In the participant's opinion, the leaders

knew more about it. P-Z6 commented, “We’re there each and every day. Those who are in leadership can see the conditions. Why do we have to gather a group of people to take care of problems we see needs to be taken care of?” In this example, decision rule and commitment were the most important factors.

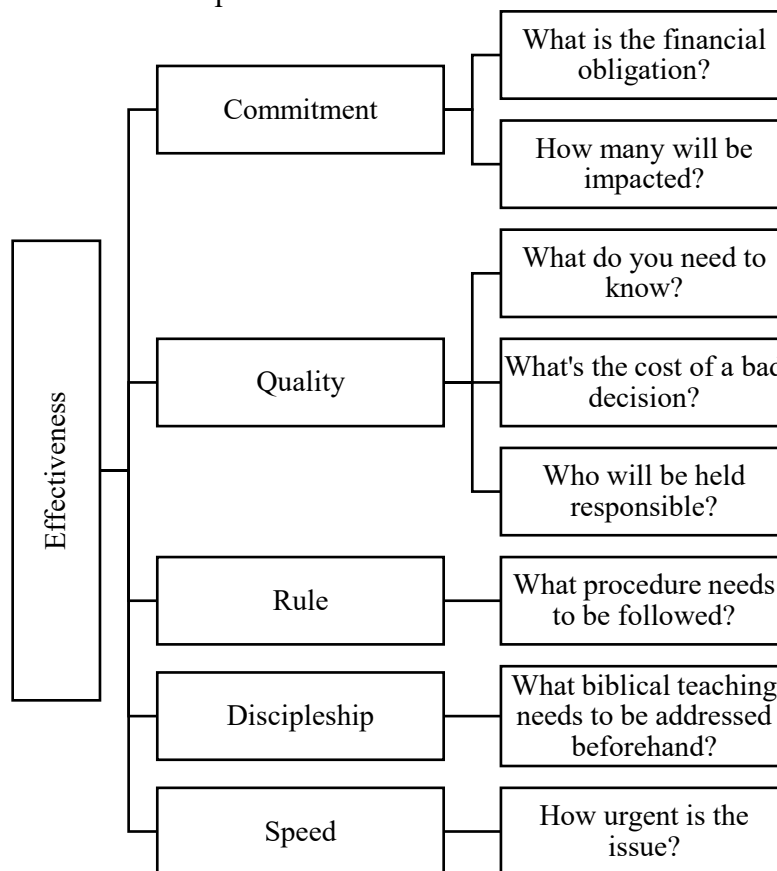


Figure 2. Factors for Effectiveness

Unified Involvement

Unified involvement represents another pattern among each of the cases. This theme was drawn from interviews with the participants. The idea is that congregational meetings create a sense of belonging. A member feels he or she is truly a part of the community by being involved in such meetings. Each of the participants were asked “When, if ever, do you think it would be appropriate for a pastor to make a decision on his own that may affect the congregation?” P-Z12 answered “Me, myself, I think never.”

The participant went on to explain why she appreciated Mount Pleasant. The member had briefly joined a mega-church before deciding to join Mount Pleasant. The size of the mega-church made it feel more like a business to this participant. Mount Pleasant, on the other hand, was much smaller. It can be characterized as a medium-sized church having 300 to 400 active members. Large and some small matters are handled within congregational meetings unlike the mega-church. The member then went on to say, “I think participation is the key to let us feel that we're a part of this church and we don't just have a boss.” While this question really addressed parameters, another theme addressed later on, the response from P-Z12 captured what it means to be united through involvement and have a sense of belonging in the church community.

The biggest threat to unity however, is conflict. Participants were not naïve in thinking no tensions would exist if people were brought together to decide an issue. All the participants were asked about positive and negative outcomes of congregational meetings. P-Z11 gives a clear explanation as to where the tensions may come from in the following response.

I think it's difficult. When you say “congregation.” That could be construed as two, three, four, or five hundred individuals. It's difficult to get that many people on one page because of the different educational backgrounds, experiences, and being able to decipher a large topic So, in that sense, I think you need to reduce the congregation down to representatives.

This participant's response reflects the common understanding participants have about group meetings. In addition to educational levels and experience, the length of membership was brought out by another informant as a difference that might cause tensions. Participants were asked whether they had witnessed any undesirable behavior in a congregational meeting.

Always. I see the bickering, the back and forth... I've seen people get upset because they've been here through the struggling part of the church. We see the blossoming and it's like, "But wait, I've been there through the negative. You weren't here.... You've only been here for five years and I've been here for 30 when we had ten members." Knowing that difference and respecting that I think gets lost in translation in meetings sometimes. The respect factor I think sometimes get lost with younger people in the church or newer people in the church.

However, despite contextual differences, participants consistently concluded the source of conflict may not be a mere difference of opinion but the lack of spiritual maturity. The accumulation of responses from participants in each case included strongly worded opinions, hurt feelings, controversies, name calling, relinquishing membership, and threats of violence. The researcher-pastor too recalls moments where he has been the subject of angry rants and accusations. Interviewee P-Z11 described his perception of those conflicts he has witnessed in the researcher's ministry context in this way: "When the membership is not on one accord . . . then people seem to revert back to their worldly stance and get in more of a fighting posture." The term "worldly" is understood in a spiritual sense to refer to a person who is not under the control of the Holy Spirit. P-Z22 described how he felt witnessing a close friend and mentor disrupt a church meeting about repairing the sidewalk. This participant's view again brings out the spiritual perspective.

I couldn't really understand why such offense was taken to the way everything was coming into fruition. I couldn't understand it. I got a very good friend who is an older guy. He's been with the church a long time ... somebody that I've looked up to. When I watched how everything happened with him, I couldn't understand it. I couldn't understand how there couldn't have been a better way for that to have panned out. I have a tendency to believe that some people have just enough Satan on their side or maybe they shake hands with the devil when people aren't looking. They look for reasons to be able to abandon the church or abandon certain things to say, "This is the reason I did it" instead of just coming to some kind of common ground.

Outside of congregational meetings, members may give off the impression they are mature to others perhaps on a Sunday morning. In a meeting however, members can be shocked and surprised by those they held in high esteem like P-Z22 demonstrated in his response. Another informant summarizes the spiritual issues best: “Everybody that’s in church is not in Christ.” This participant’s comment points to a sobering reminder for all pastors.

No formal research is needed to draw the conclusion that conflict is likely to occur in group meetings. However, what research shows is that members still believe congregational meetings are important and necessary. To achieve unification however, spiritual leadership is key. P-Z21 described how a long-standing member made comments at a meeting “that were inappropriate.” This meeting started at 7:00 p.m. and lasted until 11:00 p.m. because of hostilities. It was the participant’s father-in-law who calmed everybody down by saying, “let’s just stop what we’re doing and pray.” After prayer everyone decided to leave for the night though nothing had been decided. This last incident demonstrated what can happen when conflict occurs and there is someone on-hand to provide spiritual leadership. It shows that when there is an escalation of tensions there must also be a matching response in leadership. The person who provided that leadership in this case was not the pastor. This was partly because the pastor was the subject of the attack according to the member. Therefore, he was not in the best position to provide such leadership. In another case, the pastor was credited as the spiritual leader. P-Z17 said of the pastor that it was “the openness, the leadership, the willingness to bring the flock in on the decisions. The willingness to say, ‘Maybe we didn’t do this right. Maybe we could’ve done this better.’” The member points to the inclusive practice of the

leader and his transparency in promoting unifying meetings.

Parameters

Authority

The largest theme dealt with parameters. This theme addressed areas where the pastor is permitted to make decisions whether he chooses to consult or delegate to others. Moreover, it shows areas where the pastor is expected to participate with others in making decisions. There were also areas where the pastor or board were required to simply inform the congregation. These parameters were confirmed through interviews and organizational documents.

Since all of the churches are Baptist, they have established congregationalism as their form of governance. This is born out in their constitutions or by-laws. For example, in Mount Pleasant's constitution under Article III entitled *Polity*, it reads, "Authority to reach decisions for governing temporal and spiritual affairs ... is vested in the membership of the congregation." The constitution for New Baptist states in Article II, "Its [the church's] government shall always be vested in the membership and pastor." In Article VI under Section A it says, "The pastor and all officers and groups shall be subject to the church body." Two of the cases make an attempt to limit congregational authority in the language it uses. Second Baptist does not consider itself to be a "pure democracy" according to Article III Section 2 Line 1 of their constitution. Westside Missionary Baptist Church by-laws states, "Executive authority or leadership ... is invested by the congregation (as authorized by Scripture) in a board who leads the church and to whom the congregation is to submit under the headship of Christ." But in another place within the by-laws, it says, "The senior pastor along with the board will be the primary decision-making body." Again, these two cases (Westside and Second Baptist)

appear to lessen the amount of authority held by the congregation in order to grant more authority to its leadership.

