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A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue

Jeffrey M. Wilson
Luther Seminary

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A CONGREGATION ENGAGING IN MISSIONAL DIALOGUE:
STRENGTHENING DISCERNMENT AMID DIVERSITY THROUGH HEALTHY
CONGREGATIONAL DIALOGUE

by

JEFFREY M. WILSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

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2017

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ABSTRACT

*A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue:
Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue*

by

Jeffrey M. Wilson

This transformative mixed-methods modified Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was used to investigate and affect healthy and faithful discernment and decision-making in a diverse congregation within the reality of being the body of Christ in mission. Data were collected utilizing baseline and end-line surveys, recorded and transcribed meetings and interviews, and memos. The data revealed that people who engaged in the research process grew in their perception of the congregation as being healthy and faithful in discernment and decision-making. This research shows that mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and interdependence between leaders and congregation members helps us focus on God's mission and facilitates relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finishing this thesis is an accomplishment I never imagined possible. This paper represents not only *my* work over the past five years of learning and practice through the Congregational Mission and Leadership program at Luther Seminary, it represents many congregations, relationships, and conversations along the way. I give thanks for the small Lutheran Church Missouri Synod congregation that formed my early experiences with God, the many churches of various denominations I have attended, Christ the King Lutheran in Houston who encouraged me to go to seminary, and the congregations I served during seminary. I especially thank my current and previous congregations for their love, support, and encouragement.

I give thanks for the people throughout my life who have simply lived their faith. I cannot even begin to count the number of conversations I had with friends in high school as we were all figuring out what life and faith were all about. Many friends have both inspired and challenged me to think deeply, pray unceasingly, and to rely confidently upon God, including seeing God's work in the way *God* intends rather than the way *I* expect.

I give thanks for those who served with me at my current congregation throughout the entire doctoral process—those who served on my Journey Partner Team and those who served on my Action Research Team. This congregation has been very patient with me as I've asked questions, administered lengthy surveys, and made mistakes along the

way. Their gift of the six-week sabbatical to give me time to process my research was invaluable.

I give thanks to God for my wife, Vicki, without whom I would not have had the time or finances to be able to complete this program. She has been my biggest cheerleader, critic, and a patient reader. She has been both understanding and forgiving as I have had to dedicate significant time to this program.

I have reserved my final thanks for the most formative person in my life and my faith, my mom, Betsy Barberree. She helped form the foundation of who I am. She not only told me about God, she showed me her faith. She was very proud when I finally relented and acknowledged God's call for me to go to seminary to become a pastor, and she stood next to my wife as I knelt before my bishop to be presented for ordination. I regret that she will not be able to read this acknowledgement or this paper because of the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. Even now, as she struggles to form words and sentences, she bears witness to the faithfulness of God. Her remembrance of the early days when she knew something was amiss are forever etched in my heart as she remembers God telling her not to be afraid and as God asked her: "Don't you know? I have you in the palm of my hand." I remain thankful for her faith, wisdom, boundless love, and determination all to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Augsburg Confession
AP	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
AR	Action Research
PAR	Participatory Action Research

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research on religious trends in the United States is sobering. A widely publicized study from the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life describes the emergence of the “nones” in their 2012 report.¹ Churches have been concerned about the future of the institutional church for years before the Pew study; even so, these statistics are a wake-up call to the church. Some churches have responded by following business methodologies combined with church growth philosophy leading to the adoption of new strategies, hiring staff, and developing new vision and mission statements. Some churches have framed these trends in such a way that they see no need to change anything.² Other churches are seeking a middle ground, but are still unsure of how to respond.³ The research results, however, are clear. The updated research conducted through the 2014 General Social Survey indicates that another 7.5 million people have joined the ranks of the “nones” since 2012.⁴ Church leaders are left to raise their hands

¹ “Nones' on the Rise,” (2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/> (accessed 3/19/2015).

² Derek Penwell, “7 Reasons Not to Freak out About Protestant Mainline Decline,” *The Huffington Post Religion Blog*, 8/14/2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/derek-penwell/7-reasons-not-to-freak-ou_b_5678808.html (accessed 7/20/2015).

³ Rob Rynders, “How Not to React to the Decline of Christianity in America,” *Rob Rynders*, 5/13/2015, <http://www.robrynders.com/blog/2015/5/how-not-to-react-to-the-decline-of-christianity-in-america> (accessed 7/21/2015).

⁴ Tobin Grant, “7.5 Million Americans Have 'Lost Their Religion' since 2012,” *Religion News Service*, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/13/americans-no-religion_n_6864536.html (accessed 3/19/2015).

not in praise, but in resignation as their efforts have yielded little or no results—certainly not enough to stem the tide of change. A reasonable person may conclude that religion, and faith, in particular, are of less value and importance to people in the United States, especially young adults and youth. Community Evangelical Lutheran Church is typical among these congregations, and we are very concerned about our future.⁵

What are churches supposed to do next? How are leaders to lead through these times? Are we to try yet another church growth strategy? Are we to attend yet another workshop or conference? Are we to simply give up and accept that these trends will lead to the church’s eventual death? Are we to throw good money after bad, and invest more of our time in a dying institution? Is there any hope?

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:1-6).⁶

It is difficult to imagine anything more dry, desolate, hopeless, and so thoroughly dead as the Valley of Dry Bones from Ezekiel. The trends of the church similarly leave church leaders and members feeling hopeless and uncertain about how we would answer the question: Can these congregations live?

⁵ Pseudonyms are used in this thesis for all proper names of persons and places.

⁶ *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version ed. (National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1989). All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless otherwise stated.

Our faith calls us to be honest about what we see. We are also called to proclaim that God is at work regardless of what our eyes can see. We are called, like Ezekiel, to look to God rather than ourselves as we have no other answer than “O Lord God, you know” (Ezekiel 37:3). God reveals Himself as the one who acts in such a seemingly God-forsaken situation by bringing about life despite what appears to be clear evidence that hope for survival is doubtful and the promise of “abundant life” (John 10:10) is an impossibility.⁷

The concept of the missional church enters this God-forsaken situation not as another fad or simply a new perspective, but as a framework, a way of life, and a way of *being* church. It is built on the premise that the church is *God’s* church, so God is already at work in the world and in the church. The survival of the church is not a matter of thinking harder, being more clever, or hunkering down. God calls us together—into relationship with Him and into relationship with one another, which often generates tension and conflict. God also sends us out. Coming together, dealing with conflict, managing our own reactivity, and being sent requires *discernment* as a necessary part of God’s invitation because the Church must make decisions. Discernment calls us to maintain the right order in our relationship with God: God is the *inviter* and we are the *invited*, we seek God’s will rather than God seeking ours, God calls us into community rather than the community being of our own creation. Christian congregations, therefore, make decisions in a different way than families or businesses do precisely because we are

⁷ Personal pronouns will be used throughout this paper in reference to God because I believe God is a personal God, and I find references to God such as “Godself” to be quite clumsy. Generally, capitalized male personal pronouns will be used for God the Father and God the Son, and capitalized female personal pronouns will be used for God the Holy Spirit. The spelling of “God-forsaken” is intentional as opposed to the secular usage of “godforsaken.” Churches and the people in them may feel abandoned by God, and, therefore, hopeless.

apprentices who follow Jesus.⁸ Business, government, and military leaders sit down at the table as they gather everyone necessary to make a decision: the chief decision makers as well as the experts who can provide their insight. Churches that gather the necessary people and information but do not engage in discernment are, quite simply, not including God at the table. They are attempting to do church without God.

This project relied upon several biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses, such as the theology of the cross, to help us see God at work especially in these times of anxiety and fear as church leaders and members. These lenses helped Community better to understand conflict and complex relationships in the church. They also provided a means for the congregation to better orient themselves to the ways of God. Leaders were much better prepared and able to discern the Holy Spirit rather than simply rely upon doing what *we* thought was best leading to frustrated people and a broken community. Congregations that are able to hear the Spirit's voice can hear Her challenge to our perception of reality: "Mortal, can these bones live?" We can hear Her proclamation that brings new life to the Body of Christ—joining together members of the body that have been torn apart and laid waste. We can breathe deeply from the breath of new life we receive from the Holy Spirit, and, with thanksgiving, set about doing God's mission in our congregations, communities, and the world.

⁸ Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), Kindle, Loc 1366. Zscheile tends to prefer the use of the word "apprentice" as opposed to "disciple."

Historical Background

Each congregation has its own personality and context. A reaction to the downward trends of the church entices some church leaders to wholly embrace a technique, tool, or methodology that appears to be working in another context without adapting it to their own. Having an understanding of the congregational context I studied is helpful to the reader as I outline the study and explain my assumptions.

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church is located in a Northern Virginia community established in the wake of the Civil War. The church was formed in the late 1800s primarily for farming by people who migrated from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Community has been led by several pastors, had thousands of members, and has served innumerable people in the community, especially since the early 1970s when they established a preschool and began opening their doors to twelve-step support groups. A building-use survey conducted in 2014 revealed that approximately 800 people enter our doors every week for twelve-step support groups alone—that is about 44,000 visits a year!⁹

Community's history books and stories from members past and present tell of a faithful, and, at times, thriving congregation. The history also tells of a congregation with threads of conflict, scarcity, and fear woven into the fabric of its story. Community is resilient, but the conflict leaves spiritual and emotional residue, which manifests itself in negative self-talk such as the following: "We're just a small, country church." "We're

⁹ These numbers are based on an internal review of building use in 2014. We use the term "visits" because these are not unique individuals as many people attend multiple meetings each week. These numbers are particularly impressive when compared to the total worship attendance for Community that in 2014 was 10,200.

just a blue-collar church.” “We’re just a \$440,000 church and that’s all we’ll ever be.” “We’re a church of conflict and division.” Community experienced growth in worship attendance in the early 2000s; however, we are currently worshipping at our lowest attendance in the last twenty years.¹⁰ Our income is down and our financial reserves are all but exhausted. Finding people to serve in leadership positions and on ministry teams is often difficult. New ideas or opportunities emerge, but, when they do, the response tends to be the words *can’t* or *shouldn’t* coupled with fear and anxiety.

People bringing new ideas are often met with crippling and confusing bureaucracy from the church hierarchy, or with people working either subtly or even quite blatantly to sabotage them. A few ideas get beyond these initial obstacles, and I hear sighs of cautious relief as we see activity. The same activity that is exciting to some people upsets others because they feel things are moving too fast, toes are being stepped upon, and they feel out of control. Many initiatives during my time at Community have been either met with significant resistance or defeated entirely. Several projects that have been implemented were championed and pushed through by passionate people leaving those who disagree with the project feeling hurt, frustrated, left out, and devalued.

A divide has developed over time within Community between *the leadership* and *the congregation*.¹¹ The congregation felt as though the leadership was not acting in the best interests of the whole congregation and was not exercising good stewardship of the congregation’s financial resources. The leadership often felt unsupported and wary of

¹⁰ Worship attendance in 2000 averaged 270 and climbed to an average of 318 in 2004. Average worship is currently approximately 190.

¹¹ I use italics here and throughout this paper to highlight this division.

making decisions for fear of the congregation's reaction. Clearly naming this division is not only a fine point of terminology or a simple line of distinction between these two groups within the congregation but describes a fracture in our ability to fully live as the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30). Trust has broken down into skepticism, leaving the congregation in a condition of stagnation. I have seen too many good people on both sides of any given issue become frustrated or hurt through interpersonal conflict, decisions, and even indecision at Community. Community is left with a choice: remain the same or change. Both options involve risk, but remaining the same leaves little opportunity for growth. The question for Ezekiel rings in our ears: "Mortal, can these bones live?" (Ezekiel 37:3).

Research Question

Community's story reflects the stages of church plant, growth and establishment, the glory days, and days of decline and struggle. This pattern bears similarities to many other congregations across the United States. The plethora of workshops, books, and strategies that have been developed over the last twenty years, not to mention casual conversation among clergy, attest to this reality. The trends we observe both at Community and within the larger Christian Church tell a story. Indicators such as worship attendance and giving by themselves do not tell the complete story. These are internal means of measuring and assessing ministry, but they fail to measure the congregation's growth in faith, our impact on our community beyond our doors, and the congregation's apostolic life.¹² This is a shift from "the church's effort to extend itself"

¹² Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Kindle, Loc 207.

toward mission not simply as “something the church does,” but part of the church’s essence—“for the calling and sending action of God forms its identity.”¹³ This research project gave Community an opportunity to engage with each other, discern differently, and intentionally recognize God at the table. Working together in this way allowed us to reframe our story and update the lenses through which we see ourselves. We have been able to refocus our language and energy away from dwelling on the stories of conflict and inactivity of the past, and toward a future story of God’s telling.

Engaging one another differently meant coming together to experience relationships born out of respect and love shared through meaningful dialogue. Any healthy relationship must have good communication at its core. Good communication is difficult enough between two people in the context of marriage, but good communication is exponentially more difficult when referring to a congregation of people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and perspectives. How does a group of people who differ so greatly make a decision? What forum or forums need to be used for such conversations?

Delving deeper into the possibilities brought about by simply engaging one another differently raised several probing and hope-producing questions. What if Community was able to gather together in formal and informal ways to honestly and openly address the financial, congregational involvement, leadership, and cultural challenges before us? What if we were able to have these conversations in ways that upheld Community as a diverse and gifted congregation, enabling us to get beyond conflict and scarcity? What if faith practices became endemic to Community and were

¹³ *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), Kindle, Loc 1517.

central to Community’s dialogue? What if healthy dialogue could have other benefits to the faith and life of Community’s members and all who enter our doors? Addressing these questions as we continue our congregational life after this study can continue to have a transformative effect on how members relate with one another and how we relate with God.

Relating with one another differently is more than mere *communication*.

Communication can assume a number of definitions within a congregation, such as writing an article in the parish newsletter, sending an email blast, or posting a message on Facebook. However, dialogue, as opposed to communication, implies mutuality within relationship. It implies speaking, but also listening. I, therefore, used the term *dialogue* for this study because the word itself refers specifically to speaking as a form of interactive communication.¹⁴

The research question I used to guide this project is:

How might a participatory action research (PAR) intervention within Community that focuses on cultivating a culture of healthy dialogue lead to more faithful discernment while expressing respect for diverse opinions among members of the congregation as the body of Christ in mission?

Variables

Independent Variable

The independent variable was the PAR interventions. The purpose of the PAR interventions was to involve the congregation as we focused on building healthy

¹⁴ The etymology of the word “dialogue” means “through speaking” or “through conversation” “Dialogue,” *Merriam-Webster Online* (2015), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dialogue> (accessed 7/1/2015); “Dialogos,” *Logeion* (2015), <http://logeion.uchicago.edu/index.html#dialogos> (accessed 7/1/2015).

congregational dialogue. Dialogue, as distinct from communication, is not simply to gather and talk. Dialogue, by its definition and nature, is two-way. Dialogue is not mere communication, but is about opening oneself up to another and being willing to be changed. Dialogue and Action Research (AR) are consistent in that they both aim to affect change. The PAR interventions took on the nature of grass roots efforts rather than yet another new program developed by *the leadership*. Some congregations are able to have difficult conversations without fear of people leaving the congregation or the congregation splitting. I wanted members of Community to be able to think and feel for themselves even while they experienced disagreement. Dialogue, when conducted in the context of diversity and grace, builds trust and reduces anxiety about such gatherings even when the dialogue becomes contentious. Healthy dialogue begets healthy dialogue. This congregational focus has helped Community develop dialogical tools as they engaged in and experienced the benefits of healthy dialogue.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were the processes of more faithful discernment and improved decision-making. I have observed that an obstacle for Community is our inability to remain engaged with one another when vigorous dialogue presents. People become entrenched in their own patterns of thinking and acting, and discord ensues when people are confronted with perspectives that are not consonant with their own. Emerging with a decision that reflects God's call and the congregation's response to that call, therefore, becomes muddled. Our focus becomes misplaced and blurred as we focus on ourselves and the disagreement rather than on God and God's call. Missional congregations, by contrast, seek to recognize what God is doing and participate with God

in what He is already doing in the congregation and community. A congregation must be able to discern together if they are to speak and move as a united body.

Community's tendency to become stuck and lose focus was greatly diminished as the congregation became more familiar with the terminology and uses of the Five Phases of Discernment (or 5 A's).¹⁵ The Five Phases gave the congregation a frame for understanding how healthy dialogue helps all members of the church be heard (*attend*), how ideas for ministry become articulated (*assert*), how we agree, take action, and then assess the action we discerned. Leaders have grown in their use of this tool, which has had an impact on the ways in which they approach decisions and matters of concern to the congregation.

Intervening Variables

Several factors affect our ability or willingness to engage in dialogue, especially dialogue with congregation members about topics involving differences of opinion. These include demographic factors such as: gender, age, length of membership at Community, previous church experience, travel time to get to church, family activity schedules, conflict management style, and whether a person is an introvert or extrovert. We are people of faith, so our faith and faith practices also affect our congregational dialogue. The influence of *the leadership* is not to be underestimated either. Leaders have differing understandings of the definition and scope of leadership. Some believe leadership is simply making decisions and imposing them on the congregation because *we know what's best for them*. Leaders may also experience a sense of fear or, at least,

¹⁵ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), Kindle, Loc 1879.

the uneasy feeling of loss of control because, in their minds, power and control are supposed to be held with *the leadership* rather than *the congregation*.

Importance of the Research Question

Community's history of contention has had an effect on our perception of ourselves and our future as a congregation. The most notable causes of anxiety have been the congregation's worsening financial picture, upholding the traditions of the Lutheran church, and honoring the history of the congregation. The congregation has developed a pattern of addressing this anxiety by developing factions. The membership of these factions may change depending on the issue at hand. The unpredictable nature of these factions and the uncertainty of income tends to make leaders reluctant to engage in dialogue or share too much with the congregation because they are afraid people will leave the congregation, cause an uproar, or disengage.

