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INTEGRATING BIBLICAL TEACHING AND ORGANIZATIONAL WISDOM
IN THE WORK OF PASTOR-CHURCH RELATIONS
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA

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

BY

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ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

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ABSTRACT

This project addressed the lack of integration of biblical teaching in the consultation work of Pastor-Church Relations in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. The use of organizational wisdom from many sources was regular and helpful, but the use of Scripture was conspicuously absent in consultation work. The goal of this project was to demonstrate and encourage a thorough integration so that organizational wisdom might be informed, anchored and enriched by scriptural teaching. This goal was achieved by the development of a specific program.

A first step involved identifying hospitality as a core biblical theme. The theme of hospitality was traced from creation, through the fall into sin, through redemption in Jesus Christ and ultimately the consummation of all things. Special attention was given to the New Testament teaching on hospitality as evidenced in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and in the passages which describe the generous outpouring of gifts upon the body of Christ.

Sources of organizational wisdom which intentionally focused attention on the organized church were reviewed with respect to their engagement with Scripture. A number of sources provided excellent samples of meaningful integration. For the purpose of emulating such integration in a Pastor-Church workshop, Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations* and its use of a four-lens model in viewing organizations was selected. The workshop explored the intersection of Bolman and Deal's four lenses with

Scripture. Each of these lenses was linked to one of the four New Testament gift passages, and to the biblical theme of hospitality. There was a simultaneous focus on church as organization and as organism. The workshop was delivered on two occasions to groups of church leaders.

By means of questionnaire surveys and interviews, evaluation of the fact of integration and quality of integration was received. The project demonstrated that integration of organizational wisdom and scriptural teaching was attainable in the work of Pastor-Church Relations.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION

Statement of the Problem

This project addressed the lack of integration of biblical teaching in the work of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR), an agency in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). In a review of consultation reports written and filed between 1996 and 2008, the lack of such integration became evident. Consultation reports reflected the personal observations of consultants as well as teaching gleaned from a variety of sources and perspectives within the social sciences, but reference to the teaching of Scripture was almost non-existent.

During the process of being interviewed for the researcher's current position as a consulting pastor for PCR, the lack of such integration was identified as a deficit within this agency. Intentional integration of biblical teaching into the consultation work of this agency was presented as a specific and fitting challenge for the role of consulting pastor and also for the Office of Pastor-Church Relations as an agency within a Christian denomination.

Definition of Terms

The term "organizational wisdom" refers to a broad range of insights that speak to how organizations arrange themselves and conduct their work so as to accomplish their goals. These insights relate to a variety of enterprises including businesses, schools,

hospitals and churches and have merit across this spectrum of organizations.

Organizational wisdom is to be distinguished from “family-systems wisdom.” The Office of Pastor-Church Relations makes regular use of family-systems wisdom in observing and describing dynamics of organized churches. Viewing the church through a family-system lens focuses attention on the emotional interplay within the relationships at work in the organization, including person-to-person, person-to-group, and sometimes group-to-group. The role of anxiety is significant. Although relational dynamics and the role of anxiety are acknowledged as present and real, organizational wisdom does not specifically address them. Organizational wisdom focuses more precisely on the overall health of the organization, attending to the relationship of individuals to the organization as it seeks to fulfill its purpose.

The term “lens” is used to describe the action of viewing an organization and its complexity from a variety of perspectives. Perhaps the most helpful way to think of a lens is not so much as a particular angle or vantage point for viewing, but as a filter through which viewing occurs. In a complex organization a specific lens serves to sharpen the focus by contracting the field of vision so as to focus attention on one dimension of the organization. Remarkably, zooming in and contracting the field of vision has a paradoxical benefit of expanding the depth and wholeness of one’s perception. The variety in perspective is not so much about being placed in a geographically distinct position as it is about viewing through a variety of lenses (filters). When viewing an organization through multiple lenses the cumulative benefit is a richer, fuller and more nuanced perception of the whole. Lens is used interchangeably with the word “frame.”

“Reframing” is the process of utilizing a variety of lenses in viewing an organization so as to enrich one’s perspective on the whole of an organization or to gain clarity of focus on a particular concern within an organization. Clarity about the nature of a specific concern is necessary in order to move towards appropriate correctives.

“Integration” is understood as an engagement of two independent sources so that each source enriches the other. The sources do not simply co-exist, but they intertwine, forming a wisdom which is more profound and more practical than would be the case if each source stood alone. Chapter 5 demonstrates the integration of organizational wisdom as captured by a “four-lens” approach to viewing organizations juxtaposed with the four gift passages in the New Testament. There is an engagement of form (multiple lenses) as well as an engagement of content (each gift passage offering a unique perspective).

The result is that the New Testament teaching on gifts is enriched by the wisdom of the four lenses, and the wisdom of the four lenses is enriched by the biblical teaching. Ultimately, insight is gained into an organization which is more than mere organization: the church is an organized body which lives: it is organization and organism. What is learned about the organism from Scripture enriches one’s understanding of the church as organization. What is learned from organizational wisdom enriches one’s understanding of the church as organism. Discernment is required for appropriate engagement and integration.

“Hospitality” is understood to be a spiritual practice of generosity that creates space (makes room) for others and provides resources so that others may flourish. While it includes such familiar practices as hosting people for dinner and providing shelter to

those in need, it is here defined in a broader fashion to include and highlight an inner attitude and disposition to others which images God.

Delimitations

Filed, written reports were available for only years 1996-2008. These were the reports which provided impetus for this project. Although the Office of Pastor-Church Relations has been in existence since 1982, the nature of the consultative work changed with the arrival of a new director in 1996. Rev. Duane Visser had a strong background in the therapeutic field and utilized wisdom gleaned from the social sciences in his work with congregations. His approach often included the practice of facilitating listening groups which produced data that informed written reports.

Written reports were the only record of consultation work directly accessible to the researcher. Many other consultations occurred by way of telephone conversation and in recent years by way of email, but did not result in written reports. The reports which existed were located in the Christian Reformed Church in North America denominational headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The scope of the need for integrating biblical teaching was limited to this one particular agency within a larger denomination. The researcher made no claim as to the manner in which biblical teaching was integrated with organizational wisdom in any other agency of the denomination or by the denomination as a whole.

Finally, this project demonstrated integration of biblical teaching and organizational wisdom by identifying and engaging with one sample source of organizational wisdom from among those used by the Office of Pastor-Church Relations.

The researcher also limited his use of biblical teaching to the single theme of hospitality. The theme of hospitality was particularly appropriate because in the researcher's context as consulting pastor, the opposite experience was frequent and painful. Relationships deteriorated so that hospitality was replaced by hostility.

Assumptions

All wisdom has value and comes from God. This is a foundational assumption for the work of integration and underlines the value of wisdom from sources beyond the Christian Scriptures. This principle is stated clearly in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession,¹ one of the Three Forms of Unity within the Christian Reformed Church. Nevertheless it bears mention because in the researcher's context the book of creation is regularly treated as either inferior to the book of Scripture or as something parallel to the book of Scripture. In either case, integration is lacking. But there is an inherent unity in the creation, a unity which reflects the God whose laws uphold existence. This inherent unity suggests that wisdom gleaned from organizational observation and practice is compatible with wisdom gleaned from Scripture.

Incorporating and integrating biblical teaching into the consultative process will strengthen that process by adding the acknowledged *gravitas* of Scripture. Organizational wisdom will be heard more readily when it can be demonstrated that such wisdom reflects or expands biblical teaching. This is particularly true because of the uniqueness of the organized church and its reliance on the Scripture as authoritative in matters of faith and life.

¹ Brink, Emily R., ed., *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1987), 818.

The church is an organization whose identity is anchored, informed, shaped and enriched by the story within which it is formed. When the organized church is viewed as an organization it is fitting that among the various lenses utilized to sharpen the focus there is also a lens drawn from the teaching of the Christian Scriptures.

Setting of the Project

The researcher's current role in the Christian Reformed Church in North America is that of Consulting Pastor in the Office of Pastor-Church Relations. The denomination is comprised of approximately 1075 congregations across North America. A significant part of the work involves engaging with congregations and pastors who are experiencing conflict. Some of this consultation work falls within the realm of crisis intervention with elements of triage and responsive training in specific settings. There is also a broader attempt at educating those in leadership. Sometimes this takes the form of workshops designed for leadership groups in specific congregations; sometimes this occurs by way of facilitating workshops for mixed groups of clergy and lay leaders gathered together from various congregations in a particular geographic region.

The involvement of the office of PCR in the life of a given pastor and congregation requires an invitation from the leadership body of the congregation called the council. Typically, such an invitation does not happen until tensions have existed for a prolonged period and heightened to the point of becoming severe. This makes the possibility of positive conflict resolution and healing a challenge. When relationships are severely strained for a lengthy period of time the level of conflict often intensifies beyond the point when reconciliation and renewed trust can be established. The likelihood of effective ministry has diminished.

There is a fairly typical palette of presenting issues: a decline in membership, a financial squeeze, leadership burnout, diminishing numbers of volunteers, polarization around various issues, and general malaise. The presenting issue which surfaces most frequently is that of polarization around the pastor. Consistently, in situations of conflict the relationships which involve the pastor are under strain. These include relationships between pastor and lay leadership (council and/or its executive committee), between pastor and staff, or between pastor and congregation.

Especially when the strained relationship involves pastor and council or pastor and congregation a familiar dynamic can be observed: the relationship has deteriorated into an adversarial dynamic between an employer and an employee. The relationship does not seem so much a covenant between parties interested in the flourishing of the other, but a contract dealing with rights and obligations. Pastors feel micro-managed, and churches feel under-served. Trust is low. The atmosphere does not seem hospitable, but carries a hint of hostility.

This is precisely the point at which a contributing dynamic is observed: healthy organizational practices such as regular evaluations of personnel have not been followed. The result is that conversations around matters of performance and expectations of both a formal and informal nature are not engaged. Minor frustrations and misunderstandings gather momentum and lead to growing relational strain.

A frequent anecdotal explanation given for the lack of evaluations is that such evaluations are viewed as not fitting within the setting of the church. Nevertheless, when performance issues arise with respect to a pastor, the need for evaluation and an evaluation process becomes evident. What is also evident is that it is exceptionally

challenging to begin an evaluative process when a relationship is already strained. This is true even within the setting of the church where it is sometimes assumed that healthy relationships are the norm. This dynamic demonstrates the need to adequately respect both the reality of the church as the body of Christ, and as an organization that has definite organizational dimensions and responsibilities.

While the presenting issue may be the pastor's person or performance, this presenting issue is wrapped within the dynamics of various relationships: pastor with lay leaders, pastor with staff, or pastor with congregation members. The presenting issue is often symptomatic of organizational dynamics which are larger and longer than those involving the pastor alone. A pastor may indeed be problematic, and issues of person and performance may indeed be real challenges, but this presenting issue must be understood within the context of the health and dynamics of the organization within which this pastor is functioning. It is important to consider how the organizational dynamics at work in this situation contribute to the tension and dysfunction relative to this pastor. It is also important to consider how organizational dynamics may diminish these challenges or prevent them. Potentially, organizational dynamics promote health and the flourishing of a pastor in terms of a pastor's person, performance and the various relationships so crucial to effective, meaningful pastoral leadership.

But there is a caveat. An unspoken question often hangs in the air when working with church members, leaders and pastors: "Shouldn't we be dealing with things in a uniquely 'church' kind of way?" In effect, the question is this: "Doesn't the fact that we are the 'body of Christ' give us a unique lens for looking at our organizational

dynamics?” There’s a sense that it should make a difference that we are not just any organization—we’re the church!

For this reason, the researcher has chosen to explore the possibility of integrating organizational wisdom that seems so potentially insightful and helpful for churches, and wisdom drawn from biblical teaching which has immediate credibility and authority within the context of the organized church. It is a remarkable coincidence that business organizations are incorporated: they are entities organized in a particular legal way, and this same root word *corpus* is also used to describe the church as the body of Christ. The aim of this project is to explore linkage between organizational wisdom from the world of corporations, and wisdom from the revelation that God pours out gifts on members of the body for the benefit of the body.

This is particularly significant when the setting for this project is considered. The makeup of leadership teams (councils) is exceptionally varied. A local church council may include professionals, trade workers, businesswomen, high school dropouts, academics, fast-food clerks and stay-at-home parents. The level of theological expertise and familiarity with the biblical story ranges from advanced to minimal. And the level of ecclesiastical acuity in terms of protocols, official church polity and organizational savvy varies widely. Rather than subject matter experts, there are many leaders dealing with matters they do not fully understand and which they cannot adequately articulate. There are also many leaders in roles for which they have volunteered but not received significant training.

There is a tension between the real-world experience of lay leaders and their experience of the church; some things seem the same, some things seem different. In

general, the external contexts with which Council leaders are familiar serve as key frames of reference for them as they engage in the affairs of the local church. Specifically, it is their particular work environment which informs them as they engage in the work and life of the organized church. These work environments may be ones in which leaders identify problems, assess possible solutions, and then make the decisions that seem necessary, effective and most hopeful. For example, in the world of independent business people such as those operating family farms, problems are addressed as promptly as possible. In those settings it is expected that solutions are clear, effective and immediate. The need to confer within the context of a whole group of participants such as exists on a church council is more complicated, more deliberate and more time-consuming.

On the other hand, some on a church council may be accustomed to the academic world and quite inclined to deliberate at length. Such folks bring with them a similar tension from their own real-world experience: is the world of the academy something unique or does it bear marks of being a business organization? Unlike business owners who are inclined to view the organized church through a business lens, academics are inclined to carry a suspicion of business perspectives dominating and altering agendas, whether that is in the academy or in the church.

Some pastors and lay leaders will receive insights from the world of business or other organizations gladly and easily; others will balk at the use of insights geared for secular settings. Some recognize the wisdom and truth that can be brought to bear while others are suspicious of using concepts that seem unspiritual and therefore unfitting for use in the church. Insights gleaned from Scripture and the insights gleaned from everyday life seem to operate in parallel universes offering little hope for integration. Nevertheless

this project demonstrates that together, the teaching of Scripture and the sciences bless the discernment of patterns and practices that will allow the flourishing of all parties: congregations, councils and pastors.

The specific settings for the workshop designed in this project involved a wide range of church leaders—in terms of education, experience, career, work, socio-economic status, theological training, biblical literacy, gender, race—gathered for a time of training. The occasions were neutral, that is, not in response to a particular conflict or identified need. These were general occasions of gathering together for training with potential to improve the health of churches. The researcher presented organizational wisdom, anchored in Scripture, enriched by Scripture, and in step with Scripture’s teaching. The material needed to have specific merit so that it could stand alone as a workshop and it needed to teach a way of engaging with God’s truth encapsulated both by wisdom “out there” and the wisdom that is in Scripture. In this way there was both a message and a method. The workshop needed to be both accessible and educational.

Importance of the Project

The current project represents the culmination of a long journey in the life and thinking of the researcher. Shortly after his ordination into the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1981, the denomination began to employ the motto: “400,000 by 2000.” This was a membership growth target that spurred significant debate throughout the denomination and proved to be a deep challenge to the newly ordained pastor. The motto seemed more suitable to a business organization than to the organized church of Jesus. The researcher had a profound philosophical and theological bias against the use of business principles in the context of the church.

This bias was rooted in the teaching of Dutch philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd who articulated the concept of “sphere sovereignty.”² Basically he asserted that there are specific key values and expertise in the various spheres of life which can be identified and ought to be respected. So while there is for example, a numeric dimension to every sphere, it would be a mistake to deal with a specific sphere such as biology strictly in terms of numbers; and while there is a biological dimension to every sphere, it would be a mistake to deal with a specific sphere such as business strictly in terms of biology. Similarly in the sphere of the church there are principles peculiar to the church that hold sway, rather than applying principles of business as though they apply directly and equally well in this other sphere. Such application would amount to a reductionism whereby the church is reduced to being and functioning as if it were essentially a business.

The bias of the researcher was rooted positively in a desire to have a robust ecclesiology, but also negatively in an unfair caricature of organized business. The researcher’s point of view was that though there might be some (albeit very limited) value in utilizing business principles, what needed emphasizing and exploring was a healthy ecclesiology: that which Scripture teaches with respect to the nature of the church, her core identity and values, her mission and her methods. In this bias, a key business value such as efficiency did not seem to resonate with the manner in which Scripture revealed God to be accomplishing his goals! God’s approach seemed decidedly inefficient. It took centuries and centuries for God to finally send Jesus Christ into the world. And when at long last that decisive moment occurred, the mission of God was

² Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1969), 101-106.

given into the hands of ordinary men and women without much worldly power. By delegating the divine mission in this way God's method did not place a high value on efficiency.

Similarly, in a teaching of Jesus such as the parable of the sower, concerns about efficiency seemed unimportant and measurable bottom-lines seem not so much manageable as mysterious. Though part of God's redemptive enterprise, the church seemed to the researcher to be about building a certain kind of community within the context of a hostile environment. Marketplace concepts and values such as the size of the community, rate of growth, providing customer service and finding niche markets for consumers seemed to strike against the teaching of Jesus. Jesus invited people to take up their crosses and follow him along a path of suffering, to lose their lives so that they might once again find them. Rather than having the church's orientation focused on meeting the needs of people, the teaching of Jesus seemed to insist on people reorienting themselves around the call of God. The researcher's perception instinctively pitted what seemed to be competing views as opposites requiring a choice: either one or the other.

In retrospect, the researcher's assessment was largely based on a caricature of the business model as motivated by profit, cutthroat in its methodology, pragmatic in its core, with health defined strictly in terms of successful achievement of measurable goals. In terms of the church this meant an emphasis on growth in membership, growth in staff, growth in services provided (ministries), and growth in financial income and physical plant. External measurable growth was the goal.

There are two things which became clearer to the researcher over the years. First, there are relational and organizational insights which provide wisdom that benefits both

organized business enterprises as well as organized churches. Although churches and businesses are not identical, there are organizational similarities which can be helpful to identify and consider. Secondly, while business enterprises are indeed concerned with making profit, healthy and thriving businesses pay significant attention to a broad range of issues including the wellbeing of their employees at a number of levels. The researcher came to realize that there is organizational wisdom which is broader than the categories of business or ecclesiastical organizations. Such wisdom finds value and usefulness in many kinds of organizations including businesses, churches, schools, hospitals and governments. Jim Collins' monograph *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, as well as *Good to Great, Built to Last, Great by Choice and How the Mighty Fall* which he also had a hand in writing, are examples of works which examine a variety of organized businesses and offer insights and wisdom readily transferrable to other organizations such as churches. So too is the source chosen for use in the project workshop, Lee Bolman and Terrence E. Deal's *Reframing Organizations*.

This project afforded the opportunity to engage organizational insights and wisdom from a secular source as well as organizational insights and wisdom from the Scripture in an integrating fashion. Rather than viewing these sources as competing with each other the intent was to view these sources as complementary. In this way, the development of this project mirrored the development within the researcher's personal journey.

The researcher's context for ministry is both constant and changing. Consultations consistently explore the dynamics of parish ministry involving the intertwining relationships of pastors, church councils, staff and congregation members, and the ways

in which these relationships are affected by organizational structure and dynamics. No matter the locale, the makeup of the council membership or the person of the pastor, there is something familiar and constant about this setting in terms of the dynamics and relationships in play. What is different about each setting is the way the various pieces of the puzzle interlock, the weight which individual puzzle pieces carry, the number of pieces to the puzzle which are in view and accessible, as well as those that are not.

This dynamic of “constant and changing” can be used to describe more. A constant is that those in positions of leadership are committed to the Christian faith and to the authority of Scripture as a source of wisdom for the life of the church. What changes from one council to another, and from one person to the next, is the accent of the Christian and Reformed faith which is predominant. While being attentive to these accents, it is necessary to find sources of wisdom which are applicable in a range of settings, and which are readily acknowledged as being credible.

For both a church and a consulting pastor it is desirable that wisdom coming from various sources is complementary. For both a church and a consulting pastor this complementarity is richest when there is organizational wisdom that is echoed or illuminated by biblical wisdom that results in a confluence of perspective. Such a confluence allows a church to not merely assume some biblical anchoring, but to see it and experience it as current, living reality. In such moments Scripture frames, informs, enriches and challenges self-understanding as well as the methods and patterns of being the church. And such moments affirm the fact that Scripture’s teaching illumines and strengthens wisdom gleaned from other organizational sources, thus blessing the church doubly.

A project such as this is of value to the church at large. It seeks to utilize the best available organizational wisdom and the best available Scriptural wisdom by allowing them to dialogue together and to explore the ways in which they may be integrated. This project demonstrates an ongoing respect for the teaching of Scripture as formative and authoritative for issues of ecclesiological identity and practice. It also recognizes the value of God-given wisdom wherever it may be found. As a further value it serves to assist the church in staying grounded as an organization which is both similar to other organizations, but is also unique as the body of Christ. Finally, it provides a model of integration which may be useful in a variety of contexts: conversations, trainings and consultations.

CHAPTER TWO: TRACING THE THEME OF HOSPITALITY IN SCRIPTURE

Introduction

In the book *Engaging God's World*, Cornelius Plantinga says,

The mission of Jesus—what the Swiss theologian Karl Barth called ‘the way of the Son of God into the far country’—was to empty himself for the sake of others. In the mystery of the cross, the humiliating death of Jesus Christ was actually a triumph of self-giving love, an ‘atoning sacrifice ... for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:2). That’s why it brings glory to God. The point is that God’s splendor becomes clearer whenever God or the Son of God powerfully spends himself in order to cause others to flourish. According to the kingdom’s way of life, self-expenditure of this kind is true Lordship.¹

Plantinga suggests that the kind of love which is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus and the death of Jesus, is a love which is evident all along, even at the very beginning “when God graciously made room in the universe for other kinds of beings.”² Or as Paul Wadell says, “If to love someone is to make a place for her or him in our lives, then God is the exemplary lover because God makes a place for all of us—indeed, the whole of creation—in the divine life.”³

What is so powerfully clear in the passion of Christ is that God’s heart has room for others, longs for the well-being of others, and God’s heart leads him to spend himself for the sake of others. Such provision and passion for the well-being of others may be

¹ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 19-20.

² Plantinga, 23.

³ Paul Wadell, “Toward a Welcoming Congregation,” *Christian Reflection* (Waco, TX: Center for Christian Ethics, 2007), 82.

defined as hospitality. This revelation of God’s heart can be traced throughout the Scriptures, and is enormously suggestive for understanding ourselves as human beings created in the image of God. Plantinga describes Genesis as follows:

The account tells us of rhythmic bursts of work in which God creates vegetation, birds, fish, and livestock ‘according to their kinds.’ Then, in describing the events of the sixth day, the account shifts into a majestic first-person plural, a cohortative. ‘Let us create,’ says God. The narrative signals us that that something weighty is about to be created—something created not according to *its* kind, but almost according to *God’s* kind. It’s not as if God procreates as the birds and fish do. And yet at the end of the week God does create entities that are impressively like himself, a pair of persons who can live in society and who can use their gifts to cause others to flourish.⁴

The capacity and desire to make room for others, as well as to spend oneself so as to cause others to flourish are relevant to an understanding of God and to an understanding of humanity. “Hospitality is a lens through which we can read and understand much of the gospel, and a practice by which we can welcome Jesus himself.”⁵ Gaining a sense of the pervasive way in which the theme of hospitality is present in the story of Scripture gives weight to the use of hospitality as an additional and especially appropriate lens for use in viewing the church as an organization.

A key dimension of the biblical theme of hospitality is the notion of spending one’s resources for the sake of another’s flourishing. The focus is away from oneself and towards the wellbeing, even the flourishing of others. Healthy pastor-church relationships demonstrate mutuality in this: pastors desire to see their congregations flourish, and congregations desire to see their pastors flourish. When this mutual concern for the other is present, both parties flourish.