Pastoral Authority

Because these constitutions and by-laws do not appear to be living documents, that is, documents that go through a regular review and revision, it was assumed by the researcher there would be differences in what authority they gave from what participants believed. The clearest area where members believed the pastor had authority to make decisions was concerning spiritual matters. The job description for the pastor of New Baptist emphasized the spiritual function of the pastor above everything else.

Your duties as minister are to be our pastor, teacher, and leader. Preaching is one of your main functions, and on all occasions the congregation expects the pastor to indicate depth of thought and thorough preparation. You are also responsible for the care and nurture of the church's spiritual life, for the administration of the ordinances, the care of the sick, the burying of the dead and for any other ministry necessary to the congregation's spiritual needs. You are the chief executive and administrative officer of the church, as well as our worship leader. In addition, as pastor you would be expected to represent the congregation in its various affiliations, with budgetary provisions for the expenses made. The church also expects the pastor to be available for the membership as needed.

One sentence states the administrative role the pastor is expected to have with very little clarity as to what it entails. The remainder of the language emphasizes the spiritual role he is to have in the congregation.

Several questions were asked of interviewees to ascertain what areas they felt the pastor should have the authority to make decisions, when a group such as the board of trustees should be consulted, or when the congregation should be the decision-makers. The clearest responses related to spiritual matters. A part from this, a few areas were granted under administration, and community organization as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Pastoral Parameter Sets

Pastor as Decision-Maker												
	Mount Pleasant			Second Baptist			Westside Missionary			New Baptist		
Spiritual Parameters	Int	JD	C	Int	JD	C	Int	JD	C	Int	JD	C
Doctrine	✓			✓	✓				✓			
Teaching	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓			
Preaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Care		✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Vision	✓	✓					✓		✓	✓		
Worship Services	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Ordinances		✓			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Community Parameters												
Partnerships	✓	✓					✓					
Representation		✓					✓				✓	✓
Admin. Parameters												
Staffing	✓						✓					
Meeting Moderation			✓		✓		✓		✓			✓
Deacon Appointments									✓			
Member Exclusion									✓			
Personal Scheduling										✓		
Committee Appointments						✓						
Ministry Leader-Selection		✓								✓		
Small Purchases < \$2,000						✓						

Int=Interviews; JD=Job Description; C=Constitution/By-laws

Within each parameter set, the strongest areas of authority are confirmed by all three sources of evidence. For example, the pastor of New Baptist is unquestionably the decision-maker for worship services. P-Z21 was asked in an interview about times it would be acceptable for a pastor to make decisions affecting the congregation. This participant shared a story about a previous pastor who designated a particular Sunday for the youth. She then shared an example about the actions of the current pastor who announced one Sunday that a particular guest would preach at an upcoming service. The participant remarked “I think that’s fine for him to do.” A line in the job description for this pastor states, “You are the chief executive and administrative officer of the church as well as our worship leader.” Under Article V entitled *Pastor*, it reads, “The pastor shall

uphold the laws of the church, preach the gospel, administer the ordinances, watch over the flock, and have in his charge the spiritual welfare of the church *including all called and stated meetings of worship* [emphasis added] and business.” From all three sources the pastor has decision authority over the worship services. This pastor, then, should feel very confident in the congregation’s support of his decisions as it relates to worship services.

It should also be noted the number of sources is not the only indicator of strength in pastoral authority. The type of sources is important as well. A couple of participants in the Mount Pleasant case believe the pastor should be able to make staffing decisions such as hiring and firing. However, nothing is mentioned about staffing decisions in the constitution and the employment contract only speaks of supervision of personnel but not selection and termination. An employment contract, which contains job responsibilities, would be much stronger by itself than even a survey or interviews conducted with more than seventy-percent of the congregation since it is legally binding and speaks for the entire organization. Therefore, in places where only one source is confirmed and that source is an organizational document, the authority of the pastor may still be very strong. The one caveat is not whether he would be justified in exercising authority but whether he would be effective. In such a case, he would need to consider the factors for effectiveness.

Team Authority

Beyond these areas of pastoral decision-making, there are specific areas where the pastor must work on a team to make decisions. The team may be a board of trustees, diaconate, or ministry leaders. Participants in this study however, were not very detailed

about the areas they expected a group to make decisions except to say many decisions should be handled by a committee. The strongest evidence for group decision-making parameters outside of the congregation are found in each church's constitution. A comparison of the four cases and the aggregate of decision-parameters pastors are expected to make within these groups are shown in Table 5. There were several parameters cases had in common but not all parameters within each set is shared by every pastor and team.

Table 5. Team Parameter Sets

Pastor as Board or Team-Member												
	Mount Pleasant			Second Baptist			Westside Missionary			New Baptist		
Organizational Parameters												
Property Management	yes					n/a	yes			yes		
Financial Management	yes					n/a				yes		
Legal Issues	yes					n/a			n/a			n/a
Termination		no			no		yes					n/a
Governance Modification		no				n/a	yes				no	
Critical Issues			n/a	yes					n/a			n/a
Ministry Parameters												
Policy Creation			n/a	yes					n/a			n/a
Benevolence	yes					n/a	yes			yes		
Disciplinary Hearings			n/a	yes				no				n/a
Ministry Creation/Deletion			n/a	yes					n/a			n/a
Vision		no		yes							no	
Deacon/Trustee Removal			n/a	yes					n/a			n/a
Deacon Appointments		no			no		yes				no	
Trustee Appointments		no			no		yes				no	
Member Exclusion		no			no			no				n/a
Ministerial Appointments			n/a			n/a	yes					n/a
n/a= not applicable. These pertain to areas not specified in any source.												

A "yes" indicates clearly identified parameters in the constitution that belongs to the board or team. A "no" however, is an indication the parameter is claimed by another

decision-maker either the pastor or the congregation. If one examines Table 2 on the basis of “yes,” “no,” and “n/a” clusters, New Baptist has granted the least amount of authority to its teams having only three yeses, four “no” indications, and the rest left unspecified. Second Baptist and Westside have given the most board authority with Westside being slightly better. Both have seven “yes” rows and six rows left unspecified. However, Westside only has two “no” indications while Second Baptist has six. Furthermore, the cluster of rows indicated by “yes” show where the concern for authority lies. Westside has evenly distributed authority among organizational and ministry related issues. New Baptist and Mount Pleasant show more concern for organizational issues and Second Baptist desire their board to have most of their authority focused around ministry.

Unspecified parameters or “n/a” rows may be better informed by current ministry practices. It is likely that a church’s board has been given authority to function in those areas however, it may be simply understood by the members that this is how they would operate rather than explicitly having it stated in an organizational document. In those unspecified areas, a pastor or board would be best served by filtering an issue through the factors of effectiveness and “testing the waters” so to speak.

The role of the pastor on a board or team is also referenced in the constitutions. Three out of the four cases designate the pastor as an *ex officio* member of all groups within the congregation. The Latin term means “by reason of an office” and “is used in the nonprofit law context to mean an individual who is a member of a board of trustees or board of directors ... by virtue of holding another position.”²⁸² As an automatic board

²⁸² Bruce R. Hopkins, *The Bruce R. Hopkins Nonprofit Law Library: Essential Questions and Answers* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013), 11, accessed January 10, 2020, ProQuest E-Book Central.

member, pastors have the ability to influence decisions through whatever decision rule is established for the group. Therefore, if the group makes decisions through majority voting, the pastor gets one vote. It is only if “a governing instrument provides that an *ex officio* board member does not have the right to vote” can he be excluded.²⁸³ In the fourth case, the pastor is not called an *ex officio* member of all groups but he is a member of the board and the board handles decisions for the church.

Informing the Congregation

Being the decision-maker does not mean the pastor or the board can make decisions in secrecy. In each case, pastors and leaders have a duty to inform or consult the congregation. A participant was asked whether any positive outcomes could come from the congregation serving as the sole decision-maker. The participant commented that the best course of action would not be making decisions with “the congregation but getting their input and then leaving it amongst that smaller group.” P-Z21 states, “We should be kept in the loop but we don’t necessarily have to call a meeting for every little decision that has to be made around here.” The job description for the pastor of Mount Pleasant states the following under Article VI Line 3:

Communication with Church Membership. Accomplishes 2-way communication by focusing on performance expectations and provides effective, timely information to membership; actively participates in meetings; soliciting input on problems and suggestions for improvement.

The only exception to informing is in the area of confidential matters. P-Z7 says, “With me as a member, I don't need to know all things from the pastor I mean being in your position ... but if it affects me as a member, I would like to know.” This participant was recalling the termination of an employee that took place earlier in the year. Another

²⁸³ Hopkins, 11.

participant gave examples of children being harmed or damaging information about a member being released.