I want this research project not only to benefit Community Lutheran but to have an impact beyond this congregation. It occurred to me that perhaps the best gift we can offer the broader church is to model how we can most thoroughly know our own congregation and context. Developing patterns of healthy dialogue within Community will continue to be a great benefit to this congregation, and Community will continue after this research project to grow as a missional congregation and in its ability to see its present and future with hope.

This study has also been significant for me as a leader, a mission-focused pastor, and as one who has the privilege of walking with the congregation through this phase of its congregational life. My desire was to see the shackles that bound the congregation loosened—the shackles of fear and scarcity that had a stranglehold on the congregation

and threatened not only their existence, but constrained the movement of the congregation to be responsive to the Spirit. I wanted the congregation to work together as the body of Christ to experience the freedom and joy that comes from doing God's work and living in relationship as God intends.¹⁶ I also felt the call to help the congregation become healthier by developing a more resilient culture. My hope is that the congregation will become so adept at discerning the Spirit that they will be able to weather transitions in pastoral and lay leadership as well as transitions in membership and community demographics.

Theoretical Lenses

I relied upon five theoretical lenses to guide my research. These are Change Theory, Conflict Theory, Chaos Theory, Systems Theory, and Leadership Theory.

Change Theory

Change is a significant factor in the life of this congregation. Some people do not mind change while others despise it. Most people accept change if it is of their own initiative; likewise, most people resist change when they are not part of the change process or they feel the change is foisted upon them. Change Theory offers guidance and research from the fields of sociology and psychology relating to how and why people change as well as why they do not change. The treatment of change in chapter 2 involves the same approach as the proverb: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time."

Change is often viewed as an amorphous monolith, and its mere mention elicits fear.

¹⁶ Speaking of what "God intends," especially considering the prevalence of the so-called prosperity gospel, can seem presumptuous. Many biblical references shed light on God's intent, but I refer to John 10:10 and Psalm 27:13, in particular. John 10:10 speaks directly to God's abundance, and Psalm 27:13 addresses the this-worldly nature of experiencing God's goodness.

Change can be broken into its component pieces, and, while change can still be formidable, it can become more manageable.

I rely upon authors such as Margaret Wheatley who remind us of the necessity of change to a healthy organism.¹⁷ Kurt Lewin, James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo Diclemente offer insights that break change down into processes.¹⁸ Having a model for discerning and instituting change is helpful, but Rosabeth Moss Kanter offers guidance about managing through change.¹⁹ It is not enough simply to identify change and start the change process. Mental and emotional work is involved as challenges, frustrations, and competing interests arise throughout the change process. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' insights with regard to the grief process are helpful for leaders as they make connections between the rationality and logic of a change process and the reality that change can bring about grief.²⁰ These authors clarify that change and grief processes are not linear or entirely predictable.

Congregational leaders must have an understanding of change as a process and the emotional components of change. Such an understanding encourages leaders to allow time for congregational participation and for the change process to unfold. It also creates

¹⁷ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2006), Kindle.

¹⁸ James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross, and Carlo C. DiClemente, *Changing for Good: The Revolutionary Program That Explains the Six Stages of Change and Teaches You How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits* (New York: W. Morrow, 1994), Kindle.

¹⁹ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Change Is Hardest in the Middle," *Harvard Business Review* (2009), <https://hbr.org/2009/08/change-is-hardest-in-the-middle> (accessed 10/18/2015).

²⁰ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Scribner Classics, 2011), Kindle.

sensitivity among leaders to be able to “control the temperature” and manage the pace of the change process.²¹

Conflict Theory

Conflict, like change, is unavoidable. People tend to resist change and avoid conflict, yet both are necessary. Conflict Theory helps us understand why conflict is occurring, how to manage our own reactivity, how to progress through it, and how to frame it. The discussion on conflict theory in chapter 2 recasts conflict and the people involved in congregational conflict as both necessary and healthy. The presence of conflict tends to create the dichotomy of *us* and *them*. Labels are applied to the various perspectives, such as nay-sayers and resisters, and people divide into *camps*. The camps become increasingly entrenched in their perspectives, and increasingly unable to listen to people from another camp. The power of the differences soon overwhelm the power of that which unites us as members of one congregation who are presumably united around “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:5-6). Conflict, when it turns to division, is sinful and unhealthy.

I referred to Karl Marx, who is regarded as the father of conflict theory, as he explored the development of the two social classes of the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat in their competition for scarce resources.²² William Hobgood, Ronald Heifetz, and Martin

²¹ Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). For controlling the temperature, see pages 107-116, especially the helpful chart on page 111. On managing the pace of the change process, see pages 116-120.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Friedrich Engels, 2015), Kindle.

Links address the presence of conflict and approaches to managing conflict as a leader in the midst of people who grow increasingly anxious and even volatile in the presence of conflict.²³

The study of conflict theory in this project served the purpose of orienting Community's leaders to the beneficial aspects of conflict—that conflict can actually be an indication of health. This helped to lower the congregation's anxiety about the presence of conflict, and, instead, to embrace it. Leaders lead differently if they anticipate and expect conflict. Leaders who anticipate conflict realize that squelching resistance actually works against the health of the congregation.²⁴ Exposure to the concepts of conflict theory encouraged our congregational leaders to be aware of the importance of providing safe places to engage in deep listening and respectful conversation. The lowered anxiety and increased openness of leaders in the face of conflict served as a model for others, enabling leaders and members alike to remain in healthy dialogue with each other. Healthy dialogue has not prevented conflict but rather provided a constructive method of understanding what is beneath the conflict.

Chaos Theory

Chaos theory was first described by meteorologist Edward Lorenz. He noticed that small variations in initial conditions could evolve into having a more significant

²³ William Chris Hobgood, *Welcoming Resistance*, Alban Institute Publication (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2001); Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*.

²⁴ Hobgood, *Welcoming Resistance*, 16.

impact over time, which he termed the “butterfly effect.”²⁵ Scientists observing fractals initially saw mere randomness—chaos. They found that, as they broadened the field and looked at the fractals on multiple plains, beautiful patterns emerged. The phenomenon was named the Lorenz attractor or the “‘strange attractor’—a coherent force that holds seemingly random behaviors within a boundary.”²⁶ The patterns were always present, but remained unseen until the scientists simply observed *differently*.²⁷

A basic understanding of chaos theory can help leaders to not become frozen or confused in the face of behavior and emotions that appear to be random. This study showed that the anxiety our leaders experience in the midst of chaos can be lowered simply by knowing that order exists within chaos regardless of our involvement, knowing that there is a *strange attractor* providing regulation and order, and knowing that it is quite likely that solutions already exist within the system. With less anxiety, leaders were able to be more imaginative, to step back and observe the perceived chaos in the congregation *differently*, to step outside of themselves and their worry about the congregation’s survival, and to see through the eyes of people in our community who are already overwhelmed with the circumstances of their own lives. This perspective enables leaders to give people the needed “space in [their] lives together to talk about what the gospel looks, feels, and sounds like at this time in history.”²⁸

²⁵ Edward N. Lorenz, “Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow,” *Journal of the Atmospheric Sciences* 20, no. 2 (1963): 130.

²⁶ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 2702.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Loc 1808.

²⁸ M. Scott Boren, *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community That Makes a Difference in the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), Kindle, Loc 630.

Exposure to chaos theory has helped strengthen faith. Simply viewing chaos differently and from other perspectives allowed us to see the *strange attractor* already at work in our midst. We see that *God* is the strange attractor who holds our randomness and chaos together and creates something beautiful that resembles Himself.

Systems Theory

I used the general lens of Systems Theory to encompass General Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory.²⁹ Both of these schools of thought are reactions to the trends of traditional science which break things down into their component parts, and then break down those parts into their component parts, and so on. Systems theories claim that we lose something when we study things in such minute detail.³⁰ The primary General Systems theorist I reference is Ludvig von Bertalanffy who lived from 1901 to 1970 and was heavily influenced by Nazi Germany in World War II. His thinking tended toward a focus on social justice, which sought to understand how a person, who is made up of complex systems like atoms and organ systems, also fits within systems like groups and societies.³¹ Systems theories are not just interested in what things are made of or how something works, but how things are related, “ordered and organized.”³²

²⁹ Murray Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” in *Family Therapy: Theory and Practice*, ed. Philip J. Guerin (New York: Gardner Press, 1976), Loc 106. Bowen rejects the conflation of General Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory as an oversimplification of both theories. I use the term Systems Theory to hold both of these theories.

³⁰ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, Revised ed. (New York: George Braziller, 2013), Kindle, Loc 919.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Scott Johnson, “Family Systems Theories,” (2010), <http://www.familytherapy.vt.edu/Family%20Systems%20Theories%20--%20Johnson%202010.pdf> (accessed 8/10/2015).

I referenced Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman for Family Systems Theory, which has the most significant contributions to this lens.³³ Both authors focus on the groups of which we are a part. The primary group is the family, but Friedman also includes churches and synagogues because similar dynamics are at play. Family Systems highlights the impact of conflict and anxiety within a system as it influences the system as a whole as well as on the individuals who comprise that system. Conflict increases anxiety, which breaks down relationships causing isolation, rifts, factions, and, potentially, emotional cutoff.

Family Systems Theory helped the congregation identify the presence of anxiety and its effects. Awareness of anxiety and the importance of remaining connected enabled individual members of the congregation to manage their own anxiety, stay in the room with those whom they do not see eye-to-eye, and remain open and in relationship.

Leadership Theory

Leaders have existed as long as there have been people. Every family, group of friends, team, association, choir, band, club, institution, business, and congregation develops leaders. The systematic study of leadership picked up steam in the nineteenth century at a time when the industrial revolution was taking place and the field of psychology became more pronounced. A review of the primary leadership theories reveals that they have tended to focus primarily on the leader, their skills, and traits.

³³ Bowen, "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy."; Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York: Norton, 1988), Kindle; Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985).

Attempts to address the lingering question whether leaders are born or made seems to have not been successfully answered regardless of the theory being applied.

I rely on several authors from a variety of perspectives to inform this lens. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile address leadership specifically within the church and from a missional perspective.³⁴ Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis offer a refreshing physiological perspective on leadership that I found quite helpful.³⁵ The discussion would not be complete without Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, Allan Roxburgh, Fred Romanuk, and Peter Northouse.³⁶ These and other authors help make the word “leadership” much more rich and complex.

Leadership Theory is the funnel through which the other theoretical lenses for this project find application for each of our leaders. Community Lutheran’s leaders are becoming increasingly conversant in these theoretical concepts, which have helped promote healthy dialogue in the midst of chaos, conflict, and change. They are now in a better position to understand why resistance and anxiety are present instead of reacting in fear or seeking to remove them completely. Our leaders are increasingly able to lead through the conflict as they help others to see that they can be good and healthy signs of vitality for a congregational system.

³⁴ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), Kindle.

³⁵ Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis, “Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review* 86, no. 9 (2008).

³⁶ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*; Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Seventh ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016), Kindle.

Biblical and Theological Lenses

I engaged this study utilizing four biblical and three theological lenses. These lenses maintained the congregation's perspective of God's agency and our response, rooted us in specific scriptures related to dialogue and decision-making, and ensured that God was involved in the entire process.

Biblical Lenses

Valley of Dry Bones—Ezekiel 37:1-14

This familiar story, which I referenced in the introduction, is both a reminder of God's sovereignty and a challenge for believers. God asked Ezekiel to look out over a valley full of dry bones. Then God asked Ezekiel: "Can these bones live?" The obvious answer from a human agency perspective is "No, they can't." The creatures whose bones lay abandoned in that valley have been dead so long that there is no longer flesh or anything for the breath of life to inhabit. God confronted Ezekiel with a closed question requiring a simple answer. The question cut to the core of what Ezekiel believed about what is possible and what is impossible. Ezekiel's own logic would lead to one conclusion, while his knowledge of the power of the One who is asking would lead to another. Ezekiel had to decide between his own logic and his knowledge of the One who was asking.

God's question to Ezekiel touches on a recurrent theme that runs through the conflicts that arise at Community: what is possible? We hear scriptures like, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), and we talk about God's provision; however, we do not know what to do when we are the ones standing before a valley of dry bones. We know what the right answer *should* be, but, like Ezekiel,

are reluctant to answer clearly. Some people in the congregation would gladly prophesy to the bones while others cannot bring themselves to do it. The use of this story through the study period has challenged leaders and congregation members alike. We have found that, while we were drawn into the story, it raised more questions than answers.

The Body of Christ—1 Corinthians 12

The examination of the body of Christ by Yung Suk Kim was very thought-provoking as he considered the usage of this phrase throughout St. Paul's writings.³⁷ He expanded my thinking on this topic because I tend to view the body of Christ narrowly. I have primarily understood the body of Christ from a stewardship of time and talent perspective—as a means to help people understand how their variety of gifts fit together within the body of a congregation. If this was the only view of the body of Christ, it could be limiting and self-serving.

Expanding our understanding of the broken and crucified body of Christ to be emblematic of the abundant, self-giving love of God opens our hearts and minds. It reveals the extent to which God goes to free us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. This freedom is not just our own freedom, but freedom for the body of Christ itself. The body of Christ is not captive to the Roman authorities, the Jewish leaders, the devil, or any particular denomination or doctrine. No person or organization can claim ownership or any rights of exclusivity to the body of Christ; therefore, no one but God can declare who *is* and *is not* part of the body of Christ. We are invited to this body of Christ not to control or define it, but to participate with the fullness of the body of Christ

³⁷ Yung Suk Kim, "Reclaiming Christ's Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God's Gospel in Paul's Letters," *Interpretation* 67, no. 1 (2013).

welcoming all whom *Christ* welcomes. The generosity and openness of this lens has helped the congregation in its interactions with those with whom they agree and disagree both inside the congregation and in the surrounding community.

Controversy at the Jerusalem Council—Acts 15:1-35

The controversy at the Jerusalem Council is a perfect example in the Bible of the confrontation of the old ways with something new. The people advocating for the old ways had the Hebrew Scriptures and centuries of tradition that supported the use of circumcision as a mark of the covenant. Adopting something new for these people meant giving up a piece of their identity as chosen people of God. The people advocating for something new saw evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence even among uncircumcised Gentiles! The church and our culture are constantly being challenged by something new.

This lens has been instrumental by helping Community see that it is possible for people with deeply held convictions to discern the Holy Spirit, come to a position of unity, and find a way forward. Not all controversies will be on this magnitude, but the patterns of faithful discernment and healthy dialogue may also be applied to less extreme circumstances.

Scarcity and God's Abundance—Exodus

Scarcity arises simply when there is not enough. We experience scarcity every day to a greater or lesser degree as people have throughout history. Scarcity is ameliorated when that scarcity is able to be satisfied relatively quickly and easily. Hunger is a form of scarcity. I have the resources and the opportunities to satisfy my hunger when I am hungry. I can, therefore, say that the scarcity of my hunger is not long-lived because I possess the appropriate abundant resources. What about the people who

experience the scarcity of hunger, but they do not possess abundant resources? Their scarcity is not quickly satisfied and becomes a higher priority. They focus on their hunger to the exclusion of other needs. They experience fear.

The story of the Exodus exemplifies both scarcity and abundance. It shows how scarcity can tear away at the fabric of the society as people turn against one another, protect what is theirs, even turning away from loyalties and previous experiences. The Hebrews witnessed for themselves God's amazing power through the plagues, as God led them safely across the sea, and as God led them by a pillar of fire and a cloud. Each time the people experienced scarcity, they grumbled; and, each time, God provided. We know that this pattern did not end once the Hebrews entered the Promised Land—the people experienced scarcity and doubted God's abundance.

Leadership in the church continues this pattern in many congregations. Community benefitted by hearing the Exodus story, hearing again the patterns, and seeing themselves in it. We observed these patterns very clearly when the entire congregation engaged in *The Story* from 2013 to 2014.³⁸ Authors such as Daniel Bell, Walter Brueggemann, John McKnight, Peter Block, and Anthony Robinson built upon the foundation the congregation already had from *The Story*.³⁹ We also took the step of observing the scarcity and abundance in our community. Martin Luther's sermons on the

³⁸ Max Lucado and Randy Frazee, *The Story, NIV: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

³⁹ Daniel M. Bell, *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), Kindle; Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), Kindle; John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), Kindle; Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), Kindle.

Lord's Prayer focused on the fact that God's name is not made holy, God's kingdom does not come, and God's will is not done simply because we pray it.⁴⁰ God is holy and God is bringing about the Kingdom of God and accomplishing His will often through us.

Theological Lenses

Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross is the concept that we find God in the places we least expect to find Him. God is found as a baby lying in a feeding trough in a barn to homeless parents. God is found amongst tax collectors and sinners, in the presence of lepers, and conversing with foreign women. God is found accused, beaten, and hanging on a cross.

The theology of the cross has made Community more aware of the presence of God in the unlikeliest of places. Conversation about the question "Where do you see God?" led the people at Community to ask deeper questions, such as "Why do evangelicals tend to talk about what God is doing and where they see God than most Lutherans?" We arrived at the idea that "You don't see what you're not looking for." Some Christians tend to look for God and even expect to see God's hand at work. They also give credit to God when they sense that God is at work. Simply asking the missional questions of "What is God doing here?" and "What is God trying to do through us?" has helped Community recognize God's presence and know that we are not doing church without God.

⁴⁰ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 445-449.

Theology of Hope

What is hope? People who speak of *hope* tend to use it as a synonym for *wish*. The word “hope” can just as easily be used when rolling dice for a board game as someone says, “I *hope* I roll a six,” or when seeking after a new job accompanied by the phrase “I *hope* I get that job.” Is this the *hope* of faith? We sing: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”⁴¹ We quote St. Paul as he speaks of hope that emerges from suffering and “does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5). The hope of faith that leads us to look to and rely upon God seems as though it ought to be much more robust than the hope involved in advancing through a board game.