⁴ Plantinga, 28.

⁵ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

The theme of hospitality is particularly appropriate because in the researcher's context as a consulting pastor, the opposite experience was frequent and painful. As relationships deteriorate and conflict intensifies, hospitality is replaced by hostility. The relationship does not seem so much a covenant between parties interested in the flourishing of the other, but a contract between adversarial employer and employee. By surveying the biblical theme of hospitality, the researcher is exploring a theme which sets a healthy framework for the relationship between pastors and congregations. But more than a framework, hospitality also describes an inner attitude that fuels the practical, day-to-day conduct so crucial in building and maintaining the healthy relationships which leadership requires.

In conjunction with this focus on the flourishing of the other, the biblical theme of hospitality is well-suited for partnering with the organizational wisdom of Bolman and Deal. As Chapter 3 makes clear, the four-lens model described in their book *Reframing Organizations* is a helpful tool designed to assist in the flourishing of an organization and those who are employed within the organization.

In what follows, the theme of hospitality will be traced in a survey of the Scriptures. It will be illustrative rather than exhaustive, but will demonstrate that “*hospitality* is at the center of both creation and the history of salvation.”⁶ The New Testament passages which speak of the gifts given to the church will be highlighted because of their particular relevance to this project. Jesus intended that his body would be given the gifts necessary for it to flourish.

⁶ Kang-Yup Na, “Hospitality from Genesis to Revelation,” *The Living Pulpit*, (Summer 2013): 17.

A Survey of the Biblical Narrative Seen through the Lens of Hospitality

Genesis 1 and 2

The first chapter of the biblical narrative describes the creation of all things as an utterly free act of God who imposed a gracious order on what was chaos. He provided a suitable framework, structure and resources necessary for that which is living to thrive.

Walter Brueggemann notes in his commentary on Genesis 1:

There is a common inclination to confine the matter of God's grace to individual, guilt-related issues of morality. But this text affirms graciousness on the part of God as his transforming disposition towards his whole world. Creation faith is the church's confession that all of life is characterized by graciousness. Well-being is a gift which forms the context for our life of obedience and thanksgiving ... God's movement towards creation is unceasing generosity.⁷

A formative and foundational expression of this generosity is God's rich provision of food for animals and humans on the sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:29-30).⁸

In the second chapter of the biblical story, this generous provision of resources comes more sharply into focus. The garden is described as a place which was lush and green, with four rivers providing sufficient water (Gen 2:10) and a whole variety of trees that not only were fruitful, but pleasing to the eye. The garden was well-watered by four connected rivers; the garden's earth was rich with resources: gold, onyx and aromatic resin.

Into this garden, God placed the man, Adam. God provided a place rich with provisions for his wellbeing. God provided the man with work, so that his presence in the garden was purposeful.⁹ God's care for those whom he created was underlined when the

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press), 27-28.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

⁹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (London, UK: Tyndale Press, 1967), 61.

text notes that God observed “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). “Against the sevenfold refrain of ‘and God saw that it was (very) good’ in chap. 1, the divine observation that something was not right with man’s situation is startling. It alerts the reader to the importance of companionship for man.”¹⁰ It was as though the Lord God stepped back and reviewed his creative work, intending for everything to flourish as well as could be possible. The subsequent narrative describes the lengths to which God went in order to provide Adam with a suitable helper. No other creature could serve in this capacity: God created a new being from the rib of Adam.

The context of the story suggests this moment as a grand example of the generous heart of God. “The good news of the episode is that the well-being of the man requires a fresh creative act of God ... The woman is also God’s free creation.”¹¹ It is not hard to imagine the Lord God holding out his arm to the woman and escorting her with delight, presenting her to Adam as a sure sign of his magnanimous heart.¹² God wanted this human creature to flourish. He provided Adam with every good thing: provisions, resources, purpose— and an other. God provided a partner with whom Adam could share intimacy. “The naming of the animals, a scene which portrays man as monarch of all he surveys, poignantly reveals him as a social being, made for fellowship, not power: he will not live until he loves, giving himself away (24) to another on his own level. So the woman is presented wholly as his partner and counterpart.”¹³

¹⁰ Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 68.

¹¹ Brueggemann, 47.

¹² Wenham, 69. Wenham suggests that Adam’s passivity in the match-making process fits with a society familiar with arranged marriages.

¹³ Kidner, 65.

At the conclusion of the first two chapters of Genesis the overall picture is one of a generous Creator. God not only creates space for others but then creates these others to fill that space—and provides liberally with a view to these creatures flourishing. God’s tilt was outward, away from himself, and towards the flourishing of others. Remarkably, when these others are flourishing, then God as God is flourishing. It is the way God is. It is who God is. It is what God does.¹⁴

When God is identified and portrayed as the great Giver, human beings are implicitly identified as blessed Receivers. As Kang-Yup Na describes it,

Pushed to the origins of human beings, we may entertain the significance of God’s creative activity itself as an act of hospitality in the sense that God’s generous spirit generates all of reality; that is to say, God is the ultimate host creating and inviting *the other*, in this case, the first human beings, into a hospitable relationship expressed in the provision of home and food in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:29-30)... In a profound sense, God, in creation, provides and models hospitality for the first human beings and for all subsequent humanity.¹⁵

Presumably, when one remembers that God created humankind in his image, the implication is that there is some kind of resemblance between the Creator and these human creatures—be it in terms of capacity, function, manner, appearance or some other way. Gordon Wenham refers to five main solutions which have been proposed relative to understanding what the image of God actually means.¹⁶ If, as Cornelius Plantinga suggests, generosity and a tilt towards the flourishing of others fills the heart of God, perhaps this too may describe some of what it means to be created in the image of God.¹⁷

¹⁴ Plantinga, 19-22.

¹⁵ Na, 20.

¹⁶ Wenham, 29-32.

¹⁷ Plantinga, 28.

The picture of a God who holds nothing back in the desire to have every creature flourish becomes a picture of this man and this woman, naked in each other's presence and without shame or fear: they hold nothing back from each other. They are in this respect, truly images of the hospitable God.

Genesis 3

There is something interruptive about this next chapter in the Genesis narrative.¹⁸ At the conclusion of Genesis 2 Adam and Eve were delightfully together, naked and without shame. It would have been altogether natural to have the first verses of chapter 4 follow: "Adam lay with his wife Eve and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain" (4:1). Instead, the intimate and fearless *shalom* of the garden revealed the mysterious presence of the serpent "more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made" (Genesis 3:1), and a troubling conversation ensued.

The serpent, though one of the wild animals created by the Lord God, revealed an inclination towards sabotage.¹⁹ That which the serpent asked and asserted challenged the essence of what the creation narrative revealed. The serpent questioned the revelation of God as a generous, hospitable being who longed for others to flourish.²⁰ The serpent's suggestion that God merely posed as a generous, hospitable Creator planted a seed of mistrust. In fact, according to the serpent there is something disingenuous about God. The serpent raised a question about that tree and the command of God concerning it. In the conversation between the serpent and the woman (Gen3:1-5),

¹⁸ Brueggemann, 40. Brueggemann makes the case that Genesis 2:4a-3:24 must be read together as a connected narrative because of what he calls "dramatic coherence." This does not change the interruptive nature of chapter 3, but may in fact highlight it.

¹⁹ Wenham, 72-73.

²⁰ Wenham, 73.

On first reading at least, God seems to have tried to deceive his creatures by issuing threats he subsequently did not fulfill. The snake told the truth, not the Lord God. But as commentators have often pointed out, the snake was uttering half-truths. There is a subtle ambiguity in his words which warrants describing him as ‘shrewd.’²¹

The serpent challenged the revelation of God’s hospitable heart, suggesting that God was not an open-handed, generous Giver, but a tight-fisted, selfish Withholder.²² The command which forbade eating from that one tree was an example of God the Withholder. God had knowledge of both good and evil, and God did not want humankind to share in that knowledge and become like God. Even though God created male and female in the image of God, according to the serpent this command revealed a troubling nuance regarding God’s presenting image.²³

When God was presented as the great Giver, human beings knew themselves to be blessed Receivers. But when God was presented as a Withholder, human beings responded by becoming Takers (Gen.3:5-6). In a relationship of giving and receiving, the movement is one towards the other: a coming together, a sharing. In a relationship of withholding and taking, the movement is that of pulling back, away from the other. Movements towards the other include reaching towards, but only for the purpose of pulling back²⁴.

²¹ Wenham, 74.

²² The naming of God as “Giver” and “Withholder” juxtaposed with the naming of the human as “Receiver” and “Taker” as a way of understanding the Genesis 3 narrative was introduced to the researcher in a classroom lecture by Rev. Dr. Ron Rolheiser at Newman Theological College in the fall of 1986 in a course entitled “Contemporary Issues in the Theology of God.”

²³Brueggemann, 47-48.

²⁴ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 63-110. Nouwen describes the movement from hostility to hospitality.

When the eyes of the man and woman were opened, they immediately felt the need to protect themselves from each other and from the Lord God. Created in the image of God, now that they identified God as a Withholder they themselves became Withholders. Trust and intimacy were compromised by fear and mistrust. Hospitality was sabotaged by hostility; generosity complicated by selfishness.

The speech of the indicted couple is revealing, for it is all “I.” Therein lies the primal offense: “I heard..., I was afraid..., I was naked; I hid..., I ate..., I ate” (3:10-13). Their own speech indicts them. It makes clear that their preoccupation with the Gardener, with his vocation, his permission, his prohibition, has been given up. Now the preoccupation is “I.”²⁵

The history of life after the Fall may be described in terms of Taking and Withholding more so than Giving and Receiving. A profoundly deep and simple way of understanding the dynamics of human sinfulness may be framed in these terms: humans do not receive with thanks as deeply as they ought, and perceive God as Withholding. Therefore humans take what is not theirs to take, be it liberties, possessions or pride, and withhold from God, from others, and from themselves that which God has resourced them to give. Walter Brueggemann describes the creation of this world as an act of graciousness, thus making clear that grace goes beyond a response of God towards any sin or sinfulness of humankind. He says,

God is the one who does not grasp. And human persons in his image are those who do not grasp. Grasping power cannot create. Grasping power cannot enhance creation. As we shall see in Gen. 2-3, grasping brings death....

Creation is God’s decision not to look after himself but to focus his energies and purposes on the creation.²⁶

²⁵ Brueggemann, 49.

²⁶ Brueggemann, 34.

As the third chapter of Genesis concludes, a series of things are mentioned which all reveal something of the inclination of God's heart. There were dreadful consequences to humankind's sin, but these consequences would not be God's last word. The serpent was cursed and informed that the relationship between serpent and humankind would implode. The woman learned that childbearing would be very painful (a mother's body withholding delivery) but children would be born and life would continue. The man learned that work would be very hard because the earth would yield its fruit from among thorns and thistles (the earth withholding, yielding its produce begrudgingly).²⁷ Hard as it would be, children would be born, work would be productive and there would be hope for an end to the dreadful alliance between serpent and humanity. "Eve," Adam's name for his wife was filled with hope.²⁸ The Lord's provision of clothing was a gracious provision for their need.²⁹ Even withholding the Garden of Eden and the tree of life from humanity was a provision for their ultimate wellbeing. Brueggemann's reflections on the consequences of humankind's disobedience are helpful:

But the Gardener cares for his garden. Everything hinges on that....

Perhaps the sentence of 3:8-19 is heavy. But it is less than promised, less than legitimate. The miracle is not that they are punished, but they live. Graciousness in this narrative is not just in verse 21, after the sentence. God's grace is given in the very sentence itself....

The sentence is life apart from the goodness of the garden, life in conflict filled with pain, with sweat, and most interestingly, with the distortion of desire (3:16). But it is nonetheless life when death is clearly indicated.³⁰

²⁷ Wenham, 89. Wenham hints at the toil of labor required by women in childbirth and by men in efforts at finding sustenance. But no amount of toil can prevent mortality.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, 72.

²⁹ Brueggemann, 50.

³⁰ Brueggemann, 49-50.

As the narrative of Genesis 3 unfolds, the revelation of a God whose heart tilts towards the flourishing of his creatures continues. The creation is now marred, and *shalom* is now broken, but all is not lost. Provision will still come, life will continue and a seed of hope has been planted. Rather than an angry eruption, or a divine erasure of a heart-breaking first “draft”—the story continues. There continues to be room in God’s heart for the flourishing of this creation and the abundant provision of life.

Images of Desert and Oasis

Throughout the Old Testament the images of desert and oasis serve as frequent counterpoints. “In the OT blessing is associated with inhabited and cultivated land; the wilderness is the place of the curse. In the wilderness there is neither seed nor fruit; water nor growth. Man cannot live there. Only frightening and unwanted kinds of animals dwell there.”³¹ The desert was a place inhospitable to life. Brueggemann describes the wilderness as “the arena of chaos” and says that “to be placed in the wilderness is to be cast into the land of the enemy—cosmic, natural, historical—without any of the props or resources that give life order and meaning.”³² An oasis, on the other hand, was a place of palm trees, water and refuge: hospitable towards life.

There was also a second set of counterpoints which matched the description of desert and oasis: Egypt during the days of Israel’s slavery to Pharaoh was desert-like. Egypt was the place where the ruler’s power was used to inflict hardship, oppression and death. Egypt was a place inhospitable towards the children of Israel; a place where life was made bitter by hard service, and where children were thrown into the Nile (Ex 3:7-

³¹ William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 61.

³² Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977), 29.

10). But the land of promise was described in oasis-like terms as a place hospitable towards the children of Israel. Here was a place where people could flourish: a land flowing with milk and honey. Here was a land which Moses described as richly resourced:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills (Deut. 8:7-9).

Ironically, mere weeks after experiencing the miracle of the Red Sea crossing, the Israelites view of reality was reversed. Their experience in the desert overwhelmed them to the point that they imagined life as slaves in Egypt as a time of oasis and a place hospitable to life. “There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (Exodus 16:2-3). The miracle of their rescue from tyranny, and the blessing of life under a ruler intent on leading them to a place where they might flourish—escaped them.

This grumbling was followed by the Lord God providing both a vast amount of meat as well as a regular provision of manna which sustained the children of Israel through all their years in the desert (Ex 16:11-36). This was a revelation and an experience of the way in which the Lord God used his power to provide for the life and wellbeing of his people. Rather than a place of judgment, God’s people were able to experience the grace of life sustained. Commenting on Numbers, Richard Friedman aptly notes that the Hebrew name for this book in the canon is “In the Wilderness.” He identifies a paradox which the wilderness presents:

The wilderness depiction conveys two quite different qualities. On the one hand, the wilderness years constitute a kind of ideal. The people’s life is orderly,

protected, close to God. It is a period of incubation, of nurturing. All is provided: food, water, direction. The miraculous is the norm. At the same time, though, the wilderness is depicted as terrible. Conditions are bad. The environment is hostile. There is rebellion from within and fighting with peoples whom they encounter on the way. There are power struggles and fear.³³

Images of land which is inhospitable to life (desert-like) and land which is hospitable to life (oasis-like) recur throughout the Old Testament in the imagery of the prophets. The judgment of God is often portrayed using desert imagery, while the blessing of God is portrayed by deserts being transformed into oases. Isaiah, for example, in chapters 34 and 35 juxtaposes a prophecy of judgment and of redemption using the wilderness as a foil. The wilderness is described as the fate of Edom: “a return to wilderness, with nettles and thistles, a haunt of jackals”³⁴ (Isa. 34:9-14).

This is followed immediately by Isaiah’s description of redemption and the accompanying joy of the redeemed, in language which pictures a desert transformed into a hospitable, flourishing place of life (Isa 35:1-10). As Edward Young points out, “Isaiah delights in contrasts...what was a desert will become a place on which rich flowers are springing and luxuriant growth covers the ground....The desert and dry land represent the land devastated by the enemy. It is a land that will now come to life.

The fact that these descriptions of desert and oasis are situated so closely to each other in Isaiah sparks the observation of John Oswalt that the precise referents for “desert” and “oasis” may be an open question. Rather, these terms are symbolic and function as metaphors able to be applied at various times and in various places. In his commentary on Isaiah 34 and 35 Oswalt says that “just as Edom in ch.34 represented the

³³ Richard E. Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2001), 423.

³⁴ Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 238.

nations in general, so here the desert represents the total world: physical, social, and spiritual, which, human arrogance having destroyed, God in his grace can make to bloom. Whereas trusting the nations results in a desert, trusting God results in a garden.”³⁵

Sinai Covenant

The shape of life within the community of God’s Old Testament people was prescribed by the provisions of the Sinai covenant. Immediately prior to the Israelites entering the land of promise, those provisions were reviewed. The blessings of covenant obedience were summed up as a flourishing life:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out (Deut. 28:3-6).

But the disposition of God’s heart towards those who rejected his rule and did not keep his covenant would be just opposite: life would not flourish.

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out (Deut. 28:16-19).

This stark contrast between blessing and curse can make the terms of this covenant appear as a cold contract between a king and his subjects. In fact, Richard Friedman notes that the list of curses in Deuteronomy 28 is four times longer than the list of blessings, and in Leviticus 26 it is three times as long. But Friedman explores the meaning of this disparity by wondering whether this conveys that threats of punishment were more

³⁵ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 620.

effective than promises of reward—or—that threats were less effective and therefore needed more repetition! He summarizes his comments by noting this:

The remarkable thing is that, following all these blessings and curses, Moses speaks beautifully for two chapters about why they people should keep the covenant for *itself*. The blessings and curses are there out of a realistic recognition of human psychology: rewards and punishments are effective tools of instruction from childhood and up. But the aim is higher: that humans should come to see that what is being put in their hands is “life” and “good” and “love” (Deut. 30:15-16).³⁶

Friedman goes on to note that as the Torah nears its conclusion, there are a whole cluster of allusions which remind the reader of the beginning of the Torah. The call to choose life in Deuteronomy 30:19-20 is a call to be wise: “Using the knowledge of good and bad, and choosing to do good, is the path back to life.... As the book of Proverbs says about knowledge and wisdom: ‘It is a tree of life.’ And Jews sing this verse from Proverbs each Sabbath after reading the Torah and returning it to the ark.”³⁷

This reality of a God who demands obedience and who spells out consequences was present already in the Garden of Eden. In commenting on the story of Adam and Eve eating from the tree which had been forbidden them, Brueggemann describes the narrative as “an assertion that the recognition and honoring of boundaries leads to well-being.”³⁸ There is a distinction between the Creator and the creation which is not to be defined merely in terms of power differential which can be bridged by increased knowledge. “The God announced in this story is not a petty god who jealously guards holy secrets or who eagerly punishes the disobedient.”³⁹

³⁶ Friedman, 648.

³⁷ Friedman, 660.

³⁸ Brueggemann, 52.

³⁹ Brueggemann, 53.

What was true for Israel after Sinai was already true in the Garden of Eden:

There is something about life which remains hidden and inscrutable and which will not be trampled upon by human power or knowledge....

So what is urged, if not knowledge? Ignorance? No, not ignorance, but trust. It is illuminating to exchange the *knowledge/obedience* dialectic for the antithesis of *wisdom and foolishness*.⁴⁰

Understanding this reality about the relationship between God and God's people eliminates the sense of conditional contract, and restores the sense of gratitude appropriate to a God intent on having others flourish.

The revelation of God's hospitable heart may also be noted in specific provisions recorded in Deuteronomy. Within the core summary of God's law familiarly known as the Ten Commandments there was this Sabbath day commentary: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 5:14-15).

Throughout the Torah there is a profound and consistent concern for the wellbeing of those who were disenfranchised and vulnerable. In Leviticus 19 there were a variety of instructions which pertained to the fair treatment of those who were poor, widowed, orphaned, alien, deaf, blind, aged—in any way vulnerable. The Lord God intended that his people deal with each other and indeed, with all others—in ways which reflected his own heart. Hospitality "was recognized as a sacred duty throughout the ancient eastern world. What was distinctive to Israelite society was the explicit legislation regarding the protection of and provision for the resident alien."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Brueggemann, 53.

⁴¹ Pohl, 28.

One of the consistent refrains within the latter prophets was the call for Israel and Judah to live in ways which honored this essential value of God. Even as late a prophecy as Isaiah 58 cried out for a righteousness which resonated with God's heart for those in need. To be concerned about the wellbeing of others demonstrated the kind of spacious heart which God longed to see reflected in the lives of his people.

Israel's obligation to care was nurtured by an emphasis on its own experience as an alien and by reflection on God's gracious character. The teachings of the Law, the warnings of punishment for disobedience, and the promise of blessing on obedience reinforced Israelite hospitality toward strangers.⁴²

Old Testament Narrative Episodes

Scattered throughout the Old Testament narrative are episodes in which the theme of hospitality plays a significant role. "Acts of hospitality and inhospitality in the biblical narratives tended to reveal and reflect the underlying good or evil of a person or community. Frequently these acts demonstrated covenantal loyalty to the God of Israel."⁴³ Early on in the book of Genesis chapter 19 is the troubling episode in Sodom when Lot was visited by two strangers, and the wickedness of the men in that city was evidenced by their utterly inhospitable demand that Lot hand over these strangers to them.⁴⁴

More positively, the book of Ruth portrayed Boaz to be a model Israelite. Robert Hubbard notes that "a foreign woman who customarily would draw water for Israelites was welcome to drink water drawn by Israelites.... The gesture marked a very generous,

⁴² Pohl, 29.

⁴³ Pohl, 26.

⁴⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, "Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to his Righteousness," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104/2 (1985): 289-291.

unexpected concession.”⁴⁵ Boaz exemplified what a covenant-keeping Israelite man looked like.⁴⁶ His instructions to his men forbidding their touch, as well as specific instructions to extract stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up without rebuke, (Ruth 2:4-16) were remarkable.⁴⁷

This kindness of Boaz toward a foreigner exhibited a thorough and sweeping generosity which reflected that of God.⁴⁸ Ultimately Ruth received refuge and hospitality of a lasting kind, when she asked Boaz to make room for her in his life. Ruth found space not only within the life of Boaz, but within the family of God, becoming a key figure in the line of David.⁴⁹ Ruth flourished, as did Naomi (Ruth 4:16).

Two episodes within the story of David provide pointed examples of the practice of hospitality. The narrative involving Nabal and Abigail recorded in 1 Samuel 25 recounted David’s request for generosity and Nabal’s inhospitable response.⁵⁰ Abigail’s beautiful wisdom was portrayed by her generous words and actions; David’s generosity was described in terms of his protective care, and Abigail’s wisdom was instrumental in preventing David from acting inhospitably.

⁴⁵ Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 160.

⁴⁶ Hubbard, 227-8.

⁴⁷ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 58,61.

⁴⁸ Hubbard, 173.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey E. Wood, “Ruth, Lamentations,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* Vol.1, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 609.

⁵⁰ Eugene Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 120-121.

The second episode from the story of David involved Saul's lamed grandson Mephibosheth who enjoyed the hospitality of David (11 Sam 9),⁵¹ so unlike David's own experience of inhospitableness when at Saul's table (1 Sam 18-20). Once again there is the juxtaposition of hospitable and inhospitable behavior.⁵²

The narratives which speak about the ministry of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, provide additional instances where the theme of hospitality was front and center. Elijah and Elisha both experienced the hospitable care of women: Elijah by way of a widow and her son (1 Kings 17) and Elisha by way of a wealthy woman who provided an upper room (11 Kings 4). In both cases, these women's hospitable hearts were challenged by the death of their sons but renewed by the revelation of God's life-affirming heart in raising these two sons back to life.⁵³

The God Who Listens

Within Israel's Psalter, there is a pronounced revelation of God as the one who listens. "I love the Lord for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live" (Ps116:1-2). But it is not only the ears of the Lord which are tuned in to human cries and needs. It is also his eyes: the Lord attends to his creatures. "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry" (Psalm 34:15). There is a frequent reference to ears, eyes and also to God's face and heart. Listening is a prime, even foundational, example of hospitable behavior.