I suppose if someone has been harmed or if it would lead to information that an individual wouldn't necessarily want the church either knowing about or being able to connect the pieces and figure out it was them that was being discussed. You know . . . I can certainly see why discretion would be very important in that instance. I don't want to know. Do what you got to do. You don't want something like that becoming fodder for gossip.

Therefore, sensitive matters like child abuse, terminations, and counseling related topics seem to be boundaries when it comes to informing.

Congregational Authority

Whatever authority the pastor has been given is delegated. It has already been stated that each congregation operates with a congregational polity, which means greater authority lies in the membership. Technically all decisions by the pastor or board can be overruled by the church. However, in each case the church has delineated several places where they will maintain direct authority. As in board authority, direct congregational authority is understood by reviewing the constitutions although, there are general references to congregational authority gathered from interviews. For example, capital expenses are mentioned both in interviews and constitutions. In one case mentioned above, members spoke about the decision to keep pews rather than replace them with chairs. In Article VI Section 6, it reads, "Financial matters entrusted to the trustees are always subject to the approval or modification by the congregation. All purchases by and for the church should come to the attention of Trustees. The church shall be responsible for all debts incurred." Furthermore, since this example is taken from the researcher's own ministry context, he is aware that the practice has been that large expenditures always come before the church for a decision. In another case also mentioned above,

members spoke about renovating the church at a cost of \$75,000. In Article 1 Section 2 Line 5 for this church's constitution it states, "The Church shall also have the right to buy and sell property based on a 2/3 majority vote of the congregation." It also says under Article 9 Section 2 Line 6, "Any major purchases above this amount [\$2,000] must be taken before the church and passed by a 2/3 vote." In Figure 3, the parameters are shown in list form to get a sense of how much direct authority each church maintains in relationship to the other.

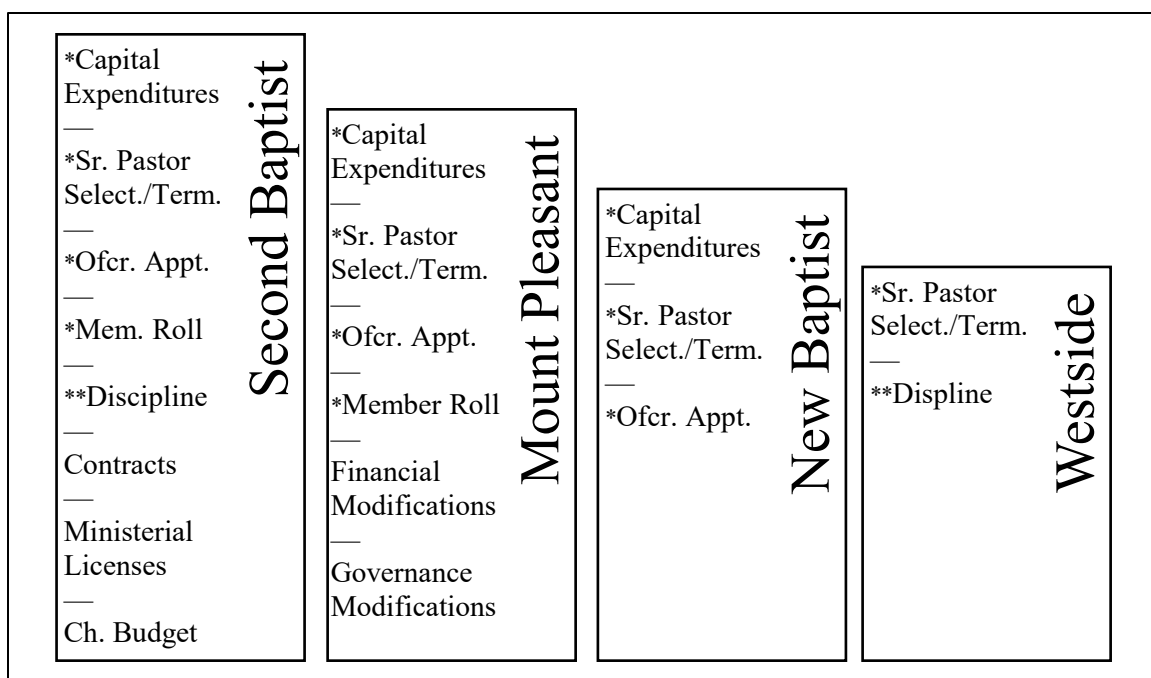


Figure 3. Direct Church Authority

All of the churches maintain control over who will become the senior pastor. Beyond this, three of the churches control capital expenses and church officer (deacon/trustee) appointments. Controlling the membership roll, that is, who can be included or excluded is maintained by two churches. Westside has the smallest direct authority partly because a couple of parameters held onto by other churches are delegated to another decision-maker (see Table 1 and 2).

While it may not seem evident, the pastor has decision influence even in the congregation. The authority of the church is really the authority of everyone including the pastor, all boards, committees, and members. Therefore, the pastor does not lose all influence in decision-making when an issue has to be decided among the congregation. His influence simply decreases as he moves into different parameter sets. Also, all of the constitutions grant the pastor the authority to moderate congregational meetings. Even though in a majority rule the pastor gets one vote like everyone else, he controls the agenda and the flow of discussion. Furthermore, his spiritual influence across the pulpit will more than likely influence members in terms of how they vote. All of this means the pastor has more authority in a Baptist congregation than he may realize.

Trusted Leadership

One final theme of the field research was trusted leadership. Trusted-Leadership was brought out in the subsequent cases but not the main case. One explanation for this may be because the main case is the researcher's own ministry context. In the main case, the participants were talking directly to the pastor while in each subsequent case this was not so. Participants in the main case may have felt unwilling to talk so freely about the pastor since they were talking to the pastor. In either case, this theme was consistent in all the other cases enough to suggest a different group of participants might have revealed this theme in the main case as well.

This theme pertains to the calling of the pastor and the confidence members place in that calling. Each of the participants were asked about the beliefs driving how they process what decisions to make among the congregation, a smaller group, or to delegate to the pastor. P-Z8 responded by saying, "The only thing that guides me into making that kind of determination is if I think the man of God is really my spiritual leader. I've had a

pastor that I knew was not my spiritual leader and I was getting ready to leave the church but he left first.” Another used a military analogy to describe trust. P-Z22 says, “We would call [it] in the military a command decision where there’s little input or any at all from anybody other than him.... I think people have to trust ... your minister as he trusts God.”

It seems members have to have an internal process that leads to the conclusion the pastor is someone who can be trusted. But the responsibility is not solely on the member to develop that trust. The pastor through his actions can help the member along. P-Z17 states, “When someone proves themselves trustworthy, they tend to stay in that lane of trustworthy until something might happen that you would doubt them.” In other words, if the pastor earns this participant’s trust through his actions, he will keep it until his actions no longer demonstrates his trustworthiness. Another participant identifies PDM as the type of action that builds trust. This informant says, “You want to have faith in [the pastor]. If that person is moving by themselves ... how do I have faith in that? I know that God gives that person a vision but explaining that vision and letting me see that vision is way different than you just saying, ‘Guess what? We’re doing this.’”

Summary

The field research converged upon four themes: effectiveness, unified involvement, parameters, and trusted leadership. Effectiveness is about making decisions members will support particularly, when they are asked to contribute to the proposal with their time and resources. Also, member-support is important if a large portion of the congregation is impacted by the decision. The research further showed participants maintain a common knowledge about large meetings and conflict. People with different backgrounds and differing opinions create the likelihood of disagreements sometimes

leading to destructive behavior. Furthermore, the research provides pastoral leaders in these cases sets of known parameters by which they can quickly judge where an issue belongs. Some areas are spelled out and if there is resistance to the decision-maker, simply reviewing the organizational documents might quell such tension. It might be advisable however, for organizations to maintain a regular review and revision of these documents to ensure they remain consistent with current practices. Finally, building trust among members may go a long way in helping decision-leaders avoid tensions and focus more on the issue at hand. PDM may be necessary even if it is not required just for this purpose alone.

CHAPTER SIX: DECISION INVOLVEMENT GUIDELINES

The research problem was concerning the need for balance between pastoral authority and congregational polity. The study looked for factors pastors and congregations should take into consideration when determining the level of inclusion by different groups in the decision-making process. The ultimate goal of the research was to produce a resource or approach churches and their leaders can use to make high-quality decisions while at the same time maintaining unity. Through the exegetical research, literature, and field study the researcher tried to identify such patterns. Understanding views on participative decision-making in a church context, identifying known parameter sets, and learning how PDM impacts trust and unity were all major findings.