Congregations like Community are often faced with real-life scarcity whether that scarcity relates to people, opportunity, or money. Leaders and finance teams may feel irresponsible simply relying on *hope* in the face of economic scarcity and downward trends. They may also feel as though their faith is lacking as some leaders and members decry their caution and apprehension. Community’s leaders came to a deeper and fuller understanding of *hope* as they confronted whether they believed Community’s best days have already passed, or, with Isaiah: “I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing” (Isaiah 29:14). Hope helped to reframe their approach to leadership, financial management, and their approach to Community’s future.

⁴¹ Edward Mote, “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, [No. 596], Pew ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

I drew on Walter Bruggeman, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and Lesslie Newbigin, among others, to gain a theological and, specifically, missional perspective on hope.⁴² These authors acknowledge the future orientation of hope as reflected in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This future hope is rooted in the current needs of people who need comfort, strength, and endurance in the present. People who are not suffering or in want are not as aware of their need for hope. Chapter 3 explores hope not as a wish or desire, but as God’s response to our cries for help and direction. Faith calls us to rely on God’s hope in spite of the current circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Missio Dei

Churches that engage in strategic planning, whether for the current year or longer periods of time, will inevitably ask questions like, “What do *we* want to do this year?” or “Where do *we* want to be in five years?” The *missio Dei* calls us to dig a bit deeper and ask: What is our identity as *church*, and how do we know if we are living in that identity? Hunsburger wrote:

The Reformers emphasized as the ‘marks of the true church’ that such a church exists wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and (they sometimes added) church discipline exercised. . . . But,

⁴² Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*; Jürgen Moltmann, “Politics and the Practice of Hope,” *The Christian Century* 87, no. 10 (1970); Jürgen Moltmann, “On Latin American Liberation Theology: An Open Letter to José Miguez Bonino,” *Christianity and Crisis* 36, no. 5 (1976); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011), Kindle; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), Kindle.

over time, these ‘marks’ narrowed the church’s definition of itself toward ‘a place where [certain things happen].’⁴³

A club, theater, grocery store, and church are all places where “certain things happen.” A healthy understanding of the concept of the *missio Dei* helped Community reframe our working definition of church from a *place* to a *people*, and our purpose from doing what we think is best given our limited means to pursuing *God’s* mission making use of God’s resources.

The *missio Dei* as it was used in this project primarily served to challenge and reorient our thinking away from centering on the church or individuals within the church and toward centering on the mission of God. Bosch writes: “Our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God.”⁴⁴ Using these words was not difficult for Community, but living the words was very difficult. One of our adult classes used Andy Stanley’s “Christian: It’s Not What You Think” video series.⁴⁵ Stanley made the distinction between being “just a Christian” and being a *disciple*. He brought to light the difference between a *label* and an *action*. The *missio Dei* involves action as Bosch writes: the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [send] the church into the world.”⁴⁶ I began teaching my new member classes that there is no place in the Bible where God’s people are told to keep the gospel to themselves and to neglect the needs of

⁴³ George R. Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God,” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), Kindle, Loc 1476.

⁴⁴ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), Kindle, 382.

⁴⁵ Andy Stanley, *Christian: It's Not What You Think* (Zondervan, 2013).

⁴⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 381.

others. Chapter 3 draws Craig Van Gelder, Lesslie Newbigin, David Bosch, and Miroslav Volf into the conversation to expound on this lens.⁴⁷

Social Science Methodology

The methodology for this research project was a transformative mixed-methods modified Participatory Action Research (PAR). I chose this methodology primarily because I felt the congregation would benefit from changing the way members interact with one another, the way they make decisions, and the role of faith in their discernment process. The transformative mixed-methods approach is particularly helpful when a population is not being heard or perceives they are not being heard. Living with the research question in light of this methodology led me to believe that *the leadership* and *the congregation* at times *both* feel a sense of injustice because of a lack of true listening.

The project was bookended by baseline and end-line surveys. The baseline and end-line surveys constituted a census of people associated with the congregation who were over the age of eighteen. I conducted three one-on-one interviews following the end-line survey. Participants in the interviews were selected based on a purposive sample of three people chosen from those who volunteered as part of the survey. I also conducted a one-on-one interview with a long-time congregation member regarding the history of the congregation. This interview specifically addressed congregational conflicts and the possible involvement of factions in the development and fostering of those conflicts.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998); Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*.

The original research design included a series of five interventions. The Action Research Team (ART) and I decided to reduce the number of interventions and change the purpose of them, which will be described in detail in chapter 4. The population for the four interventions, except for the second, consisted of a convenience sample of the congregation. Publicity encouraged wide participation and sought to include those who were on the fringe of the congregation and might not otherwise have engaged in such conversations. The first intervention facilitated information sharing and dialogue to help the congregation address the question: “Should we maintain the existing building or seek a more substantive remodeling or rebuilding?” The second intervention utilized a purposive sample as it was targeted specifically at leaders of the church. This intervention began with a survey of all leaders and included questions to elicit topics they felt needed to be addressed. The intervention included information and discussion on these items as well as the topics of change, dialogue, and conflict. The strategic importance of this intervention was to prepare leaders to *seed* the congregation as we engaged in subsequent interventions.

The third intervention consisted of a series of cottage meetings accessible to the entire congregation. The cottage meetings were held in member homes to maintain a smaller group size and more intimacy for better conversation. The need to discuss the future of the congregation’s building arose and became the focus of the first intervention. We needed to address whether we should undergo significant renovations or pursue major remodeling. The purpose of the cottage meetings was to continue the conversation from Intervention 1 by addressing the status of the building discussion as well as what

members believe are the mission, values, and priorities that guide our calling by the Holy Spirit.

The original design of the fourth intervention made use of the skills gained by leaders and congregation members through the second and third interventions. It was an opportunity for the leaders to provide feedback to the congregation so they knew they were being heard. I intended this intervention to help us engage the Five Phases of Discernment to attend to the needs of our community outside the congregation and how God might use Community to address those needs. The design of the fourth intervention changed to be a special congregational meeting at which we provided a summary of the discussions from the cottage meetings in Intervention 3. This feedback helped participants experience a feedback loop, which should increase congregational confidence that they were heard.

The fifth and final intervention was designed to begin the preparation of the 2017 congregational budget. It was intended to draw together all of the prior interventions and all of the frames discussed in chapters 2 and 3. The fifth intervention did not occur due to time and resource constraints as described further in chapter 4.

The design was to follow each intervention by a debriefing session with the ART and a focus group. The first two interventions were debriefed according to the original design, but the last two were not. I led the focus groups which were held at a later date and consisted of a purposive sample of those who volunteered following participation in the corresponding intervention. The ART debrief and focus groups were guided by interview protocols developed for those groups. The surveys, one-on-one interview protocol, debrief protocol, and focus group protocol were each field tested to increase the

likelihood of clarity, reduce the level of bias, and assess the length of time required for each instrument.

This project involved two congregational surveys, two surveys of leaders for Intervention 2, four one-on-one interviews, four interventions, two ART debrief meetings, and three focus groups. Survey data were either collected electronically using SurveyMonkey or by paper questionnaires.⁴⁸ The responses to the paper questionnaires were later manually entered into SurveyMonkey. Quantitative data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics software.⁴⁹ Qualitative data were coded according to Charmaz' method as described in chapter 4.

Other Considerations

Definition of Key Terms

Dialogue. A form of communicating that is necessarily two-way. "Dialogue" is used in this paper as opposed to the more generic *communication* to reinforce the conversational—speaking and listening—aspect of communication. See page 7 footnote 12 for more.

Decision threshold. This term arose out of an ART meeting. We were discussing the fear or apprehension that some people have about making decisions. The decision threshold addresses the question: What will it take to get you to "yes" or "no"?

Discernment. The act of distinguishing between two or more scenarios, and making some judgment between them based on a core principle, belief, or value. We may

⁴⁸ "SurveyMonkey," Palo Alto, CA: SurveyMonkey Inc., www.surveymonkey.com.

⁴⁹ IBM SPSS Statistics for Macintosh Ver. 23, IBM Corp, Armonk, NY.

discern based on values, priorities, faith, finances, common good, or some combination of these.

Conflict. Actions or differences of opinion or approach that elicit a physical, verbal, emotional, or physiological response immediately or after the fact. Conflict may be small and pass quickly, or it may involve multiple people over time. For simplicity, this paper will rely on the shorthand definition provided by Rendle: “two or more ideas in the same place at the same time.”⁵⁰

Intervention. An event, action, or process used within Participatory Action Research (PAR) to help an organization to attempt to achieve change toward a specified goal or trajectory.

Missio Dei. Latin for the “mission of God.” The two most important concepts with *missio Dei* are that God is a sending God, and to get the direction of that sending correct: the Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit, and the Spirit sends the church. These concepts focus on God as the sender and the agent instead of humans or even the church. The order of the *missio Dei* can be summed up in the phrase: The church doesn’t have a mission. God’s mission has a church.⁵¹

Missional. The core concepts of the missional church are that God is at work in our world, and that God is a sending God. The word “missional” has been very popular lately—everything is missional. Some may misuse the word by using it to refer to missions in other countries, or to speak of the *purpose* of a church in a way that focuses

⁵⁰ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), Kindle, Loc 2879.

⁵¹ Richard H. Bliese, “Addressing Captives in Babylon,” in *The Evangelizing Church: a Lutheran Contribution*, ed. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005), Kindle.

on the people and the church to the exclusion of God. The idea that the mission of the church does not start with the church, its initiatives, or programs. Instead, “missional” begins with God. God is a missional or sending God. See more under *missio Dei* above.

Participatory Action Research. A form of research that does not separate the researcher from those being studied, but brings them together. This form of research is much more than merely studying and describing behavior, or proving a hypothesis. The organization being studied becomes a learning community working together in a democratic way toward the goal of changing some behavior. The framework of the study is outlined at the beginning of the study period, but that framework will likely evolve as the organization learns.

Rabbit holes. Conversation topics that garner attention and energy, but lead the group away from the topic at hand.

Search conference. “A specific kind of cogenerative learning process” to “create a situation where ordinary people can engage in structured knowledge generation ... based on systematic experimentation.”⁵²

Ethical Considerations

The thesis proposal for this project, the “Application for the Approval of Use of Human Subjects in Research” form, and all implied and informed consent forms were submitted to the Luther Seminary Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that this study provides for the “ethical and responsible treatment of human subjects involved in

⁵² Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 136.

research conducted at Luther Seminary.”⁵³ The Luther Seminary IRB website says that the seminary “accepts three historic documents, the Nuremburg Code (1949), the Helsinki Declaration (1964), and the Belmont Report (1979) as expressing the general philosophical and ethical foundation of the IRB.”⁵⁴ It goes on to say:

The Belmont Report establishes three quintessential requirements for the ethical conduct of human subject research: *respect for persons* (involving a recognition of the personal dignity and autonomy of individuals, and special protection of those persons with diminished autonomy); *benefice* (entailing an obligation to protect persons from harm by maximizing anticipated benefits and minimizing possible risks of harm); and *justice* (requiring that the benefits and burdens of research be distributed fairly).⁵⁵

The population for this research involved a census of individuals over the age of eighteen and who were not considered vulnerable by IRB standards. All focus groups and interviews were recorded by audiotape for later transcription, and permission to do so was included in the informed consent form. All questionnaires and interview protocols are included in appendices A through F. All resulting data are being stored in an encrypted folder on my laptop, and only I have access. These records will be kept until May 31, 2020, and then destroyed. This study had no anticipated risks to the participants of the research project. The benefits of this study were to help the congregation grow in its ability to have healthy and faithful dialogue leading to missional discernment and action. These benefits outweighed any nominal risks from this project.

⁵³ “IRB Approval Instructions,” Luther Seminary, <http://www.luthersem.edu/irb/approval.aspx> (accessed 7/25/2015).

⁵⁴ “IRB Policies and Procedures,” Luther Seminary, <http://www.luthersem.edu/irb/policies.aspx> (accessed 9/17/2015).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Confidentiality for all respondents was maintained, and individuals have not been identified by name. I used SurveyMonkey and numbered paper questionnaires to allow comparison between baseline and end line surveys, and I am the only person with access to the number-name correlations. Informed consent forms were used with all interviews and focus groups. Implied consent forms were attached to all questionnaires. The informed and implied consent forms were developed following IRB guidelines for content and procedure.

I am aware that my dual role as the researcher and the pastor of this congregation are accompanied by power dynamics and biases. All of the conflicts, conversations, and major decisions over the last eight years involving me and members of the congregation have the potential of creating either a positive or negative perception of my role in those activities. I am also aware of the varieties of perspectives regarding how much time and effort should be expended talking and analyzing as opposed to making decisions and taking action. My personal bias and assumption from the beginning of this project has been that the congregation needs to understand itself—its values and priorities—in order to have the dialogue necessary for fruitful discernment.

I communicated these biases to my Action Research Team so they could remain aware of them. I asked them to help me be aware of any unhelpful influence I may have brought to the process. I expressed to participants that their experiences, perspectives, and contributions are valuable and legitimate in order to solicit more authentic responses. I have intentionally encouraged people to share in their own words rather than trying to use unfamiliar theological language.

Summary

Chapter 1 offered an introduction to Community Evangelical Lutheran Church's context, a broad outline of the study process and the reasons for it, and a thumbnail sketch of the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses involved. I also briefly described that this research project showed a positive relationship between healthy dialogue (independent variable), more faithful discernment (dependent variable), and decision-making (dependent variable). Chapter 2 explores the theoretical lenses in much greater detail as it employs literature to deepen the lenses and explain their relevance to this project. Chapter 3 likewise engages literature to expound on the biblical and theological lenses. These lenses are especially important as this study addresses relationships, dialogue, and decision-making specifically from a Christian point of view and within the context of a Lutheran Christian congregation. Chapter 4 expands significantly upon the brief description of the methodology in the current chapter. Chapter 5 shares the results from both qualitative and quantitative instruments and offers an interpretation of the data. Chapter 6 articulates the conclusions of the research process.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE LITERATURE

This chapter outlines the theories utilized in framing this research project. All theories must be contextualized to understand how they shape the conversation within a particular congregation; therefore, I draw on the historical background introduced in chapter 1 as the context to which these lenses apply. I follow this historical background with the five theoretical lenses that guided my research: Change Theory, Conflict Theory, Chaos Theory, General System Theory, and Leadership Theory.

Change Theory

The history of this congregation sheds light on why it can be difficult for leaders and the congregation alike to address change. The mere mention of the word “change” is enough to elicit fear, anxiety, and even jokes, such as the one that begins with the question: “How many Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb?”¹ My observation at Community is that people tend to either become anxious with change or they make light of it. People who tend to become anxious in anticipation of change approach new circumstances with the assumption that change is difficult and that it will require them to make an uncomfortable or significant investment. The anxiety around change draws attention and energy to itself in such a way that the idea of change becomes burdensome

¹ Answer: “None. Lutherans don’t believe in change.”

and distracts the congregation from focusing on the underlying reason for it in the first place.

This misplaced focus can have a significant impact on the congregation's decision to either *lean in* to and embrace the change, or back away from it. The misplaced focus stirs up rational and irrational fears about money and whether the change might upset people and cause them to leave the congregation or withhold their offerings. This misplaced focus moves the individual or congregation from faithful discernment of a call from a loving, sending God to an anxiety-ridden, lifeless understanding of change that pits one side versus the other as we debate personal preferences, ideals, and solutions. *Change* becomes an amorphous monolith that avoids adequate description and deconstruction. Change is perceived as being too huge and too unknowable, so the congregation may be reluctant or feel inadequate to address the reality of change resulting in sluggishness or even paralysis.

The reality is that change happens whether we like it or not—it is a constant. Van Gelder writes:

A congregation in praying for God's kingdom to come has to recognize that in doing so, it is inviting itself into experiencing and participating in change ... Encountering change is inherent in what it means to be human, and it is also inherent in what it means to be Christian. The church should expect to change as it interacts with its community/environment.²

Organizations, including congregations and individuals, seek stability. Stability, or a state of equilibrium, as Margaret Wheatley contends, is exactly the *opposite* of the condition

² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 2471.

we should be seeking. Wheatley writes: “In venerating equilibrium, we have blinded ourselves to the processes that foster life.”³

Change Theory offers guidance and research from the fields of sociology and psychology that helps us understand, explain, and break down the monolith into parts that can be described and addressed. A scan of the literature on leadership, the church, and change reveals that many of these books treat change as a monolith—something too large and unknowable that is unable to be considered as component parts. These resources describe change, how leaders may prepare themselves and their congregations, and the stress and conflict arising from change. That is where they stop. Steinke observes: “Clergy leaders—besides being anxious about implementing change for the fear of resistance, removal of support, and so forth—are not well prepared to conduct the change *process*.”⁴ It is as though these authors prepare leaders then launch them into the abyss hoping they will emerge on the other side having accomplished the desired change. They do not necessarily address change as a process.

Kritsonis, in a comparison of change theories, helps us see that there are many ways of understanding the change process, each with their own strengths.⁵ The change theories Kritsonis compared understand that change is not simply a matter of a leader making a decision and issuing an edict to all loyal followers. A model for change may look “good on paper,” but, if it fails to consider “human feelings and experiences [it] can

³ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1262.