⁵¹ H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1964), 300.

⁵² Gnana Robinson, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 109, 200.

⁵³ Pohl, 26.

Henri Nouwen says, “Listening is an art that must be developed, not a technique that can be applied as a monkey wrench to nuts and bolts. It needs the full and real presence of people to each other. It is indeed one of the highest forms of hospitality.”⁵⁴ In the act of listening, a person makes room for another by creating space in one’s person: setting aside one’s own agenda and focus so as to assure that the other is heard.

The revelation of God as the great Listener which the Psalter highlights also calls to mind the importance of this reality throughout Israel’s history. The great rescue of God’s people from Egypt and the covenant-making at Sinai celebrated in so many psalms, were preceded by this revelation:

The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them (Exodus 2:23-25).

This is followed closely by these words of the Lord to Moses, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering” (Exodus 3:7). God’s eyes and ears and heart worked together in revealing his hospitable attitude towards Israel.

Far beyond the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when Isaiah portrayed the new heavens and new earth, God’s capacity for listening was highlighted. Humanity will be heard with unimaginable clarity and speed because of the attentiveness of the Lord God: “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear” (Is 65:24).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Nouwen, 95.

⁵⁵ John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 201. Prayer will be unnecessary!

Redemption as Revealed in Jesus Christ

Philippians 2:1-11

Although the gospels would be the next place to trace the biblical theme of hospitality sequentially, there is merit in beginning with Philippians 2, and an early hymn which summarizes the trajectory of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.⁵⁶ This will function for the New Testament portion of this survey in the manner of an overture to a symphony, establishing the key melody whose strains can be heard throughout. This familiar Pauline passage has often been illustrated by the use of a parabola: the infinitely great Son of God humbled himself all the way to death on a cross, and then was exalted to an infinitely high place.⁵⁷ This is in keeping with the trajectory of a parabola, whose arms extend into infinity, but whose low point can be clearly identified and defined. It is the humility and the willingness to be humbled to this astounding degree which is highlighted. "The grave of Christ was a cave, not a tunnel. Christ acted in our behalf without view of gain. That is precisely what God has exalted and vindicated: self-denying service for others to the point of death with no claim of return, no eye upon a reward."⁵⁸

Unlike the typical parabola graph, although the point of Christ's deepest humility may be clearly identified, it certainly cannot be measured.⁵⁹ Christ's attitude or hospitable tilt is identified as the impetus for this trajectory: "in humility consider others

⁵⁶ Fred Craddock, *Philippians* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 40-43.

⁵⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1971), 125-126.

⁵⁸ Craddock, 42.

⁵⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "The Epistle to the Philippians" *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* Vol. 2, ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R.E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 250-251.

better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:3-4).

Jesus’ attitude displays a basic tilt towards the flourishing of those around him. This is the heart of hospitality. The extent of Christ’s humiliation (all the way to death on a cross) is the extent to which Christ used his resources for the benefit of the wellbeing of others. Fitzmyer says, “Jesus did not treat the status of divine glory (i.e. being equal to God) as a privilege or possession to be clutched so tenaciously that it might be exploited in the future; it was not for him a miser’s booty.”⁶⁰ Jesus made room in his being to the extent that he gave himself entirely, using every ounce of who he was: he emptied himself.

Christ Jesus has revealed the character of God himself. Here is the epitome of God-likeness....

The concern is with divine selflessness: God is not an acquisitive being, grasping and seizing, but self-giving for the sake of others.⁶¹

Gospel passages

There are many gospel passages which speak of God’s concern for the wellbeing of others and the generous way in which God provided. Front and center is the gift of God’s one and only Son as that is summarized in John 3:16. An example from the teaching of Jesus would be the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) and its emphasis on understanding the concept of living as a neighbor. In fact, the gospels are filled with examples of Jesus’ attentiveness to the needs of those who were

⁶⁰ Fitzmyer, 251.

⁶¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 197, 211.

disenfranchised because of various reasons.⁶² Christine Pohl identifies Luke 14 and Matthew 25 as two passages which “shaped the distinction between conventional and Christian hospitality.”⁶³ About Luke 14, Pohl says that the call is to invite those without the “capacity to reciprocate. But in welcoming them one anticipates and reflects the welcome of God.”⁶⁴ Then she goes on to explore Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 about caring for the stranger who may have a variety of faces: poor, sick, imprisoned, naked. Jesus himself provides the commentary about inasmuch as one provides for the least of these, one provides for the King himself.

God’s invitation into the Kingdom is tied to Christian hospitality in this life. This passage sets up a fundamental identification of Jesus with “the least of these” and personally and powerfully connects hospitality toward human beings with care for Jesus... The sight of Jesus does not eclipse the particular human being who stands there in need, but it challenges Christians to offer the most gracious welcome possible.⁶⁵

Hospitality is also underlined when the contours of the life of Jesus are traced as described in the gospels. The familiar detail of Christ’s birth is especially poignant: Christ, who is hospitality incarnate, is wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger because “there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7).⁶⁶ The gospel of John describes it this way: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”

⁶² Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 3-4.

⁶³ Pohl, 20.

⁶⁴ Pohl, 21.

⁶⁵ Pohl, 22.

⁶⁶ R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 419-420. Brown offers a different interpretation, suggesting that the locale was simply incidental, and that there was purposeful intent in having Jesus placed in a manger, connecting this event with words found in Isaiah 1:3.

(John 1:10-11). Christine Pohl notes that “in the Hispanic Christmas tradition of *Las Posadas*...congregations of Christians reenact the story of Mary and Joseph going from door to door to find shelter. They are turned away many times before finding a place where Jesus can be born.”⁶⁷ During the course of his ministry, Jesus described himself as one without a home (Luke 9:57-62).

Ultimately, when Jesus was arrested the inhospitable treatment continued. There was no room for Jesus in the city: those condemned to death by crucifixion were consigned to Golgotha, outside of Jerusalem. And even the bare fact of being condemned to death was a proclamation which declared there was no room for Jesus in the land of the living.⁶⁸

Yet all the while, this is the same Jesus who described what he was doing in this way: “In my Father’s house are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:2-3). So the pattern persists, both in terms of how Jesus conducted his ministry as well as in terms of what he was willing to endure. And, when Jesus spoke of returning to the Father, the pattern of seeking the welfare of others would continue. The revelation of a hospitable God in creation continues in the revelation of both the humbled and exalted Jesus.

Cornelius Plantinga aptly summarizes the ministry of Jesus by describing it this way:

The work of Jesus Christ represents the intelligence and expressiveness of the triune God. According to God’s intelligence, the way to thrive is to help others to

⁶⁷ Pohl, 68.

⁶⁸ This was echoed in a later commentary on these events provided by Hebrews 13:11-14.

thrive; the way to flourish is to cause others to flourish; the way to fulfill yourself is to spend yourself. Jesus himself tried to get this lesson across to his disciples by washing their feet.⁶⁹

Plantinga is not the only one to connect the foot washing story of John 13 with the theme of emptying described in Philippians 2. G.F Hawthorne traces the movement within the foot washing story against the backdrop of the movement described in the Philippians 2 hymn, concluding that “the entire hymn preserves the descent-ascent motif that is prominent in the Gospel story (13:3-17).”⁷⁰

The theme of hospitality can be traced quite clearly and powerfully in key moments of Jesus’ birth, life, death—and, as he prophesied, also in the benefits of his exaltation and return to the Father. Jesus experienced the ungodly opposite of hospitality: hostility. But as Plantinga noted above, Jesus’ work and his person continued to be fully directed towards the flourishing of others.

Lucan Vignettes

There are three episodes within Luke’s writings which are included in this survey of the biblical material. As Luke makes the transition from narrating the life of Jesus to narrating the life of the early church, these particular episodes highlight the theme of hospitality.

Luke 24:13-35

The first of these involved the encounter of the risen Jesus and the two people walking towards Emmaus as told in Luke 24:13-35. These two were confused about the recent events in Jerusalem, and listened as someone walked them through the Scriptures.

⁶⁹ Plantinga, 22.

⁷⁰ Hawthorne, 712.

After walking and talking for a lengthy time with Jesus, and entirely unaware that this stranger was in fact Jesus, the two travelers initiated the practice of hospitality, “an act pregnant with possibilities in the Third Gospel where meals have so often been the site for revelatory discourse...Also in keeping with other meal scenes in the Gospel of Luke, once he is at the table, Jesus’ role shifts. He is no longer the honored guest but the host of the meal.”⁷¹ Fred Craddock suggests that this meal became more than an ordinary meal: “That this meal in Emmaus is the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, is quite evident in the language: “took...blessed...broke...gave...” (v.30; 22:19; 9:16), but other details as well confirm the judgment.”⁷²

It is noted twice that the identity of Jesus was revealed in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:30-35). It was in the sharing of this meal, the quintessential act of hospitality, that they recognized Jesus. And remarkably, it was Jesus who was breaking the bread and giving thanks as the host. This salient detail seemed to point rather directly to the experience of this meal as a sacramental experience. “Eating together, ritualized in the Lord’s Supper, continually reenacts the center of the gospel...A shared meal is the activity most closely tied to the reality of God’s Kingdom, just as it is the most basic expression of hospitality.”⁷³ The sharing of a meal is an experience of fellowship rooted in the welcome extended by Jesus to those who were estranged but are now reconciled, and brought near.

⁷¹ Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 849.

⁷² Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Pres, 1990), 286.

⁷³ Pohl, 30.

This revelation of Jesus who died on the cross but was now risen from the dead, was a revelation of the one who is hospitality incarnate. Joel Green notes that there is a well-defined “inverted parallel structure” in the Emmaus narrative,⁷⁴ with the central, highlighted feature being the declaration of the angels to the women that Jesus was in fact alive.⁷⁵ By way of explaining the Scriptures, together with the breaking of bread, “their eyes were opened” and they recognized the risen Jesus.

Acts 8:26-40

Once more, Luke describes a confused traveler who is returning from Jerusalem, and in need of help to understand the Scriptures. Once again there was someone who opened the Scriptures. Jesus had explained to the Emmaus travelers that the Christ needed to suffer and then enter his glory. Now Philip, beginning with the passage which the Ethiopian eunuch was reading, explained the Scriptures and told the good news about Jesus.

This episode also concluded with what is recognized as a sacrament:⁷⁶ the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized as a member of the family of God. In this experience, the Ethiopian encountered the hospitable heart of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. One who as a eunuch had been despised and considered unclean—an amphibian type of person who belonged to neither gender (Lev 11) was “transformed by this act of Christian

⁷⁴ This literary device will recur when Luke narrates the Philip episode in Acts 8, providing a literary balance.

⁷⁵ Green, 842.

⁷⁶ F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts* (Sheffield, England: Academic Press, 1992), 143.

baptism.⁷⁷ And coincidentally, in reading from Isaiah 53, the Ethiopian heard of themes similar to what those walking towards Emmaus heard: suffering and glory.

It was the hospitable heart of God towards one who was both a foreigner and a eunuch, which had Philip offer the welcoming embrace of God to this man by way of baptism.⁷⁸ The following diagram illustrates the clear ways in which these two episodes are parallel. Both are rich revelations of hospitality; both culminate in an experience of what the church identifies as sacraments. Both speak to the immensity of God's generosity as that was represented and demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ. And, rather strikingly, both the Emmaus narrative and this Philip narrative are constructed in the inverted parallelism known as chiasm.⁷⁹ "By so modelling the Emmaus and eunuch narratives after a common pattern, Luke no doubt betrays his customary concern to demonstrate continuity between the experiences of Jesus and the early church."⁸⁰

Quite apart from the specifics of each narrative's inverted parallel literary structure, it is instructive to note the similarities in literary flow through key phrases and themes as demonstrated below:

⁷⁷ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2008), 72.

⁷⁸ In the relatively close context of the passage the Ethiopian was reading, are the words of Isaiah which speak about the welcome of foreigners and eunuchs into Israel (Isa 56:3-8). F. Scott Spencer makes this connection in *The Portrait of Philip in Acts*, 100-103. While Spencer argues that the hospitality theme is absent in the Philip story in terms of hosting and guesting, the inclusion of a foreign eunuch into the family of God by way of baptism speaks of a more broadly conceived expression and experience of hospitality.

⁷⁹ Spencer, 132.

⁸⁰ Spencer, 142.

Table 2.1 Comparison of key components

<u>Luke 24:13-36</u>	<u>Acts 8:26-40</u>
On the road	On the road
A stranger approaches	A stranger approaches
Are you a visitor to Jerusalem?	Was a visitor in Jerusalem
Did not the Christ have to suffer?	The suffering servant of Isaiah
Explained the Scriptures	Explained the Scriptures
Breaking of bread	Baptism of Philip
Jesus disappeared	Philip disappeared

Acts 4:32-5:11

Nestled inside of these two hospitality-themed sacrament stories is a challenging narrative episode (Luke 4:32-5:11) involving Ananias and Sapphira. It is the story of a husband and wife who conspired to lie about the size of their gift to the church. As a result, they were instantly struck down. At first glance it may seem odd to have this episode highlighted as one which contributes to the biblical theme of hospitality. But on closer examination, this passage proves to be formative and essential. If the church of Jesus Christ hoped to be identified as the church of Jesus, it would need to be generous as God is generous—the God who gave his one and only Son, and the Son who emptied himself.

The first observation about this passage is that it needs to be read as part of a larger narrative, beginning at Acts 4:32.⁸¹ In this way, there is a juxtaposition of the character and generosity of Barnabas, with the character and generosity of Ananias and Sapphira.⁸² Mikeal Parsons claims that “Luke employs the rhetorical device of *synkrisis* in the form of an *encomium/invective*...(which) contrasts two persons, ideas or things and represents an attempt to blame one thing completely and praise the other.”⁸³ The pericope begins with a comment and observation about the church as a whole: “All the believers were one in heart and mind” (Acts 4:32), and concludes with a comment and observation about the church as a whole: “Great fear seized the whole church” (Acts 5:11).

The narrative begins with a description of the church which seems almost airbrushed. “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (4:32). The church was portrayed as a community of resurrection-powered, grace-filled images of God!⁸⁴ This was a community filled with generosity towards one another: resources were recognized as gifts from God, and so the members of the church did not hold onto these resources tightly, but shared freely. “It is part and parcel of Luke’s ideal portrait of the early church in Acts. None of the standards fit the church of our experience...Luke depicted it as a unique period, the new people of God in

⁸¹ W.A. Criswell, *Acts: an exposition Vol. I Chapters 1-8* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 183.

⁸² W. Willimon, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1988), 52-54.

⁸³ Parsons, 72.

⁸⁴ Willimon, 53.

Christ, filled with the Spirit.”⁸⁵ So generous was the presence of God’s Spirit in this community that “there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need” (Acts 4:34-35).

In this community God was known as Giver; people knew themselves as Receivers.⁸⁶ As Luke describes it, “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own but they shared everything they had” (Acts 4:32). Elizabeth Newman’s words are fitting: “Christian hospitality embodies the conviction that to live fully is to receive and to give God’s own plenitude.”⁸⁷ The generosity of God was reflected in the communal experience of these people: there was receiving and there was giving—and they were one in heart and mind. It was so beautiful as to seem Eden-like. And in this Eden-like setting there was a man who was a clear example of being exceptionally generous so as to be a reflection of God’s generosity: an image of God. “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (4:36, 37).

But in Luke’s description of the newly created Christian community, there was suddenly, mysteriously, the intrusive presence of evil.⁸⁸ “Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.” This simple description

⁸⁵ Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Co., 1992), 161.

⁸⁶ The reference to God as Giver and people as Receivers is intended to link this portrayal of the early church to the narrative of Genesis 3 as noted above.

⁸⁷ Newman, *Untamed Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 101.

⁸⁸ The sudden presence of evil in this ideal community interrupts the flow of the narrative in a way similar to what was noted earlier: the narrative of Genesis 3 interrupts what would be a smooth flow of narrative between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 4:1. Acts 5:1-11 interrupts what would otherwise be a smooth transition from 4:37 to 5:12.

sounded innocent and reminiscent of Barnabas, but what followed was not innocent at all: “With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 5:2).

Ananias presented this money as though it represented the full amount of the sale price. In fact, when Peter reprimanded Ananias, Peter made clear that Ananias was under no obligation to donate all of the proceeds of the sale. “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing” (Acts 5:4)? Then follow a cluster of details which cumulatively crescendo as an allusion to the story told in Genesis 3. The connection between the Ananias-Sapphira narrative and the narrative involving Adam, Eve and the serpent in Genesis 3 has been noted frequently.⁸⁹ A number of details from the Ananias-Sapphira narrative call to mind the narrative of Genesis 3. For example, Peter identified the evil as evidence of the presence of Satan.⁹⁰ And the sin of Ananias is identified in verse 3 as lying to the Holy Spirit, and again in verse 4 as a lie to God. The presence of untruth, of Satan, and a sinful husband and wife in the context of an almost Edenic portrait is striking.

But there are still more echoes of Eden. The moment that Ananias’ sin was exposed, he fell down and died. And when, three hours later Peter offered Sapphira the opportunity to speak the truth and she, as her husband before her, also perpetrated the lie, death was once again instant. This called to mind the conversation in the Garden of Eden

⁸⁹ Brian Thomas Hoch, “The Year of Jubilee and OT Ethics” (PhD diss., Durham U., 2010), 284. Hoch cites Macauley, Rackham, Fitzmyer and Derrett as among those making this connection in various ways.

⁹⁰ Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978), 64.

which revolved around questions of death, of opened eyes, of good and evil, and of the genuineness of generosity.

Unlike Adam and Eve, in the account of Ananias and Sapphira, husband and wife are literally struck down that very day. And tellingly, Ananias and Sapphira did what they did with full awareness. They had knowledge of both the good they were doing, and the evil.

Beyond these detailed allusions to the story of the Garden of Eden, the sin of Adam and Eve, and the presence of Satan and his lie—there is a deep and resonant allusion to the themes at work in the story of the Fall. As mentioned earlier, the record of God’s creative work portrayed God as the great Giver, with a generous heart and a hospitable attitude by which he used the power of all his resources to provide for the flourishing of others.

But the serpent challenged that portrayal of God by suggesting that God was in fact a tight-fisted Withholder who uttered the prohibition towards eating from that one tree. Satan accused God of hypocrisy: God acting as if God was generous, but in fact acting only to protect his own position. This same undercurrent of hypocrisy is present in the narrative of Luke.⁹¹

In summary, there are clear allusions in Acts 4:32-5:11 to details from the Garden of Eden story in Genesis 3, as well as clear allusions to the questions and values at work in that story. Luke includes the story of Ananias and Sapphira, juxtaposing this husband and wife with Barnabas, and in the telling of this story, pointing us back to the Garden of

⁹¹ Polhill, 157 and F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 113.

Eden. In so doing, the story of Ananias and Sapphira serves as a paradigmatic episode for the newly created church of Jesus Christ.

To establish this thought more fully, it will be helpful to note that the story of Ananias and Sapphira is frequently connected to the story of Achan found in Joshua 7.⁹² Brian Hoch identifies and examines Acts 5:1-11 as a type-scene in the manner described by Robert Alter.⁹³ He also diagrams the ways in which Genesis 1-3, Joshua 7 and Acts 5:1-11 are similar to each other. Quite apart from his specific interpretation, Hoch's work (Appendix B) establishes that allusions to both the Achan narrative and the Garden of Eden narrative are plausible.⁹⁴

The Achan story is another chilling account of an individual's knowing disobedience. The consequences for the community of God's people Israel were painful, and the judgment of God upon Achan was public and final. There were undercurrents in the story of Achan similar to those in the story of Ananias and Sapphira: illegitimate taking and withholding, and this within the context of God's giving and the people's receiving of the land. Dillon and Fitzmyer note that the Greek word *nosphizo* which is found only once in the New Testament, is found here in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and in the Septuagint rendering of Joshua 7:1 to describe the action of Achan, thus possibly linking these accounts.⁹⁵ Notably, the story of Achan occurred near the beginning of the conquest of the land promised to God's people and soon after the victory

⁹² F.F. Bruce, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 110; Criswell, 184; Rackham, 64; Witherington, 213; Polhill, 156.

⁹³ Hoch, 282-289.

⁹⁴ Hoch, 285-286.

⁹⁵ Richard J. Dillon and Joseph A. Fitzmyer "Acts of the Apostles," *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer and R.E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 180.

over Jericho, the first fruits of the conquest. It was the dawn of a new era, with a new people set to establish a new kingdom in the land. The episode involving Achan served as a warning: the commands of Yahweh were designed to provide for an abundant life. To ignore those commands would result in death.

The story involving Ananias and Sapphira had some similar characteristics. At the very dawn of this new chapter in the story of redemption, with the newborn church learning how to live together as the images of God, and learning how to present themselves to others as the community of redeemed, the sin of Ananias and Sapphira and its punishment made a powerful point. As noted previously, if the church of Jesus Christ hoped to be identified as the church of Jesus, it would need to be generous as God is generous—the God who gave his one and only Son, and the Son who emptied himself. But even more, this generosity would need to be more than an appearance: it would need to be a generosity with integrity. Those anointed and known as the people of Jesus are to make room for each other, and use resources for the flourishing of each other. And it must be more than a veneer of kindness and niceness. It must be heartfelt and true. The new humanity must be new if it is worthy of God’s name. “The church was called to be an alternative community, a sign, a signal to the world that Christ had made possible a way of life together unlike anything the world had seen. Not to confront lies and deceit, greed and self-service among people like Ananias and Sapphira would be the death of the church.”⁹⁶

In summary, this episode highlights these issues of hospitality: a generous spirit which counts others as better than ourselves, and looks not only to personal interests but also to the interests of others. A tilt towards the flourishing of the other is what God has

⁹⁶ Willimon, 54-55.

practiced from the beginning. In fact, one might almost say that when Jesus emptied himself, he did this because this is what God has been doing all along: consistently and persistently. When Jesus took the form of a servant, he was not disguising himself so much as revealing himself.

It was mentioned above that the three Lucan episodes mentioned each contribute to the theme of hospitality, and they are inter-related. There is in the first place, a hint of literary balance in that each of these episodes includes a male-female pairing. As Polhill notes, “In both his Gospel and in Acts, Luke paired women with men, particularly in contexts of witness and discipleship.”⁹⁷ The Philip story identified the Ethiopian eunuch as in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. While she is not present with the eunuch, mention of her along with him provides a consistency for the account of Ananias and Sapphira as well as the account of the two travelers to Emmaus. James Boice has argued that the two Emmaus travelers were a husband and wife.⁹⁸ A secondary note is that the Emmaus narrative includes a direct allusion to the Garden of Eden, in that it was precisely in the act of eating that “their eyes were opened” so as to recognize Jesus, providing a clear link to the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

So the travelers who were on their way from Jerusalem, walking towards Emmaus and riding towards Gaza, had the Scriptures opened up for them, and both conversations resulted in the travelers being confronted with the person of Jesus. There was a baptism and there was a breaking of bread: the hospitable heart of God was personified in Jesus, whose death on the cross revealed the generosity of God par excellence. And then,

⁹⁷ Polhill, 156.

⁹⁸ James Boice, “The Way to Emmaus” *Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals* (2010), <http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/the-bible-study-hour/read/articles/way-to-emmaus>, (accessed November 1, 2013).

nestled within the embrace of these two stories, is the account of Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira: the generous, hospitable heart of God highlighted once more, and underlined as a core value for the fledgling New Testament church. Although this episode often seems difficult at cursory glance, a careful reading of the text suggests that it is a powerful call for the church to have integrity. The church is that people who serve to represent her God: to make room for others in the way that God makes room for others, generously. In a profoundly tragic, teachable moment, God called and still calls the church to the serious holiness of genuine hospitality.