Biblical and Literature Discussion

Biblical Assessment

One of the subproblems in this study looked at patterns that may have emerged in how the early church made decisions. The researcher reviewed three passages in Acts in a quest for useable guidelines. In each situation, the church came together to make a crucial decision around an issue that threatened her mission. Two of the three passages addressed leadership selection. Acts 1:15-26 was about the replacement of an apostle—Judas. Acts 6:1-7 was about the creation of a second-tier leadership team to handle the material needs of a neglected group within the church. In both of these situations, decisions were made through a group process. Whether the group was the entire congregation or a smaller group is not clear through scholarship. Some like Gaventa, Witherington, and Keener

think the 120 believers in Acts 1 are indicative of the entire body of believers.²⁸⁴ Johnson believes Acts 6 denotes a smaller deliberative body even though the text refers to the “whole community” (v. 2).²⁸⁵ The researcher sides with those scholars who believe these were congregational meetings. Leaders moderated those meetings and established criteria. For example, Peter set forth the criteria for who could be an apostle (Acts 1:21-22). The apostles operating as a leadership team established the criteria for who could serve the neglected widows (Acts 6:2-3).

In the third passage, the issue pertained to doctrine. An argument erupted in the church at Antioch over circumcision (Acts 15:1-3). The matter was brought to the church in Jerusalem to be settled. The passage showed a back-and-forth of decisions made between the congregation and a smaller group of ruling leaders. The congregation disappears at verse six and reappears again in verse 22. The disappearance and reappearance of the congregation is affirmed by Barrett and Peterson.²⁸⁶ It shows the decision to send delegations to and from Jerusalem were made among the congregation (vv. 3, 22-23). The main issue however, was discussed and decided among a ruling group (vv.6-21).

Two of the three decisions used a consensus rule (Acts 6:1-7; 15:6-21) and the other used a system of voting (Acts 1:15-26). No decision was made by a single individual. Members were informed or consulted even when the decision rested with the leaders. The decision parameters included: delegation, leadership selection, meeting

²⁸⁴ Gaventa, 69; Witherington, 120; Keener, 754-755.

²⁸⁵ Johnson, 106.

²⁸⁶ Barrett, 90; Peterson, 422-424.

moderation, and doctrine. These parameters were split evenly between the congregation who made decisions about leaders and representatives, and leaders who made decisions about meeting criteria and doctrine.

Another emergent pattern was the use of Scripture. In two of the passages, leaders educated the participants through the use of scripture before the decision was made (Acts 1:20 and 15:15-18). In the other case concerning the widows the apostles referenced the importance of Scripture in their argument before laying out their proposal.

The biblical evidence demonstrates how important PDM is to not just high-quality decisions but discerning God's will. The fact that the apostles who were given a direct commission from the Lord did not think it would be wise for any one of them alone to assert some apostolic authority over disciples is telling. Everyone had a chance to put forward an apostolic candidate before casting lots in the first situation (Acts 1:23). They left it to the congregation to select their own servants to address the needs of the widows when the apostles more than likely could have done so in the second situation (Acts 6:5). The congregation chose their own representatives to send with the council's decision to the other churches in the third and final situation (Acts 15:22). These types of group processes suggest members should be included in discerning God's will in some matters—the ones directly affecting them.

Furthermore, the apostles operated as a team though in a hierarchal fashion. When decisions were theirs to make, they worked with each other, deliberated, examined Scripture, reflected theologically, and decided unanimously. Churches like Mount Pleasant and the ones in the field research would do well to consider a team concept to pastoral leadership where pastors form a council. Those decisions that are important for

pastors to make could enjoy the benefit of PDM. The role of a senior pastor would not be completely void if the model of team leadership in Acts was used. In two of the cases, the apostolic replacement and the council of Jerusalem, the teams were led by what seemed to be chairpersons. Peter chaired the meeting for Judas' replacement (Acts 1:15) and James chaired the meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13).²⁸⁷ The senior pastor could serve as the team chair who facilitate discussion, set meeting agendas, and submit proposals.

Literature Assessment

There was another subproblem that looked at approaches to PDM in other organizations and ideas about inclusion within theology. The positive and negative effects of such practices were also considered. PDM has a range of ways in which it can be implemented from almost no involvement from workers to complete control over decisions by workers.²⁸⁸ This discovery gives leaders options. It does not have to be an all-or-nothing approach. Leaders must identify just how much participation is needed to reach a high-quality decision. In some cases, pastors may only need to seek input from others. In other cases, pastors may need to relinquish control to their members.

The literature showed several factors that must be considered by leaders when deciding to include others. Leaders must think about how much impact a decision will have on their members. The degree to which a decision will affect a large portion of members' lives is the degree to which the members of that organization should be involved. McCaffrey and others assert this as a basic belief undergirding the human

²⁸⁷ Just, 263.

²⁸⁸ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 104.

relations movement.²⁸⁹

Leaders must also consider how much knowledge they possess individually and what would be the cost of a poor decision. As Tropman concludes, individuals who make decisions in isolation are prone to errors in judgment that make quality decisions difficult to obtain.²⁹⁰ However, to garner enough knowledge through participation, the literature showed the best avenue for doing so is decentralization and power sharing. The study done by Alonso and others demonstrated how decentralized structures outperformed centralization when coordination was necessary. For example, if departments or ministries had to work together to reach a goal, less involvement from top leaders was better in producing the type of information needed for quality outcomes. This loss of power may be a personal concern for leaders and their attitudes can make or break the success of the process.²⁹¹ If a group is brought together to decide then the solution may not be favorable for the leader. The leader has to be accepting of this. Furthermore, leaders have to factor time into the equation. If time is critical, inclusion may not be possible. But as Means posits, crisis should not be made up in order to justify autocratic leadership.²⁹²

The literature brings out the need to consider what impact PDM will have on unity. Some matters might cause conflict and become too disruptive to the mission of the church if handled in a congregational setting. Other issues might create the same effect if

²⁸⁹ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606.

²⁹⁰ Tropman, 171.

²⁹¹ Locke and Schweiger, 194.

²⁹² Means, 86.

not brought to the congregation. This is because groups bring differing opinions. Those opinions have the potential to generate good ideas but they also have the potential to leave people wounded.²⁹³

Lastly, to get the most out of PDM, leaders have to build relationships with the members and demonstrate behaviors that signal to workers they can be trusted. S. B. Pierce's application of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory has demonstrated the effects of PDM on trust.²⁹⁴ Members who receive opportunities to participate in decision-making increase their trust of leaders. Pastors must see inclusion then, not just as a right of members but an opportunity for them to develop a great deal of trust among members. In turn, this may lead to a willingness on the part of members to allow the pastor to exercise discretion in decision-making with matters he or she is passionate about.

When considering the intersection between PDM, pastoral authority, and priesthood doctrine, the literature leads the researcher to believe the application of priesthood doctrine has been wrongly applied by Baptist churches. Priesthood theology is about all having equal access to God through Christ.²⁹⁵ The way it has been exercised in the church, especially the Baptist church, is to redefine the role of the pastor as equals with the rest of the membership. This is probably due to ministerial abuses.²⁹⁶ Pastoral leaders have a responsibility "to be overseers but not lords over God's heritage."²⁹⁷ With

²⁹³ Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 108; Levi, 148-155

²⁹⁴ Pierce, 164-165.

²⁹⁵ Young, 131-146.

²⁹⁶ Ott, 350-351.

²⁹⁷ Means, 93.

that being said, the church is not a pure democracy where everyone gets an equal say in its affairs. There are times when members are not capable of making decisions in their own best interests.²⁹⁸ For instance, knowledge of Scripture is largely important in making decisions for and about the church but many members do not possess this knowledge sufficiently enough to make a decision that aligns with it. Pastors are to guide members by teaching them to know sound doctrine thereby empowering them to be good decision-makers. Until that time however, pastors may have to assert their leadership within the congregation for their benefit. At the very least, the pastor should be in charge of bringing together a group of spiritually mature individuals who are capable of addressing problems. On this point, the researcher found Tropman's four basic types of group members helpful: problem identifiers, solution generators, resource controllers, and responsibility bearers.²⁹⁹

Discussion of the Field Study

In addition to the previous two subproblems that looked at the biblical material and PDM literature, two other subproblems investigated how Black Baptist churches located in Central Indiana approached decision-making and why. Going into this study, the researcher felt he had very little authority or freedom to truly lead his congregation. He experienced many conflict-filled meetings and was chastised often for decisions he made without bringing the issue to the congregation. It did not matter much that he consulted other groups and even used a group decision-making process with a smaller unit so as to not make a decision in isolation. The perception was that since the decision

²⁹⁸ Gastil, 9.

²⁹⁹ Tropman, 186-187.

was not made in a congregational meeting through a majority vote, the pastor made the decision unilaterally. A great deal of ambiguity existed around when if ever the pastor could make decisions without the need to involve the congregation. There was also confusion around whether or not the pastor had the discretion to determine who he thought should participate in making a decision. The four themes that emerged in the field study helped the researcher clarify the pastor's role and better understand the perception of the congregation. Based on the findings the researcher believes he can work with his congregation to develop a strategy for handling issues in the future.