⁴ Peter L. Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010), Kindle, Loc 81.(emphasis mine)

⁵ Alicia Kritsonis, “Comparison of Change Theories,” *International Journal of Scholarly Academic Intellectual Diversity* 8, no. 1 (2004-2005): 1-6.

have negative consequences.”⁶ No one can predict exactly how the change process will affect people, and no one can design a rational process that saves leaders from the discomfort brought about by change. Leaders can, however, seek to understand the individual, interpersonal, and group dynamics at work in the congregation, including whether the people want to change or have the ability to adopt the new behaviors necessary to bring about change.⁷

Some theorists, such as Lewin, tend to treat change as a linear and predictable process; whereas others, like Prochaska and DiClemente adopt an approach to change that is iterative, recognizes how difficult change can be, and where it often does not occur smoothly.⁸ Prochaska and DiClemente joined with John Norcross to write a book entitled *Changing for Good*. They employ their iterative or spiral process to individuals living with addiction. This is a population in which people wish to change yet are unable to, and those who love them hope for change yet are unable to make the change for their loved one. Prochaska, *et al.* who are proponents of “self-change,” studied people with high-risk behaviors and found “that fewer than 20 percent . . . are prepared for action at any given time.”⁹ How can those living with addiction presume to take power over their addiction and undergo self-change when the first step involves admitting powerlessness?¹⁰

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ Ibid., 3-5.

⁸ Ibid., 4, 6; Kurt Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts & Field Theory in Social Science*, ed. Gertrud Lewin (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1997), Kindle; Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good: The Revolutionary Program That Explains the Six Stages of Change and Teaches You How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits*.

⁹ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good: The Revolutionary Program That Explains the Six Stages of Change and Teaches You How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits*, Loc 131.

¹⁰ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing, 1953), 21.

Reflecting on our own experiences shows us that not only is change a process, but that there are several facets of the change process that cannot be ignored. The dynamics of context, trust, motivation, control, power, grief, and vision all play a role in the change process not only being successful, but also being *holy*. Many of these dynamics are represented as Zscheile writes:

When innovation is not leader-driven and coercive, when people don't feel like they are being managed into a future they don't understand or is uprooted from the past, and when they are given space to grieve losses and try things on at their own pace, transformation becomes a shared work. It is vital here to recall the Spirit's leadership, for it is precisely in the moments of crisis, despair, disorganization, and fear that God's Spirit forms new community in the Bible.¹¹

All change, even good change, can stir up anxiety and a sense of loss. We have observed at Community that, not only do people resist change, but everyone experiences change differently. Steinke says: "Transformation redefines who we are and what we do. It is always an emotional experience."¹² He goes on to say that "transformation begins with *endings* ... the natural response is for people to grieve."¹³ Kübler-Ross famously articulated that grief, like change, is not a monolith. She observed that there are five stages of grief each with their associated emotions.¹⁴ If the *prospect* of change in a congregation elicits fear and grief, then congregations are not only dealing with the *effects* of change, but the *anticipation* of it.

¹¹ Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*, Loc 2018.

¹² Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope*, Loc 692.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, Loc 93. Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Community Lutheran, in an attempt to avoid discomfort by leaders and members in the congregation and to make change more palatable, has opted not to initiate change, engaged very slowly in change, or rushed through change. Leaders, however, can give a great gift to congregational members by involving them in the process and helping members to see what leaders see. An important role of Christian leadership also involves helping people of faith in a community of faith see and engage with the Spirit throughout the whole change process. Welker points out that “the Spirit causes the people . . . to come out of a situation of insecurity, fear, paralysis, and mere complaint,” thereby restoring “loyalty and a capacity for action among the people.”¹⁵

The congregation likely perceives that all is well in the absence of negative information to the contrary, which is in line with the axiom: “no news is good news.” If the congregation is to be one body, the body has to know the truth of its circumstances. G. K. Chesterton writes: “It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”¹⁶ If the congregation does not perceive that there is anything wrong, then it has no motivation to do anything differently and no motivation toward any sense of urgency. Steinke, quoting Covey, writes: “This is one of the greatest insights in the field of human motivation: *Satisfied needs do not motivate.*”¹⁷ Unmet needs create vulnerabilities in the congregation. Wheatley uses the word *autopoiesis* to refer to “life’s

¹⁵ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 56.

¹⁶ G. K. Chesterton, “The Point of a Pin,” in *The Scandal of Father Brown* (eBooks@Adelaide, 1935), Kindle; as quoted in Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good: The Revolutionary Program That Explains the Six Stages of Change and Teaches You How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits*, Loc 476.

¹⁷ Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 241; as quoted in Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2125.

fundamental process for creating and renewing itself, for growth and change ...” because “change is prompted only when an organism decides that changing is the only way to maintain itself.”¹⁸

We made use of Lewin’s Force Field Analysis when working with the congregation “to describe in detail the forces influencing their situation and then choose steps to shift the balance toward a wanted change.”¹⁹ Rendle reminds us that we cannot attempt to meet the irrational with the rational. He compares leaders who have been immersed in the research and decision-making to an American speaking with someone who does not know English by “speaking more slowly and loudly. ... Responding to feelings by speaking reasons more slowly and clearly does not work. ... The insight that fits this scenario is that people do not resist change. They resist being changed.”²⁰

Resistance tends to separate people into camps that are in opposition to one another. This is conflict and will be addressed in the next section.

Moving through change is not just a matter of understanding the problem, a range of solutions, and the rationale for pursuing a proposed solution. Moving through change

¹⁸ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 505.

¹⁹ Rendle refers to Lewin’s field theory as originally presented in 1943 in Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2497. Force Field Analysis helps “leaders identify and describe ‘driving’ and ‘resisting’ forces operative in the congregation as a way to strategize next steps. It is based on the assumption that a system held in equilibrium (nonchange) is held there by the opposing but balanced driving and resisting forces.” David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), Kindle, Loc 3576. Coghlan and Brannick describe it as follows: “Force field analysis comprises five steps. Step 1. Describe the change issue and the desired direction of the change. Step 2. List the political forces driving change and those restraining in a diagram which has the forces in opposition to one another. Step 3. Give a weighting to the forces – those that are stronger and more powerful than others. Step 4. Focus on the restraining forces, and assess which of the significant ones that need to be worked on, and those which can be worked on. Step 5. Develop plans for reducing these forces.” Lewin, *Resolving Social Conflicts & Field Theory in Social Science*, Loc 4558.

²⁰ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2112.

involves the human concepts of “emotional barriers, imaginative gridlock, and resistance.”²¹ It involves including people who “fall into different categories in their readiness to embrace change—from the innovators, who are impatient to embody the future, to the laggards, who resist it as long as possible.”²² It also involves giving people time and space to be human and to feel the range of emotions that they will naturally feel. We can’t avoid the emotion, but we can hold people together “in the wilderness of their experience, the chaos of not knowing what comes next until it comes. It is what Ronald Heifetz ... describes as providing a ‘holding environment’ for containing the stresses of adaptive change.”²³

The logic for a decision may be clear to leaders, and they may feel a sense of relief and accomplishment once a decision to move forward has been made. This is the point at which some of the literature launches leaders into the abyss. Living with the change, especially if the change process takes a considerable amount of time, and with new patterns of doing things can be wearing on a congregation. People may become weary or distracted over time. Kanter observes that “all new initiatives ... can run into trouble before reaching fruition” because “everyone loves inspiring beginnings and happy endings.”²⁴ Leaders and parishioners alike may begin questioning whether the decision to

²¹ Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope*, Loc 324.

²² Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, Loc 3550.

²³ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 1784; Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), Kindle, Loc 1268.

²⁴ Kanter, “Change Is Hardest in the Middle.” Kanter suggests five considerations when determining whether to continue or abandon the change process: (1) Tune into the environment, (2) Check the vision, (3) Test support, (4) Examine progress, and (5) Search for synergies.

change was the right decision—consider the grumbling by the Israelites once they began their new life in the wilderness. Not every decision is a good one, and no congregation should be forced to enact a bad decision simply because that is what the leaders or the congregation decided. Emotion alone cannot be relied upon to decide whether or not to abandon the change process. It takes some degree of wisdom, patience, and rational thought to determine whether the change should be abandoned, a mid-course correction should be made, or continue forth. Kanter reminds us that stopping an effort too soon “by definition ... is a failure.”²⁵ Logic and sensitivity is required to lead through these lulls in the change process that Kanter describes as the “miserable middles of change” which led to Kanter’s Law: “Everything looks like a failure in the middle.”²⁶

This literature opens leaders and the congregation to an understanding of change as a process or a tool rather than an adversary or hindrance. It also gives the congregation language to understand what they and others are feeling and experiencing. Leaders play a significant role by moving the conversation away from an internal focus that privileges our own self-interests, and toward an open conversation that involves the community. This kind of dialogue is grounded in the values and purpose of the congregation, but is much more willing to be influenced by the community.²⁷ Prochaska, *et al.* identified six stages of change.²⁸ They write: “When contemplators begin the transition to the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations*, Loc 2166.

²⁸ Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente, *Changing for Good: The Revolutionary Program That Explains the Six Stages of Change and Teaches You How to Free Yourself from Bad Habits*, Loc 467. The six stages of change are: (1) pre-contemplation, (2) contemplation, (3) preparation, (4) action, (5) maintenance, and (6) termination.

preparation stage, their thinking is clearly marked by two changes. First, they begin to focus on the solution rather than the problem. Then they begin to think more about the future than the past.”²⁹ We can see that the

research suggests that people are more likely to be successful in their change attempts when they are given two choices of how to pursue change rather than one; the success rate increases with three or more choices. Your motivation to change increases, your commitment becomes stronger, and you become more able to free yourself from your problem.³⁰

Encountering change is simply part of life. Change that we choose can be exciting and motivating. Change that we feel is imposed upon us can make us feel that something has been taken from us, and we grieve. The prospect of change can cause us to ask: “What is wrong with the way we were doing things?,” “What’s broken that we have to fix?,” “What if *we* liked things the way they were?” Change, especially adaptive change, is seldom easy or without conflict. Just as change is not a monolith, neither is conflict, the subject of the next section.

Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory helps us understand why conflict is occurring, how to frame it, how to manage our own reactivity, and how to progress through the conflict. A simple summation of Conflict Theory states: “The basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups in society struggle to maximize their share of the limited resources that exist and are desired by humans. Given that there are limited resources, the

²⁹ Ibid., Loc 518.

³⁰ Ibid., Loc 407.

struggle inevitably leads to conflict and competition.”³¹ The reality is that change will happen with or without our involvement in any change process. Conflict will likewise occur where there are “two or more ideas in the same place at the same time.”³² Rendle articulates that “change will produce conflict, which is good and not to be avoided.”³³ Heifetz and Linsky reflect that “many organizations are downright allergic to conflict, seeing it primarily as a source of danger.”³⁴ These allergic reactions within organizations fail to see that “out of the ‘conflict’ of more than one idea comes energy, motivation, clarity, and direction. Without such conflict, which is the engagement of differences, it is very hard to responsibly meet a changing future.”³⁵

The presence of conflict in any relationship or any organization is a given.

Questions arise about how we are to address conflict in a productive, healthy, and faithful manner. How do we discern the leading of the Holy Spirit in the midst of conflict? What is the role of a missional leader? Is the role of a missional leader, including the role of pastor, to stand on the power of his/her role and simply dictate the direction and take an upper hand in resolving conflict? The previous section noted that change cannot be forced or coerced. Karl Marx, who is regarded as the father of conflict theory, noted the

³¹ “Sociological Theory/Conflict Theory,” https://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?title=Sociological_Theory/Conflict_Theory&oldid=2766274 (accessed 12/15/2015).

³² Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2880.

³³ *Ibid.*, Loc 414.

³⁴ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 101. More at Loc 2874.

³⁵ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 421.

power imbalance between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat.³⁶ Marx traced the development of the bourgeoisie and noted that their accumulation of financial and political power, instead of mending “class antagonisms,” split society “into two great hostile camps, into two great classes, directly facing each other.”³⁷ Marx’s perspectives give missional leaders a helpful perspective on the power imbalance in organizations as well as in society at large. Community’s history, in which a divide has developed between *the congregation* and *the leadership*, can benefit from Marx and his “assumption that in all social structures, the unequal distribution of power inevitably creates a conflict of interests between superordinates holding power and subordinates lacking power.”³⁸ The presence of conflict at Community, the congregation’s interest in avoiding conflict because it is seen primarily as a negative, and the possibility of understanding conflict as a strength rather than a weakness led to my inclusion of Conflict Theory as a theoretical concept.

I worked in the computer and business field prior to attending seminary. My enculturation into that field involved taking a class in management concepts called Model-Netics.³⁹ One of the many models in this program was that “people resist change.” This word *resist*, like the words *change* and *conflict*, is mostly viewed as a negative

³⁶ Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Loc 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Loc 30.

³⁸ Jonathan H. Turner, “Marx and Simmel Revisited: Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict Theory,” *Social Forces* 53, no. 4 (1975): 621.

³⁹ Model-Netics is a training class developed by its President and CEO, Harold Hook. Mr. Hook started a company called Main Event Management which further developed this methodology. Model-Netics is a 30-hour training program administered to all new employees of the American General Corporation. I participated in this training in 1993 when I worked for the Variable Annuity Life Insurance Corporation (VALIC), a subsidiary of American General. Harold Hook, “Model-Netics,” Main Event Management, www.maineventmanagement.com/model-netics (accessed 12/15/2015).

action. The people who resist change tend to be viewed negatively by the proponents of change. They are labeled as “nay-sayers” and are thus not listened to unless they cause a commotion and make threats. I spoke with the congregation at our November 2015 annual congregational meeting and asked them to use words to describe those who resist change. The congregation responded with mostly negative words, but I heard one person speak the word *realistic*. This person and others who may be resistant to change do not tend to describe themselves negatively; instead, they view themselves as being faithful stewards of God’s church, as opposed to antagonistic to God’s call. Luther’s explanation of the eighth commandment is helpful for Christian leaders to remember. He writes that we should not slander or destroy the reputations of our neighbors; “instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”⁴⁰

The word “resistor” is common in electronics; thus a basic understanding of electronics is helpful as we gain an alternative perspective on resistance. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines electricity as “a fundamental form of energy observable in positive and negative forms that occurs naturally or is produced and that is expressed in terms of the movement and interaction of electrons.”⁴¹ Electricity is intended to do something, and its energy must go somewhere because all “electricity in a circuit must be used.”⁴² An electric current may be used to turn on a light, operate a fan, or otherwise use

⁴⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 353.

⁴¹ “Electricity,” *Merriam-Webster.com* (2015), <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dialogue> (accessed 12/15/2015).

⁴² “Step 3: Resistance,” Autodesk, Inc, 2015, <http://www.instructables.com/id/Basic-Electronics/step3/Resistance/> (accessed 12/15/2015).

up the electricity in a circuit. Components on a circuit board are intended to change the voltage in a current (transformer), store electricity (capacitor), or slow down and absorb the current (resistor). Resistors generate “heat energy as the electric currents through them overcome the ‘friction’ of their resistance.”⁴³ “If electricity passes through a component (or group of components) that does not add enough resistance to the circuit, a short will likewise occur.”⁴⁴

Resistors are a vital part of an electric circuit. Translate this metaphor of a circuit to the life of a congregation. Is it possible that resistors are as necessary to the health and faithful functioning of a congregation as they are in an electric circuit? What if change or progress in a congregation was unregulated or un-resisted? Can congregational leaders engage both *resisters* and those who promote change in a way that both discern the source of their energy? The energy may be that which comes through the Holy Spirit motivating us to awareness or action. Resistance helps us slow down and do the faith work of discernment, while also providing “clues about what in the system is of value and should be preserved.”⁴⁵ The result is that those who act as resisters feel that their concerns have been heard and they can “even be helpful in improving the process of gaining acceptance for change.”⁴⁶

⁴³ “Resistors: Chapter 2 - Ohm's Law,” All About Circuits, 2015, <http://www.allaboutcircuits.com/textbook/direct-current/chpt-2/resistors/> (accessed 12/15/2015).

⁴⁴ “Step 3: Resistance.”

⁴⁵ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 1274.

⁴⁶ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Ten Reasons People Resist Change,” *Harvard Business Review* (2012), <https://hbr.org/2012/09/ten-reasons-people-resist-chang> (accessed 10/18/2015).

The desire for change is like the electric current moving through the circuit of the congregation. The presence of the desire for change in a healthy, open system should be expected, and, like a circuit, this desire is the current that must be used. Enough resistance must exist in the congregation to prevent the resistors from burning out, to avoid short circuits, and to ensure the ministries of the church continue to work properly. The “heat” present in the congregation is evidence of resistance and conflict. Neither of these is unhealthy at this point; in fact, “resistance is a healthy, self-regulating manifestation which must be respected and taken seriously.”⁴⁷ Hobgood notes that “resistance is a natural response to the elevation of stress ... and anything that seeks to disrupt the equilibrium of a system.”⁴⁸ Resistance is also a tool leaders can use to take the temperature of the congregation. If resistance is not present, it may signal that there is an “absence of concern, challenge or interest.”⁴⁹ Conflict and resistance become unhealthy when resisters are removed from the system, either when they become frustrated and burn out, or when they are marginalized and removed from the discussion. Conflict and resistance, like electricity in a circuit, must go somewhere. Leaders do well to truly listen and engage with resisters understanding resistance as being present in healthy congregations. The alternative is that “their resistance may go underground and await another opportunity to surface, perhaps in a destructive form, as they move from emotional to antagonistic resistance.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Loc 2570.

⁴⁸ Hobgood, *Welcoming Resistance*, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Heifetz and Linsky, in line with the previous discussion on electronics, suggest that two of their four ideas for enacting change are creating a holding environment and controlling the temperature.⁵¹ The holding environment is a safe space that is held together by relationships, but also shared experiences or values. A holding environment, like a circuit board, cannot bear unlimited current; “therefore, one of the great challenges of leadership in any community or organization is keeping stress at a productive level.”⁵² Controlling the temperature is a matter of being aware of one’s own ability to tolerate heat as well as an awareness of how much the group can bear.⁵³

Conflict, like change, cannot be avoided, and, as we have seen in this section, conflict should not be avoided. Focusing on conflict as a tool and indicator of congregational health helps leaders become less anxious about the presence of conflict, and helps the congregation welcome rather than isolate those who resist change. Change and conflict stir up any number of emotions, feelings, and reactions. The next section on Chaos Theory helps by giving a frame to help gain perspective on that which causes confusion and disorder within congregational life.