Gifts from the Ascended Lord

Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1 Peter 4:7-11

The generous hospitality of God is further demonstrated in the four key New Testament passages which speak about gifts given to the church: Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Peter 4:7-11. There is teaching common to all four of these passages. And further, there is a compelling citation of Psalm 68 in the Ephesians 4 passage which underlines the generous heart of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ and the outpouring of gifts as resources intended to bless the recipients. Gifts enable the recipients to bless others: the church is imbued with the impetus and the resources to be the hospitable image of God.

There are four essential components found in each of these passages. In Ephesians 4:7, the apostle Paul uses the phrase, “to each one of us” as a way to make clear that every member of the church of Jesus Christ is identified as a Receiver.⁹⁹ In 1 Corinthians 12:7 it says, “Now to each one” which “implies that there is a special manifestation of the

⁹⁹ Gary L. Harbaugh, *God's Gifted People* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), 523.

Holy Spirit in the life of every Christian”¹⁰⁰ and in Romans 12¹⁰¹ the all-inclusive nature of Paul’s words are repeated in this way: “I say to every one of you . . . , just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts” (12:3-6). And Peter underlines this same teaching when he says in 1 Peter 4:10, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received.”¹⁰² The consistent teaching is that every member of the church of Jesus has been gifted, and every child of God is a gifted child.

The second essential component to this teaching found in each of these passages is that there are a variety of gifts with which brothers and sisters of Jesus have been graced. If on the one hand there is the uniform reality that in the church of Jesus each member is gifted, on the other hand it must be acknowledged that there is no uniformity about the gifting received. There is a variety of gifts: believers have been graced—blessed with capacity and inclination, with ability and desire of many kinds. While commenting on 1 Corinthians, Richard Hays notes the “differing lists found in Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13; and even later in this same unit in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30. The gifts enumerated here simply serve to represent the diversity of the workings of the Spirit.”¹⁰³ Ephesians 4 speaks about apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors and teachers; Romans 12 speaks about prophesying, service, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership and showing mercy; in 1 Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul

¹⁰⁰ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 212.

¹⁰¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 119.

¹⁰² Leonard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 300.

¹⁰³ Richard B. Hays, 211.

mentions apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, those speaking in different tongues, and the gift of interpretation; in 1 Peter 4, offering hospitality is linked directly to the exercise of gifts, and the gifts specifically named are those of speaking and serving. Paul Achtemeier notes that the listing of only two types of gifts is a matter of identifying the two basic categories of gifts.¹⁰⁴

These lists demonstrate the variety of gifts within the church of Jesus, but do not pretend to be exhaustive in nature.¹⁰⁵ It would be more accurate to describe them as sample lists or suggestive lists. The apostle Paul, after all, according to 1 Corinthians 7:7 considered celibacy as a spiritual gift: “I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.” As well, though these lists do not include any mention of music, it would be hard to imagine that musical gifts would not be included if the list were intended to be thorough.¹⁰⁶

The third common teaching is that gifting is not a matter of choice or achievement but of receiving from God, as Peter Davids notes with respect to 1 Peter 4.¹⁰⁷ There are pertinent phrases in the four gift passages which provide confirmation of this basic fact. Beyond the 1 Peter 4:10 phrase “whatever gift he has received,” Paul speaks of “the grace given us” in Romans 12:6 and in 1 Corinthians 12:7 he speaks of “the manifestation of the Spirit” and yet again in Ephesians 4:7 he speaks of grace given “as Christ apportioned it.” “It can be fairly said that the Biblical view of human beings attributes all our abilities,

¹⁰⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996), 298.

¹⁰⁵ Alvin J. Vander Griend, *Discover Your Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1996), 21.

¹⁰⁶ Vander Griend, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 160.

capacities, talents and skills to the gift of the gracious God who created us.”¹⁰⁸ The giftedness of a particular person has to do with the way in which God has knit us together: it’s how God made us, how Christ measured it out, how the Spirit has been manifested. This speaks to God’s choosing, calling and creating.¹⁰⁹ It is the doing of God, which means there is room for humility, whether one’s gifts seem many or few.

The fourth consistent teaching is particularly significant: gifts have been given with a view to the benefit of others. Hemphill says “gifts have meaning only in community.”¹¹⁰ When Paul says in Romans 12:5 that “we belong to each other” Murray comments that there is a “community of possession, the communion which believers have with one another. They have property in one another and therefore in one another’s gifts and graces.”¹¹¹ God’s people are blessed so that they may bless each other, and ultimately, so that they may bless others beyond the church family. The point is that gifts are to be used, and to be used for the wellbeing of others. When Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” he means that “the whole purpose of God’s distribution of these gifts is for the benefit of the community as a whole, not merely the private edification of the individuals who receive the gifts (cf.6:12; 10:23). This sentence contains in a nutshell the burden of Paul’s teaching in chapters 12-14.”¹¹² It also agrees with the thrust of Ephesians 4:12¹¹³ and the

¹⁰⁸ Eugene V.N. Goetchius and Charles P. Price, *The Gifts of God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Barlow, 1984), 17.

¹⁰⁹ Richard B. Hays, 210.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth S. Hemphill, *Spiritual Gifts* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 165.

¹¹¹ John Murray, 120.

¹¹² Richard B. Hays, 211.

direct statement of 1 Peter 4:10 that “each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others.”

It is this particular value which undergirds the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 and 14. The eloquent words which describe love lead into a discussion of some very specific considerations which involve the use of gifts in community. Paul affirms and reaffirms the basic notion that gifts have been given for the purpose of edifying the church, building the church, strengthening the church—and if there is in any way a contest of individual “rights” vs. communal “rights” then the wellbeing of the community trumps the rights of the individual. Paul says what he does as a way to illustrate the importance of practicing the love which he has held high.¹¹⁴ It is fitting for the body of Christ to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5).

In summary, gifts, though given to individual members of the body, are really given to the body, and for the health of the body.¹¹⁵ Gifts seem to have to do with the wholeness of the church, and though they involve the spiritual gifting of individual members, their intent is the flourishing of the body.¹¹⁶ “Paul holds himself up as an example to be imitated—an example of renouncing spiritual glory and status for the sake of others.”¹¹⁷ To be “in Christ” is to be gifted to serve the health of the body.

¹¹³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002), 551.

¹¹⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 234-5.

¹¹⁵ Hays, 211.

¹¹⁶ Goppelt, 302.

¹¹⁷ Hays, 238.

The Spoils of Victory

In Ephesians 4, Paul's teaching on gifts includes a reference to the ascension as well as a citation from Psalm 68:18. The picture presented is that of a conquering king returning to his city, leading a parade of captives and loaded down with the spoils of victory: gold, silver, food, slaves, weapons. Paul teaches that Christ lavishes his grace upon the church in the way that a conquering king or a general returning from battle might lavish his people during a victory parade. This grace takes the form of various gifts and is a demonstration of generosity.¹¹⁸

The citation from Psalm 68 has proved controversial for a number of reasons including identifying the precise reference for the word "descent" and for the fact that Paul seems to adjust the words of the psalm writer so that instead of the returning king receiving gifts, the returning king gives gifts.¹¹⁹ What is clear is that the Christ Jesus who was incarnate, who died, and who descended into hell, is the Christ Jesus who triumphantly ascended the throne and equips the church with gifts.¹²⁰ Indeed, the ascension of Jesus to the throne seems to be for the express purpose "that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10). Hoehner observes that "all things" means that Christ's work is not limited to the church:

Rather, the object of Christ's ascension was to allow him to enter into a sovereign relationship with the whole world, and in that position he has the right to bestow gifts as he wills. How is the universe filled with all things? It is the benefits of the work on the cross and consequently the ministry of the church to which Christ

¹¹⁸ W.A.Criswell, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 215.

¹¹⁹ Hoehner, 523-540.

¹²⁰ Hemphill, 174.

gave gifted persons who can function in his power. In 1:23 Christ is filled with God's fullness and Christ fills the church with that fullness.¹²¹

Hoehner's words suggest a filling from God which is of God: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the outpouring of gifts from the exalted Christ are linked.¹²² As Markus Barth notes,

Even when the incarnate seems to be an absent Lord after his return to heaven, he proves to be continually present by and in the many gifts given to all the saints, by the special ministers he appoints to engage them in the common ministry, and by continually permeating "all things with his power (4:7-12)."¹²³

The ascended Jesus pours himself, his spirit of servanthood into his body. He fills his body with himself so that the body of Christ is an embodiment of the Spirit of Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve. The familiar liturgical phrase from the sacrament of communion seems strikingly appropriate: "The gifts of God for the people of God." A second phrase might be added, "And the people of God, for the universe."

In Ephesians and Colossians fullness and filling denote a dynamic unilateral relationship: the revelation of God's glory to the world through Jesus Christ; the power exerted by God in Christ and in the church for the subjection of the powers and the salvation of all mankind; the life, growth, and salvation given by Christ to his body; or, in brief, the presence of the living God and his Messiah among his chosen people for the benefit of all creation."¹²⁴

In summary, Christ pours out gifts upon the church for her strength and wellbeing. It's as if Christ, upon ascending out of view, now pours out this grace, these gifts—to fill his church with faith, knowledge, truth, love, capacity—to fill his church full of Himself! It is the church which is the body of Christ, and it is to each and to all together that grace has been given. The church is a body of gifted togetherness. And the work of those gifted

¹²¹ Hoehner, 537.

¹²² Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 477.

¹²³ Barth, 477.

¹²⁴ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 209.

servants specifically mentioned, (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) is intended to benefit the entire congregation, equipping them all for service. So rather than being individual infants, blown about like rag dolls by any and every whim, opinion, feeling or teaching, “we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Jesus spoke of his presence when he ascended into heaven: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). Paul’s teaching about gifts suggests that the presence of Christ is experienced in the community of believers through each other and with each other. This teaching must be savored: the wonder of the church, with all her gifted members, is a sign of Jesus on the throne, showering gifts, filling a congregation and ultimately the whole universe with the Spirit of his servanthood.

Consummation: Revelation 21:1-22:5

The story which the Scriptures tell concludes with a beautiful picture of life in the new creation. Everything about this picture is a testimony to the good news that in the new creation life will flourish!¹²⁵ The place where God lives (heaven) and the place where people live (earth) have come together, so that people are in the presence of God continually. “Adam” will not be alone in any way (Gen 2:18).

Flourishing will be experienced in two distinct ways: by means of what is absent, and what is present.¹²⁶ Noticeably absent will be darkness and night. There will be no gates in the city. There will be no evil people within and no threat from without: nothing impure. As well, there will be no sea in the new creation: there will be no threat of chaos

¹²⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 387.

¹²⁶ John Timmer, *They shall be my people* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1983), 136-137.

to overwhelm the order of God's handiwork, as with the great flood. And consequently, there will be no fear. The presence of God is described in this remarkable way: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Resources of every kind will be present in rich and generous ways: precious jewels and treasured gold, a river flowing with the water of life running down Main Street, and the tree of life—are there two trees or is there one, large enough that it straddles the banks?—on either side of the river, with a continuous production of fruit. The light of God's presence¹²⁷ will carry the Day, and the leaves of the tree will yet again have a helpful function: the healing of the nations. The absence of the curse and the experience of rich blessing are simply two ways of describing what seems to be a paradise. This is oasis, not desert. This is promised land—where life can flourish, the people be blessed, and the ruler's presence be hospitable to wellbeing. This is not the land of slavery, where existence is bitter because of oppression, where death stings and where the ruler's presence is hostile and hope-destroying.

This picture of the new creation inhabited by the creator is filled with lavish generosity so as to ensure the flourishing of all. This is an utterly hospitable place because its creator is an utterly hospitable God. He removes every impediment imaginable so as to create room for the flourishing of everyone there. On the one hand, "the old order of things has passed away," and on the other, "He who was seated on the throne says, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Revelation 21:5). And so the "self-

¹²⁷ Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 59,66. Mouw notes that the identity of the Light in the new Jerusalem is the Lamb!

expenditure” of God which Cornelius Plantinga identified as present from the very beginning, produces by way of the Lamb, this new creation in which all flourish.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Plantinga, 19-20.

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Part of the project involved a review of relevant literature. Relevant literature was understood to be resources which intentionally used organizational wisdom within the context of the organized church. Resources were drawn from the organizational wisdom regularly utilized by Pastor-Church Relations (PCR) in their work with congregations, as well as from other scholarly work. In all cases, the basic relevancy test of an intentional application of organizational wisdom to the setting of the organized church was applied.

Once identified as relevant, these sources were then reviewed with respect to their engagement with Scripture. In the process of applying organizational wisdom to the setting of the organized church, were the Scriptures a part of that engagement? How integral and meaningful was that engagement? The researcher's evaluation of these sources was based partially on the actual presence of Scripture citations, and partially on a subjective assessment of the quality of the engagement.

The literature review began by examining sources regularly utilized by the PCR office in its consultations. This was followed by examining sources identified as having potential for such consultation because of their intentional use of organizational wisdom from the world of business in the context of the organized church. Both sets of sources included those which addressed high-stress situations and followed by those which addressed more general organizational dynamics.

Within the summary of the literature review a source of organizational wisdom was identified as especially appropriate for use in the researcher's project. An accompanying articulation of the rationale for this choice followed.

One further word of introduction prior to the literature review must be noted. A source of writing relevant to this project was the set of consultation reports on file in the PCR Office. These covered the years 1996 – 2008, prior to the arrival of the researcher, and were reviewed as a first step. A sample report (with names of individuals and the church deleted), has been included (Appendix A) so as to provide a sense of the consultation work, the resulting report, and the type of recommendations included.

Consultation Reports prior to 2009

From 1996 through 2008, PCR conducted consultations with a variety of congregations throughout the denomination. The exact number of those consultations is not known with certainty, but those which included a written, filed report number 41.¹ Of these, 32 involved congregations in the United States and nine involved congregations in Canada.²

These reports included observations of the consultants based on a variety of interactions: initial telephone conversations, personal visits with congregational leaders, with pastors and their spouses, attendance at meetings of church councils or their executive committees, and data received from the facilitation of listening groups comprised of congregational members.

¹ These reports are filed so as to preserve appropriate confidentiality and will not be cited in any manner which would reveal the identity of the congregation or the individual persons involved.

² The ratio of written consultation reports relative to churches in the United States and Canada has changed significantly in the years 2009-2013. Ten involve churches within the U.S. and 17 involve churches in Canada.

In only one report was Scripture cited directly. Reference was made in a 1996 report to Matthew 18:15-20 where Jesus outlined the protocol to be followed “if your brother sins against you.” Although this passage was acknowledged and frequently referred to as relevant in consultations, it occurred in the written consultation reports just once. Beyond this direct reference there was one other indirect reference to Scripture. A 2003 report included reference to the use of the “shepherd” metaphor to describe the work of a pastor, although the language of the New Testament church also used that metaphor to describe the work of elders. The virtual absence of direct and indirect references to Scripture was remarkable for reports written in the context of a denominational office at work in churches which faced challenges.

Relevant Sources Utilized in PCR Consultations

The literature review began with those resources already utilized within the office of PCR. As a matter of course, resources written for contexts of significant stress and even conflict created a starting point for the review. Within this group the interaction and engagement with Scripture covered a wide range, from no engagement at all, to a very high degree of engagement. There was also significant variance in the depth of engagement with Scripture.

Among the resources which engaged frequently and purposefully with Scripture was Kathleen Smith’s *Stilling the Storm: Worship and Congregational Leadership in Difficult Times*. Smith identified three distinct contexts of transition, crisis and conflict as contexts in which the role of congregational leaders and the place of worship were especially significant and rich with opportunity for the ministry of the gospel. The thesis of this book was that when congregations go through difficult times, those difficulties

affect the worship life of the congregation, and the practice of worship will itself be a key part of the congregation's healing process.³ Smith related the story of a transitional pastor's effort to address a conflict by way of utilizing the story told in Acts 15. A process for confession and healthy, healing conversation was set in motion during worship and within a context that honored the voice of Scripture.⁴

This resource is rich with liturgical suggestions for using Scripture in a meaningful way, and it does so because the role of Scripture in worship and the role of leaders in selecting appropriate words from Scripture are keys. This is where the deepest meaningfulness of all that hangs in the balance during difficult times is articulated and explored. Arthur Paul Boers in the preface to Smith's book says, "Worship is the venue where we bring and lift up our most important longings and yearnings. Here we name what matters most to us. Here we uncover, recover, and discover our true identity in God. Here we are swept up into God's salvation story."⁵ In a book such as this, focusing on the worship dimension of an organized church's life during times of transition, crisis and conflict, the inclusion and appeal to Scripture directly is right and good and altogether expected. What is remarkable is that this engagement with Scripture takes place not only when it comes to the nuts and bolts of worship, but also when establishing the framework for considering the specifics of worship in difficult times. Says Smith,

"The congregation is an organism—not just an inanimate object or organization, but a living being. In fact, because the congregation is the manifestation of Christ's presence and work in this world, it's a very special organism. The church is the body of Christ. A congregation has all the necessary parts and gifts of an active living body, but it also differs from other organizations in the world

³ Kathleen S. Smith, *Stilling the Storm* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), xxi.

⁴ K. Smith, 47-49.

⁵ K. Smith, xv.

because of its identity in Christ.... Paul emphasized the functioning of this body in I Corinthians 12.⁶

In a similar vein William Willimon's *Preaching About Conflict in the Local Church* very pointedly included the Scriptures. He integrated the use of Scripture and "street-smarts" in his consideration of how a pastoral leader might preach. This was illustrated for example, in the manner in which Willimon addressed conflict by preaching from two related texts which the lectionary gave him for Pentecost Sunday: Genesis 11:1-9 about the tower of Babel, and Acts 2 which described the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁷ Nevertheless, in this resource Willimon acknowledged the complexity of the relationship between pastor and congregation, and the need to be discerning with respect to when to speak and when not to speak, and the manner in which one speaks. It was not simply a matter of using Scripture or not using Scripture, but using Scripture thoughtfully and prudently. He offered examples of Scripture being used well, and being used unhelpfully.⁸

Beyond the use of public worship as a key place within which conflict may be tended, there were other "places" or aspects of an organization's life identified as key. In *Healthy Disclosure, Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations*, Ruth and McClintock focused on the challenge of communication. This involved deciding how much information is shared, and with whom information is shared. Ruth and McClintock framed their consideration of these dynamics by engaging the key Scripture passages which inform a Protestant Christian church setting where the laity has been empowered

⁶ K. Smith, 10-11.

⁷ William H. Willimon, *Preaching About Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1987), 38-43.

⁸ Willimon, 87-99.

to engage in governance of the church. On the one hand, this development involved the need for transparency between leaders and congregants. On the other hand, the need for confidentiality remained.⁹ The challenge of this tension was identified as high because of the strong emphasis in Scripture on truth-telling: “To this day, Christian communities rely on scriptures that stress the importance of truthfulness in all interactions (1Kings 2:4; 11 Kings 20:3; Pss. 15:2, 26:3, and 51:6; John 8:31-32), openly confronting wrongdoing (Matt.18:15-19), and speaking the truth lovingly (Eph.4:15).”¹⁰

While this resource engaged Scripture in terms of establishing a framework for considering the challenges of communication, it also engaged Scripture in discussing specific principles and their application: “The need to know is less a legal concept than a subjective one, based on opinion about a specific situation or relationship. Matthew 18:15-17 is a scriptural example of the need-to-know concept, which restricts knowledge of an offense to the smallest number possible.”¹¹ Nevertheless, although this resource engaged Scripture in a meaningful fashion, it was not a matter of quantity so much as quality. Much of the engagement had to do with setting up suitable parameters for using and exploring the relevant organizational wisdom with respect to communication.

A fourth resource frequently utilized by PCR was *When Steeples Cry*, a book identifying change as an experience of loss. In an intriguing and counter-intuitive fashion, author Jaco Hamman appeals to insights from the business community when he says, “Even though their suits may not project an image of pastoral sensitivity, it is business

⁹ Kibbie Simmons, Ruth and Karen A. McClintock, *Healthy Disclosure: Solving Communication Quandaries in Congregations* (Herndon: PA, The Alban Institute, 2007), 15.

¹⁰ Ruth and McClintock, 16.

¹¹ Ruth and McClintock, 120.

leaders who are at the forefront of pastoral awareness.”¹² In a culture of rapid change, the experience of loss is frequent and overwhelming. Learning to identify this dynamic and respect the reality of grieving is an essential task of leaders for themselves and for those being led.¹³

Hamman connects this vital task of effective leadership to challenges facing the church, and in particular to the overwhelming declines in church membership over the past decades. The losses of community, of friendships, of what was and what might have been—are many. Hamman anchors the work of mourning to the very person and nature of God when he remembers

Jesus, who experienced the rejection, isolation, and wrath of God: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46). Jesus, who cried bitterly at the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35), or who became troubled when he knew his death was imminent (John 13:21), invites you to mourn your losses.¹⁴

Hamman goes on to connect this essential task of mourning specifically to the way a leader may utilize and engage with the Scriptures in settings of worship. In particular, he makes use of a variety of lament psalms and the book of Lamentations to assist congregations in the stressful grief-work of mourning losses produced by a variety of factors, including change.

Yet another instance of organizational wisdom being intentionally directed towards blessing the organized church comes in Mark Lau Branson’s *Memories, Hopes and Conversations*. He describes a technique called Appreciative Inquiry as a way to engage with churches experiencing distress. It offers a positive lens for viewing such

¹² Jaco H. Hamman, *When Steeples Cry* (Cleveland: OH, The Pilgrim Press, 2005), 35.

¹³ Hamman, 35.

¹⁴ Hamman, 27.

situations: “Appreciative Inquiry is built on theories that move a congregation away from deficit-based models toward the images and forces that are most life-giving.”¹⁵ Particularly noteworthy is the third chapter of this book which is entitled Biblical Reflections, and provides a thorough grounding of the Appreciative Inquiry method in gratitude, which Henri Nouwen is quoted as describing in this way: “the discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.”¹⁶ Branson then describes the ways in which beginning and ending with gratitude is a pattern observable throughout the Scriptures, from Paul’s letters back through the Psalms. This consistent and identifiable pattern forms the impetus for using Appreciative Inquiry, not only, but also informs specific strategies in specific situations. The integration of Scripture with organizational wisdom is thorough.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach with its open-ended invitation to imagine new story lines is similar to the approach taken by Hester and Walker-Jones in their *Know Your Story and Lead with It: the Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership*. Situations of distress often present a dominant narrative with foregone conclusions about outcomes. An essential feature of their approach is having leaders operate from a “not-knowing position of curiosity instead of a knowing position of top-down direction.”¹⁷ This approach makes room for imagining new outcomes and new directions.

¹⁵ Mark L. Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 39.

¹⁶ Branson, 43.

¹⁷ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), 4.

What Hester and Walker-Jones explore is a model of leadership which is steeped in hospitality. They look carefully at Jesus as a New Testament example of one who exercised narrative leadership. They also look at the roots of this kind of leadership for the community in the Old Testament experience of life within the parameters of covenant with God. “It gives rise to leadership that is more invitational than coercive, more equalitarian than hierarchical, more communal than stratified. Such leadership maintains curiosity, listens to stories told and for those not being told, and helps others use their own wisdom rather than telling them what to do.”¹⁸ This is another example of a thorough and intentional integration of biblical teaching with organizational wisdom.

An instance of organizational wisdom being intentionally applied to the church setting but without any direct reference to or grounding in Scripture is Oswald and Johnson’s *Managing Polarities in Congregations*.¹⁹ The book provides very thorough and accessible teaching about the dynamics of polarities and the ways in which they function within congregations. These dynamics explore the way in which competing values are held in healthy tension or have incorrectly been treated as problems to be solved. Diagrams, exploration of managing sample polarities, and pedagogical suggestions for group learning all combine to make this resource valuable in situations of distress. But Scripture is neither mentioned nor engaged at all.