Of the four major themes, effectiveness was most beneficial in assessing the values members carry into decision-making. In this study, participants were very explicit about their desire to be involved in decision-making. They felt they had a right to participate if the outcome of a decision affected them personally. In fact, rights form one of the justifications for PDM in the literature.³⁰⁰ Nowhere else does the congregation feel they have a right to participate than when it comes to money. The pastor must bring those issues involving money to the them especially when it is a large dollar amount. At the very least, the pastor should only make decisions around money in a team. The proper handling of money presents the pastor with an opportunity to build trust among members. It would be extremely wise for pastors to show that they did not act alone and were completely transparent in every decision where a large dollar amount was involved. Moreover, if the pastor wants members to support a decision through their energy and money, he needs to involve them from the start.

It was not surprising to learn participants were not confident in the pastor's ability

³⁰⁰ McCaffrey, Faerman, and Hart, 606.

to make decisions for them on his own. In their minds, the pastor cannot know everything and must work with others to make high-quality decisions. Levi also affirms high-quality decisions are benefits of PDM.³⁰¹ Even in those places where the congregation has clearly given the pastor authority to be the final decision-maker, members still want to see him or her consult others. Only a few areas were completely up to the pastor to decide without consulting or informing anyone. Those areas dealt with sensitive matters such as counseling, abuses, and termination.

What was surprising to the researcher was to learn that participants cared whether or not the pastor is blamed for a poor-quality decision. Participants wanted the pastor to include others so he would not bear the full burden of a decision outcome. This may be one of the motives behind the apostles' strategy in Acts 6. By allowing the congregation to select their own servant-leaders, they may have been trying to mitigate blame on their part in case the leaders exacerbated the situation rather than made it better. The literature however takes a different view by asserting increased participation does not lessen accountability.³⁰² Leaders are still held responsible.

For this reason, sharing decision authority is difficult ground. If a person is going to be held responsible for the decision no matter who makes it, it seems right to defer to that person. This would be known as involvement rule.³⁰³ As a result of this discussion of responsibility, the researcher was led to another discovery on effectiveness specifically concerning decision rule. Members in each of the cases have only been exposed to one

³⁰¹ Levi, 148.

³⁰² Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall, 107.

³⁰³ Tropman, 93-94.

decision approach, which is majority rule. The researcher believes members need decision-skills training so they can learn about other ways to make decisions. Then, when issues arise that call for members to get involved, they will have more than one approach at their disposal. The three biblical cases also affirm using different approaches. Two of them used a consensus model and one used voting followed by casting lots.

Pastors have a burdened not shared by other organizational leaders in for-profit and non-profit arenas. They must teach the Bible which impacts decision effectiveness. An interesting part of the findings for the researcher was hearing participants discuss how they taught or would teach biblical principles leading up to an important decision in order to affect the outcome. This is actually consistent with the biblical material. Peter taught a lesson from Scripture leading up to the decision to replace Judas. He expounded theologically about the activity of God in the Jerusalem meeting while James taught the biblical lesson in that same meeting. One participant talked about not just the importance of discipleship to effective decision-making but the use of PDM for the development of members. Using PDM in this way would help members become better thinkers in his assessment. This last point is similar to how non-religious organizations might use PDM. It would develop “the knowledge and competence of individual members by providing them with opportunities to work through problems and decisions typically occurring at higher organizational levels.”³⁰⁴ The discipleship and development dynamic to effective decision-making was an area that was naively minimized by the researcher before conducting the study. However, the researcher now sees the need to incorporate these

³⁰⁴ Victor H. Vroom, “Leadership and the Decision-Making Process,” *Organizational Dynamics* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 82–94.

dynamics in a more intentional way.

One last point on effectiveness is related to speed. Pastors cannot be expected to engage in a participative process when time is of the essence. PDM slows down decision-making and the cost of moving too slow may be greater than a poor-quality decision in a crisis.³⁰⁵ Participants in Second Baptist were particularly aware of this factor. The pastor and leaders had to deal with an emergency that threatened the safety of their daycare and the health of the membership in a way that exceeded cost restrictions placed on them by the constitution. No one seem to have a problem with the leaders violating the rules and addressing the issue in that situation. Pipes could break, a major storm might warrant the use of the church as an emergency shelter, and a host of other crises preventing congregational inclusion may occur. The church must release their pastor or leadership team to make decisions on their behalf under such circumstances.

Theoretical Contribution

At this point, it is important to note the field study actually corroborates and somewhat advances PDM theory. This type of corroboration is one function of case-study research.³⁰⁶ In particular, the findings support Victor Vroom's Normative Decision Theory. In his normative model there are four considerations for determining how much involvement a leader or manager should have in a decision situation. These considerations are similar to the ones found in this study. First, a leader must consider decision quality. This factor "depends on where the relevant knowledge or expertise

³⁰⁵ Vroom, 85.

³⁰⁶ Yin, 38; Leedy and Ormrod, 142.

resides, that is, in the leader, in the group, or both."³⁰⁷ Second, leaders must consider whether support is necessary for implementation. If the commitment of team members is important to an effective decision then leaders would be better served by participation. Third, time costs, which relate to efficiency, should be weighed carefully. If decisions need to be made fairly quickly a participatory process will only cause delay as stated earlier. Finally, development must be a consideration. Participants become better assets to the organization when they are given opportunities to share in decision-making with other team-members. These four considerations are funneled through seven situational factors shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Victor Vroom's Situational Factors

Factors	Definitions	Considerations
Leader Expertise	Your knowledge or expertise in relation to this problem.	Quality
Group Expertise	Team members' knowledge or expertise in relation to this problem.	
Decision Significance	The significance of the decision to the success of the project or organization.	Development
Group Support for Objectives	The degree to which the team supports the organization's objectives at stake in this problem.	
Team Competence	The ability of team members to work together in solving problems.	
Importance of Commitment	The importance of team members' commitment to the decision.	Implementation
Likelihood of Commitment	The likelihood that the team would commit itself to a decision that you might make on your own.	

Source: Victor H. Vroom, "Leadership and the Decision-Making Process," *Organizational Dynamics* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2000), Exhibit 4.

To help managers determine what decision approach to take, Vroom has

³⁰⁷ Vroom, 85.

managers filter an issue through these factors using one of two matrices. The first is a time-driven matrix used when time-costs are important and the other is a development-driven matrix used when development is important. At the end, a recommendation is given to them as to what they should do: “decide, consult individually, consult group, facilitate or delegate.”³⁰⁸ These matrices are only useful when it is within the discretion of the leader to decide.³⁰⁹

In Vroom’s model, decision quality and implementation, which is dependent upon commitment, are the two main components of effectiveness.³¹⁰ These two qualities were also confirmed in the findings on effectiveness from the case study. However, time and development were handled as separate outcomes denoting efficiency in Vroom’s model and also shown to be important for determining involvement. Those two factors (Time and Development) are modified in the present study because they are linked to effectiveness (see Figure 2). Moreover, Means’ six considerations for inclusivity was also consistent with the findings. His considerations are similar to Vroom’s four factors (Quality, Time, Implementation, and Development), which are illustrated in Table 7. The difference in Vroom’s considerations with that of Means’ lie in significance. For Means, when an issue is unimportant, leaders can be passive and allow members to decide. Leaders only need to assert their leadership when the issue is of importance. Vroom, on the other hand, suggests any benefit that could come from PDM by way of development

³⁰⁸ Vroom, “Leadership and the Decision-Making Process,” 83.

³⁰⁹ Vroom, 86.

³¹⁰ Victor H. Vroom, “Educating Managers for Decision Making and Leadership,” *Management Decision* 41, no. 10 (December 2003): 969, accessed October 3, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740310509490>.

for members is “negligible when the decision lacks significance, that is, when the issue being decided is trivial and lacks consequences to the organization.”³¹¹

Table 7. Comparison of Considerations for Inclusion

Means’ Considerations	Mean’s Description	Vroom’s Considerations (Situational Factors)
Type of Issue: Problem-solving or policy-making	A problem-solving task require facts. Policy-making tasks are connected to value systems. Policy-making issues necessitate a participatory approach using a consensus model for the sake of maintaining unity	Implementation (Importance of Commitment)
Degree of Importance	Unimportant issues need a laissez-faire approach but important ones need assertive even autocratic leadership	Development (Decision Significance)
Availability of Data	When facts are needed participatory leadership is called for if the leader does not have the necessary information.	Quality (Leader/Group Expertise)
Efficiency Requirements	Many issues do not require PDM, and good leaders are conscious of time cost.	Time
Leadership Vacuum	If there are other competent leaders, then the senior most leader do not need to be assertive. Leadership is necessary where there is an absence of good leadership	(Team Competence)
Group Cohesiveness	Unity is more important than decision outcome	

Source: James E. Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 83-87.