Chaos Theory

Chaos Theory emerges from the fields of science and mathematics. Wheatley offers a practical entry into the understanding of Chaos Theory by telling a story about equilibrium and disequilibrium from the perspective of both a child and an adult. She

⁵¹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 102.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 108.

watched as her son plays with other children on the playground, and noticed that “everywhere I look, there are bodies in motion, energies in search of adventure.”⁵⁴ Wheatley observes that adults avoid “disequilibrium, novelty, loss of control, [and] surprise” while children thrive on them.⁵⁵ A parent worries about chaos on the playground because they are concerned that their child (and/or someone else’s) will lose control and hurt themselves. We want to spare them that anticipated hurt. To what degree do leaders, like parents, want to control and avoid the anticipated hurt of change? Hotchkiss reminds us that “religion transforms people; no one touches holy ground and stays the same. . . . Religion at its best is no friend to the status quo.”⁵⁶

Congregations and the adults within them flee from chaos because “a well-ordered congregation lays down schedules, puts policies on paper, places people in positions, and generally brings order out of chaos.”⁵⁷ We may even consult the opening verses in Genesis in which God brings order out of chaos. A point we may miss is this: if there were no chaos, there would be no emergence from that chaos into something new—without the chaos of death, there would be no resurrection. This is the creation of “new order” Wheatley mentions when she says, “This is a world where chaos and order exist as partners, where stasis is never guaranteed nor even desired.”⁵⁸ Hock introduces the term *chaordic* which is a combination of the words chaos and order. He says a chaordic

⁵⁴ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1244.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Dan Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009), Kindle, Loc 235.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 248.

organization is “any self-organizing, self-governing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization, community or system, whether physical, biological or social, the behavior of which harmoniously combines characteristics of both chaos and order.”⁵⁹

Chaos, like change and conflict mentioned above, is necessary to organizations and life itself, yet these words carry such negative connotations. They need to be understood not through the lens of fear or “interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions [of disruption, confusion, and chaos] are necessary to awaken creativity.”⁶⁰ Demystifying chaos can help us approach chaos with less fear. The following paragraphs describe four concepts within Chaos Theory and how these concepts illumine this project: the butterfly effect, strange attractor, relationship, and entropy.

The “butterfly effect” is a concept articulated by Edward Lorenz as a way of describing the concept of “sensitive dependence,” which is the idea that “the smallest of changes in a system can result in very large differences in that system's behavior.”⁶¹ The wording of the butterfly effect varies, but the premise is that a butterfly flaps its wings in one place causing a tornado in another location weeks later. The butterfly effect may be observed in many ways in a congregational setting. Leaders may be surprised when a

⁵⁹ Dee Hock, “The Art of Chaordic Leadership,” *Leader to Leader* 15 (Winter 2000), <http://www.griequity.com/resources/integraltech/GRIBusinessModel/chaordism/hock.html> (accessed 12/15/2015).

⁶⁰ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 531.

⁶¹ Edward N. Lorenz, *The Essence of Chaos*, The Jessie and John Danz Lectures (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 15. See an early explanation of sensitive dependence in Robert Bishop, “Chaos,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2009 ed. (Stanford University: The Metaphysics Research Lab Center for the Study of Language and Information 2009), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/chaos/>. Also, a later elaboration in Lorenz, “Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow,” 136.

seemingly small disagreement erupts into something much larger than the initial disagreement warrants. The butterfly effect helps leaders ask questions beyond simply diagnosing the issues presented before them. Leaders may then have the presence of mind to see that the conflict may have arisen from suppressed resistance as discussed in the previous section. They can ask deeper questions such as: Where did this come from? What conditions worked together to make this such a big deal? The butterfly effect can also be used proactively. Leaders may find that taking time in the present to engage in dialogue and listen to the concerns of another person, while these seem small, will yield much greater benefits in the future as seen through increased trust and healthier dialogue. We may also apply the butterfly effect to relationships—building relationships based on trust and respect now will help when conflict and chaos emerge at some point in the future.

Wheatley writes about observing a mathematical equation being enacted on a computer screen. The points being plotted initially appear random ... chaotic. She observes that “chaos has always partnered with order—a concept that contradicts our common definition of chaos.”⁶² The presence of what Wheatley calls the “strange attractor” (elsewhere known as the Lorenz Attractor) helps us see that, in the midst of what appears to be chaos “order is already present; it has now become discernible.”⁶³ Congregational leaders will observe that people’s words and actions initially seem random. The concept of the strange attractor encourages leaders to take another look from

⁶² Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1796. The “strange attractor” is a pattern that emerges over time from what initially appeared as random (chaotic) computer generated points. See Loc 546.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, Loc 1808.

different perspectives. They will see that these actions, which at first appeared to be random, when viewed over time and with appropriate distance “demonstrates inherent orderliness.”⁶⁴ Seeing these patterns gives leaders another way of attending or listening to people. Engaging the person in dialogue may even reveal patterns of which that person was unaware. I am captivated by the role of the strange attractor in the life of a Christian congregation. Wheatley uses language indicating that, over time, “the attractor reveals itself.”⁶⁵ In the midst of chaos “where everything should fall apart, the strange attractor emerges, and we observe order, not chaos.”⁶⁶ Is God the strange attractor of a Christian congregation? If the strange attractor reveals itself, is God revealed through the randomness and the chaos of the congregation’s seemingly unpredictable behavior whether that behavior is good or bad?

An assumption when considering *science* may be that science is about facts, proofs, and all that is *objective* rather than *subjective*. Ascough is clear that “the science of quantum physics focuses not on ‘things’ as did Newtonian science but on relationships. Relationships are seen as the key to understanding the world we inhabit.”⁶⁷ Wheatley further clarifies this point as she writes: “In Newton’s universe, the emptiness of space created a sense of unspeakable loneliness.”⁶⁸ Field theory pushes us to notice

⁶⁴ Ibid., Loc 548.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Loc 1794.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Loc 1799.

⁶⁷ Richard S. Ascough, “Chaos Theory and Paul’s Organizational Leadership Style,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2002): 22-23.

⁶⁸ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 915. Wheatley notes at Loc 915 that an atom is 99.99% empty.

that, even though there appear to be great distances in the universe and even within an atom, the universe is “filled with interpenetrating influences and invisible forces that connect.”⁶⁹ The quantum physics concept of relationships may be used to help congregations understand congregational relationships differently as we see that each person is connected to another person. Our words, our actions, and even our *inactions* have an effect on those around us.

Congregations with this concept of field theory can then see the complex series of relationships among congregation members, but also between the congregation and community. We have a choice about how we will engage these relationships and to what extent we allow the *other* to affect *us*. Wheatley describes the difference between open and closed systems. Open systems engage with their environment; whereas closed systems are cut off from their environment—isolated. “Closed systems [eventually] wind down and decay.”⁷⁰ Wheatley describes the second law of thermodynamics as follows:

In classical thermodynamics, equilibrium is the end state in the evolution of closed systems, the point at which the system has exhausted all of its capacity for change, done its work, and dissipated its productive capacity into useless entropy. (Entropy is an inverse measure of a system’s capacity for change. The more entropy there is, the less the system is capable of changing.) At equilibrium, there is nothing left for the system to do; it can produce nothing more.⁷¹

This description of entropy may be helpful for congregations to be challenged as to whether they are open or closed systems. Are they engaged with the environment of the community around them, taking in new ideas, and being renewed? Are they closed off

⁶⁹ Ibid., Loc 960.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Loc 1524.

⁷¹ Ibid., Loc 1262.

and unwilling to change because they do not want the disequilibrium and uncertainty that comes with it? Equilibrium, based on Wheatley's research, is "a sure path to institutional death."⁷²

Chaos theory gives congregations language and perspectives with which to view chaos differently. Leaders may feel as though they want and need equilibrium because our plans can then be carried out much more easily, conflict and chaos will not distract us, and matters of the church will not demand as much from us. This is leading and managing according to a Newtonian system, which is seen as preferable because it is predictable, regular, and deterministic. Leaders in congregations that are seeking to be open systems realize that we cannot completely control our environment. Following God's calling and being responsive to God necessarily introduces unpredictability and chaos into the congregation. No person or congregation reacts the same way to the presence of change, conflict, or chaos, and even the same congregation will react differently to the same conditions at another point in time. The butterfly effect reminded us that we are affected by even small actions that occurred at some point in the past. This analysis of Chaos Theory prepares us to better understand relationships through the lens of Systems Theory, which is explored in the next section.

Systems Theory

This section on Systems Theory further explores the relationships between people and groups. Chaos Theory, as a part of quantum physics, instructed us to observe chaos from different perspectives to be able to see the patterns as the strange attractor emerges.

⁷² Ibid., Loc 1256.

It encouraged us to understand that the distance between two bodies in space or between people is not simply void, but the seemingly empty spaces are filled with fields. Systems Theory uses similar concepts and applies them to people, families, and organizations. The paragraphs that follow explore human relatedness and the effects of emotional systems on what we do and who we are.

The systems theorists upon whom I focus in this section—Ludvig von Bertalanffy, Murray Bowen, and Edwin Friedman—all noticed that science was studying matter in smaller and more distinct categories.⁷³ Studying matter at this level helps us understand those component pieces but fails to help us make important connections between them.⁷⁴ Bertalanffy put it this way: “Science tried to explain observable phenomena by reducing them to an interplay of elementary units investigatable [sic] independently of each other ... ‘systems’ of various orders not understandable by investigation of their respective parts in isolation.”⁷⁵ Bowen and Friedman observed that the same movement toward greater compartmentalization and greater specialization was occurring within the realms of psychology and psychotherapy.⁷⁶

Bertalanffy saw that studying people in greater detail and dividing this detail into component parts, as one does with the scientific method, diminishes “the living organism [by reducing it] into cells, its activities into physiological and ultimately physiochemical

⁷³ Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*; Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy.”; Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*.

⁷⁴ Johnson, “Family Systems Theories.”

⁷⁵ Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, Loc 780.

⁷⁶ Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” 46; Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 4.

processes, behavior into unconditioned and conditioned reflexes.”⁷⁷ This “man as robot” model did not allow for creativity but reduced the human organism to instincts and impulses.⁷⁸ Bertalanffy’s theory challenged these prevalent psychological models of the early part of the twentieth century by understanding the *whole* person in terms of systems. He defined his “general system theory ... [as] a general science of ‘wholeness.’”⁷⁹

This whole person perspective is especially important in light of Bertalanffy’s context and background. He was heavily influenced by World War II and the concept of the Aryan master race, which held that one group of people was better or higher than others. This background led Bertalanffy to reject the view of people as “mere cogs in a machine, but instead as inherently valuable and autonomous.”⁸⁰ The “machine” Bertalanffy refers to is the larger capitalist or self-serving narrative he felt was being promoted by the psychological practices of behaviorists, such as B. F. Skinner. He viewed these methods as manipulative and in the service of “this great society [so it may] follow its progress toward ever increasing gross national product.”⁸¹ Bertalanffy’s General Systems Theory was an attempt to find “theoretical unity among all the sciences ... based on the observation that societies contain groups, groups contain individuals,

⁷⁷ Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, Loc 688.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, Loc 296, 3425.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Loc 793.

⁸⁰ Johnson, “Family Systems Theories.”

⁸¹ Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, Loc 3430.

individuals are comprised of organs, organs of cells, cells of molecules, molecules of atoms, and so on.”⁸² These, he said, constitute a *system*.

Family Systems Theory is often considered part of, or a derivative of, General Systems Theory, a notion soundly rejected by Murray Bowen, one of the principal Family Systems theorists.⁸³ Family Systems Theory understands the complexity of a human organism, but, instead of attempting to unify a system as Bertalanffy defined it, Family Systems Theory understands people and their relationships as systems. Family Systems Theory comprehends the space between human organisms not as being void as discussed above in the discussion on chaos theory, but as being filled by the interconnectedness between people, which we may refer to as emotional fields.⁸⁴ Emotional fields operate in the same manner as the fields of quantum physics—they touch, move, and motivate. Friedman contributes not only that this interconnectedness is present, but that many factors impact how this interconnectedness affects the people involved in the system. He posits that Family Systems thinking is a “departure from traditional notions of linear cause and effect. ... Each component ... rather than having its own discrete identity or input, operates as part of a larger whole. *The components do not function according to their ‘nature’ but according to their position in the network.*”⁸⁵

⁸² Mary Jo Hatch and Ann L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 3rd ed. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29.

⁸³ Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” 62; Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, Loc 106.

⁸⁴ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 125.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.(emphasis in the original)

This study drew on concepts from both Bertalanffy and Bowen, but the primary conceptual framework was from Friedman’s work. His specific application of family systems through his writings and experience has been utilized in congregational leadership settings. A comparison of the central tenets of family systems from both Bowen and Friedman are listed in table 2-1 below. The following paragraphs highlight concepts that were especially helpful when using systems thinking to frame this study as well as noting elements of family systems that flow through these writings.

Table 2-1. Comparison of Central Tenets of Bowen and Friedman

Bowen’s Eight Concepts⁸⁶	Friedman’s Five Basic Concepts⁸⁷
1. Scale of Differentiation	1. Identified Patient
2. Triangles	2. Homeostasis
3. Nuclear Family Emotional Process	3. Differentiation of the Self
4. Family Projection Process	4. The Extended Family Field
5. Multigenerational Transmission Process	5. Emotional Triangles
6. Sibling Position	
7. Emotional Cutoff	
8. Societal Emotional Process	

Both Bowen and Friedman use the words *anxiety* and *stress* to refer the friction or the emotional field between people. All people in the system have choices about how to respond to the presence of anxiety. Family Systems Theory suggests that many of our responses are pre-programmed into our DNA and we may feel unable to think, react, or relate in any other way. The visible effects of the anxiety or stress on a person are referred to as being *symptomatic*. Anxiety in an emotional system is like a current in a circuit—it must go somewhere, and it may show up in unexpected ways, such as burning

⁸⁶ Kerr and Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, Loc 6653.

⁸⁷ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 19-39.

out a resistor in a circuit or causing symptoms in one or more members of a system. This is the concept of the “identified patient.”⁸⁸

An identified patient is the symptom-bearer in the system. It may be that a child is acting out or engaging in risky behavior, and the parents bring the child to a therapist and say, “Fix him!” The reality is that the child is the symptom-bearer, the identified patient, within the family. His behavior is merely symptomatic of some other stress within their family. The parents’ desire to fix him allows them to use their child as a scapegoat absolving them of any role in creating the conditions that brought about the child’s symptoms. Friedman instructs that the term “identified patient” is quite purposeful so as “to avoid isolating the ‘problemated’ family member from the overall relationship system of the family.”⁸⁹

The act of labeling resisters as nay-sayers has the effect of making them the symptom-bearers of the congregational system, isolating them from other relationships within the congregation, and absolving everyone else of any responsibility for their role. The congregation, by avoiding such labeling, is forced to address the anxiety and conflict brought about by change or tensions between people. The human desire is to avoid conflict and “conventional therapy [attempt] to resolve, or talk out, conflict. This does accomplish the goal of reducing the conflict of the moment, but it can also rob the individual of [their] budding effort to achieve a bit more differentiation.”⁹⁰ Not maintaining differentiation and not addressing the anxiety in the system leads to the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 19-23.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁰ Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” 74.

concept of homeostasis, which is “the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually ... to preserve the” *status quo*.⁹¹

Two concepts regarding differentiation are worth noting. The first is Friedman’s definition of differentiation. He says: “Differentiation means the capacity to be an ‘I’ while remaining connected.”⁹² This means that there is a difference between who you are and who I am—where you end and I begin. A healthy emotional system is one in which I can truly be my *self* and you can be your *self*, and neither of those *selves* becomes dominant at the expense of the other.⁹³ The second is Bowen’s scale of differentiation. He says that differentiation is “the degree to which people are able to distinguish between the *feeling* process and the *intellectual* process.”⁹⁴ He goes on to say:

People with the greatest fusion between feeling and thinking function the poorest. They inherit a high percentage of life's problems. Those with the most ability to distinguish between feeling and thinking, or who have the most differentiation of self, have the most flexibility and adaptability in coping with life stresses, and the most freedom from problems of all kinds.⁹⁵

Bowen developed a scale of differentiation to which Friedman also refers.⁹⁶ The higher a person is on the scale, the more “capacity [one has] to maintain a (relatively) non-anxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one’s own

⁹¹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 23.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹³ Bowen, “Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy,” 69.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59. (emphasis in the original)

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-75; Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Brown Theory: A New Way of Thinking About the Individual and the Group* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2004), 29-35.

destiny and emotional being.”⁹⁷ The higher members of a congregation are on the scale of differentiation, the more able they are to coexist as part of a healthy emotional system.

The concept of emotional triangles is also common to both Bowen and Friedman. “An emotional triangle is formed by any three persons or issues.”⁹⁸ Triangles and triangulation are terms bandied about in clergy groups as we attempt to describe conflicted relationships. The number of emotional triangles in which congregation members are involved forms an extremely complex web of interrelatedness and grows exponentially with the size of the congregation, their family, and their work and social groups. Friedman writes: “The basic law of emotional triangles is that when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will ‘triangle in’ or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another.”⁹⁹ I have described this concept at Community using the word “entrenchment.” Entrenchment in this context refers to the dynamic of people finding themselves on opposite sides of a decision or issue. The conversation devolves into two camps each wanting to gain control of the contentious issue as they triangle in on the opposing group of people. A result of this triangulation can be isolation of a person or group, and even manipulation or bullying behavior.