Apart from resources which address situations involving stress and conflict, there are also sources which more generally apply organizational wisdom from the world of business to the world of the organized church. John Wimberly’s *The Business of the*

¹⁸ Hester and Walker-Jones, 71.

¹⁹ Roy M. Oswald and Barry Johnson, *Managing Polarities in Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010).

Church is almost more than intentional in its application of organizational wisdom to the setting of the church: it proclaims brazenly “that the Christian church is the original, largest, and wealthiest multinational corporation in the world.”²⁰ Wimberly explores a variety of management facets: managing the congregation as a system, managing personnel, facilities and finances. He applies business terminology unapologetically and uncritically to the life of the church.

Wimberly also engages Scripture directly. He considers Jesus an exemplary manager, and describes many of the ways in which Jesus evidenced managerial competency in training and equipping his disciples, and delegating work to them. Wimberly notes that upon Jesus’ death “the small organization nearly collapsed...but it is a testimony to Jesus’s leadership and managerial skills that he was able to overcome his disciples’ failure and pull his followers back together in the days following his resurrection.”²¹ This assessment of the leadership and managerial skill of Jesus post-resurrection seems somewhat forced and simplistic. Nevertheless, both near the beginning and near the end of his book, Wimberly is drawn to speak of the apostle Paul’s use of the body as an image for the church. “Paul blends the idea of the whole with its parts in pure system theory manner. Just as the human body needs ears as well as eyes, the body of Christ needs teachers, prophets, leaders, and managers. This is not only excellent theology. It is also excellent management theory.”²² It seems to the researcher that in this effort at organizational wisdom applied to the church, the business model takes precedence. Scripture is integrated by blending into the business model.

²⁰ John W. Wimberly, *The Business of the Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010), 2.

²¹ Wimberly, 36.

²² Wimberly, 144.

An older attempt at applying organizational wisdom to the life of the church is Lindgren and Shawchuck's *Management for Your Church*. Published in 1977, it reflects an age in which the use of organizational wisdom from the secular world was a relatively bold step for many congregations. According to Lindgren and Shawchuck, the two key ways in which integration of organizational wisdom and Scripture engage each other for the sake of the church are these: through the establishment of a clear mission statement, and through the insight that may be found throughout the Scriptures, namely that God chooses to accomplish his work by having us join with him.

For this reason, pastors and other church leaders in America are presently enrolling in continuing-education workshops and post-seminary degree programs in record numbers. But to renew ourselves in scripture, theology, liturgy and so forth, and not attend to what kinds of organizational structures and management procedures are most effective in our modern environment, is, it seems to us, only to renew ourselves halfway.²³

This is an instance where the engagement with Scripture undergirds a sense of compatibility between organizational wisdom and the church. The church as an organization is guided by a statement of mission, and must have its ministries aligned appropriately so as to be effective. Inputs and outputs become key indicators for assessing effectiveness. In this particular effort at applying organizational wisdom to the church, Scripture plays a role in establishing the validity of the church seeking help beyond herself, (as did God himself), as well as in providing input for a statement of mission.

An earlier book by one of these co-authors, Alvin J. Lindgren, evidences an even more consistent and thorough engagement with the Scriptures in setting out the foundational principles for church administrative work. In *Foundations for Purposeful*

²³ Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck, *Management for Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1977), 15.

Church Administration, Lindgren persistently notes the need for the organized, institutional church to maintain its identity as an organism, namely, the body of Christ.

It is for this reason that we are seeking to discover what the church ought to be, what its basic nature is, by turning to the Scriptures rather than seeking to analyze the institution of the church in today's world.

Without some institutional structure the church cannot live, yet when primarily concerned about its institutional well-being the church betrays its basic purpose, which is literally to do Christ's work.²⁴

Lindgren goes a step beyond establishing compatibility between organizational wisdom and church administration—he establishes the priority of the church as body of Christ (organism) and intends that the organizational needs of the church are subordinate to the reality of the church as living body whose head is Christ.

Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership is the title of Dan Hotchkiss' book which explores what he describes as the inherent tension between the words "organized" and "religion." "The stability of a religious institution is a necessary precondition to the instability religious transformation brings. The need to balance both sides of this paradox--the transforming power of religion and the stabilizing power of organization--makes leading congregations a unique challenge."²⁵ Hotchkiss considers current dynamics such as increased staff, diminished volunteer hours, size of congregations, and different ways of functioning as a board.

Although Hotchkiss is speaking about governance and ministry in the local church, he does not engage Scripture directly. There is but one incidental quotation from

²⁴ Alvin J. Lindgren, *Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1965), 44-49.

²⁵ Dan Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), 1.

11 Corinthians 3:6²⁶ and several other allusions to Scripture scattered throughout. The basic premise for Hotchkiss is that no “original, correct model of leadership can be found in history or Scriptures,”²⁷ and this may explain why he considers governance quite apart from any direct reference to them.

In contrast to Hotchkiss, Donald E. Zimmer’s *Leadership and Listening: Spiritual Foundations for Church Governance* sets out to engage as robustly as possible with the Scriptures: “Any journey into the arena of church governance must begin in the Scriptures, for the Scriptures are our common heritage and the foundation of our life together.”²⁸ Zimmer discusses what seem to be two contrasting approaches to governance found within the New Testament. One approach found in Pauline material is organic; one found in the Pastoral Epistles is more formal and hierarchical.²⁹

The engagement with Scripture is thorough and deep, intending to ground the framework for thinking about governance as well as the actual exercise of governance in healthy spiritual practice and scriptural teaching. There is a recognition that organizational wisdom ought not to be applied uncritically to the church setting, but ought to be marinated in scriptural teaching and spiritual practice. “Over the past century church governing boards and people working in administrative roles within the church have been increasingly influenced by the culture of North American business enterprise....(it)also extends to the way people think about their life, read the Bible, and

²⁶ Hotchkiss, 16.

²⁷ Hotchkiss, 3.

²⁸ Donald E. Zimmer, *Leadership and Listening: Spiritual Foundations for Church Governance* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2011), 31.

²⁹ Zimmer, 25.

practice their faith.”³⁰ Zimmer claims that the impact of business and economic value is so great that it has, as Betty Sue Flowers has described it, “become the foundational story informing the thinking and behavior in all domains of North American life.”³¹

Janet Cawley’s book addresses the question of an organized church’s identity. It would be possible to view a church through a multitude of available lenses, such as “size, demographics, power structure, history, significant individuals, theological stance, denominational policy and polity.”³² All of these might help to describe a church, but to capture the “deepest and most basic kind of identity,” Cawley advocates tapping into the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. She then describes an extensive process whereby through the use of this image of the body, a congregation imagines itself as a singular body, a person. This is a creative engagement with Scripture, not only, but with the imaginative capacity of a group of individuals who together form one body. More than an exercise in name-branding, this is an exercise in exploring core identity.

The last resource of this type is the Doctor of Ministry project of Norm Thomasma which explored Bowen Family Systems Theory from a biblical perspective. Thomasma notes ways in which Scripture challenges Bowen Theory, and ways in which Bowen Theory is complemented by Scripture. Although Thomasma’s work helped inform an understanding of Bowen Theory as it was utilized in consultation work by the PCR office, the direct linkage to Scripture was not mentioned in consultation reports: it served primarily as background information.

³⁰ Zimmer, 20-21.

³¹ Zimmer, 21.

³² Janet R. Cawley, *Who Is Our Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 4.

Other Relevant Resources

Beyond the resources already utilized within the PCR office, there are other resources which have intentionally applied organizational wisdom to the organized church. These were considered in the same sequence as those above: first those resources which addressed situations of stress, and then those which addressed the more general use of wisdom from the world of business to the world of the organized church. These resources were examined in the same manner, namely, as to their engagement with Scripture, and the extent to which scriptural teaching was integrated with organizational wisdom.

The first such application of organizational wisdom to the arena of the church was found in Cecil Williams' study of how churches were impacted financially and how they adapted to the economic recession early in this century. This study was concerned with questions of how churches adapted, and did not engage questions relative to rationale. Scripture was not engaged as part of this work. The premise was simply that because churches rely on volunteer gifts, a time of recession poses an exceptional challenge for financial viability. "The specific church business problem is the application of successful strategies for coping with the economic downturn in order to maintain financial stability."³³

The issue of leadership succession in the context of megachurches was the focus of two studies, one by Meredith Wheeler, and one by Sheila Strobel Smith. Wheeler's study involved in-depth studies of three separate succession experiences, while Smith's study involved 22 churches in terms of their preparation and planning for succession.

³³ Cecil Williams, "Church Leaders' Financial Coping Strategies During a Recession" (D.B.A., Walden University, 2013), 4.

Wheeler's study did not engage with the Scripture in any way; Smith's study was steeped in Scripture.

Smith explored a number of key leadership successions within the Scripture itself, namely those between Moses and Joshua, Aaron and Eleazar, Jesus and the apostles, and lastly, the apostles and their successors. In so doing, Smith identified patterns for leadership succession, including this general observation, that "in the beginning, God alone selected the leaders, but over time God actively involved the current leader and the community in the selection process."³⁴ Smith's examination of leadership succession narratives and dynamics within Scripture provided the basis for her to advocate an anticipatory succession strategy rather than a reactive one. And though her study focused on megachurches, she recognized the importance of succession strategies for churches of all sizes. The transition from one senior leader to the next is a significant stress, a source of conflict and a challenge of faith. "Children and adults may be adversely impacted by stress and ambiguity as they respond to the situation emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Some may decide to stay, some may decide to worship elsewhere, and others may choose to shop for groceries."³⁵ It is both pastoral concern arising from the situations Smith observed, as well as the impetus of scriptural teaching which gave added weight to the application of organizational wisdom to the church setting.

Examples of sources which were more generally from the world of business included dissertations by David Vardaman and Stephen Carman which both engaged the matter of leadership style. Vardaman studied the relationship between particular

³⁴ Sheila Strobel Smith, "*Complexities of pastoral change and transition in the megachurches of the Baptist General Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Presbyterian Church (USA)*" (Ph.D., Luther Seminary, 2010), 20.

³⁵ S. Smith, 4.

leadership styles and effectiveness, while Carman studied the relationship between particular leadership styles and church attendance. In both instances, various leadership styles produced only modestly divergent results.

In Carman's study on leadership style and church attendance, he "did not find a statistically significant difference in church growth patterns for the three leadership styles." As to engagement with Scripture, Carman referred to key passages underlining the nature of leadership as being in service to others, including Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 10:35-45, and later, to Philippians 2:5-11.³⁶ This engagement with Scripture occurred as Carman described the same set of leadership styles as did David Vardaman. The engagement was not so much thorough as incidental.

Vardaman explored transformational, transactional and change-oriented leadership by engaging more fully with the Biblical text. He concluded that "there seems to be no inherent contradiction between the leadership of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the present leadership constructs in transformational, transactional, or change-oriented leadership."³⁷ He concluded that the transformational and change-oriented styles produced moderately better impacts, and anchored his discussion of these leadership models in a consideration of the ministry of Jesus.

Noelle Scuderi studied two styles of leadership acknowledged as reliable and valid, in the hope of determining which style might be the better of the two when

³⁶ Stephen B. Carman, "Leadership Style and church attendance: An ex post facto study of Churches of Christ in Texas" (PhD diss., Capella University, 2013), 25-28.

³⁷ David L. Vardaman, "Leading change: exploring the relationship between transformational, transactional, and change-oriented leadership and their impact on leadership effectiveness among pastors in a protestant denomination in the mid-western United States" (Ph.D. diss. Indiana Wesleyan University, 2013), 20.

exercised in church organization settings. Both servant leadership and transformational leadership were identified as styles of leadership with scriptural precedence. Scuderi appealed to words of Jesus in Matthew 20 and Luke 22, as well as calling to mind the story of Nehemiah and the work of Paul as examples of servant leadership.³⁸ Scuderi also found much support for the practice of transformational leadership in the ministry of Paul, especially as demonstrated in Paul's relationship with Timothy. "Further evidence of individualized consideration on a larger scale lies in the coaching role that Paul embodied in relating to many of the early churches in New Testament times. Paul was consumed with the growth and maturation of Christ's followers in the churches under his care."³⁹ This engagement with Scripture was meaningful for understanding and fleshing out a picture of the two leadership styles as inherently compatible with scriptural examples. But in terms of the research undertaken, the engagement with Scripture was relatively modest.

A study by Roger Haskins within the Free Methodist tradition considered a number of factors as potentially relevant to the process of change within a church. These factors included leadership styles, principles of organizational change for non-profit organizations, various types of ecclesiastical polity, and the place of theology, among others. In this study Haskins suggested that there were two basic styles of leadership evident in Scripture, namely shepherd leading and servant leading.⁴⁰ While these two examples are prominent, limiting examples of leadership to these two seemed

³⁸ Noelle F. Scuderi, "Servant leadership and transformational leadership in church organizations" (PhD. diss., The George Washington University, 2010), 36.

³⁹ Scuderi, 47-8.

⁴⁰ Roger W. Haskins Jr., "Guiding the church through change" (PhD. diss., Union Institute and University, 2009), 86.

incomplete. In this regard, the engagement with Scripture was weak. On the other hand, Haskins seemed especially clear about the need to consider theology in the context of change. He says, “A good theological understanding of leadership is critical to defining the role of a pastor in facilitating effective change within a congregation. When the organization undergoing change is the church it becomes necessary to clarify and at times redefine a biblical understanding of what it means to be the church.”⁴¹

Another example of wisdom from the world of business was a study which considered the role and impact of “business intelligence” on the life of the church. Business intelligence is a matter of utilizing data in ways which become useful to an organization, and is all about finding advantageous use of technology. Says Charmaine Felder, “Similar to for-profit businesses, the church environment is changing, and technology is opening new doors to conducting business in innovative ways.”⁴²

Engagement with Scripture was limited, but the research questions with regards to the use of technology and “business intelligence” within the church revealed the tension which seemed inherent and perhaps necessary. The general sentiment was that “churches run on a nonprofit status and therefore share commonalities with other nonprofit organizations. Limited resources, reliance on volunteer staff, and reliance on voluntary giving from donors are a few similarities. Management of organizational resources is an important task.”⁴³

⁴¹ Haskins, 58.

⁴² Charmaine Felder, “The Potential Role of Business Intelligence in Church Organizations” (Ph.D. diss., Walden University, 2012), 31.

⁴³ Felder, 32.

Yet another type of organizational wisdom applied intentionally to the organized church was that of “learning organization” principles. One such study by Colleen Bryan explored the relationship between three learning organization principles and three levels of church growth in a sample of Nazarene churches. Scripture was not engaged in this study.

A second such study was undertaken by David Coleman. This study focused the application of learning organization principles on a different target, namely spiritual maturity as evidenced in small group participation. This particular goal was supported by two observations. “Based on the biblical passage of Acts 2:42-47, which describes the growth of the early church, Whitesel and Hunter’s four measurements of church growth include growing in maturity, growing in unity, growing in favor, and growing in numbers.” Secondly, Coleman noted the fundamental truth “that God uses people to accomplish his purposes. Through supernatural means, God chooses to make His appeal through men and women by enlisting them to be ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).”⁴⁴

Intentional participation in small groups was identified as an expression of spiritual maturity by linking it to the practice of the early church. “According to Acts 2:46, the first Christian church ‘met in the homes of believers where they took part in breaking bread and eating together with glad and sincere hearts.’ This atmosphere of fellowship, referred to as *koinonia*, was inherent in the first century church.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ David H. Coleman, “The Impact of Learning Organization Strategies on Spiritual Maturity as Exemplified in Participation in Home-Based Small Groups” (Ed.D., Indiana Wesleyan University, 2011), 17-18.

⁴⁵ Coleman, 25.

Engagement with Scripture provided a route to help identify a growth measurement which was meaningful in the context of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

Summary

It was noted at the outset that this project addressed the lack of integration of biblical teaching in the work of the office of PCR. A review of the consultation reports on file in the PCR office demonstrated the lack of direct usage and engagement with Scripture. Only one of 45 reports included a direct citation from Scripture.

The first segment of the literature review examined sources of organizational wisdom utilized in the regular consulting work of PCR with congregation. The sources reviewed were not organizational wisdom in general, but only those which could be identified as intentionally utilizing organizational wisdom to address matters of concern within the organized church. Many frequently used sources such as, for example, Patrick Lencioni's *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Jim Collins' *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, and Bolman and Deals' *Reframing Organizations* were not included in this review because their focus was not intentionally and specifically on applying organizational wisdom to church settings.⁴⁶

The sources chosen were then reviewed with respect to their engagement with Scripture. In the process of applying organizational wisdom to the setting of the organized church, were the Scriptures a part of that engagement? How integral and meaningful was that engagement? The researcher's evaluation of these sources was

⁴⁶ Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, (Boulder, CO: Jim Collins, 2005), 17-23. There is a description of the economic engine which supports the Hedgehog Principle and could be applied to a church setting by reconfiguring that engine as a resource engine.

based partially on the actual presence of Scripture citations, and partially on a subjective assessment of the quality of the engagement.

The same method of review was applied to a sample set of other resources which were chosen because they intentionally sought to apply organizational wisdom to a study of some facet of the organized church. For these sources the same questions were applied: were the Scriptures a part of that engagement, and how integral and meaningful was that engagement? Also, both sets of sources included those which addressed high-stress situations followed by those which addressed more general organizational dynamics.

The first thing which the literature review revealed was a wide range of engagement with the Scriptures. There were some sources and studies which did not engage directly with Scripture at all, such as Oswald and Johnson's *Managing Polarities in Congregations*, and Meredith Wheeler's "*The Leadership succession process in megachurches.*" There were some sources which demonstrated moderate engagement with Scripture, citing a few passages and making occasional scriptural allusions. These sources applied organizational wisdom to the church directly and without robust interaction with Scripture. Examples of these are *Healthy Disclosure* by Ruth and McClintock, *Governance and Ministry* by Dan Hotchkiss, and "*Guiding the church through change*" by Roger Haskins. There were also many sources which engaged frequently and deeply with Scripture as they applied organizational wisdom to a church setting. Examples are Sheila Smith's "*Complexities of pastoral change and transition in the megachurches of the Baptist General Conference, Evangelical Lutheran Church in*

America, and Presbyterian Church (USA),” Donald Zimmer’s *Leadership and Listening*, and Mark Lau Branson’s *Memories, Hopes and Conversations*.

So among sources which intentionally applied organizational wisdom to the organized church, it was those sources which addressed specific stress and conflict situations which more often integrated biblical teaching the most fully. In particular, Kathy Smith’s *Stilling the Storm*, William Willimon’s *Preaching about Conflict* and Jaco Hamman’s *When Steeples Cry* had a particular focus on the setting of worship as a setting within which stress and conflict might be tended. This allowed for a natural and almost necessary integration of Scripture.

Two sources specifically addressed the stressful matter of pastoral succession. Whereas Scripture was absent from Wheeler’s work, Smith’s work was replete with references to and engagement with Scripture. In the two sources which invited curiosity and imagination as methods of dealing with congregations in distress, there was significant engagement with Scripture or a scriptural theme. Hester and Walker-Jones engaged Scripture more indirectly with an approach steeped in the theme of hospitality. Branson’s use of Appreciative Inquiry was rooted very directly in the Scripture text, identifying gratitude for God’s generosity as a starting point in creating a new congregational chapter.

Among the more general sources of organizational wisdom, integration of biblical teaching was less prominent and less thorough. An exception was Zimmer’s *Leadership and Listening*.

The literature review made clear that among sources which PCR already utilized as well as among other sources of organizational wisdom, there were many which

integrated biblical teaching with organizational wisdom to some degree. More significantly, there were some sources where the integration was profound and thorough. There were sources which featured the type of integration between organizational wisdom and biblical teaching which was lacking in the consultation work of PCR.

The project undertaken was an attempt to emulate such integration in a new and creative way with a source of organizational wisdom not intentionally directed towards the organized church. And, the project was an attempt to achieve such integration not in response to a stress or conflict involving broken relationships, but in a more general, educational context. If there were sources which demonstrated significant integration, might such integration also be initiated and demonstrated in the actual work of PCR?

The resource which seemed particularly suited to this task was *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* by Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal.⁴⁷ This source was familiar to the researcher as a source with much insight into organizational health, and useful both for fostering health and for identifying areas requiring growth. This source was particularly compatible with the biblical theme of hospitality.

Essentially, the authors promote the wisdom of observing organizations through multiple lenses so as to gain a multifaceted picture of the whole. Because this resource encourages multiple lenses, it requires making room for multiple perspectives, a concept which fits well with the “making room” perspective of hospitality. It is not the case that one lens is always best, but that each lens is helpful in its own way. Sometimes one lens will be most helpful; sometimes another lens will be most helpful.

⁴⁷ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

The structural lens focuses attention on the goals or objectives of an organization.⁴⁸ Achievement of such ends requires attending to the coordination of roles and relationships. The flourishing of the organization as a whole is front and center.

In contrast to the structural lens, viewing an organization through the human resource lens places more attention on the wellbeing of the humans within the organization. Ensuring that the right people are in the right positions, based on their giftedness, and setting people up for the best possible chance to succeed is paramount. Ideally, the fit between a person's abilities and the particular task or role is so great that it benefits both the organization and the individual.⁴⁹

The political lens views organizations as communities of diverse people who deal with limited resources.⁵⁰ Sorting out how resources are best distributed, and sorting out how each and every voice is heard appropriately so that all stakeholders can flourish as much as possible, meshes well with the theme of hospitality.

The fourth lens is the symbolic and focuses attention not so much on what is accomplished, but on what things mean: their significance. The symbolic lens directs attention to the culture of an organization and is immediately relevant to both what an organization seeks to do, and the manner in which it is done. It is immediately relevant to a theme such as hospitality which highlights both a deep and meaningful theme as well as an everyday manner of expressing that theme.

These four lenses seemed immediately useful and relevant to the life of an organized church. Issues of mission and governance, appropriate fit of staff and volunteer

⁴⁸ Bolman and Deal, 45.

⁴⁹ Bolman and Deal, 115.

⁵⁰ Bolman and Deal, 186.

to specific tasks, the reality of limited resource as well as a range of voices among stakeholders, as well as the role of public worship both in revealing and in providing meaning by connecting to a deep reality—each of the lenses connected easily and directly to the life of the organized church.

The use of four lenses was particularly compatible with the consultative work of PCR because a great deal of time and energy is spent simply observing. Viewing a congregation or its council through each of the four lenses means that significant time and energy are spent in the observation mode. Description precedes prescription.

There is further benefit to such careful observation and the use of these four lenses as a diagnostic tool. It encourages leaders to attend to a variety of angles, and it also provides a helpful way to identify organizational challenges. This is especially helpful when congregations are not flourishing, and a pastor has been quickly though not necessarily accurately identified as the problem.

In summary, Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations* use of a four lens approach is one which resonates with various perspectives making room for each other. It also is quite intentional about having an organization and its membership flourish. This is an organizational source which does not mention the word "hospitality" but is permeated with hospitable wisdom.

Additionally, the use of four lenses was a familiar method of observation when paired with the way Scripture offers four gospel lenses to view the person of Jesus. And, there was the curious coincidence of four gift passages offering similar but unique perspectives on the flourishing of the body of Christ by way of its gifted members.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Rationale

The particular kind of research employed within this project is program development. It has been identified by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister as a common means of pursuing an “in-ministry” project. She describes it as follows: “In program development research, the researcher determines the need for a program or intervention, establishes its theoretical basis, sets its objectives, designs it, implements it, and evaluates the results.”⁵¹ This then will form the outline for the researcher’s methodology.