Means based his considerations on an amalgamation of Scripture, leadership theory, and experience while Vroom’s study involved over 100,000 managers in for-profit organizations.³¹² It is hoped that the present research adds one more step in the bridge between PDM and the church. The results of this multiple-case study provide empirical data showing how members of different churches think about involvement in

³¹¹ Vroom, “Leadership and the Decision-Making Process,” 86.

³¹² Vroom, 84.

an environment where God is the focus.

The findings related to effectiveness were not the only ones to shed light on the application of PDM in the church. It was very informative but not surprising to learn about members' attitudes and experiences concerning conflict in church meetings. Because the researcher has personally experienced conflicts in his role as a pastor, he knew going in to the study there would be other examples of conflict. However, the findings confirmed the opinion that spiritual and calming leadership is necessary in those moments of high tension. To add to this, spiritual leadership does not always have to originate with the pastor especially when attacks are directed at him. Others can and should step in to assume the role of spiritual leadership. For example, in one case, a participant talked about the congregation feeling "shellshocked" because of the aggressive leadership of the pastor. The researcher took this to mean the pastor created a level of tension that made everyone undesirous of contributing to the discussion. The participant's example showed how the pastor was not a calming presence and spiritual leadership needed to come from someone else.

In another case, when the pastor was the subject of an attack, another member stepped in to lead everyone in prayer. When moments of conflict arise, leaders can do as this member did by leading in prayer. Leaders can perhaps relieve tensions with light humor or calling for a break during the meeting. The literature affirms that conflicts are unavoidable but understanding the interplay between leadership and conflict must be an important consideration among leaders.³¹³

Another equally important finding helped the researcher eliminate from his

³¹³ Pierce, 162-177.

confusion known parameters around his decision authority. These parameters were established and confirmed through interviews, job descriptions, and governing instruments. Of the three sources, the constitutions were the strongest for gaining a clear picture of the pastor's decision parameters versus a board or the congregation itself. The challenge however, is that those documents are not living documents. There is no regular review and revision process which is something that is needed. Moreover, the pastors in this study were somewhat reluctant to share those documents with the researcher. If it were not for the relationship the researcher had with the pastors and churches, he may not have been granted access to them. Because those documents are so out of date with the leadership style of the pastors, they may have feared bringing attention to them would work against them. This may also play into why those documents do not undergo regular review and revision. Rather than granting more freedoms, members might attempt to further limit the pastor. Where the constitution fell short, job descriptions provided a more updated idea of what the congregation, through its representatives, expected of the pastor. The interviews, in turn, gave viable insights into the mindset behind those expectations.

When the parameters are clearly identified the pastor should only have to locate the issue within its proper parameter set and follow the prescribed rules of decision-making. Any dispute with the pastor or team's authority could be addressed by simply referencing the organizational documents. The documents themselves carry far more weight than the opinion of a few key actors. The challenge for pastoral leaders come when the documents are not clear and do not specify where discretion falls. The pastor may feel it is his responsibility to be the final decision-maker concerning an issue and the

congregation may feel they have a right to participate. Unfortunately, the documents may even have more influence on members than Scripture. That very phenomenon was one of several motivating factors for this research study.

The pastors in this study have discretion to make decisions personally or with a group, if they choose, in spiritual matters such as preaching and teaching, counseling, and worship services. It is within their scope of service to represent the congregation in the community or formulate partnerships. Beyond this, they have been granted authority by members to assume limited administrative functions. The pastor is required to work with a team (board of trustees, deacons, and/or ministry leaders) primarily on property and financial management issues and a small number of ministry concerns. No matter what role the pastor and these groups have been given, the congregation always retain the greater authority. Furthermore, the congregation holds on to direct authority mainly when it comes to the appointment of officers, the selection of a pastor, large capital expenses, and membership all of which are attested to in the literature.³¹⁴ Leadership selection is specifically affirmed in the biblical cases (Acts 1:23; 6:5). The findings substantiate all but two of the direct congregational parameters in Means' list. His list includes *doctrinal positions*, by-laws, incurring debt, large purchases, accepting or denying membership, adopting budgets, election of key leaders and *professional staff*.³¹⁵ The findings however, showed that doctrinal positions and professional staff are delegated to the pastor or board by the congregation. The feeling is the pastor is the expert on those matters. As it relates to doctrinal issues, one participant stated, "there's no one better equipped to make the

³¹⁴ Argent, 98; Means, 116.

³¹⁵ Means, 116.

decision than the pastor.” It makes sense that professional staff would be in the purview of the pastor being that he interacts directly or indirectly with the staff far more than the congregation and would have a better understanding of their performance. Furthermore, some information related to employees of the church may need to be kept confidential.

What the research showed was that pastors in these cases have more authority than they may realize. Pastors never completely lose authority. Their authority might increase or decrease depending on which parameter set they find themselves in but they always have some level of it. In fact, spiritual parameters are the most important. Pastors have an enormous opportunity to affect both how and what decisions are made through discipleship—teaching, preaching, and modeling Christian values.

Lastly, the findings pointed to the need for leaders to develop trust among the membership. The literature supports this through LMX theory as stated above. In the field study, participants spoke about having an internal assurance the pastor has been called by God. In addition, the actions taken by pastors concerning personal and participative decision-making either validates or invalidates the participants’ internal beliefs. In some ways, the findings in this study agrees with the findings in a different type of study. The quantitative study done by Lam, Huang, and Chan concerning the threshold effect of participative leadership showed that employee performance was stronger when leaders exceeded an internal threshold and weaker when that threshold was not met.³¹⁶ Likewise, the data in this present study affirmed members undergo an internal process as well based on certain leadership behaviors, namely whether or not leaders include others. Pastors may be sure of their calling but they must help members be

³¹⁶ Lam, Huang, and Chan, 836-849.

assured as well. They cannot leave it up to members to figure it out for themselves. To help members find this peace, pastors must include members when issues matter a great deal to them. They must also seek to be transparent about decisions they have made away from the membership individually or amongst a team so that members can see the leaders' integrity on display. At the very least, pastors should provide convincing rationales for why they chose not to include everyone or limited a decision to a certain group of members.

Practical Application for Ministry

Pulling all the data together from the biblical material, literature, and field study, the researcher proposes a model that may help senior pastors in churches that are structured similar to the ones in this study to navigate the rocky terrain between authority and PDM. When an issue is reviewed for whether or not it is a part of a known parameter set, filtered through the factors of effectiveness, and the leader considers how participation or the lack thereof will impact trust and unity, he can discover what approach is best. This model modifies the one offered in Vroom's research by taking into consideration concerns for trust and unity as well as the meaning of commitment for church members in this case study. Figure 4 is a visual illustration of the model.

Starting from the left, a pastor identifies an issue or one may be brought to him by members in the congregation, a board or team. The pastor then works through a series of yes-and-no questions. Those questions seek to discover if the issue is a part of a known parameter set. If so, the pastor must determine if there are clear and usable guidelines written in his job description and the church's constitution or by-laws. By following this step alone, it forces the pastor to engage in a regular review of these documents even if a