Systems thinking reinforces that no one lives in isolation. We are all influenced by our families, past and present; other congregations of which we have been a part; our jobs; personal relationships; and even our perceptions of these relationships and our place

⁹⁷ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

within them. Each person in the congregation is part of the emotional system of the congregation. Missional leaders may see through the lens of systems theory an opportunity to be missional even through the emotional systems and the complex web of interconnectedness that reaches beyond the doors of the church into the community. The role of leaders in the congregation cannot be underestimated. It is to the final theoretical lens of leadership that I now turn.

Leadership Theory

What is leadership? This is a question that new leaders ask mentors, is the subject of conferences, and about which much is written.¹⁰⁰ Leadership itself is nothing new. Leaders have existed as long as groups of people have existed. It is said that “leadership abhors a vacuum,” so, even if a group is gathered with no defined leader, a leader will emerge.¹⁰¹ Leadership exists within families, religions, business, communities, militaries, and nations.¹⁰² Some people may consider leaders and managers together as they discuss *leadership*. This section will preserve the distinction between leaders and managers according to Rendle:

Managers are largely responsible for the stability and the efficient and smooth working of an organization. . . . Leaders are quite different. They do not ask the management question, are we doing things right? They ask the more difficult question, are we doing the right things? Leaders step out into the future to discern what God is calling the congregation to do in the next chapter of its life. Managers are the voice of stability in the congregation (and therefore sensitive to measures

¹⁰⁰ A search for “What is leadership?” using the Google search engine yielded over 486 million results. A search on Amazon.com for books related to leadership yielded over 30,000 books. (accessed 3/17/2016)

¹⁰¹ The phrase “leadership abhors a vacuum” appears to be related to the similar phrase “nature abhors a vacuum,” but the attribution is unclear.

¹⁰² Mark Van Vugt, “Evolutionary Origins of Leadership and Followership,” *Personality & Social Psychology Review* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates) 10, no. 4 (2006): 354.

of happiness or satisfaction); leaders are the voice of change in the congregation (and more sensitive to measures of purpose and faithfulness).¹⁰³

The roles of both manager and leader are critical to the functioning of any organization.

Rendle acknowledges that congregational leaders are often called upon to be both leaders *and* managers.¹⁰⁴

Advances in production through the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s and early 1800s were accompanied by advances in the study of work as a science and psychology. The study of workers and processes leads to the study of the leaders who direct them, thus, the development of leadership theories. Several leadership theories exist, but the most common are: Great Man Theory (1840s), Trait Theory (1930s—1940s), Behavioral Theories (1940s—1950s), Contingency Theories (1960s), Transactional Theories (1970s), and Transformational Theories (1970s).¹⁰⁵

Northouse points out that “scholars and practitioners have attempted to define leadership for more than a century without universal consensus.”¹⁰⁶ He has, however, identified four components “central to the phenomenon: (a) Leadership is a *process*, (b) leadership involves *influence*, (c) leadership occurs in *groups*, and (d) leadership involves *common goals*.”¹⁰⁷ Leadership theories tend to focus on the leader and leadership qualities or skills. We can see from Northouse’s four components that leadership is not

¹⁰³ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 289.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Loc 304.

¹⁰⁵ “Leadership Theories,” Leadership-Central.com, www.leadership-central.com/leadership-theories.html (accessed 3/17/2016).

¹⁰⁶ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5. (emphasis mine)

just about the leader, but also about those who follow—so leadership is relational.

Leadership is not just about the leaders and followers, but the greater organization—so leadership has to do with understanding the purpose and goals of the whole organization.

Leadership is also not just the fact that leaders, followers, goals, and purposes exist, but that there is interaction between them.

Goleman and Boyatzis delve into biology as a means of describing the human interaction between leaders and followers. People in leadership positions have not only formal leadership roles and authority; they have a *biological* role related to human mirror neurons, spindle cells, and oscillators.¹⁰⁸ Mirror neurons allow us to “detect someone else’s emotions through their actions,” and then “reproduce those emotions.”¹⁰⁹ Followers take their social cues from leaders—both positive and negative. A leader who smiles, laughs, and engages with followers will have a positive effect on their mirror neurons. They, in turn, mirror the leader’s behavior.

Spindle cells act as our “social guidance system” by helping us make connections between our “emotions, beliefs, and judgments.”¹¹⁰ Our spindle cells activate when we meet new people as we gather first impressions about their trustworthiness, or whether we will like the person. They also activate when we are presented with information or a situation, and we have a gut-reaction or instinct about what to do. Oscillators are neurons that “coordinate people physically by regulating how and when their bodies move

¹⁰⁸ Goleman and Boyatzis, “Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership,” 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 77. Spindle cells fire within one-twentieth of a second.

together.”¹¹¹ Evidence of oscillators can be seen when a couple is dancing or they move toward a kiss—their bodies seem to move together.

These neurological components work together to create a social awareness or *interconnectedness* between leaders and followers. This “social intelligence [is] ... a set of interpersonal competencies built on specific neural circuits (and related endocrine systems) that inspire others to be effective.”¹¹² One might conclude that leadership ability, or lack thereof, is etched within each person’s biology and cannot be changed. This is the lingering question about whether leaders are born or made. Goleman and Boyatzis give hope to leaders who struggle with their leadership abilities. They contend: “leaders can change” as long as “they are ready to put in the effort.”¹¹³

We cannot consider a leader separate from those they lead or the organization in which they serve, especially in light of the previous Systems Theory discussion and the biological perspective on leadership. This project specifically locates leaders in the congregational setting at Community, which includes all of its history. Congregational leaders function as part of the system because they are not outside the system. We are not studying human interactions in a laboratory, but are living in relationship with people experiencing a wide range of real emotion and expressing real opinions in real time. The experience may be compared to making repairs to a ship while it is in dry-dock versus making repairs to a ship while underway. Exploring how leaders relate vertically and

¹¹¹ Ibid., 78. The authors write: “thanks to oscillators ... two musicians’ right brain hemispheres are more closely coordinated than are the left and right sides of their individual brains.”

¹¹² Ibid., 76.

¹¹³ Ibid., 80.

horizontally within the organization is very important as they walk through the change, conflict, and chaos in the midst of the system in process.

Leaders have several tools and concepts to help them be relational, understand goals and objectives, and hold these together. The prime tool Community used is Van Gelder's Five Phases of Discernment referenced in earlier sections.¹¹⁴ *Attending* helps leaders listen to and be attuned to the needs of the congregation and community. I consider the values, goals, and objectives of a missional congregation to be part of the expression of the congregation's discernment, and are, therefore, included within the *Attending* and *Communally Discerned* components of the Five Phases. The *Asserting* phase allows a leader to articulate what the leader perceives to be the direction. This phase is critical for how leaders and followers work together. Leaders and followers both have expectations about how decisions will be made and precisely what the role of the leader should be. Some people, for example, want a strong and decisive leader who assumes an authoritarian style.

The literature is clear that harsher, more authoritarian styles are not effective. An alternative is to see leaders as meaning-makers. Our language, attitude, and physiology all work together to make an effective leader. Niemandt says, "The language of leaders is a powerful organisational [sic] tool both for articulating meaning and collective action. Leaders use language to help give meaning to unfolding events. Leaders *interpret* emerging events rather than direct events."¹¹⁵ Leaders have an interpretive role, but

¹¹⁴ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 1879.

¹¹⁵ C. J. P. Niemandt, "Complex Leadership as a Way Forward for Transformational Missional Leadership in a Denominational Structure," *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 7.

Cormode nuances this a bit by saying, “No person can make meaning for someone else. All a leader can do is to create categories and interpretations” and provide vocabulary to help people articulate their experience.¹¹⁶ Missional “leaders provide a theological framework that involves others to make their own spiritual meaning.”¹¹⁷

I mentioned previously that leadership theory cannot focus solely on the leader, but on the follower, the congregation’s purposes, and the interaction of all of these components. Leaders cannot abdicate their role to “intentionally cultivate authentic Christian community ... [and] to create the conditions under which people can come together in shared life to discover their participation in God’s mission.”¹¹⁸

Leadership is easy when we are discussing leadership theory, or when leaders and followers are in alignment. Leadership becomes quite complicated when disruptions occur within the process of the Five Phases of Discernment or when there is significant conflict. Family System Theory informs leaders as it addresses what it means to be a “leader ... [who] define[s] his or her own goals and values while trying to maintain a non-anxious presence within the system.”¹¹⁹ Bowen refers to his scale of differentiation when he says:

People [with] moderate to good differentiation of self ... are the people with enough basic differentiation between the emotional and intellectual systems for the two systems to function alongside each other as a cooperative team. The intellectual system is sufficiently developed so that it can hold its own and

¹¹⁶ Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 54.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹⁸ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, Loc 155.

¹¹⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 3.

function autonomously without being dominated by the emotional system when anxiety increases.¹²⁰

A leader, therefore, who is able to continue to think clearly even when anxiety and emotions run high, will tend to help lead the congregation through the conflict in a more healthy manner. Leaders in these times of heightened anxiety cannot control the emotional response of others or bring about change through the manipulation of others; nevertheless, leaders can bring about change “by changing their own responses to the emotional environment.”¹²¹

Leading from within the conflict can be quite disorienting. Authors Heifetz and Linsky discuss concepts such as “getting to the balcony” as a matter of gaining a different perspective, “adjusting the thermostat” to either increase or decrease the amount of conflict, and helping the community see “a different future.”¹²² Roxburgh and Romanuk address what it is to be a missional leader and a missional congregation, understanding where our congregations are along the Three Zone Model of Missional Leadership, and how we can help move a congregation forward.¹²³

¹²⁰ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1985), 369.

¹²¹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 126.

¹²² Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 160.

¹²³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 40. The Three Zone Model consists of an emergent zone, a performative zone, and a reactive zone. It is a “framework to assist leaders in understanding the adaptive shifts in leadership style require amid much change, identify the skills and competencies required in each zone, and help congregations understand their own location in massive change.” The emergent zone is characterized by creativity and confidence as the congregation and leadership are highly focused on the mission of God. The performative zone has to do with performing well. It may be that leaders are either trying to recapture what they did in the past that worked, or provide continuity for successive leaders. The reactive zone is characterized by “confusion, conflict, and anxiety.” They will likely try to gain or regain control through rules, regulations, and policies.

This section addressed not only the *leader* as part of leadership theory, but followers and the congregation itself. Historical literature conducts a thorough analysis of the leader and what makes certain people good leaders. More recent literature tends to broaden that scope and seeks to help leaders from their current situation. We are not living in a laboratory or performing maintenance on a ship in dry-dock. Most leaders in our congregations were not evaluated for their leadership gifts or potential. The reality is that many of our leaders stepped into leadership positions because they felt called to it or because no one else was taking leadership. This section reinforced that leaders are both born *and* made. Certain traits help some people become excellent leaders. We have also found that people can be effective and faithful leaders who are in authentic relationships with their followers and who help the congregation move toward the goals the congregation has discerned with the leading of the Holy Spirit. These leaders can take part in their role of formation as they help promote healthy dialogue in the midst of chaos, conflict, and change.¹²⁴ The goal is not to remove resistance or anxiety, but to understand why it is there and that these can be good and healthy signs of vitality for a congregational system.

Summary

This chapter briefly reviewed Community's context and history, then explored literature related to each of the five theoretical lenses that guided my research: Change Theory, Conflict Theory, Chaos Theory, General System Theory, and Leadership Theory. Threads of relationships and interrelatedness can be seen woven throughout these

¹²⁴ Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters*, 53.

theories as we find that nothing exists as distinct from anything else. A matter taken up in this project is how leaders in a Christian congregation employ these theories to help people in all of their complex systems address the friction and power dynamics at work in dialogue and decision-making. Chapter 3 continues these threads of relationships and relatedness as we explore Biblical and Theological lenses.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

I used four biblical and three theological lenses to further frame this study. The theoretical lenses outlined in chapter 2 have implications in any organization regardless of its religious affiliation. The lenses outlined in this chapter maintain Community's focus on our identity as a Christian congregation. I began the four biblical lenses with the story of the Valley of Dry Bones to address the congregation's definition of God's reality and God's preferred future in terms of what we can see and perceive. I opened up the concept of *the body of Christ* to move it from a trite phrase to reveal that the body of Christ has strong implications for how congregations live together in community for the common good. The controversy at the Jerusalem Council is a poignant example of how the early church addressed a significant and divisive issue facing them with the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Finally, I used the Exodus story to see patterns of scarcity, abundance, and God's provision.

I began the section on theological lenses with the Theology of the Cross. The richness of the *absconditus Dei* works well in cooperation with the Valley of Dry Bones. Moltmann's journey from an idealized theology of hope to the theology of the cross resulted in a much more robust theology of hope. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of the *missio Dei*, which is the theological thread uniting the entire study. These lenses

along with the Five Phases of Discernment root the congregation in the Bible and help ensure the perspective of God’s agency and our response.¹

Biblical Lenses

Valley of Dry Bones—Ezekiel 37:1-14

People love a good story. Parents read stories to their children. Pastors and people seeking to motivate others often use stories. Stories were used to pass along oral history from generation to generation before there was the written word. The story does not need to be long or complex in order to inspire. Two brothers tell their story of growing up in a lower middle class family and the burdens of their childhood. Their mother asked her six children every night at dinner “to tell her something good that happened that day,” because she maintained the belief that “life is good.”² The two Jacobs brothers went on to form the Life is Good Company, which is now worth \$100 million.³ Their mother’s values became part of the brothers’ life story, which, in turn, affected virtually every facet of their life.

Biblical writers were also products of their time and used their words to challenge, inspire, and form others. Ezekiel lived and wrote before and during the Babylonian Exile. The first twenty-four chapters included “oracles of warning” leading

¹ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 1879.

² Natalie Walters, “Brothers Who Cofounded a \$100 Million Company Say This Question Their Mom Asked Every Night at Dinner Is What Inspired Their Business,” *Business Insider*, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/life-is-good-founders-say-this-question-inspired-their-business-2015-12> (accessed 1/2/2016). Reading this website shows how the simple words “Life is Good” became part of the brothers’ story and life philosophy even leading them to donate 10% of their net profits to children in need through their Life is Good Kids Foundation.

³ “Life Is Good,” The Life is Good Company, <http://www.lifeisgood.com/> (accessed 1/2/2016).

up to the fall of Jerusalem.⁴ Chapters thirty-three through forty-eight are known as the “oracles of hope.”⁵ The story of the Valley of Dry Bones is located within these oracles of hope. This familiar and powerful story contrasts images of utter desolation and death with life and hope.

This vision follows Ezekiel 36:22-38 in which God sounds like a politician making campaign promises. God promises action using the words “I will” twenty-one times in Ezekiel 36. Imagine Ezekiel and the people of Israel in exile in Babylon wagging their heads at the notion that God would act on their behalf and that God would bring about anything resembling restoration. God reminds Ezekiel: “It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you” (Ezekiel 36:32). God’s intent is that “the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when *through you* I display my holiness before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:23).⁶

I cannot presume to know the intent of God in these two chapters, but I can imagine being Ezekiel and hearing these words from God. Is it possible that God gave Ezekiel the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones to help Ezekiel understand God’s promises for a hope-filled future despite their current circumstances? The vision begins with an image of desolation, death, and hopelessness. God then challenges Ezekiel with the question: “Can these bones live?” Ezekiel is stuck—he must answer “yes” or “no.” He gives the only answer he can without committing himself one way or the other: “O Lord

⁴ Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), OT 1057.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ It is significant that the phrase “shall know that I” occurs sixty-nine times in Ezekiel; eight of those occur in Ezekiel 8-9. Emphasis in the citation is mine.

God, you know” (Ezekiel 37:3). “The alternative would be a flat no. ‘These bones are dead.’”⁷

A key word in this passage is “prophecy.”⁸ This word clarifies that Ezekiel is not speaking on his own behalf, but on the behalf of God. Fox notes that Ezekiel’s prophecy is actually a rhetorical device used to draw listeners in, create a sense of expectation, and then hold them in suspense to see if the bones will actually live.⁹ Fox contends that the nation of Israel was slipping into despair and that their living arrangements could become “permanent because a nation that despairs of its future will do nothing to insure its continuation. Despair is tantamount to surrender.”¹⁰ The people in Exile were becoming “more comfortable with their new life in this foreign land and children were being born and would grow up with no knowledge of their old life.”¹¹

The words of death in this passage are harsh. They are made even more harsh because the dry and lifeless “bones are the bones of Israel (37:11-14). ... [While Israel] is not truly dead, ... she is ‘dead’ in that her hope is lost.”¹² Finding hope is impossible for

⁷ Christopher R. Seitz, “Ezekiel 37:1-14,” *Interpretation* 46, no. 1 (1992): 53.

⁸ Hebrew: naba’ (Strong’s #5012). Greek: propheteuo (Strong’s #4395). These words are not the Hebrew or Greek for “to speak” implying that the words find their origins in the speaker; rather, their definitions include inspiration from God. Driver Brown, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon Entry for Naba’,” *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/naba.html> (accessed 8/31/2015); Thayer and Smith, “Greek Lexicon Entry for Propheteuo,” *The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/propheteuo.html> (accessed 8/31/2015).