The first step in such a project is a clear definition of a problem. From the very beginning of the researcher’s association with PCR, the existence of a problem was acknowledged. In the initial interview for his current position, a lack of integration of biblical theology with organizational wisdom used in church settings was identified as a deficit within this denominational agency. Intentional integration of biblical teaching into the consultation work of PCR was presented as a specific and fitting challenge for the role of consulting pastor and also for PCR as an agency within a Christian denomination. The hope was that such integration might become the consistent practice of the PCR office, and the challenge was that the researcher might serve as a catalyst.

The Director of PCR, Norm Thomasma, identified this need from his own experience in consulting with congregations, and from his own desire to integrate biblical teaching with sources of wisdom for the organized church. This was evidenced in his

⁵¹ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 163.

own Doctor of Ministry project which considered the application of Bowen Family Systems Theory to teaching congregations about healthy corporate life. In it, Thomasma explored both the congruence and dissonance between Bowen Theory and biblical/theological teaching.⁵²

In order to establish with certainty that the identified deficit within the work of PCR was real, the researcher reviewed the files of PCR consultations. Each file was read to determine whether Scripture was cited or engaged at all, and if so, in what manner it was cited or engaged. This would provide both a quantitative assessment as well as a qualitative assessment.

What was determined was that Scripture was cited directly only once in the thirteen year period between 1996 and 2008. Allusions to scriptural teaching were virtually absent as well. The deficit identified by the Director of PCR proved to be real.

The underlying premise for identifying this deficit as a problem which needed to be addressed was this: for both churches and consulting pastors, it would be desirable that wisdom coming from various sources be complementary. Such complementarity would be richest when organizational wisdom is echoed or illuminated by biblical wisdom so that there is a confluence of perspective. This would allow a church to not merely assume some biblical anchoring, but to see it and experience it as current, living reality. In such moments Scripture can frame, inform, enrich and challenge self-understanding-- as well as the methods and patterns of being the church together. Such moments also affirm that Scripture's teaching illumines and strengthens wisdom gleaned from other sources.

⁵² Norm J. Thomasma, "*The Utilization of Bowen Family Systems Theory in Teaching Healthy Corporate Life in Congregations—Implications and Applications*" (D.Min., Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL., 2001), 35-74.

Once the deficit within PCR consultation was identified as the problem to be addressed, the program development model for the research project was chosen as a suitable way to proceed. This choice was both deliberate and necessary within the ministry context of PCR. The researcher first explored the possibility of a case study involving a specific consultation within a congregational setting. Such a study would provide the most direct application of the effort to integrate organizational wisdom and biblical teaching. It would allow for lengthier, more in-depth interactions between the researcher and the ministry setting. It would have parameters and a unique focus, and be a consultation similar to the consultations for which reports were filed.

While seemingly best-suited for addressing the identified problem, the case study had one unavoidable drawback. The ability of PCR consultants to engage with specific congregations depends upon receiving an invitation. Experience has revealed that congregations have been reticent to ask for help, and typically make such requests later than would be advisable. This reticence to ask for help is combined with an aversion to the possibility of a separation of church and pastor, which the arrival of PCR representatives often signals. There is a perceived stigma to such separations which both churches and pastors seek to avoid. Given these realities, it seemed imprudent to request permission for a case study, and potentially risk what has already been a tenuous willingness for churches to engage with PCR. Congregational concerns about confidentiality and inadvertent public sharing of difficult matters were deemed to be real barriers to the possibility of pursuing a specific case study.

Consequently, program development became the method of choice. Although different from a case study, it would still provide an opportunity to explore integration of

organizational wisdom and biblical teaching. It also presented a number of challenges to the researcher.

Target Population

A particularly challenging aspect of this project was the identification of a target population. The reason that this was especially challenging was this: the ultimate goal of this project was to enrich the consultation work done with congregations and congregational leaders by representatives of PCR. This raised the question whether the target population was the congregations and their leaders, or the consultants within PCR? A case can be made either way: consultations are for the benefit of the churches, and therefore improving the content and quality of such consultations through the intended integration of biblical teaching would benefit the churches. But improving the content and quality of the integration of biblical teaching would also improve the work of PCR consultants. There was a sense in which the target population was both the consultation staff of PCR and the congregations. Rather than view this as an ambiguity, the researcher viewed this as an honest reflection of the relational character of the consultation work.

Ultimately, the target population in terms of received benefit was determined to be both the congregations and the consultants. In terms of immediacy, the initial target population was the consultation staff of PCR. And in order to evaluate the possibility and credibility of enriching consultation by way of integrating biblical teaching with organizational wisdom, the development of a program for a test group provided the necessary research opportunity. Feedback from a test group became an essential component of evaluation necessary for determining the success of the project.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the specific settings for the workshop designed in this project involved a wide-ranging group of church leaders—in terms of education, experience, career, work, socio-economic status, theological training, biblical literacy, gender, race—gathered for a time of training. The training occasions were neutral, that is, not in response to a particular conflict or identified need. Rather, in both instances it was a general gathering of congregational leaders for training with potential to improve the health of churches. The specific occasions were regional Sustaining Congregational Excellence gatherings for smaller churches within the Christian Reformed Church. Regional training events are part of a denominational strategy financed by grant monies to equip and encourage smaller congregations which often cannot afford to send leaders to training events. Congregations are invited to send up to four leaders so as to facilitate meaningful engagement for participants while at the conference. This group of four can then maintain meaningful engagement with each other after returning to local congregational settings.

Because of the neutral character of the occasions, the diversity of participants and the fact that they were unknown to the researcher, the program developed was intended to be subject matter that could apply in a wide range of circumstances. It was intended to be subject material which would benefit churches seeking to remain healthy and become even healthier, as well as churches seeking to recognize early symptoms of distress. And, in response to the problem identified within the consulting work of PCR, this program for gathered church leaders would need to be organizational wisdom anchored in Scripture and enriched by Scripture. The material needed to have specific merit so that it could stand alone as a workshop and it needed to teach a way of engaging with God's truth

encapsulated both by wisdom “out there” and the wisdom that is in Scripture. In this way there was both a message and a method. Finally, the program needed to be both accessible and educational.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this program was the intentional integration of Scripture with organizational wisdom as it is applied to the organized church. In order for that to happen, a series of objectives were necessary to achieve. The first step was a review of relevant literature. Such literature was identified as that in which organizational wisdom had intentionally been applied to the setting of the organized church. Relevant literature would include sources with which the researcher and PCR office were familiar, as well as sources which were available but not as yet familiar to the office of PCR. The specific focus for the literature review would be the matter of the integration of Scripture: was the Scripture engaged, and if so, was it integral to the application of organized wisdom to the setting of the organized church? It was important to gain a sense of whether Scripture was being engaged at all, and the manner in which it was being engaged. This included both a quantitative assessment as well as a qualitative assessment. It would acquaint the researcher with any prior or current conversations with respect to the project.

Second, a suitable source of organizational wisdom had to be identified, one which had to be helpful to church leaders: general enough to be of use to all, and versatile enough to be useful for application in unique settings. Third, a suitable biblical theme or teaching had to be identified, which could interact and be integrated with the selected source of organizational wisdom in a meaningful way. Fourth, an occasion for presenting this material and engaging with church leaders needed to arise either by invitation or by

arrangement. Fifth, arrangements for a multifaceted evaluation process had to be made, so that there might be input from program participants, colleagues, and the personal reflections of the researcher.

All three of these evaluative sources were important for this project. Program participants provided input by way of questionnaire surveys. “On balance, when a reasonable return rate is assured, questionnaires are a quick and simple way to obtain a fairly solid reading from a setting.”⁵³ Myers suggests that keeping it simple is usual practice in D.Min. projects and says, “the simpler the questionnaire, the more likelihood of useable data and a high rate of return.”⁵⁴ A simple five point continuum was utilized. A number of program participants also provided evaluative input by way of interviews.

As part of the target population, and as colleagues, evaluation input from the researcher’s colleagues was significant. So too was self-evaluation. William Myers underlines the value and validity of such evaluation when he says,

While some research methodologies deny the importance of data generated by the researcher’s own internal (and highly subjective) dialogue, the D.Min. process accents such data as necessary and important information.... It would seem that for ministerial transformation in the D.Min. process, such data (and the critical reflection generated by focusing on such data) is absolutely central to the task.⁵⁵

Evaluative data was gathered from the participants by way of survey questionnaire and interview, from colleagues in the PCR office, and from the researcher by way of personal assessment and reflections through a personal journey. When a variety of evaluative streams converge to provide a sense of coherence, the validity of the evaluations is

⁵³ William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry* (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 1993), 61.

⁵⁴ Myers, 65.

⁵⁵ Myers, 69.

strengthened. As Myers notes, “several tools may, in tandem, provide just the right amount of evaluative power.”⁵⁶

Each of the evaluative streams was qualitative. If there had been opportunity to arrange for a presentation of the organizational wisdom alone, followed at a later date with a presentation of the same organizational wisdom integrated with biblical teaching, there would have been opportunity to evaluate the difference in participants’ responses. This would have provided a quantitative measure of how well the goal of the program development had been achieved. Nevertheless, qualitative evaluations from a variety of sources combined to provide a fairly consistent assessment.

The achievement of the individual objectives would demonstrate the relative success of this program development in reaching the goal of integration. Participant responses to the questionnaire could also provide some input into the question of merit: does the integration of biblical teaching with organizational teaching add weight, or clarity, or enrichment to the organizational teaching? What these objectives will not prove is the relative value, impact or appreciation such integration might have for the program participants as they return to their congregational settings.

The achievement of these objectives would demonstrate that a theme in Scripture such as the long and panoramic theme of hospitality can be useful for sharpening the focus of organizational wisdom. And it would demonstrate that there are objective sources of organizational wisdom which are readily compatible with biblical teaching so that they serve to strengthen and enrich each other.

Finally, if congregational representatives recognize that integration is possible and beneficial--and are appreciative-- it will encourage PCR consultants to be more

⁵⁶ Myers, 68.

intentional about such integration. This will benefit the consultants' themselves as they engage the work, and also the congregations with whom they work, in a mutually beneficial, back and forth rhythm.

CHAPTER FIVE: FIELD WORK AND RESULTS

In this chapter, the process of developing the program from preparation through presentation is described. This is followed by an examination of the various means of evaluation used to assess whether the program achieved its goal.

Preparation

First objective

The first objective in the preparation phase was the identification and selection of an apt source of organizational wisdom. In the literature review of sources, the researcher reviewed those sources which intentionally applied organizational wisdom to the realm of the organized church (ch.3). It was determined that there were sources which demonstrated a profound and thorough integration of organizational wisdom with biblical teaching. The project undertaken was an attempt to emulate such integration in a new and creative way with a source of organizational wisdom not intentionally directed towards the organized church. And, the project was an attempt to achieve such integration not in response to a stress or conflict involving broken relationships, but in a more general, educational context. If sources which demonstrated significant integration already existed, might such integration also be initiated and demonstrated in the actual work of PCR? In an effort to begin with a clean slate, the researcher looked for a source of organizational wisdom which was not intentionally directed towards the organized church—but which had potential.

The resource which seemed particularly suited to this task was *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* by Lee G. Bolmans and Terrence E. Deal.⁵⁷ This source was familiar to the researcher as a source with much insight into organizational health, and useful both for fostering health and for identifying areas requiring growth.

Essentially the authors promote the wisdom of observing organizations through multiple lenses so as to gain a multifaceted picture of the whole. Individual lenses provide a zoom capacity for a specific area of focus, and this zoom capacity, together with the enrichment of the other lenses, contributes to a greater sense of the whole. This resource offers a blend of focusing on specific target areas, and focusing on the broader picture. Because this resource encourages multiple lenses, it requires making room for multiple perspectives, a concept which fits well with the “making room” perspective of hospitality.

According to Bolman and Deal, reframing organizations requires an ability to understand and use multiple perspectives, and to think about the same thing in more than one way. Bolman and Deal introduce four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each is distinctive, coherent and powerful in its own right. Together they help capture a comprehensive picture of what is, and what might be done to maintain or improve a current situation.⁵⁸ The insights of Bolman and Deal are relevant for encouraging health as well as diagnosing growth areas.

⁵⁷ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

⁵⁸ Bolman and Deal, 5.

The structural lens focuses attention on the goals or objectives of an organization. Achievement of such ends requires attending to roles and relationships so that diverse efforts are coordinated for the benefit of the organization.⁵⁹ Images such as an auto assembly plant or an aircraft carrier provide examples of complex endeavors which require the coordination of many smaller parts.

In contrast to the structural lens, when viewing an organization through the human resource lens much more attention falls on the well-being of the humans within the organization. Attention falls on matters of ensuring that the right people are in the right positions and of setting individuals up for success through appropriate training and the employment of feedback loops. Ideally, the fit between a person's abilities and the particular task or role is so great that it benefits both the organization and the individual.⁶⁰

The political lens views organizations as communities of diverse people who deal with limited resources. Sorting out how resources are distributed and used, setting priorities and negotiating power so that all voices are heard—these are staple dimensions that require significant collaboration by the stakeholders.⁶¹

The fourth lens is the symbolic. It focuses attention not so much on what happens or is accomplished, but on what things mean: their significance. The symbolic lens directs attention to the culture of an organization, and to the deeper layers of meaning. A

⁵⁹ Bolman and Deal, 45.

⁶⁰ Bolman and Deal, 115.

⁶¹ Bolman and Deal, 186.

particularly key way to measure meaningfulness is to observe the public gatherings of an organization and see what is identified as weighty.⁶²

These four lenses seemed immediately useful and relevant to the life of an organized church. Issues of mission and governance (structure), appropriate fit of staff and volunteers to specific tasks—as well as ensuring the wellbeing of these individuals in their roles (human resource), the reality of limited resources, power to be negotiated and differences among stakeholders (political), as well as the role of public worship both in revealing and in providing meaning by connecting to a deep reality (symbolic)—each of the lenses connected easily and directly. For the purpose of thinking about the organized church in a holistic manner, these lenses assist leaders in considering multiple essentials.

This resource was also readily compatible with the consultative work of PCR because a great deal of time and energy is spent simply observing. In consultation, the intent is to describe things carefully and thoroughly before moving to any kind of prescribing. As such, the four frames, or four-lens model offers a helpful tool to analyze a particular congregation and the challenges its leaders are experiencing. Viewing a congregation or its council through each of the four lenses means that significant time and energy are spent in the observation mode. Description precedes prescription.

There is a further benefit to such careful observation and the use of these four lenses as a diagnostic tool. On the one hand, it encourages leaders in the organized church to attend to a variety of angles which contribute to overall health. On the other hand, it provides a helpful way to identify organizational challenges. This is especially important in situations where congregations are not flourishing, and the pastor has been quickly though not necessarily accurately, identified as the problem.

⁶² Bolman and Deal, 242-243.

Reframing Organizations seemed especially suitable for integrating with Scripture because of the familiar dynamic of using four separate lenses to look at the identical subject or object. While Bolman and Deal look at an organization, the four gospel writers view the life and ministry of Jesus. There is something similar about each of the gospels in that they deal with the life and ministry of the same Jesus, but each gospel has a unique perspective. Having these separate lenses through which to see and hear the gospel of Jesus enriches the overall perspective and understanding of the reader. This familiar dynamic allowed for a smooth transition into speaking of a four-lens model for viewing organizations.

Second Objective

The second objective was to identify a suitable biblical theme or teaching which could be integrated meaningfully with the organizational wisdom to be applied. This was accomplished by tracing the biblical theme of hospitality as a thread running throughout the Scriptures, from beginning to end. It encapsulated a revelation of God's heart which bursts with generosity so as to do whatever is necessary for the flourishing of his creation and the creatures in its space. This resonated with the notion of an expressive artistry as noted by Bolman and Deal.⁶³ The theme of hospitality was traced through the key moments of creation, fall, redemption and consummation.

The theme of hospitality was also identified as essential to the life of the church. This was evidenced by the themes at play in the paradigmatic story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, set so very near the beginning of the life of the church. More specifically, the theme of hospitality was identified in the New Testament teaching on

⁶³ Bolman and Deal, xvii-xviii.

gifts given to the church by the ascended Lord Jesus. Both of these teachings underscored the good news of hospitable generosity: providing and utilizing resources for the wellbeing of others. This begins with God and continues with those who are being renewed in the image of God.

Both the overall theme of hospitality and the specific teaching on gifts which illustrated this theme were suited to being integrated with the four-lens model of Bolman and Deal. The teaching on gifts given to the body of Christ is found in four New Testament passages: Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, and 1 Peter 4:7-11. It was demonstrated in Chapter Two that there are teachings common to all of these passages. What became especially useful for the workshop was that in these four Scripture passages on gifts there are also unique emphases which the researcher matched with the four lenses of Bolman and Deal.

In Romans 12, there is an emphasis on self-examination. Individual members are encouraged to discern accurately just what the measure of their giftedness might be. “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.” (Rom. 12:3). When Paul speaks of using the gifts given, he highlights the appropriate, proportional use of gifts. To use the example of a rubber tire, there is an apt level of inflation.⁶⁴ Too little inflation as well as too much inflation may produce unwanted results in terms of tread wear. In terms of life in the body, an overly-inflated view of one’s giftedness is problematic, as is an under-inflated view. Paul’s concern about self-awareness speaks to an important dynamic within the human resource frame: the alignment of giftedness and task.

⁶⁴ John Murray, *Romans Volume II*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 117.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 has a decidedly different accent. This passage underlines the value of each member. Whereas individuals may be inclined to consider some gifts as more important and some gifts less so, Paul explores the metaphor of the human body and makes the point that each part has its role. He notes the irony surrounding which parts of the body might be perceived as weak or strong, presentable or unpresentable. "He employs the analogy not to keep subordinates in their places but to urge more privileged members of the community to respect and value the contributions of those members who appear to be their inferiors, both in social status and in spiritual potency."⁶⁵ This would be demonstrated by the experience of each member of the body receiving care appropriate to the need. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Attending to the voices and needs of every stakeholder and ensuring that each diverse voice is heard appropriately, is basic to the political frame.

Ephesians 4 calls attention to yet another facet of gifts and their use. In order for the body of Christ to be built up and mature so that it attains "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), there needs to be a coherence of structure. Such coherence would ensure that ministry and use of gifts are in line with the goal. Paul says, "From him (Christ) the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16). While translation of this text has proven to be problematic for interpreters, the basic

⁶⁵ Hays, 213.

notion that the various parts of the body are aligned by way of connection to Christ and to one another for a shared purpose is evident.⁶⁶

1 Peter 4 aligned with the *symbolic* lens, which focuses attention on meaningfulness: giving appropriate weight to matters in the public gatherings of an organization. Peter's teaching on gifts begins by setting a context of meaningfulness: "The end of all things is near. Therefore..." (v.7). Because the Giver of the gifts is returning, questions of stewardship and accountability become paramount.⁶⁷ This longer, deeper story frames the individual stories of people and ministry as these come to the worship setting. Exploring this dimension of gifts and giving appropriate weight to this reality in the context of worship makes the text fit well with the symbolic frame.

The first way, then, in which the biblical theme of hospitality was suited to integration with the organizational wisdom of Bolman and Deal was via a direct linking of the gift passages to each of the four frames. In this way, the generous outpouring of God's gifts to the body of Christ was linked directly to the body in its organized form. Viewing a church through one of these specific lenses and incorporating specific biblical teaching at the same time was intended to enhance the "zoom" effect of zeroing in on one specific area of the church. Both the church as organization (via the lenses of Bolman and Deal) and the church as organism (via the "gifts for the body" passages) would simultaneously be under consideration.

The second way in which the biblical theme of hospitality was suited to integration with the organizational wisdom of Bolman and Deal was by way of a more

⁶⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 445-451.

⁶⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The Jerome Biblical Commentary Vol. 2. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 368.

broad application. The sheer fact that Christ has poured out gifts for the flourishing of his body is a demonstration of hospitality. But now there is an additional question which goes beyond identifying gifts as evidence of God's heart. This additional question has to do with whether the human recipients of God's gifts are using them hospitably. To pursue this question, each of the four frames in their specific micro-focus would also be viewed through the macro-lens of hospitality. It would require superimposing the wide-angle lens of hospitality over each of the specific lenses, so that questions and matters of hospitality would provide enrichment and added depth. For example, if the human resource lens focuses attention on matters of self-awareness, and alignment of giftedness and tasks, the wide-angled lens of hospitality would ask the prime and deepest question, "How can we help each member of the body and the whole body to flourish?" In this way, the human resource lens has succeeded in not only placing human resource matters under a microscope, but alignment of giftedness and tasks becomes an opportunity for aligning the life of the body of Christ with its head, so that the heart of God nourishes the entire body.

This broad question of hospitality would be applied consistently to each of the four frames. Once again, the church-body as organization and the church-body as organism would be interacting simultaneously, since the biblical theme of hospitality is inseparable from the person and heart of God: a living being in whose image humans have been formed. The healthy functioning of a church organization becomes especially significant because the healthy functioning of a body is an image familiar and understood by all. The organizational wisdom of Bolman and Deal becomes more than just another

tool; it becomes a way to better understand and promote the health of a living, corporate entity.

After achieving the first objective of identifying a suitable source of organizational wisdom, and the second objective of identifying a suitable biblical theme which could be integrated well, what remained was the challenge of organizing the materials for presentation.

Presentation

The opportunity for presentation came in the form of a request from Lis Van Harten, Program Director of the Sustaining Congregational Excellence in the CRCNA. This gathering was held in London, Ontario, November 7-8, 2013. A total of 46 leaders were present, coming from a variety of locations in southern Ontario as well as eastern Michigan. It included pastors of established churches, church planters, spouses of pastors, lay persons who were leaders in their local churches, both men and women, from a wide range of ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as a wide range of socio-economic status and educational background. These people were unknown to the researcher, and a typical representation of the diversity among leaders in local churches within the CRCNA.

A second opportunity for presentation arose in November of 2014. This time the venue was in Mystic, Connecticut, and 31 congregational leaders from the eastern United States gathered on November 12-13, 2014 for a Sustaining Congregational Excellence event. The range of attendees was identical to the gathering a year earlier.

A combination of biblical teaching during morning devotions, lecture, group activity and plenary discussion was utilized. The allotted time for presentation was three hours. The rationale and flow of the presentation are now described.

The presentation began with a devotion based on Ephesians 4:1-16. The intent was to set the stage for the workshop material by focusing attention on the broad biblical theme of God's generous heart, and his hospitable posture towards the creation. In this case, the picture of the ascended, victorious Christ pouring out his gifts as the spoils of victory was the starting point. As God has done from the very beginning, God provides all the resources necessary for his creatures to flourish. This is also true for the church, the living body of Christ. Gifts are given so that the body as a whole may flourish. These gifts are given to individual members of the body, but the intent of these gifts is the flourishing of the body as a whole.

The presentation then began by drawing attention to the human body as comprised of twelve unique systems. The human body is an example of an instance where differences are not only real, but necessary. The coordination and intersection of these twelve systems is essential to the health of the person as a whole. Attending to each of these twelve systems is important for nurturing health, and attending to each of the twelve diverse systems is important for correct diagnoses of ailments. The researcher used an example of misdiagnosis in a person due to a physician attending to only one of the body's systems, rather than to many. These twelve systems function as lenses through which one may observe and examine a body.

A similar dynamic may be observed in Scripture. Though the number shifts from twelve to four, the existence of four gospel accounts of Jesus provide readers with four distinct views. Each gospel deals with the same person, yet each gospel is unique. The authors are diverse; the intended audience is diverse; the choice of material varies; the perspective is distinct. But each gospel enriches the overall picture of Jesus.

It is this simple dynamic of viewing someone or something from a variety of angles, or through a variety of lenses, which Bolman and Deal utilize in *Reframing Organizations*. Just as there are four gospels which view the person of Jesus, so Bolman and Deal identify four lenses through which one may view an organizational body. This comparison was the first attempt at integrating this organizational source of wisdom with that of the Scriptures. This connection was not one of content, but one of form: a similar way of gaining and providing insight. It was intended to establish credibility for Bolman and Deal at a very basic level.