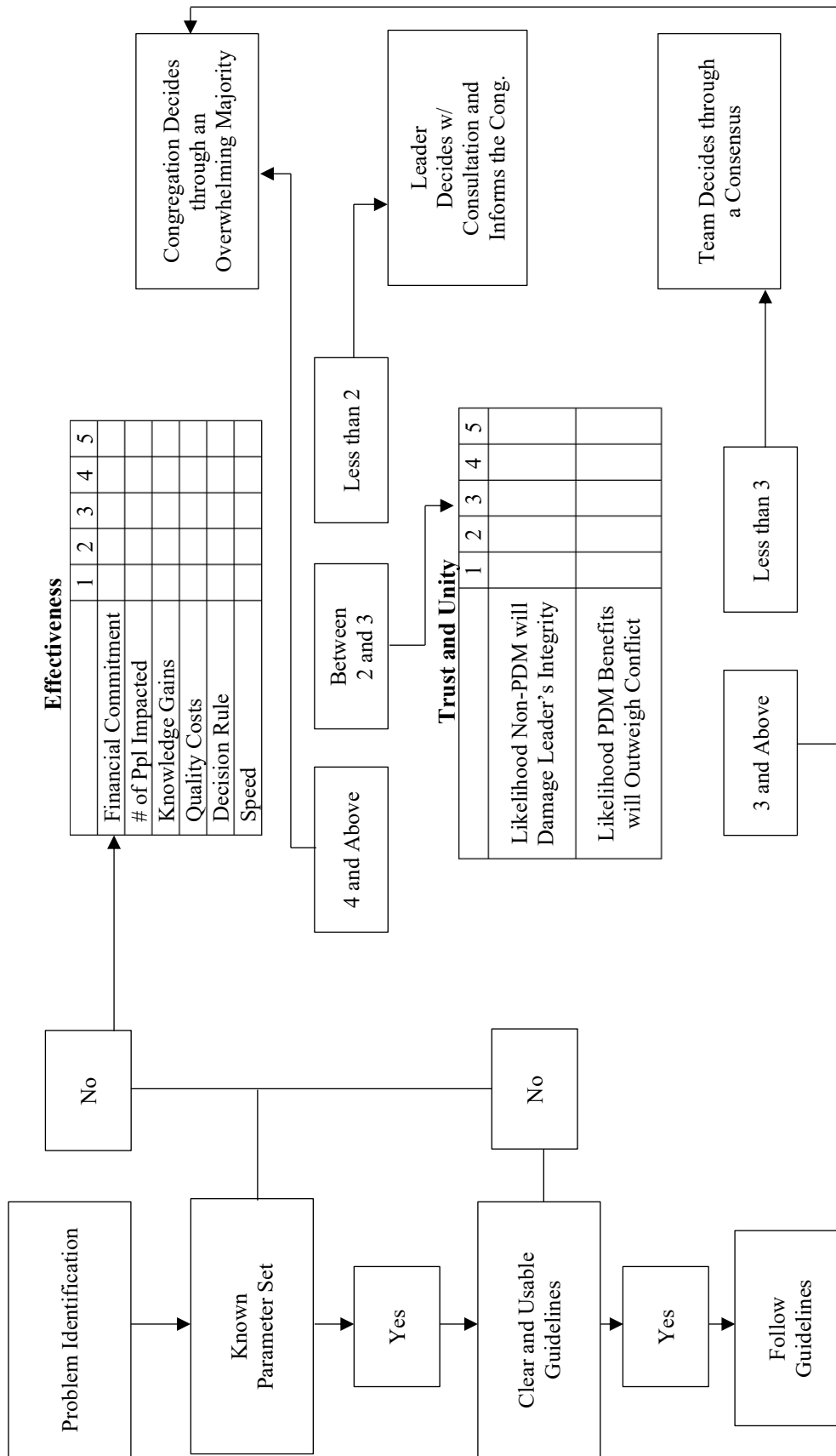


Figure 4. Decision Involvement Guide

formal schedule for review and revision has not been set up by the congregation.

Furthermore, if the pastor should ever push for changes to the constitution or by-laws, he will have accumulated enough issues in which he has worked through to know what should be changed and why.

If those documents do not lay out clear and usable guidelines, and expectations for the pastor to follow, or the issue is not a part of a known parameter set, the pastor then must go through an internal process of determining the importance of effectiveness and the impact PDM has on trust and unity. The scales in each table reflect degrees from lowest to highest. On the effectiveness scale, the pastor can rate each factor by thinking of the congregation and placing the phrase “How important” in front of each factor.

For example, with the first factor the pastor will ask, “How important is the financial commitment of the congregation?” He will mark one for “Not Important,” a two for “Slightly Important,” three for “Important,” four for “Very Important,” or five for “Extremely Important.” Pastors will then take the average for the scale. As it relates to the number of people impacted, this factor addresses how many people will be affected by the decision and how important of a concern it should be. Knowledge gains deal with how important it may be to gather information from the congregation to make a high-quality decision. There may be experts in their field sitting in the congregation and the pastor would be greatly benefitted from tapping into that knowledge base. Quality cost looks at how important it is to make a high-quality decision. Will a workable solution to the problem suffice even if it is not the best decision and how much will the congregation suffer from a poor-quality decision?

Next, the pastor must consider the importance of using a particular decision-rule

such as voting or consensus. Other decision rules can be substituted for majority and consensus if the pastor and the congregation so choose however, whatever rule is selected must make the congregation feel they have a voice. The final consideration is speed. How important is the amount of time it takes to make a decision? After completing the effectiveness scale a recommendation is given or the pastor is directed to move to the trust-and-unity scale.

The trust-and-unity table works in a similar fashion except it raises the question, “how likely is it that one of these situations are true?” The responses are one for “Not Likely,” two for “Moderately So,” three for “Likely,” four for “Very Likely,” and five for “Extremely Likely.” That average rating tells the pastor how to move through the decision-tree toward a decision recommendation.

Strengths and Weaknesses

One of the strengths of this study was in designing it as a multiple-case study. By doing so, the findings are more generalizable to churches of a similar kind to the ones in the study. Furthermore, because it was a qualitative study, it provided a deeper look into the phenomenon of participative decision-making to figure out how and why certain approaches are valued over others. Those pastors trying to understand the attitudes of members who do not want them making most decisions without their involvement can peak behind the veil of members’ attitude to understand some of the motivating factors driving that attitude.

This study did not just look at literature pertaining to PDM but investigated components of theology that might inform PDM practices in the church. Much was discovered about the theology of inclusion as well as PDM theory in for-profit organizations. However, very few research studies in recent scholarship of the past 30

years were found that linked the two together. This study provides one small step forward in closing that gap. Looking at factors of inclusion in the literature, biblical material, and field study also allowed the researcher to develop a model and tool to help pastors navigate the rocky path of inclusion. This was one of the goals from the start. The researcher wanted to fix a dilemma in his own context. This self-motivated research project now has the potential to help a number of other pastors do the same.

A weakness of this study was the number of members interviewed in each church. While the three participants in the researcher's church and the four participants in each of the other cases served as key informants into the participative practices of each church, their input alone could not be generalized to a large number of members in those churches without the corroboration of other sources of evidence. If the researcher could do this project again, he would design it as a mixed-method study to not just look deep but wide. He would collect survey data in addition to interviews and include more churches from different denominations, ethnic and economic backgrounds, and across different regions of the country to investigate this research problem.

Moreover, time was a hindrance. This research has been underway for the past two years and the researcher did not reach the point of collecting data until recently. In trying to make deadlines for submission of this report, a second level of analysis was missed which would have further increased construct validity. Drafts of the within-case reports were not reviewed by key informants who could have provided feedback leading to a second round of coding nor were follow-up interviews conducted. It was hard to schedule interviews with each participant because of their personal life-challenges. The researcher was not confident he could accomplish any of these reviews and follow-ups in

a timely manner for this reason.

Another design modification would be to solicit research assistants who could help gather and analyze data, and conduct interviews on behalf of the researcher. The problem in this study was the researcher was also the interviewer. This is the reason only three participants were included in the researcher's context while four were included in the other churches. The fourth was the pastor of those churches. It is believed the participants in the researcher's church redacted their comments because they were being asked to describe situations involving the pastor while talking to him. This also may explain why information was not generated around trusted-leadership for the main case but existed in every other case.

Summary

In the final analysis, this study provides insights which can be used as a theoretical framework in other studies. The deep look into involvement practices reveal how members process decision-making, what issues are important to them, what issues they would rather for a pastor to make, and what issues they look to a team to make on their behalf. Pastors would do well to put more thought into how they are involving the congregation and to engage in participative practices as much as possible. While differences can produce a great deal of conflict, the differing experiences, educational backgrounds, expertise, and beliefs existing in the congregation can lead to high-quality decisions. Such decisions can result in the church fulfilling her mission in new and creative ways never imagined before. The world may be forced to study the church in a greater capacity to discover our ways of leading rather than neglecting the church in their pursuit of understanding how to develop sound organizations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GROWTH AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Future Research

This research did not explore how PDM is addressed in other denominations as well as other parts of the country but future research should apply this research problem to that larger audience. A comparative analysis should be done between Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other mainline churches as well as nondenominational evangelical churches to explore the application of PDM in the wider Christian community. There are some churches that have a corporate style of governance where the pastor acts as a CEO and a staff makes most decisions. Some denominations use a top-down leadership structure like those following episcopal traditions. It would be very interesting to know if members of these different types of churches have the same concern for having a voice as members do in congregational churches. If so, is it for the same reasons and if not, what factors explain why? More research is needed to know for certain.

Another research question that should be explored in future studies concerns how attitudes around volunteering affect PDM when there is not a profit motive. Most PDM research is done in for-profit organizations and links PDM to employee performance and job satisfaction. All of this is driven by the need for companies to make money. Also, some of the literature suggested PDM works best when it is tied to financial incentives for employees. The church does not have the same concern. Members are not given money rather they are responsible for giving money to support the church. While this

research touched on some aspects of giving and PDM more should be done to see how generosity and PDM relate to each other in volunteer organizations. Furthermore, do members who serve in different ministries have a greater desire to participate than members who do not? In other words, it may be that serving causes members to take greater ownership in the congregation and increase the “rights” argument. Someone may say, “I have the right to be included on certain decisions.” The opposite may be true as well. Members might feel less of a need to be involved in decision-making if they are serving. Serving-members may have greater trust in their leaders and permit them to decide matters for these members. Further research could explain if either of these hypotheses are true.