⁹ Michael V. Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel’s Vision of the Valley of the Bones,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 51 (1980): 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹² Seitz, “Ezekiel 37:1-14,” 54.

bones that have no life in them. Returning to life is not a matter of the bones trying harder or for Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones on his own behalf, but hope and new life arise from “God's own testimony to the prophet about the divine intention for total re-creation.”¹³

Ezekiel's use of the word *ruah* reveals a subtle but significant aspect of God's re-creation of the dead bones of Israel. Fox notes that Ezekiel uses the word *ruah* ten times to ensure that the listener pays attention to this word.¹⁴ He noticed, “the *ruah* that God promises to put in the nation (v. 14) is not the same as the *ruah* that he puts in the bones.”¹⁵ Fox describes the difference in this way:

In part I (after v. 1) *ruah* is the breath of life, the life-force common to all creatures. The naturalness and substantiality of this type of *ruah* is emphasized by its being called from the four *ruhot*, winds. It is “the wind” (vv. 1-10), something external to God that can be addressed and summoned. But at the very end (v. 14) God promises to put *ruhi* “my spirit” into the revived Israel.¹⁶

Seitz recalls Genesis 2:7-8 as God formed “human creatures from the dust and then [breathed] the breath of life into the nostrils. Without God's spirit, there is no life.”¹⁷ The rhetoric of this passage calls us to see that there are two logical paths. The first is the logic of Israel in which the assumption is that “dry bones do not come to life.”¹⁸ Fox notes a “deep-rooted syllogism” that follows this assumption and completes the logic by

¹³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision of the Valley of the Bones,” 14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Seitz, “Ezekiel 37:1-14,” 53.

¹⁸ Fox, “The Rhetoric of Ezekiel's Vision of the Valley of the Bones,” 12.

saying: “Israel is dry bones[;] therefore Israel cannot come to life.”¹⁹ The logic of God in contrast is that “dry bones *can* come to life,” and “Israel is dry bones[;] therefore Israel can come to life.”²⁰

Prophets are called to proclaim the truth of God at a particular point in time. God sent prophets to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms before their falls with warnings to return to God. To what extent is the modern church in a similar situation? Are we, like Ezekiel, called to speak a prophetic word of life from God in places where congregations and church leaders see a field of dry bones that, according to our syllogistic interpretation of the valley, has no hope and no future? Are we called to boldly proclaim God’s foolishness in the presence of hopelessness?

It is important to note that Ezekiel’s vision preserves God’s agency. It is clear that the agent of new life is God and God alone. Ezekiel is clear on God’s agency as he says: “I prophesied as I had been commanded” (Ezekiel 37:7, 10). God chose to show this vision to Ezekiel and God chose to engage Ezekiel in the process of rebirth. Why? So that “the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when through you I display my holiness before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:23). This experience for Ezekiel became an exercise in listening to God and being bold to speak God’s words in a situation God directs even though it does not appear to make sense. God’s words, this vision, and God’s challenges to Ezekiel formed Ezekiel for the life and work to which God called him.

The lived story at Community tends to focus on *human* agency rather than God’s. God challenges Ezekiel with the question: “Can these bones live?” Community would

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

likely answer this question by saying: “Yes . . . theoretically, but not in reality.” Strong stories like this one, Noah’s Ark, and the Creation story receive significant attention for children in Sunday School, but they get much less attention for adults. Children are concrete thinkers until the age of about fourteen when they become more abstract and imaginative thinkers.²¹ What happens if our life experiences and our thinking mature, but our engagement with the Bible does not? This can happen if people either stop coming to church after they are confirmed or if congregations do not tell and re-tell the story using age-appropriate methods.²² Foster says, “being at home with a word, symbol, concept, metaphor, image, or method of knowing involves the freedom to explore its hidden potential and the demands those discoveries may make on our lives. This activity is *doing* theology.”²³

One of our tasks through this project has been to engage in a process of telling and re-telling this story as we also allow the story to mature in the hearts and minds of the congregation. Our appropriation of this text has had to move the vision away from being understood as either simply an easily dismissed vision with no basis in reality or an elementary school level interpretation received through Vacation Bible School or Sunday school. This study has led us to teach this story through adult education classes, treat it in sermons, and address it through articles in our newsletter. We have located the text historically, reimagined the description of that valley, heard God’s challenge, and heard

²¹ Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²² Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 40.

²³ *Ibid.*, 96.

the words from the “whole house of Israel” saying, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost” (Ezekiel 37:11). One story told one time does not change people or impact the way they live their lives. The telling and re-telling of the story, then living with and applying it, is what has an impact in the same way as the Jacobs brothers were impacted over time by their mother.

Community has grown in its understanding of the Valley of Dry Bones, but it will take time and the story’s application by different people in a variety of circumstances before the congregation can prophesy to the dead and lifeless bones they see before them. We will continue to ask God’s question with regard to our finances, attendance, education programs, youth and family programs, outreach, evangelism, and leadership: “Can these bones live?” We will have to continue to ask ourselves: Do we believe “our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost” both for the whole Christian church and for our particular congregation? We will have to hear: “the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when through you I display my holiness before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:23).

A challenge for Community in the future will be maintaining focus on God’s agency as the source for hope rather than relying on our own abilities to produce hope. Our faith calls us to believe that God can bring life from the lifeless, and the Bible supports the idea that hope can emerge from suffering (Romans 5:3-5), but do we believe that God will bring about life from the lifeless *for us*? I discuss more on suffering and hope in the following section on the Theology of the Cross.

The Body of Christ—1 Corinthians 12

The metaphor of the “body of Christ” is prominent in Christian theology, and most people cite the writings of St. Paul as the biblical basis for this metaphor. Scholars

who study Paul's writings note the development or even inconsistencies among the Pauline and deuterio-Pauline letters.²⁴ Brevard Childs, in his analysis of Paul's writings, noted such a development as he wrote: "Though it might first appear to be of secondary importance within Paul's letters, [the body of Christ] developed into a major theological category in the deuterio-Pauline epistles and in later Christian theology."²⁵ A casual reading of the Bible may lead us to simply equate the body of Christ with the church—the primary implication being for the recruiting of volunteers for various ministry positions. One may even quote scriptures such as Colossians 1:24 in which the author rejoices in his sufferings "for the sake of his body, that is, the church." This proves a simplistic and potentially self-serving reading, however.

Exploring the many uses of the phrase "the body of Christ" helps to broaden our assumptions about the application of this metaphor. "The body of Christ," as already suggested, may refer to the church. It may also refer to the bread of the Eucharist; the Communion of Saints; and Jesus' own physical body that lived, suffered, died on the cross, and rose again. Our understanding of the body of Christ also has significant implications for how we see ourselves, our congregations, and the Church in relation to the body of Christ. This section fleshes out the breadth and depth of meaning of "the body of Christ," especially as it pertains to unity and diversity within that same body.

²⁴ Kim, "Reclaiming Christ's Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God's Gospel in Paul's Letters."; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997); Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998); D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

²⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, 436.

The seven letters traditionally ascribed to Paul are best understood by knowing Paul's context.²⁶ The churches Paul served, including the church at Corinth, were filled with "broken bodies and souls" as they dealt with "problems, ranging from sexual immorality to communal eating."²⁷ Kim says, "All these problems boil down to a fundamental issue regarding the body. That is, members of the community do not remember and reflect Christ-like body, his sacrifice, and love for others. Instead, people seek their own power or status at the expense of others."²⁸

Kim challenges the concept of the body of Christ solely as the church, and makes several good points in his article that are helpful for the present conversation. Kim notes the differences between the seven undisputed letters of Paul, the Deutero-Pauline letters, and the Pastoral Letters.²⁹ The undisputed letters tend to speak of Christ's body as broken and crucified or in terms of the way of life of a Christian.³⁰ The Deutero-Pauline letters and Pastoral letters, on the other hand, tend to focus on ecclesiology.³¹ It is worth noting, "Paul never puts *sōma Chistou* ('the body of Christ') side by side with the church

²⁶ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 13 n.39. Dunn lists Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon with Colossians and 2 Thessalonians disputed.

²⁷ Kim, "Reclaiming Christ's Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God's Gospel in Paul's Letters," 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

(*ekklesia*).³² Whiteley adds: “St. Paul never calls the church a building.”³³ We can see that Paul’s use of the body of Christ focuses on people, not individually, but collectively.

Kim’s helpful clarification of the word “members” in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 sheds further light on the body of Christ. He says, “the Greek noun *mele* ... more directly refers to parts of the human body, not members of a social body.”³⁴ Christians are not, therefore, likened to members of a gym or a club. Kim argues for a reading of the undisputed letters of Paul as saying we are invited into the life (or body) of Christ. This affects the way we live our lives. We do not take the body of Christ to a prostitute (1 Corinthians 6:15). We are so closely joined to Jesus that we become “one spirit with him” (1 Corinthians 6:17).³⁵

North American Christianity tends to emphasize a *personal relationship with Jesus*. Paul would not disagree with this emphasis, but he would equally emphasize the importance of community. We are not Christians alone, but we are part of something larger. We are guided not by our own thoughts and values, but by those of Christ. Brown writes, “Paul uses the image of the human body and its many members ... to stress that diversity is necessary. Even the less presentable parts have an indispensable role.”³⁶ It is

³² Ibid., 20. Brown supports this observation by saying Paul “never used the imagery of the church as the body of Christ or Christ as the head—a major theme in Col (and Eph).” Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 612.

³³ Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 199.

³⁴ Kim, “Reclaiming Christ’s Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God’s Gospel in Paul’s Letters,” 21-22.

³⁵ It is not insignificant that Paul uses the image of marriage from Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16. In this verse, it is used to be shocking or offensive because a believer would never consider Jesus and a prostitute being joined so closely in the union of heart, body, and spirit as in marriage. The implication is that Christians are already joined in this close bond both to Christ and to one another in the body of Christ.

³⁶ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 531.

interesting to note that “Johannine circles developed the image of Christ and the church as a vine and branches, characterized by their mutual indwelling (‘I in them and they in me’), a parallel to the Pauline image of the body of Christ.”³⁷

1 Corinthians 12, according to Childs, “[argues] for the unity and plurality of gifts within the community.”³⁸ Childs goes on to show that Paul’s imagery of the body of Christ builds on “his understanding of the Christian community according to the building imagery of ‘the household of God’ with Christ being the cornerstone of the structure (2.20ff).”³⁹ Childs sees the body of Christ imagery as being a bridge that not only constitutes the body as being grounded “completely in Christ,” but constitutes it with “Christ as the head of the body” and gives it direction—“the edification of his body.”⁴⁰

I have thus far attempted to broaden our assumptions regarding the body of Christ, and discuss unity and diversity within the body. The body of Christ is not a place or state of being, but, if it is truly a *body*, then the body must do something.⁴¹ I borrow the Eucharistic words *broken* and *given* to address the purpose or function of the body of Christ. This image of the body of Christ broken and resurrected offered a significant challenge to the cultural understanding of the “hierarchical, hegemonic body politic in which the elite or strong rule the weak or the lower class,” and “hierarchical unity” is

³⁷ Bruce M. Metzger and Michael David Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89. Referring to John 15:1-17.

³⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*, 436.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 196. Whiteley writes: “in the Bible *sōma* is applied to the individual human being, alive or dead, except where some other meaning is demanded by the context.”

maintained insofar as the hierarchical structure is kept in balance.⁴² Paul's representation of the body of Christ "reverses the social convention" and "in Paul's community, honor is given to all, not by social status but by God's radical love and justice."⁴³ This body is not to be kept to oneself, but is to be shared for the building of community. Brown writes: "Paul writes of baptism and the Eucharistic cup of blessing that is a sharing (*koinōnia*) in the blood of Christ and bread-breaking that is a sharing in the body of Christ (10:16)."⁴⁴

Being the body of Christ, and being broken and shared means that an individual cannot be part of the body of Christ without being connected to it.⁴⁵ Division cannot exist within the body. Individuals cannot assert headship over the body, which is a role reserved for Christ alone.

Being joined with Christ and one another, "Paul exhorts [Christians] to live like Christ, not simply because they are one in Christ but because they are part of Christ crucified."⁴⁶ "The believer's job is to imitate Christ ... not [to be] a mere copy of his life but a participant in his life. What this means in Paul's logic is simple: 'die and live.'"⁴⁷ The body of Christ, seen through the Pauline letters, provides both hope in the midst of brokenness and an ethic for how we are to live and interact together, because we "are not

⁴² Kim, "Reclaiming Christ's Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God's Gospel in Paul's Letters," 23.

⁴³ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 521.

⁴⁵ Consider especially Paul's questions in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, and the imagery and words of Jesus in John 15:1-17.

⁴⁶ Kim, "Reclaiming Christ's Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God's Gospel in Paul's Letters," 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 23.

linked only with Christ individually; we are joined to Christ, and we are also joined to each other in mutual functional dependence.”⁴⁸ Our North American sense of individualism and independence may balk at the idea of truly living as the body of Christ. Whiteley gives some assurance that “though there is no swallowing up of human personality, there is for St. Paul a general transcending of the separateness of normal human individually in the case of those who are baptized into Christ.”⁴⁹

The body of Christ as articulated by Paul, then developed by the pseudepigraphers, and by the early church sought to institutionalize the body of Christ so that “God’s righteousness can be manifested *continually* in the world (Rom 3:22).”⁵⁰ The church is the institutionalization of the body of Christ. Institutionalization has taken on a negative connotation as being synonymous with bureaucracy, inefficiency, and even unethical behavior. Whiteley reminds us of God’s activity through the institution of the church as he writes, “Since Christ and Israel were the individual and the group respectively, in whom God had acted supremely, all these metaphors describe the church as the sphere of God’s activity, and to be more precise, as the sphere of God’s activity in Christ.”⁵¹

The institution of the church, however, is not unified. Many denominations exist that are at odds with one another. All congregations during the course of their life will experience some kind of conflict or division. My underlying belief and assumption is that

⁴⁸ Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 191.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁰ Kim, “Reclaiming Christ’s Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God’s Gospel in Paul’s Letters,” 21, 27.

⁵¹ Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, 198.

there is only one body of Christ—the body of Christ is not fractured into a Lutheran body of Christ over against a Roman Catholic or Baptist body of Christ. There is an inherent danger in saying that there is only one body of Christ, however, because it leaves us to develop a definition of who is, and, therefore, who is *not* the true body of Christ. This understanding can lead to an arrogant and self-righteous depiction of oneself or one’s church as the *true* body. The unspoken consequence is that others whose truth claims are not in perfect alignment with our own are clearly *not* the true body—they are “no-bodies or hopeless people.”⁵² No Christian would declare that they themselves are not part of the body of Christ, but “there are many Christians today ... who profess a love of Christ but not for the church.”⁵³ Brown challenges that this situation cannot be addressed only through the institution of the body of Christ as described in the deuterio-Pauline letters.⁵⁴

St. Augustine is a favorite of mine because of his discussion of things and signs. He writes, “All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs.”⁵⁵ He writes later, “No one should consider [signs] for what they are but rather for their value as signs which signify something else. A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses.”⁵⁶ St. Augustine’s wisdom can be applied to prophets, miracles, and the body of Christ. A

⁵² Kim, “Reclaiming Christ’s Body (Soma Christou): Embodiment of God’s Gospel in Paul’s Letters,” 25.

⁵³ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 617.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson (New York: Prentice Hall, 1958), 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

prophet is not a thing but a sign pointing beyond itself to the thing, which is God's message to God's people. Miracles are not things but signs pointing beyond themselves to the One who brings about healing, wholeness, and resurrection. The church, even as participants in body of Christ, is also not *the* thing. We are called to be a sign pointing beyond ourselves to the One who is.

The discussion of the body of Christ in this section so far has focused on breaking down our understanding of the body of Christ using Paul's writings. Kim's interpretation is that Christians are *parts* not *members* of the body of Christ. We are a sign, according to St. Augustine, pointing to or witnessing to Christ. The reality, as we see in Paul and as we experience in our congregations, is that even a right understanding does not mean the body will function as intended. The reality is that divisions, even deep divisions, exist both in our congregations as the institutionalization of the body of Christ and within the lives of individual Christians. Does the improper functioning of a part of the body of Christ mean that the body is not effective? Does disagreement mean disunity or represent a fracture in the body of Christ? Does it mean that Christ Himself is ineffective since we are the body of Christ, which assumes an intimate connection with Christ?

Jesus prayed, "That they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:11. See also verses 21, 22 and 23). St. Paul wrote, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Has Jesus' prayer gone unanswered? Is Christianity a failure since divisions do exist and it appears that we are not "one in Christ Jesus"?

One could argue that there has never been unity in the body of Christ. Jesus gathered with His disciples before He was crucified—among them was Judas Iscariot,

one of Jesus' inner circle who would betray Him, Peter who would deny Him, and the other disciples who would scatter (John 13). Significant disunity occurred between believers such as “the break between Paul and Barnabas, the conflict between Peter and Paul, the unjust Communion practices at Corinth ... the false teachers who led the faithful astray,” and the controversy over who should be included in the Way.⁵⁷

The expansion of the Way from Israel to the world continued to bring forth more challenges as they had to contend with differences in language, background, social customs, and religious traditions.⁵⁸ There remains significant diversity within the body of Christ today. Christians are Democrats and Republicans, fiscal and social liberals and conservatives, male and female, young and old, have diverse cultural backgrounds, represent a myriad of denominations, and so on. Diversity is a reality in any body; unfortunately, diversity can be a cause for divisiveness. Kim's analysis makes the connection that the physical body of Christ was broken on the cross, the way of life of the Christian is broken by sin, and, likewise, the *institutionalization* of the body of Christ as the church is broken. How can we expect anything other than brokenness within our congregations and the lives of our congregation members?

Two theological concepts may help us see from God's perspective rather than simply our own. The theology of the cross, which is discussed in detail below, helps us to see God's hope especially through the darkness and brokenness of this world. The already and not yet of the Kingdom of God helps us understand that God's Kingdom is

⁵⁷ Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, “Lament for a Divided Church: Why the Ecumenical Movement Keeps Working to Overcome Fraying in the Body of Christ,” *Christianity Today* 58, no. 2 (2014): 39.

⁵⁸ David Ewert, “Can We Have Diversity with Unity?: Unity and Diversity in the Body of Christ,” *Direction* 11, no. 3 (1982): 20.

not yet fully realized—just as Christ’s broken physical body was not the end of His story, the brokenness of the body of Christ is not the end of our story.