What followed was an attempt at integration which focused more particularly on content. The presentation identified the four New Testament passages which deal with the gifts given to the church. Teaching which was common to these passages was identified, followed by teaching that was unique to these passages. At that point, the presentation began to directly integrate the organizational wisdom of Bolman and Deal with the scriptural teaching on gifts. Each of the four lenses was explained and then linked to a particular gift passage.

Specifically, the presentation drew attention to the organized church and what each lens might bring into view. This entailed key concepts as well as key questions, and these are summarized as presented.

Key concepts for the structural lens were those of “skeleton frame” and coherence of the parts with the whole. The structural lens brings matters of organization, administration and governance into view. Questions which arise are those relating to lines of accountability and authority: are these lines clear? Are the boundaries of responsibility clear? Are channels of communication present and clear? And ultimately, do the various

parts align with the mission and purpose and specific goals which have been set? The gift passage for this lens was Ephesians 4:1-16, and especially verses 15-16. The organizational images used to highlight this frame were those of a factory and an aircraft carrier.

The key concept within the human resource frame was the question, “who is doing what?” The intention in this frame is to find a win-win scenario for both individual persons and for the body as a whole. For this to be accomplished, honest assessments of giftedness are essential. The gift passage associated with this lens was Romans 12:3-8 in which Paul calls attention to self-awareness. Questions which arise for the church involve the alignment of gifts and tasks, so that people are in roles well-suited to their capacities. Nurturing success means expectations must be clearly stated and understood, appropriate orientation and training must be in place, and feedback loops are active and interested both in the work and the person. The organizational images used to bring clarity to this frame were those of a family and a sports team.

The third lens identified by Bolman and Deal was the political lens. In the presentation, this lens was named the stakeholder lens so as to enhance clarity and avoid misunderstanding. Key to this lens was the matter of balancing needs, opportunities and resources—and to do so justly, with a concern and care for all who are involved. Lying underneath it all is the matter of power: how decisions are made so as to provide the balance desired. It is especially in this frame that the diversity within a body can be experienced both as real and as problematic. For this reason, the gift passage in 1 Corinthians 12 is relevant. A key question which arises when viewing the body through this lens is this: who are the stakeholders? (Answer: everyone impacted by the ministry of

this church body is a stakeholder of some kind.) What remains are the questions of whose voices are being barely heard and whose voices are too loud? Are the needs of all stakeholders being addressed? The organizational images for this lens were two. The first is the city, which helps explain the “political” term used by Bolman and Deal; the second is an orchestra, which explains the references to the volume of various voices.

The fourth frame was the symbolic, which emphasized significance and meaning. This frame raised the question of weightiness, and the manner in which this plays out in the public gatherings of an organization. For a church, this brings a focus upon public worship. It raises questions about the way in which worship deals with people and ministries. Is what we are doing worthwhile? Is it good stewardship of the time and energy and resources required? How does an individual life story or a particular ministry story fit within the grand story which Scripture tells? What receives weight, or, as per the Hebrew *kabod*, what is given glory in worship? The gift passage in 1 Peter 4:7-11 was tied to this frame because it provides a context of meaningfulness for considering the use of gifts. Peter reminds us of the larger story within which life occurs: “The end of all things is near” (v. 7) which is to say, “The giver of the gifts is returning.” The organizational images used to highlight this frame were that of theater and temple.

After exploring the four specific lenses in conjunction with the four gift passages, the presentation took a step back for a wide-angle view. Viewing the organized church through these specific lenses narrows the view and brings details into focus. This micro-view has hospitable intent: the flourishing of individual body members and the body as a whole. But there is another way to address hospitable intent, and that is by way of a macro view. The presenter imagined a wide-angle hospitality lens superimposed over

each of the specific lenses. This wide-angle lens provided opportunity for ensuring that the broad theme of hospitality would be called to mind.

The key concepts for this lens were that of making room for each other, and a generous use of one's resources for the blessing and flourishing of others. The key Scripture passage for this lens was Philippians 2:1-11, in which the heart of God's hospitality was revealed in the story of Jesus Christ's humiliation and exaltation. The four lenses of Bolman and Deal provided the impetus for the questions raised. How do the four lenses contribute to the flourishing of each and every one involved in the church? How are we contributing to faith-formation? Are we mourning and rejoicing with each other? Are the heart of God and the mystery of God's Spirit at work in this community of believers encouraged? As an organizational image, the presenter called to mind the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: in order to be whole, the body of Christ must have the mind of Christ.

The presentation concluded with a group exercise designed to give the teaching some traction. First of all, each participant was asked to identify which of the four lenses they considered their default lens. The presumption was that each of us has one lens which fits most comfortably as a natural and first way of viewing. Then, the familiar nursery rhyme "Humpty, Dumpty" was used as a foil for participants to put their default lens to use. Participants were grouped according to their default lens and asked to address the predicament described in the nursery rhyme by assessing what had gone wrong, and what might be done in response.

The intent was that each participant would take ownership of their default way of approaching a situation, and recognize it as such. This would also make clear the reality

of other perspectives. After a time of group work was completed, representatives of each lens grouping shared the ways in which this situation appeared through the vantage point of their particular lens. Opportunity was given for questions and comments. Ideally, the participants discovered that there were insights to be gained from perspectives other than their own. This would encourage an appreciation for the need to be hospitable in making room for a variety of perspectives. It could also increase an awareness of the blind spots present in their own default perspective.

Ultimately, this playful exercise could allow participants to practice the same kind of multi-lensed approach in dealing with dilemmas in their home congregations. Both humility and a more nuanced, more enriched perspective would result.

Arrangements for evaluation were also implemented. A questionnaire survey was prepared for the attendees at the first gathering in London, Ontario. There were six questions which addressed the matter of the integration of Scripture with the organizational wisdom from Bolman and Deal. The questionnaires were administered by the event facilitator without advance notice to the participants. Of the 46 questionnaires distributed, 31 were returned.

Further evaluation was received through interviews with selected participants at the second gathering in Mystic, Connecticut. Six people (five participants and the event facilitator) were asked to engage in a follow-up conversation with the presenter/researcher for the purpose of evaluation necessary for this learning project. The interview was intended to address matters similar to the questionnaire, but open-ended and relatively unstructured. There was room and encouragement for further comment.

Four people agreed to the follow-up conversation. One was conducted in person, and three by way of telephone.

This was a purposive sample, based on a perceived willingness to engage with the researcher during the event itself, and based on seeking input from a variety of participants.⁶⁸ Those interviewed included two females and two males, two different races, and four different occupations. The interviewees included the event facilitator, a seminary student, a church administrator, and a pastor. Each of these conversations was recorded with the permission and awareness of the participants, for the purpose of transcription and reference by the researcher.

A further means of evaluation was arranged with the researcher's two colleagues in the PCR office, both of whom were aware of the problem identified for this project, and both of whom engage in the consultative work of PCR. They were asked to review this program development in terms of the stated goal and objectives, to review the supporting materials and also the script of the presentation.

The final source of evaluation was an ongoing self-evaluation. This would include an "in the moment" evaluation of the actual field work, but also a contextualized evaluation arising from the researcher's personal story. It was important, therefore, that in the write-up of this project, the program development be located within the context of a pastoral journey which has a lengthy history and still continues.

Evaluation

The foremost means of evaluation was a questionnaire survey which was given to the 46 participants at the gathering in London, Ontario. Two-thirds of these

⁶⁸ Myers, 55,56.

questionnaires were returned, and a number of them included handwritten comments. Further evaluation came by means of four interviews of participants at a second gathering in Mystic CT, two colleague assessments and self-evaluation. These served to supplement and enrich the core evaluation provided by the questionnaire results.

The questionnaire surveyed the levels at which participants deemed the scriptural materials relevant to the organizational wisdom being taught, the level of integration achieved, and whether this integration served to clarify and strengthen the teaching of organizational wisdom. Questions one and two addressed the question of relevance with respect to content: were the scriptural teaching on gifts, and the scriptural teaching on the broad theme of hospitality relevant to Bolman and Deal's teaching on four lenses? Question three addressed the relevance of relating the formal concept of four gospel lenses to the teaching on four lenses. Question four went a step beyond specific relevance to ask how well integration of organizational wisdom and biblical wisdom was achieved. Finally, questions five and six addressed specific benefits of integration: did the integration provide clarity to the teaching of the four lenses and did it help strengthen that teaching?

Table 4.1 Questionnaire Results

Relevance of Gifts

1. On a scale of 1-5, rate the level at which the scriptural teaching on gifts was relevant to the teaching on the use of multiple lenses.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
			26	4

This question referred to the use of the four New Testament passages on gifts given to the church. Ten of the questionnaires included comments on this item. In general, these comments reflected the very positive numbers recorded. One participant found this connection “freeing—to encourage each other to walk in our giftings.” Others found the tie-ins “very compelling,” “a lot to think about” and “the verses made clear the teaching on gifts.” A pastor commented that it allowed for revisiting familiar Scripture texts “from a new and different angle. It allows me to rethink how I could or will preach and reflect on a text.” Although one participant found it “at times too much, particularly at the beginning,” another gleaned that “God’s gifts ‘reflect’ the light shining through us (lenses) that ultimately focus his light where needed.” This comment reflects an understanding of these gifts as a demonstration of God’s generosity.

One of those interviewed spoke of how the teaching on gifts “stretched her thinking.”⁶⁹ The conference facilitator noted that “where you talk about different gifts, again, very, very clear because obviously depending on what your lens is, that’s how you are gifted, so that was a really good connecting point.”⁷⁰ In a review of the project colleague Norm Thomasma suggested that “the ‘discovery’ of complementarity between the four lenses of Bolman and Deal and the four gift passages of the New Testament is particularly intriguing and promises to yield considerable lift in engaging and enlightening congregations.” Notably, all 30 of the recorded responses were positive about the relevance of the gifts passages.

Relevance of hospitality

⁶⁹ Joyce Monsma, interview by author, November 26, 2014.

⁷⁰ Lis Van Harten, interview by author, Grand Rapids, MI, December 4, 2015.

2. On a scale of 1-5, rate the level at which the scriptural teaching on hospitality was relevant to the teaching on the use of multiple lenses.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
	1	3	17	9

This question dealt with the more general theme of hospitality which had been identified in the morning devotions as the underlying heart of the teaching on gifts. The broad theme of hospitality was also referenced in the teaching of the specific passages on gifts. Some respondents found this concept difficult to grasp and one said that “it seemed a stretch.” On the other hand, one respondent stated that the teaching on hospitality “puts focus on the most important factor by which all other lens should be applied.” While nine respondents stated that this teaching was completely relevant, at least one said its relevance was minimal. There was a definite diversity among participants in their response to this part of the teaching.

Those interviewed provided additional nuance. Lis Van Harten was challenged to engage with the hospitality teaching as it pertained to the four lenses until she noted that “allowing people to be who they are is a form of hospitality.”⁷¹ Two of those interviewed anticipated some benefit from the teaching on hospitality for conflict management. Jeremy Chen wanted a stronger emphasis on the teaching of hospitality and its potential applications within a local church,⁷² while Matthew Lin appreciated the way this teaching shed light on a church conflict with which he was familiar.⁷³ All of those interviewed

⁷¹ Van Harten, interview.

⁷² Jeremy Chen, interview by author, December 3, 2014.

⁷³ Matthew Lin, interview by author, December 1, 2014.

remarked on the capacity of hospitality to make congregation members more accepting of each other. Joyce Monsma noted the way hospitality would enable people to make room for each other.⁷⁴ This would encourage humility with respect to one’s own default perceptions, and would encourage more thinking about how every member could flourish. And in his review, Norm Thomasma said that “overlaying this workshop under the wide angle lens of hospitality invites people to consider other points of view, other narratives and other persons in painting a thicker and richer picture of their congregation.”⁷⁵ Though there were challenges for some, and a variety of thoughts of how the material might have been presented more effectively, there was a strong sense among respondents that the hospitality teaching meshed well with the emphasis on using multiple lenses.

Relevance of four gospel lenses

3. On a scale of 1-5 rate the level at which using the model of four gospel lenses was relevant to the teaching on the use of multiple lenses.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
	1	2	16	12

This third question focused not on content, but on form. Was the similarity in form between the Scripture’s use of four gospel lenses and Bolman and Deal’s use of four lenses a compelling similarity? Most of the respondents were positive in their assessment. Comments noted that “it made sense to draw the comparison,” it “made me

⁷⁴ Monsma, interview.

⁷⁵ Norm Thomasma, interview by author, January, 2015.

think more clearly,” and “each gospel is a contextual reflection of the author’s situation.” One comment acknowledged “I don’t understand this, so not sure.”

Among those interviewed, three of the four agreed that the use of four lenses within Scripture provided a helpful connector to the teaching of Bolman and Deal. In particular, Lis Van Harten said “Because you were taking the exact same thing, but showing it through four different writer’s viewpoint, and for me that was just so clear.”⁷⁶ While not all respondents agreed, the survey demonstrated that this formal connection was helpful for most of them.

Integration

4. On a scale of 1-5 rate the overall level at which scriptural teaching was integrated into the presentation.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
			18	13

The survey now moved beyond specific elements of relevance to inquire concerning the actual integration of these specific elements from Scripture with the four lens model. The respondents were uniform in their assessment that integration was achieved either largely or completely. Two of three respondents noted that this integration was “very well done.” In commenting on the integration of organizational wisdom with biblical wisdom, colleague Denise Posie observed that “applying the biblical wisdom adds a deeper dimension of learning and possible transformation.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Van Harten, interview.

⁷⁷ Denise Posie, interview by author, January, 2015.

Norm Thomasma noted that the integration demonstrated in this project is an illustration of “an appreciation for the way in which creation also reflects the creator and that through the organizing lens of Scripture, creation is a rich open book”⁷⁸ which allows Christians to value the findings of the social sciences.

The topic of integration also produced comments concerning pedagogical strategy. Lis Van Harten noted that she preferred beginning with Scripture and then integrating the organizational wisdom, as opposed to beginning with teaching the organizational wisdom and then integrating the Scripture.⁷⁹ The topic of integration led Matthew Lin to consider the ways in which Scripture might not only impact an understanding of the lenses, but how the lenses might impact an understanding of Scripture. He noted, “I think about how Paul and Barnabas interacted—just looking at how these lenses play out in Scripture would be really fruitful.”⁸⁰

Clarity

5. On a scale of 1-5 rate the level at which the integration of scriptural teaching helped to bring clarity to the teaching on the use of multiple lenses.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
		3	17	10

The survey included this question on clarity because in a process involving a great deal of observation and the use of various lenses, one hopes that the focus can be sharpened. Two rather different comments were noted. One respondent did not feel that

⁷⁸ Thomasma, interview.

⁷⁹ Van Harten, interview.

⁸⁰ Lin, interview.

the presentation had helped to bring clarity, but said “this may be because of my familiarity with the four frame concept already.” Perhaps clarity had already been achieved for this participant. Another stated that “it completed the picture well. It helped me to see God’s word made alive in the presentation and in my life.” In the interview with Lis Van Harten, the word “clear” recurred several times in describing the relevance of both the form of the four gospels and the content of the gifts passages.⁸¹

Strength

6. On a scale of 1-5, rate the level at which the integration of scriptural teaching helped strengthen the teaching on the use of multiple lenses.

Not at all	Minimally	Moderately	Largely	Completely
		4	16	10

The final question related to the perception of increased strength. One of the respondents noted that “I could bring this back to my council or congregation and have a strong biblical basis.” Denise Posie affirmed this assessment by noting that this integration of organizational wisdom with biblical wisdom “helps in strengthening churches by aligning an organizational need with a biblical need.”⁸² Monsma underlined

⁸¹ Van Harten, interview.

⁸² Posie, interview.

the strengthening value of this integration with Scripture because “that’s where life’s framework comes from” and this made the teaching more meaningful.⁸³ Lis Van Harten noted that while it might not matter if one were presenting to non-Christians, when presenting to a Christian audience, “it definitely does strengthen it, your lens proposal.” This is a very existential concern for a person who is both a Christian and involved in a daily basis in the life of an organization.⁸⁴

Summary

The questionnaire results demonstrated that integration of Scripture and organizational wisdom had been largely or completely achieved. Eighteen of the respondents said that it had “largely” been achieved, and 13 stated that it had been achieved “completely.” These numbers are inclusive of all 31 returned questionnaires. This affirmation of the fact of integration was also confirmed by those interviewed after the gathering of church leaders in Mystic, CT. as well as by the researcher’s colleagues.

In assessing the quality of this integration, a high majority of respondents affirmed that the integration of biblical material was largely or completely relevant: 30 respondents affirmed that the biblical teaching on gifts was relevant, 26 of the respondents affirmed that the biblical teaching on hospitality was relevant, and 28 respondents affirmed that the biblical dynamic of four gospel lenses was relevant to the four-lens model of Bolman and Deal.

⁸³ Monsma, interview.

⁸⁴ Van Harten, interview.

The results were only slightly less affirmative in response to questions about clarity and strengthening: 27 of the respondents stated that the scriptural teaching helped bring clarity, and 26 of the respondents stated that the scriptural teaching helped strengthen the teaching, and this again was either largely or completely so.

The interviews, though based primarily on the flow of the questionnaires, were open-ended. These gave rise to some fruitful observations with respect to pedagogical strategy as well as the diverse manner in which participants engaged with the materials.

A particular question of pedagogical strategy had to do with the relative merit of beginning with the biblical teaching and integrating the organizational wisdom afterwards, or beginning with the organizational wisdom and then integrating the biblical teaching.

A second question of strategy revolved around the group activity of utilizing a familiar nursery rhyme as a playful way to own default lenses and imagine viewing a situation through each of the four lenses. This was assessed quite differently by two of the interviewees. One was very positive in the effectiveness of this exercise, saying, “they may have had it before the nursery rhyme, but I’m sure they have it after the nursery rhyme.”⁸⁵ Another was not as convinced that the exercise had achieved its intended goal. Jeremy Chen felt that some would make the connection between this light-hearted exercise and more serious situations in home congregations, but others would not.⁸⁶ Norm Thomasma reflected that the use of the Humpty Dumpty narrative would provide a playful way for participants to deepen their understanding of various perspectives. He

⁸⁵ Van Harten, interview.

⁸⁶ Chen, interview.

said, “Helping participants function from the more imaginative parts of their brains will help them see their congregation with new eyes and imagine some new possible narratives other than the one or two to which they have become attached.”⁸⁷

Personal evaluation

The evaluative comments above seem consistent with the researcher’s personal assessment. On the one hand, there were significant attempts to integrate the organizational wisdom with biblical teaching. Linking the four gift passages to the four lenses was one direct way of integrating organizational wisdom and biblical teaching. The fact that the gift passages are a key demonstration and experience of God’s hospitable generosity towards the church underlined the value and fittingness of the second, broader attempt to integrate. Considering the biblical theme of hospitality as a wide-angled lens to be superimposed over the individual lenses enhanced the focus of the individual lenses and strengthened the overall effect of integration. In summary, the attempts at integration using this biblical theme and this source of organizational wisdom succeeded. The questionnaire results on the question of integration were the most decisive numbers of the six questions asked. The 31 respondents all stated that integration had been largely (18) or completely (13) achieved.

It was of interest to the researcher that the familiar pattern of four lenses which is evident in the gospels, seemed to establish the validity of the integration with Scripture every bit as much as the actual teaching from Scripture. In this instance, it was not only substance which provided an integrative link, but a familiar and complementary pattern which gave credence to the integrative effort.

⁸⁷ Thomasma, interview.

The fact that integration occurred, that it seemed relevant, strengthened teaching and brought greater clarity to teaching is what the questionnaire responses suggested. Nevertheless, the researcher noted a slightly weaker response when it came to questions of benefit. Did integration with biblical teaching bring greater clarity? Did integration strengthen the teaching? In these instances, there were three who answered that greater clarity was achieved only moderately, and four who answered that the integration strengthened the teaching only moderately. Although 26 of 30 and 27 of 30 stated that clarity and strengthening had been achieved largely or completely, this slight differential raised the question of pedagogical effectiveness. If it was clear to all that integration was achieved, it was not quite as clear that the intended benefit of such integration was achieved.

The speculations above with respect to pedagogical effectiveness were articulated directly in some of the interviews, with the suggestion that it may be more helpful to begin with something specific and local, and then move to the more universal.⁸⁸ As it was, the presentation moved in the opposite direction, from the broad concept to the more specific. Pedagogically, there may be areas to explore so as to increase effectiveness.

The concept of integrating these two different, yet complementary sources of truth has merit. Doing it well, so that integration has integrity, and is not forced, requires careful attention both to the organizational wisdom itself and to the Scriptures. And presenting this in ways which result in traction for a whole range of church leaders requires careful attention as well. In reflecting on the interviews, the differences in what was heard by a seminarian, an office administrator, a pastor and an event facilitator underscored the varied nature of those gathered.

⁸⁸ Chen, interview.

The use of a familiar nursery rhyme to assist in engaging participants with the notion of default lenses, and with the practice of viewing a situation from a variety of angles, was an effective strategy. It brought the theory into practice in a concrete manner, and it did so in a non-threatening manner.

To summarize, meeting the objectives that were set out led to a real integration of specific organizational wisdom and specific biblical teaching. What the questionnaires and interviews also made clear is that while the goal of integration was achieved, the benefits of achieving that goal leave room for improvement. Much of this may be accomplished by improved pedagogy. But there is a further unknown. While participants recognized that integration had occurred, participants were slightly less clear about the benefits of clarity and strengthening. It is unknown how appreciative or desirous the participants were with respect to integrating biblical teaching in this presentation. The assumption of the researcher that integration with Scripture would provide additional *gravitas* may not be shared by all participants. This might be a question worth asking of future participants.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This project addressed the lack of integration of biblical teaching in the work of the Office of Pastor-Church Relations (PCR), an agency in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA).

During the process of being interviewed for the researcher's current position as a consulting pastor for PCR, the lack of such integration was identified by the Director of PCR as a deficit within this agency. Intentional integration of biblical teaching into the consultation work of this agency was presented as a specific and fitting challenge for the

role of consulting pastor and also for the Office of PCR as an agency within a Christian denomination.

In a review of consultation reports written and filed between 1996 and 2008, the lack of such integration became evident. Consultation reports reflected the personal observations of consulting pastors, as well as teaching gleaned from a variety of sources and perspectives within the social sciences. Reference to the teaching of Scripture was almost non-existent.

As a means of addressing this problem, the researcher engaged in a research project of program development. The goal of this program was the integration of biblical teaching with organizational wisdom.

Biblical Theme of Hospitality

In the book *Engaging God's World*, Cornelius Plantinga says,

The mission of Jesus—what the Swiss theologian Karl Barth called ‘the way of the Son of God into the far country’—was to empty himself for the sake of others. In the mystery of the cross, the humiliating death of Jesus Christ was actually a triumph of self-giving love, an ‘atoning sacrifice...for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:2). That’s why it brings glory to God. The point is that God’s splendor becomes clearer whenever God or the Son of God powerfully spends himself in order to cause others to flourish. According to the kingdom’s way of life, self-expenditure of this kind is true Lordship.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 19-20.

Plantinga suggests that the kind of love which is revealed in the incarnation of Jesus and the death of Jesus, is a love which is evident all along, even at the very beginning “when God graciously made room in the universe for other kinds of beings.”⁹⁰

Or, as Paul Wadell says, “If to love someone is to make a place for her or him in our lives, then God is the exemplary lover because God makes a place for all of us—indeed, the whole of creation—in the divine life.”⁹¹

What is so powerfully clear in the passion of Christ is that God’s heart has room for others, longs for the well-being of others, and God’s heart leads him to spend himself for the sake of others. Such provision and passion for the well-being of others may be defined as hospitality. This revelation of God’s heart can be traced throughout the Scriptures, and is enormously suggestive for understanding ourselves as human beings created in the image of God.