Future research should look at what deliberative rules are the most effective for mitigating tense conversations in meetings. The present study did not go into detail concerning how to relieve tensions in congregational meetings. Many groups and churches use Robert’s Rules of Order to lessen combative discussions. However, Robert’s Rules are not grounded in biblical and theological research and may not be the most effective. At least this has been the experience in my own context. Perhaps ideas in Robert’s Rules that are consistent with biblical principles can be joined with other practices to create a new model. That model could be taught and tested in several church meetings to determine its success rate.

Personal Growth

One of the things I gained from this research project was the need to listen reflectively. As the researcher-interviewer-pastor in my own ministry context, it was humbling hearing members describe how they felt in the congregational meetings I led. When one member described the atmosphere in meetings as “shellshocked,” I felt like I

had gone too far in trying to rebuff antagonists. By the term shellshocked, the implication was that members had been frightened away from speaking. We have had several high-conflict meetings where voices were raised, tears flowed, and insults were spoken. In an effort to prevent such meetings from becoming the norm, I deliberately became more forceful in controlling debates and agendas. I thought our meetings were becoming more peaceful. My goal was never to defuse healthy conversations and debate. This research made me rethink my approach. While I do feel justified in controlling meetings, I do not want to lose the benefit of PDM by creating an atmosphere where people do not feel free to share.

Furthermore, the post conversation of several interviews lasted longer than the actual interviews. Participants in my own ministry context remarked about how much understanding they gained about my leadership, my heart, and the needs I was trying to address through my vision. A suggestion was given to me through these post conversations to hold periodic roundtables in order to share in settings similar to the interviews with other members. The idea was that members might come to understand and relate to me better knowing more about where I stand on certain matters. To be clear, I do share information with them in congregational meetings and across the pulpit on Sunday mornings. However, people hear differently in large meetings versus small intimate ones. As a result of this research, I am giving serious thought to scheduling revolving roundtables with small groups of six to twelve members each just to listen to them and offer clarity about what I see as the vision of this ministry.

Another type of listening gripped my heart through this project. It was listening to the voice of God. There were times throughout my doctoral journey I questioned whether

I had pure motives for desiring to pursue this degree. I wondered if it was all worth it. Many times, I felt I was incapable of finishing this degree. I was prepared to end my pursuit several times along the way. The first time I had this thought was in December of 2016. My son was due to be born at the end of that month. I had completed Missional Apologetics earlier in the year and now had to complete the project section for the course. The schedule with the church, doctors' appointments and the birth of my son took my focus away from school that year. I almost gave up.

The reason I took the plunge to start working toward this degree in 2015 was because my wife and I had been trying to have children and was not having any success. We felt it would not happen for us so we should focus on our personal development. Not long after enrolling and completing a semester or two, she became pregnant. Our son, Sean Michael Johnson, is our first and only child. It was overwhelming trying to manage family, school, and work as first-time parents.

Another time I almost gave up was during the sudden loss of my sister Jessie. She passed in October 2017 of a brain aneurysm. She was only 52 years old. August of that year, I was in the project section of Family Systems. My research project for the course led me to interview my family to find out details about our family of origin. My sister Jessie was one of the family members I interviewed. I learned a great deal about my sister and how she felt about her position in the family growing up. She was the oldest in the home and 13 years older than me. I felt we had grown closer to each other through that project. Little did I know her life would end two months later. Because of the stress I experienced, I was not sure I could go on.

I became very discouraged about being in this program after I failed to complete

the program and make graduation last year. I watched friends from afar who entered their Doctor of Ministry programs after me but finished before me. Granted, they were enrolled in different schools, but it still felt like a blow to my ego to see others finishing ahead of myself. I have since learned the reason for their finishing so quickly has something to do with the difference in how Bethel's programs are structured. Bethel is one of the more rigorous Doctor of Ministry programs among schools offering these degrees. This really became evident to me when I compared Bethel's program with my wife's PhD program. The structure of Bethel's program was similar to hers. Knowing this was both encouraging and discouraging. I felt perhaps I had taken on more than I could handle. I wondered once again if I should end my pursuit.

Through all of these episodes, my encouragement to keep pressing forward came from that still small voice telling me to "Keep going! You're going to make it!" In each moment, God spoke to my spirit and strengthened me. God reassured me this was not just an academic exercise but a journey of discovery. I was discovering things about my leadership, my endurance, and my passion for ministry.

I value the time I get to spend with my family. Since my wife and I are both enrolled in doctoral programs, it has been really hard to schedule time to spend as a family. As a result, Sunday lunch after church has become an even more treasured pastime. We have always had those lunches but they have taken on new meaning for us since it is one of the few things we are able to do regularly as a family.

I learned through this journey how to prepare sermons as a busy pastor. When I first started pastoring Mount Pleasant, I spent the majority of my week in preparation for Sunday. My total work hours ranged from 50-55 a week. Thirty of that was sermon

preparation. Part of the reason for so much time being put into sermon preparation was because I loved studying everything I could in a passage. By being in this program, I could no longer spend so long in study and had to learn how to focus on a few key principles from a passage. What I discovered was how much more receptive the congregation was to these simpler messages than the ones that involved an overwhelming amount of material.

Adding to this, I have learned to relinquish the pulpit more to associate ministers. There was a time before the program that I preached over ninety-percent of the sermons. When I did not preach, I outsourced to neighboring pastors the other opportunities. Part of the reason for this centered on one of the cultural norms in black church tradition. Pastors are the epicenter of Sunday morning worship. This tradition stems as far back as slavery.³¹⁷ Another reason was based on my fears concerning church attendance. Church attendance tends to decline when I am out of the pulpit. However, the amount of time it took to conduct this research forced me to step back from taking on so many responsibilities and share. I believe God was teaching me to abandon cultural norms and see the gifts in others. God was also teaching me to recondition a church tradition that had become mired in putting too many unrealistic expectations on their pastor.

I also learned I have a passion for organizational leadership. I believe a part of the reason God led me to this program was to validate this calling. My desire is to contribute to the field of congregational development so that the institution of the church can survive for another millennium if the Lord continues to delay in his return. My personal observation of the institutional church is that it is shuttering in North America. A recent

³¹⁷ William Harrison, "How African American Pastors Learn the Roles of Ministry," (diss, University of Georgia, 2010), 1.

Pew Research poll shows a decline in church attendance and affiliation with Christianity.³¹⁸ A theory I hold to which might warrant a separate research project is that when the church intentionally pursues her mission the church institution will eventually take on similar organizational characteristics as churches today. That is to say, all the elements of an organization will be present: leadership structures, the management of resources, rules and policies, programs, facilities and so on. If a new group of believers started meeting in a house and they actively engaged in evangelism and discipleship, if they met together regularly and served the community, eventually the need to take on these organizational elements would grow until that house church looked like the traditional brick-and-mortar churches we have today. If this is true, we cannot get rid of the institutional model simply because people are abandoning it.

Just from the conversations I have had with other pastors, it appears some people are walking away from churches because of their suspicions of corruption and the control of power. We have to correct the wrongs within the congregation and I believe this present research project will aid in doing so. I believe it will help pastors and congregations work together to build more trust. Any distrust because of a perception of corruption might be counteracted through PDM.

In addition to the passion for organizational leadership, a passion for research has been ignited in me through this program. God has taught me through the thesis template that some issues in the church require vigorous research, and biblical and theological engagement not just from professional researchers but from the pastor. It is already

³¹⁸ Michael Lipka, ed., "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," *Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life Project*, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

asserted by some that pastors are the resident theologians of their ministry but we also have to be the resident researchers. We have to lead the congregation in bringing thoughtful reflection to issues. Therefore, I would like to engage in more thoughtful research within my own ministry context using questionnaires, focus groups, and roundtable interviews. Then coupling those findings with biblical and theological material to present solutions facing Mount Pleasant.

Conclusion

PDM literature is vast and so much more could have been included. Overall, however, this research takes one more step in closing the gap in the literature between PDM theory and its application in congregations. Moreover, the journey in looking into PDM theory has been rewarding. It has been informative to learn about the positive and negative effects of PDM within organizations. Some assumptions have been confirmed and others have been reshaped through the literature.

The knowledge that has been gained through exploring passages in Acts only created a desire to look more systematically at the Bible to find examples of meetings and forms of inclusion throughout the Scriptures. Unfortunately, that examination could not be carried out here. Nevertheless, the passages that were explored shed light on some of the biblical concerns pastoral leaders and congregants should take into consideration.

Ultimately, the hope is that the community, for which this research was designed, accepts it. It would be really good for Mount Pleasant to revise their constitution or create a set of by-laws to go along with the constitution and include the Decision Involvement Guidelines (DIG) as a part of the fabric of church governance. In fact, every church in this study could use the DIG tool with a little training to facilitate better PDM practices. The benefits of PDM has the potential to lead to greater trust among members with their

leaders, high-quality decisions, and stronger church institutions. In the future, PDM research may demonstrate that PDM is one viable way of protecting the church against prevailing negative perceptions. In the final analysis, all believers must take part in sustaining the church for generations to come.

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