The capacity and desire to make room for others, as well as to spend oneself so as cause others to flourish are relevant to an understanding of God and to an understanding of humanity. “Hospitality is a lens through which we can read and understand much of the gospel, and a practice by which we can welcome Jesus himself.”⁹² Gaining a sense of the pervasive way in which the theme of hospitality is present in the story of Scripture gave weight to the use of hospitality as an additional and especially appropriate lens for use in viewing the church as an organization. The church is never merely an organization, or an organized body; the church is a living body—an organism.

⁹⁰ Plantinga, 23.

⁹¹ Wadell, 82.

⁹² Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 8.

This theme of hospitality was traced from creation through the fall into sin, through the story of redemption in Jesus Christ, and to the consummation of all things at the end of times. This theme was shown to be especially helpful for the purposes of addressing the problem within the consultation work of PCR because of three reasons. First, hospitality and the integrity of generosity were identified as key markers of health in the life of the early church as evidenced in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. Secondly, the gifts of the ascended Lord Jesus were identified as evidence of the hospitality of God. These gifts were given to individual members but always for the benefit—the health and vitality of the whole body of Christ. Third, the broad theme of hospitality and its more specific manifestation in the gifts given to the church as the body of Christ, was identified as a theme which could be useful for integrating with organizational wisdom geared at assisting the organized church to be a body of health and vitality.

Literature Review

In the first segment of the literature review, the consultation reports on file in the PCR office demonstrated the lack of direct usage and engagement with Scripture. Only one of 41 reports included a direct citation from Scripture.

The second segment of the literature review examined sources of organizational wisdom utilized in the regular consulting work of PCR with congregations. The sources reviewed were not organizational wisdom in general, but only those which could be identified as intentionally utilizing organizational wisdom to address matters of concern within the organized church. Many frequently used sources were not included in this

review because their focus was not intentionally and specifically on applying organizational wisdom to church settings.

These sources were then reviewed with respect to their engagement with Scripture. In the process of applying organizational wisdom to the setting of the organized church, were the Scriptures a part of that engagement? How integral and meaningful was that engagement? The researcher's evaluation of these sources was based partially on the actual presence of Scripture citations, and partially on a subjective assessment of the quality of the engagement.

The same method of review was applied to a sample set of other resources which were chosen because they intentionally sought to apply organizational wisdom to some facet of the organized church. In these applications the questions were asked once again: were the Scriptures a part of that engagement, and how integral and meaningful was that engagement?

What the literature review revealed was a wide range of engagement with the Scriptures. There were some sources and studies which did not engage directly with Scripture at all. There were some sources which demonstrated moderate engagement with Scripture, citing a few passages and making occasional scriptural allusions, but applying organizational wisdom to the church without robust interaction with Scripture. There were also many sources which engaged frequently and deeply with Scripture as they applied organizational wisdom to a church setting. What was not clear was the relationship between level of engagement with Scripture and the intentionality of the writers.

In the judgment of the researcher, those authors who engaged robustly with Scripture, seeking to integrate it fully with other research and wisdom, provided the most satisfying results. The engagement with Scripture added *gravitas* and a sense of completeness to their work. Authors such as Sheila Stobel Smith, Mark Lou Branson and Donald Zimmerman produced works which demonstrated the possibility of achieving integration, and also demonstrated the value of such integration. The works of these authors encouraged the researcher to search for fitting ways to achieve similar integration in the specific areas of PCR consultation.

It became evident that the presence of Scripture citations all by themselves did not ensure robust engagement or integration. Similarly, the absence of Scripture citations did not mean that a particular element of organizational wisdom was not useful in a church setting. It became evident that integration would be enrichment, and that it would need to be done thoughtfully and deeply for integration to have integrity. In none of the sources examined was it the case that the integration of Scripture was the specific focus: it occurred, or did not occur. Whether it was intentional was not clear.

Field Research

The researcher identified a source of organizational wisdom as well as a strand of biblical teaching which seemed suitable for the purpose of intersecting and integrating with each other. The occasion to test such integration was a regional gathering of Christian Reformed church leaders, both lay and clergy, held in London, Ontario in November of 2013. A second occasion for testing such integration was a regional gathering of Christian Reformed church leaders, both lay and clergy, held in Mystic,

Connecticut, in November of 2014. The specific program developed was an intentional integration of organizational wisdom and relevant biblical teaching.

The source of organizational wisdom was Bolman and Deals' *Reframing Organizations*.⁹³ This resource was readily compatible with the consultative work of PCR in that PCR places emphasis on the need to observe. A great deal of time and energy is spent in observing, so as to describe carefully and thoroughly before moving to any kind of prescribing. As such, the four frames, or four-lens model offered a helpful tool to analyze a particular congregation and the challenges its leaders experience. As a diagnostic tool, its wisdom seemed particularly well-suited to the diagnostic type of consultation in which PCR is engaged.

This resource also seemed well-suited for use with participants familiar with the gospel records found in Scripture. There are four distinct gospels serving as four distinct lenses through which to view the story of Jesus' life and ministry. Each views the same material, but does so uniquely.

The biblical teaching was the theme of hospitality: the notion of God as unfathomably generous in his desire to provide all the resources needed for his creatures and creation to flourish. The New Testament teaching on gifts was the focal point for demonstrating the intersection of biblical teaching and organizational teaching.

Just as Bolman and Deal identify four unique lenses through which to view an organization, so the biblical teaching on gifts is located in four separate settings which provide not only teaching which is shared, but also teaching which is unique to each setting. The researcher highlighted the manner in which the uniqueness of each gift

⁹³ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

passage might connect to one of the four lenses proposed by Bolman and Deal. Participants in the first gathering were surveyed by way of questionnaire to determine their assessment of the quality of the attempted integration of organizational wisdom and biblical teaching. Some of the participants in the second gathering were engaged in open-ended conversations based on the initial questionnaire outline. The researcher's colleagues in PCR provided their assessment of the project's trajectory, and the researcher also engaged in a self-evaluation.

Summary

These evaluations demonstrated that the attempt to integrate organizational wisdom and biblical teaching was successful. The use of the four-lens model provided organizational wisdom which was applicable to the setting of the organized church. It was also compatible with the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts. Integration was achieved in terms of the broad teaching of hospitality, which makes clear that gifts given are resources to bless the whole body. And integration was achieved in terms of matching specific lenses with specific gift passages: in effect, the unique teaching within each of the gift passages served as a matching four-lens approach. The fact that there are four gospels in the Scriptures provided a ready point of comparison for the credibility of a four-lens approach.

In addressing the deficit within the office of PCR, this project demonstrated that such a deficit could be overcome. What remains is to increase the effectiveness of presenting such integration by improved pedagogy and by whetting the appetite of participants for such integration as a matter of course.

Strengths of the Research

A strength of the research was the convergence of a suitable source of organizational wisdom and a suitable biblical theme or teaching. The demonstration of a biblical theme present throughout the Scripture story and especially evident in the key moments of creation, fall, redemption and consummation was significant. This was especially so because the specific teaching on spiritual gifts which served as the specific point of integration, was shown to be an expression of this long and deep theme of hospitality. Gifts are given for the sake of the health and vitality of the body of Christ.

The fact that Bolman and Deal use of four lenses was also designed for the health and vitality of organizations made the integration of such wisdom with biblical teaching relatively seamless. There was a convergence of four lenses and four gift passages; there was a convergence of pattern in that each of the four lenses and gift passages offer something unique, as well as something similar; there was a convergence of hospitable intent. The gift passages added the depth of the mystery of an organized body being more than mere organization: the church is the living body of Christ.

A second strength of the research was not so much the result of personal insight but the insight of Bolman and Deal and their four-lens model, and the blessing of discovering their approach. It is multi-dimensional, sharpening the focus in observing specific areas of an organization, and encouraging a rich and wholesome understanding of the organization. Utilizing different lenses forces an observer to go beyond one vantage point, and certainly beyond one's preferred vantage point. It encourages humility and a respect for multiple points of view. This too is an expression and experience of "making room" for others: a hospitable posture. It helps to prevent premature

assessments and one-sided solutions. It respects the complexity of organizations and their members. It considers not only itself, but looks to the flourishing of others and the whole.

Weakness of Research

As it stands, this project demonstrated that an intentional integration of biblical teaching with organizational wisdom is possible. Although specifically geared to address the deficit in the niche area of PCR, it stands alongside other sources which engaged robustly with Scripture and integrated biblical teaching with organizational wisdom. Nevertheless, this project seems but a first step, and a small one. While it demonstrated the simple fact of integration being possible, it did not demonstrate increased levels of effectiveness or benefit to the teaching of organizational wisdom. A number of possibilities suggest themselves.

First, it would be enlightening to survey a group of people relative to a specific presentation of organizational wisdom apart from any scriptural teaching. Then, repeat such a presentation to the same group, but this time with that organizational wisdom intentionally integrated with biblical teaching. This would allow a more quantitative assessment of the difference such integration may have produced. This would provide another valuable layer of research data.

Second, it would be helpful to explore the use of this specific four-lens approach, integrated with biblical teaching, in a congregational setting over a period of time. This would provide an opportunity for an actual case study in the usefulness of this organizational wisdom and potentially allow this organizational wisdom to shed light on the scriptural teaching regarding spiritual gifts. Measuring the impact and growth would be most helpful.

Third, while integration was achieved, further questions now present themselves. For example, while the researcher assumes that the integration of biblical teaching adds weight, value, and even authority to organizational wisdom, do congregation members and their leaders share this assessment? It would be interesting to chart the benefit of integration in terms of its weightiness for members across a period of time.

These observations suggest this study is generative. It demonstrates the viability of integrating biblical theology with organizational wisdom, and encourages further development of this practice.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FORMATIVE IMPACT

The process of writing this thesis began in the summer of 2011. Already then, it became clear that it would require a great deal of persistence. From the start, the need to narrow and sharpen the focus of this project was evident. The initial proposal needed to be rewritten entirely. Some months later, another version with a still sharper focus was drafted. Although it was approved, there would be yet a further reconfiguration of the proposal. Persistence was practiced and learned.

A number of times there were many months when the project sat dormant. Picking it up again and rekindling the interest and energy to build momentum was a challenge. This was one more dynamic which required persistence.

Far beyond this basic and perhaps common experience of developing persistence, the process of writing this thesis was profoundly formative. At times the process was exciting; at times it was frustrating; at times it was exhausting—but whatever the experience or emotion, it was formative.

This project arose within the context of a long pastoral journey. Early on, there was an antipathy towards wisdom from the world of business and secular organizations being utilized in a church setting. Gradually, this antipathy faded. The researcher began to understand that there was a broad category of organizational wisdom which was helpful and appropriate for organizations of many kinds such as schools, hospitals, businesses and churches. This led to a desire to not only utilize organizational wisdom, but to explore whether it could be integrated with specific biblical teaching.

In fact, during the process of working on this project, the value of organizational wisdom became more deeply evident to the researcher. But surprisingly, the researcher discovered that this process of integration also increased an appreciation for the biblical teaching itself. In searching the Scriptures for teaching which would intersect and even enhance the organizational wisdom, the researcher's understanding and appreciation of the gift passages deepened. Biblical passages which were often avoided or engaged moderately, now seemed more weighty and vital to the gospel message and the health of the organized body of Christ. This was a surprising turn, and seemed a delightful instance of God's sense of humor at work.

This renewed sense of discovery for the Scripture's teaching also strengthened the passion for integrating and anchoring organizational wisdom within the teaching of Scripture. There is a sense of personal transformation here, so that this dynamic of integrating the Scripture is not energized by a defensive posture, but by a posture of discovery and openness to what the Scriptures might have to say.

Another angle to this transformation is the sense that when speaking of the church as organization and organism, one need not choose between these two so as to prefer one or the other, suggesting that one is better than the other. The realities of the church as organism and organization exist simultaneously, and together form the whole. Because the image of the church as body is so prominent in the New Testament gift passages, it seems there is an analogy between the human person as a body-soul unity, and the church as an organization-organism unity. For the researcher, this thought increases the glory of the local church as a local manifestation of the body of Christ. There is the mystery of the invisible reality present in the visible reality, united in ways that defy description.

There was something about the four-lens approach which was appealing from the very start, namely, that this approach encouraged multiple vantage points. Much transpired within the researcher's heart and mind as a result. Multiple vantage points encourage and underline the value of different perspectives. There is not one vantage point which is the better or the best, but each has something to offer, and all have something to share. This perspective encouraged a sense of humility about the default or preferred lens that one might have. One person's style is one person's style. It is neither the only one nor the best one.

Further, what this project impressed upon the researcher was a deeper understanding of how challenging it is to use other lenses than one's own. It is one thing to state that each lens has value, but to follow through in ways which truly respect and incorporate these multiple views is another. Practicing hospitality—creating space for others-- in ways which are specific to the local church, and in ways which bless, is the hard work of discipleship.

This discipline of respecting others, be that in terms of methods or viewpoints, became necessary in a very foundational way as this project report was being written. The challenge of sharpening one's focus so as to deal with a smaller and smaller subject, which is exactly what each of the four lenses do, was difficult. The researcher's default mode moves in an opposite direction, making connections and expanding horizons. This challenge was experienced already in the early stages of writing the thesis proposal again and again. But it persisted as a challenge throughout the process, and once again became a major challenge in the writing of this report.

The fact that a written thesis such as this has a whole set of protocols and is almost a unique literary genre was difficult to sort through. There is a poet within, who relishes adjectives and adverbs. There is a lover of words who relishes the ambiguity and the multiple meanings that they allow. But in a project such as this, one is required to be clear and unambiguous. There is a need for thoughts to flow not so much fluidly, but with a logical progression. Clarity and precision trump loose and casual. What is more, the prescribed format of reporting which includes reviewing and summarizing and even repeating, seemed at first to be a hurdle. But in the process of writing, especially the sixth chapter, the wisdom and rationale for such review became apparent. Once again the

writer was forced to sharpen the focus, to bring clarity to a process and a journey, so that steps could be traced and retraced. It required submission and persistence, but it was utterly worth the moment of realization: this process was helpful. It was good. But how long it had taken for that moment of realization to arrive was humbling, and even a little disconcerting.

A related thread of discovery occurred during the course of interviews with workshop participants. Comments were made relative to improving the pedagogy so as to give more traction to the teaching in the moment, and also for greater impact for participants when returning to their congregations. What was identified was the need to think more strategically, considering how to maximize clarity. This involved the logical progression for learning the material in ways which would prove actionable.

There was a consistency in what was learned regarding pedagogy, what was learned in the thesis proposal stage and what was learned in the thesis writing stage. The default mode of thinking, presenting and writing needed to be set aside for the purpose of this project. There were other important methods and practices which were more fitting to the task. Learning this proved to be a lesson in the experience of practical hospitality: not submitting to it begrudgingly, or refusing to submit, but rather to see this as an opportunity to be stretched. It afforded an opportunity to gain a level of appreciation for something other than one's preferred or natural approach. The researcher gained an appreciation for clarity of thought and for methodical steps.

Finally, the value of persistence and endurance also became evident in seeing a project completed. Each version was better than the previous one. It was not the case that lessons were learned once and then absorbed perfectly. Lessons were learned once and

then again and again. Frustration was a part of that learning. But so too was the sense of accomplishment in seeing the fruits of work that refines and then senses that there is room to refine still further. This seems utterly symbolic of the Christian life as a person develops character through the practice of habits and disciplines. The effort required for a thesis project such as this serves to underline the effort required for a life of Christian discipleship: persistence and endurance are necessary components. Even if a project is deemed at some point to be acceptable, the refining and learning continue.

This project has encouraged continued learning and growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. The blessing of an adviser able to speak the truth with grace, and so to encourage rather than discourage—has been a source of gratitude. For the variety of others, and for the grace of others, this project has enlarged my sense of smallness. And for the discovery and exploration of the integration of Scripture and the four-lens model, this project has increased a sense of accomplishment and wonder. The degree to which these two sources of truth intersect and shine light on each other is great.

APPENDIX A

Consultation Report

*****CRC

January, 2008

Rev. Norm Thomasma

Pastor-Church Relations

Introduction

This report follows the activities and observations of the week of January 28.

Activities

This report reflects my visits with the council and the Pastor and spouse in August. It also reflects the listed meetings I held on this visit:

- Pastor and spouse
- Church Council excluding Pastor
- Five small groups involving a total of approximately 30 individuals. (Counting my meetings with the council and Pastoral Advisory Team my meetings included over 40 individuals)
- an individual who had been providing feedback to Pastor about sermon preparation and delivery
- Regional Pastor
- Pastor and spouse
- Church Council including Pastor and spouse
- Church Council without Pastor and spouse

Observations

--Pastor and spouse report some improvement in their observations of the relationship with the church although they still wonder where things are at. Pastor acknowledged the difficulty he had in preaching from notes rather than manuscript but acknowledged that it seemed to go fairly well.

--The council reports continued concern about the life and health of the church. There has been some tranquility around the pastor-congregation relationship. It is perceived that the congregation has been waiting for the consultation process that is reflected in this report to continue. Many in the council also note some improvement in Pastor's sermon delivery over the last few weeks since he has discontinued reading his manuscript.

--In the small groups I heard and documented diverse perspectives on the life of the church including the pastor-congregation relationship. There is much valued by the congregation in the life of the church including the relationships, the family feeling, small groups and some of the programs of the church. There are concerns about responding to the desires and preferences of different generations and the potential of losing important core values in the attempts to be more sensitive to the younger people. It is observed that, along generational lines, there are a variety of perspectives as to what constitutes the core values (kernel) of the faith and what constitutes the particular cultural or generational packaging (husk). There are also concerns about the difficulty the congregation has adapting to the changing situation and needs of the congregation.

--Significant concerns continue to be expressed about Pastor. While there is great appreciation for the integrity of his faith, his sincerity and his hard work and there is great appreciation for the contributions of his spouse, the concerns remain that he has difficulty in preaching and “reading” the congregation in terms of its perspectives and needs. I observe that, among many but not all who are active in the ministries of the church, there is a lack of confidence that Pastor can lead this church effectively for the future.

Interpretation

--*****CRC is a congregation with a long history, deep family ties and a well-established culture. While there is within many of the congregation a desire to be evangelistic and responsive to the community there is also recognition of the deeply held values and relational patterns of the church. Part of this culture is a tendency to communicate negatives in indirect ways. Another dimension to the life of the church is a sense of loss and fear. There is a recognition that the church does not hold the place in the community or in the lives of families that it once had. Many have experienced the departure of family members to other communities. There is also a fear that the church may not survive. Another part of this culture is the reticence to communicate negatives to the Pastor whom some still see as the “Dominie.” Change at *****CRC will come incrementally and will require considerable interpersonal ability and leadership skill.

--Pastor came into the church with a desire to move the congregation toward evangelism and outreach. He did not take sufficient time to establish relational trust, to read the culture and to recognize what could and could not be changed and at what rate change could happen.

--It has also become apparent that he Pastor has some difficulty recognizing and interpreting non-verbal communication in both individual and group interactions. This, coupled with the congregation culture of indirect communication, has created a difficult situation to resolve. Frustrations began to occur around interpersonal interactions, preaching and around his style of leadership with groups. These frustrations continue.

--Many within the congregation are feeling tension within their minds and hearts. On the one hand, there is significant respect for Pastor’s character, commitment and work ethic. There is also great appreciation for his spouse and her contribution to the ministry. On the other hand, there is little confidence that Pastor has the communication skills or leadership ability to effectively lead *****CRC over the next two to ten years.

Recommendations

--That the *congregation* reflect on its culture and recognize ways in which communication can become more direct and open. Skill building around having difficult conversations could also be helpful. One strategy that many congregations are finding effective is the establishment of behavioral covenants that define how people will interact with one another and with the church when they disagree. This could include protocols around leaving the church so that, when people do decide to leave it is done in an open way and appropriate “farewells” can be offered.

--The *congregation and its leadership* seek greater understanding on what it takes to lead a multi-generational congregation in today’s world. This dynamic at *****CRC as well as many other dynamics within the church are not unique to this congregation but are challenges shared by many churches across North America. In response to these challenges and opportunities a significant number of books and articles are being written that provide wise counsel for congregations. It would be well if *****CRC found ways to take advantage of these resources. One option might be that some within the congregation who enjoy reading, read some selected books, discuss them and provide helpful summaries of what they have learned to the rest of the congregation.*

--That the current pastorate of Pastor at *****CRC not continue for an indefinite period of time. I urge *the council and Pastor* to have conversations by which the duration of his pastorate at *****CRC is defined and a suitable timeframe for ending this arrangement established. And, I urge that this be done in a way that is respectful of the congregation as well as of Pastor and spouse.

--I would also recommend that the deliberation around these choices be done carefully and, perhaps, with the assistance of a seasoned neighboring pastor such as the Regional Pastor.

--Once these arrangements have been made the congregation should be informed as to the basic outline of the plan.

Additionally

--On the one hand—this seems like a loss or failure. On the other hand, it could provide the congregation as well as Pastor and spouse a way to celebrate some dimensions of the ministry, practice the art of saying “goodbye” in a healthy way and prepare well for the next season of ministry. The clarity about the tenure of Pastor’s ministry could, in fact, provide a context in which the pastor-congregation relationship might be more conducive to effective ministry.

—During this time of deliberation there will be questions and wonderings within the congregation. It is important for council members, Pastor and spouse and the congregation to be grounded in your relationship with God so that you are able to be calm, stay connected to one another and stay the course that has been determined. It is also important that you support each other with prayers and with listening ears.

Reading Resources

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APPENDIX B

Fig. 5.1: Analysis of Acts 5:1-11 as a Type-Scene with Genesis 1-3 and Joshua 7

Type-Scene Motif:	Genesis 1-3: Adam and Eve in the Garden	Joshua 7: Achan after Jericho's Fall	Acts 5:1-11: Ananias and Sapphira
Setting of a New Beginning:	Creation of the world and the seventh day of rest	The initial victory of the conquest after entering the Promised Land	After the giving of the Spirit and the initial restoration of the kingdom
Misappropriation of a Forbidden Object:	Taking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil	Taking of the Mrx spoil of the devoted city of Jericho	Holding back from land proceeds that were devoted to God
Sinful Act:	Saw, desired, took (3: 6)	Saw, coveted, took (7: 21)	Lied to Spirit, kept money (5:3)
Hiding/Deception on the Part of the Sinners:	"Hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." (3:8)	Hid the gold, silver, and mantle from Shinar in the ground under his tent (7:21)	Husband and wife conspired in their hearts and lied to God (5: 4, 9)
Revealing of the Secret Upon Questioning:	Yahweh questions Adam and Eve (3: 9-13)	Joshua questions Achan (7:19)	Peter questions Ananias and Sapphira separately (5: 3, 8)
Pronouncement of God's Judgment:	Curses Announced (3: 14-19)	Joshua displays the devoted things and proclaims God's 'trouble' (7: 22-25)	Peter Rebukes Ananias and Sapphira for their lying to God (5: 4, 9)
Judgment of Death:	Removal of Access to God as metaphoric (i.e. spiritual) death (3: 23)	Literal Death by Stoning (7: 25)	Literal Death by Peter's pronouncement (5: 5, 10)
Interpretation of the Corporate Impact of the Sin:	Sin of one man brought death to all (Rom 5:12)	Sin made the entire people 'devoted to destruction' (7:12)	Great fear seizes church (5:11) (first use of ekkhlesia in Acts) (5:11)

Source: Brian Thomas Hoch, "The Year of Jubilee and OT Ethics" (PhD diss., Durham U., 2010), 284.

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