Hinlicky Wilson refers to St. Paul and notes that unity and diversity are not necessarily binary. The previous section revealed the many facets of the body of Christ. Hinlicky Wilson shows that St. Paul makes a distinction between “factions” and “division.” She writes:

Paul makes an important distinction: While he acknowledges that ‘there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized’ (1 Cor. 11:19 ESV), there must be ‘no division among you’ (1:10). The Greek word there is *schismata*, from which we get ‘schism.’ And the reason is that ‘in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.’ (1 Cor. 12:13 ESV)⁵⁹

It is clear that differences exist. The challenge for Christians is whether those differences become an opportunity for God to be glorified or whether the differences become an opportunity for sin. Luther was a proponent of unity as he wrote about *adiaphora* and wrote: “For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word.”⁶⁰ Luther also realized that there were times when unity was not possible—perhaps these were the factions St. Paul wrote about above. Luther spoke at the Diet of Worms saying, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Wilson, “Lament for a Divided Church: Why the Ecumenical Movement Keeps Working to Overcome Fraying in the Body of Christ,” 39.

⁶⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 42, AC Article VII, para 2.

⁶¹ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Meridian, 1995), 144.

Luther's guidance is that the body politic and its hierarchy cannot force or enforce true unity. Unity in the body of Christ is not about removing differences. Unity in the body of Christ is both received and lived. Christians are part of the body of Christ, but we also receive the body of Christ through Holy Communion. St. Paul writes, "The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Greek word translated here as "sharing" is *koinonia*, which means community and implies participation.⁶² Phillip Melancthon, in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, writes, "The body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present and are truly distributed."⁶³ He goes on to quote St. Cyril of Alexandria who writes, "We do not deny that we are joined spiritually to Christ by true faith and sincere love. . . . For who has ever doubted that Christ is a vine in this way and we are truly the branches, deriving life from him for ourselves?"⁶⁴

Jesus calls us back to the fundamental concept of love. Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. *By this* everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-45 emphasis added). Jesus also called a scribe back to the Old Testament as Jesus talked about the most important commandment. Jesus said:

The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,

⁶² Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon Entry for Koinonia," *The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/koinonia.html> (accessed 1/15/2016).

⁶³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 184. AP Art. X, Par. 54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* AP Art. X, Par. 56.

and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29-31)

Christ’s body was broken and given for us on the cross because of love. Christ’s body is broken and given for us as we receive Holy Communion, a means of grace. We, as the body of Christ, are also broken and given. We are intimate participants in His body, and, therefore, are called to witness to God’s wholeness from the midst of our brokenness so that God may be glorified. This is the “way of living” Kim sees in St. Paul’s writing.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Controversy at the Jerusalem Council—Acts 15:1-35

Circumcision is a “holy symbol of [the Jewish] people’s ancient covenant with God; and the Christian Jew was appalled at the thought of breaking that covenant.”⁶⁵ Every male child from the time of Abraham was to be circumcised on the eighth day as a rite of initiation and in keeping with the covenant (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3). God’s command was also accompanied by a consequence—God said: “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:14). Jewish religious leaders and adherents alike probably never dreamed that circumcision would ever be controversial, challenged, or debatable.

⁶⁵ Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, The Story of Civilization 3, 11 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), 582-583. See Genesis 17:9-14.

The Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 was a significant challenge to the role of circumcision in the life of new Christian believers as it attempted to answer the question: Must a Gentile convert to Christianity first become a Jew?⁶⁶ The Jerusalem Council was not the first time the leaders of the church in Jerusalem discussed God's work outside of Israel. Peter's experience in Acts 10-11 mirrors Paul's experiences in Acts 13-15. Both apostles were among the Gentiles, both witnessed the Spirit at work among the Gentiles, and both went to Jerusalem to bear witness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's experiences opened his heart to the movement of the Spirit *outside* the covenant people. Peter was confronted about Jewish dietary laws. He fell into a trance in which "he saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air" (Acts 10:11-12). God told Peter to "kill and eat," to which he replied: "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean" (Acts 10:13-14). God delivered a clear direction as God said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 10:15).

Peter's understanding was also challenged by a meeting with Cornelius, "a centurion of the Italian Cohort, ... a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:1-2). It is

⁶⁶ The Jerusalem Council is also known as the Apostolic Decree and the Jerusalem Quadrilateral. The latter in recognition of the four practices from which they are to abstain: "things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:20, 29). It is worth noting that the Jerusalem Council does not receive any treatment in *The Works of Josephus* and is a matter of minor discussion in Will Durant's *Caesar and Christ* Flavius Josephus, "The Antiquities of the Jews," in *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, New updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987); Durant, *Caesar and Christ*.

helpful to point out that the term “God-fearer” had a specific meaning as it referred to a “class of monotheistic Gentiles who worshiped the God of the Old Testament, kept the Old Testament ethical code, attended synagogue, observed the sabbath and practiced the main requirements of Jewish piety.”⁶⁷ Peter began to speak to Cornelius and his family saying, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35). Luke continues:

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ (Acts 10:44-47)

Peter was confronted with these two circumstances that were in conflict with what he was taught and what he knew about God. These situations left him “greatly puzzled” and “astounded,” yet, the work of the Spirit was clear. Peter and others were witnessing the works of the Spirit, which seemed to be in conflict with what God had already revealed through the scriptures. Peter, being a bit impetuous, “ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48).

Peter went to the “circumcised believers” in Jerusalem who were criticizing him for going “to uncircumcised men and [eating] with them” (Acts 11:2-3). Peter thoroughly explained what he had seen and experienced and all that the Spirit was doing among them. “When they heard this, [even those circumcised believers who criticized Peter] were silenced. And they praised God, saying, ‘Then God has given even to the Gentiles

⁶⁷ “Cornelius's Vision,” *InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/Acts/Corneliuss-Vision> (accessed 1/15/2016). This term occurs in Acts 10:2 and 22. See also Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 582.

the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18). Luke then tells how Paul and Barnabas went about proclaiming the good news and “how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

Callan analyzed the “Apostolic Decree [and found that it] does derive from laws which apply to both Israel and to the *gēr* in the midst of Israel.”⁶⁸ This analysis is important because of how the laws were applied to both groups of people. Callan wrote: “the word *gēr* originally denoted aliens residing in the midst of another people. However, in most cases post-biblical Jewish writers understood the word *gēr* to mean convert.”⁶⁹ Callan goes on to say, “A convert was completely incorporated into the people of Israel.”⁷⁰ A discrepancy arises when considering the expectations of the *gēr* with regard to the laws. Some historical references state that a convert was to abide by the whole law; otherwise “he is not to be received.”⁷¹ Evidence also exists that the *gēr* were under no obligation to keep the whole law and could be “incorporated into Israel in some way,” whether this term was used to refer to converts, resident aliens, or Gentiles who are adherents to the Law and friends of the Jews known as “God-fearers” or “God-worshippers.”⁷² Interpretation of these laws outlined in Leviticus 17-18 is also helped

⁶⁸ Terrance Callan, “The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20,29, 21:25),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1993): 285. *Gēr* (Strong’s #1616) is a Hebrew word that can mean sojourner, stranger, or alien. Driver Brown, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon Entry for Ger,” *The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/ger.html> (accessed 7/1/2016). These laws are recorded in Leviticus 17-18.

⁶⁹ Callan, “The Background of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20,29, 21:25),” 290.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 289-293.

because “some of them are introduced by the idiom *ish ish* (any man),” which, if taken literally, applies to *all* people including those outside of Israel.⁷³

History and application of the law even within Israel established a precedent for hearing the witness of Peter about the Spirit at work among the Gentiles, even though Peter’s vision and actions violated the food laws and established norms regarding dining with and entering the home of a Gentile. The events leading up to the Jerusalem Council differ in that the topic under debate was circumcision—*the* mark of the covenant between God and Israel. Circumcision was so much a part of the Jewish identity that Jews were called “the circumcision” and Gentiles were called “the uncircumcision” (Ephesians 2:11). This rift is noted in the Bible as the circumcision and the uncircumcision factions.⁷⁴ Another key difference between Acts 11 and 15 is the presence of the Judaizers who followed the team of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch teaching that new Christians had to first become Jews through circumcision (Acts 15:1). They found that the debate could not be resolved amongst themselves in Antioch, so Paul and Barnabas were sent on behalf of the church in Antioch to the elders in Jerusalem, and there they were met by Pharisees who agreed with the Judaizers (Acts 15:5). The Jerusalem Council was convened around the year 50 A.D. in response to the conflict that erupted in Antioch as Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming the gospel among the Gentiles.

The details in the text of Acts 15 itself are scant. Durant helps us ground this biblical story with additional historical perspective. Durant notes that “James ‘the Just,’

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The “uncircumcision faction” is noted in Rom 2:26, Eph 2:11, and Col 2:13. The “circumcision faction” is noted in Gal 2:12, Eph 2:11, Phil 3:3, Col 2:11, Col 4:11, and Titus 1:10.

‘the brother of the Lord,’ became the head of the now reduced and impoverished church in Jerusalem. James practiced the Law in all its severity, and rivaled the Essenes in asceticism.”⁷⁵ Durant later cites Galatians 2:10 as possible motivation for the Jerusalem Council to both meet and address the issue. He writes: “Paul eased the way by promising financial support for the impoverished community at Jerusalem from the swelling funds of the Antioch church.”⁷⁶

We can assume that the activity of the Spirit among the Gentiles caused a great deal of conflict amongst the new Christian leaders. We can also assume that both sides were firm in their belief, and, before the meeting of the Council, could see no way of compromise. Some leaders may not have seen the need for a meeting and wanted to stand firm in the answer they believed comes from scripture because the decision and the way forward were clear. The work of God among the Gentiles was not going to simply go away, so the leaders needed to meet because, “as new converts are added to the Christian community, believers have to think again, and think hard, about what is essential and nonessential in Christian belief and practice.”⁷⁷

We do not know how much time elapsed in the debates in Jerusalem, or the nature or tenor of the debate. We do know that both sides argued their position and there was “much debate” (Acts 15:7). The debate was helped by the discussion not centering around Paul and Barnabas, but on the work of the Spirit. They were not alone in their advocacy because recognized leaders, such as Peter, reminded those gathered that God

⁷⁵ Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 577.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁷⁷ Lois Malcolm, “Conversion, Conversation, and Acts 15,” *Word & World* 22, no. 3 (2002): 252.

gave “them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:8-9). Peter challenged the elders by asking, “Why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). Malcolm notes “that to put God to the test means to mistrust God.”⁷⁸ Peter ended his speech by speaking the truth, “We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11).

James also spoke with authority and rooted the conversation in “the words of the prophets” (Acts 15:15). We know that a clear decision was made, and that decision was communicated not just by the delegates from the church in Antioch, but with corroboration from the elders in Jerusalem. The key verse comes in Acts 15:28 as James speaks: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials.” The conversation leading up to verse 28 is important, but it involves debate and taking sides. Verse 28 conveys a decision that is not based solely on human wisdom and experience, but involves the Spirit in the conversation.

I was surprised to find very little detail from Josephus about the Jerusalem Council. His writings indicate that, in the years after the Jerusalem Council, conflict still remained. He wrote *The Life of Flavius Josephus* as an appendix to *The Antiquities of the Jews*, which was published in 93 A.D.⁷⁹ Since people who sought refuge among the Jews or who married Jewish women were being compelled to be circumcised and become

⁷⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁷⁹ Josephus, “The Antiquities of the Jews,” 27, fn. b.

Jews, Josephus expressed his views that “everyone ought to worship God according to his own inclinations, and not to be constrained by force.”⁸⁰

This study made use of the example of the Jerusalem Council to help the congregation answer the questions: “What can we learn from what happened both in Antioch and Jerusalem?” and “How are we to be open to something new that God is doing among us?” Relying solely on Acts 15 actually limits our discussion and understanding of what happened at the Jerusalem Council. We are left to wonder precisely how the leaders knew where the Spirit was leading. Did the Spirit communicate in a miraculous way? Did the Spirit “speak?”

Lampe, Krodel, and Rapske agree that the involvement of the Holy Spirit “probably means that the Spirit, by coming upon the Gentiles, made it clear to ‘us’ that we ought not to impose such a burden upon the converts; and we therefore testify to what the Spirit has thus shown us to be right.”⁸¹ That the Holy Spirit “made it clear” suggests process, and process suggests time. Krodel “argues that James and the others ‘submitted to the Spirit’s *already evident* decision (his coming upon the household of Cornelius) recounted to them by Peter (15:8).”⁸² “It is *not* therefore about a decision that the Spirit has taken with the Apostles during the Council of Jerusalem; *the coming of the Spirit on Cornelius* has been the *sole* decision that the Spirit has taken or, more exactly the

⁸⁰ Josephus, “The Life of Flavius Josephus,” 8, Sec 23, and fn. j; also 19, Sec 31.

⁸¹ G. W. H. Lampe, “St Luke and the Church of Jerusalem: The Ethel M. Wood Lecture Delivered before the University of London on 4 March 1969,” in *The Ethel M Wood lecture* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 25.

⁸² Gerhard Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 290-291.(Emphasis mine)

evidence of the decision of God.”⁸³ “The church would have had confidence that, consistent with the reports of God’s earlier actions, it was attuned rather than opposed to the will of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁴

The implications of this wider perspective of the interaction with the Holy Spirit in the process of discernment on congregations and on personal discernment are immense. Some Christians project themselves as being able to hear the Holy Spirit as if the Spirit literally spoke in their ears. Some congregations likewise seem very able to speak confidently about the Holy Spirit’s direction. The consequence of this perspective can be people and congregations who *do not* literally hear the Holy Spirit feeling as though they are inferior Christians or that there is something wrong with their faith. Imposing speech on the Holy Spirit without actually hearing the Spirit could mean that the person or congregation is co-opting the Spirit and bending Her to suit their needs and desires such that their prayer becomes “*my* will be done” rather than “*Thy* will be done.” This tactic also may be an attempt to gain power over others, because “the Holy Spirit told me”

A means by which we may remain open to the work of the Holy Spirit is, therefore, not by divination, but simple observation. Engaging in faith practices can slow us down enough and enable us to become more “attuned rather than opposed to the will

⁸³ John A. McIntosh, “For It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit’ Acts 15:28: How Did the Members of the Jerusalem Council Know This?,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 3 (2002): 133. McIntosh quotes Haya-Prats’ *L’Ésprit, Force de l’Église* using his own translation.

⁸⁴ Brian Rapske, “Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 243.

of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁵ Dykstra and Bass observe: “We come to perceive how our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world.”⁸⁶ Dialogue and observing the work of the Spirit helped those gathered for the Jerusalem Council acknowledge that God was doing something new and confronting previous understandings. This process of discernment led the Council “whatever inner reservations some may have felt, [to a] response [that] was the only one possible: cessation of objection, and praise to God in acknowledgment that he had given Gentiles salvation by faith in Christ (11:18).⁸⁷

Community made use of the Five Phases of Discernment previously mentioned, which provided a concise way for us to see similarities between the discernment at the Jerusalem Council, and the discernment and resulting conflict within our congregation. A key learning from this frame is simply to pay attention to the Spirit, be in relationship with the Spirit over time, and not to only seek answers from the Spirit when we have questions as if the Spirit were a Ouija board or Magic 8 Ball. Observing the Spirit’s action and urging over time creates a faithful and faith-filled relationship with the Spirit that should result in healthier, more faithful discernment.

⁸⁵ McIntosh, “For It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit’ Acts 15:28: How Did the Members of the Jerusalem Council Know This?,” 133.

⁸⁶ Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “Time of Yearning, Practices of Faith,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), Kindle, Loc 604.

⁸⁷ McIntosh, “For It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit’ Acts 15:28: How Did the Members of the Jerusalem Council Know This?,” 136.

Scarcity and God's Abundance—Exodus

Three biblical stories are used to elucidate the concepts of scarcity, abundance, and God's provision. The first encompasses the entire Exodus story and is replete with examples of scarcity and God's abundance—from the depths when “the Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out” (Exodus 2:23) to the day that “all the companies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt” after 430 years (Exodus 12:40-41)—from the many times the Israelites grumbled and complained against Moses and God to the ways God answered each of their complaints (Exodus 14:11; 15:24; 16:2-3; 17:2-3). The second is the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:7-16). The third are the stories of the feeding of the multitudes.⁸⁸

The concepts of “scarcity” and “abundance” have already become part of Community's vocabulary, as we also understand it conceptually. I have preached several sermons to challenge whether or not we believe there is *enough* in light of several biblical stories of abundance. One sermon, in particular, focused on the feeding stories of Elisha and Jesus.⁸⁹ The conclusion of that sermon was to ask a series of repetitive questions: Did Elisha think there would be enough to feed 100? Did God? Was there enough? Did the disciples who were with Jesus think there would be enough to feed 5,000? Did God? Was there enough? Do we at Community believe there is enough to accomplish what God has called us to do? Does God? Is there enough?

⁸⁸ Feeding of the 5,000 is recorded in all four gospels: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15. The Feeding of the 4,000 is only recorded in Matthew 15:32-16:10 and Mark 8:1-9.

⁸⁹ The sermon was preached on July 29, 2012 (Lectionary 17, Year B). The primary texts that Sunday were of Elisha feeding 100 (2 Kings 4:42-44) and Jesus feeding the 5,000 (John 6:1-21).

In another recent sermon, I articulated that there are ways to view scarcity other than purely negatively.⁹⁰ The scarcity in each of the three biblical stories mentioned here have made it abundantly clear that we cannot rely completely on our own abilities and on the treasures we have stored up on earth for ourselves (Matthew 6:19). Brueggemann orients us toward grace as “a reach of divine generosity not based on the recipient but on the giver.”⁹¹ He goes on to say: “‘Wilderness’ is a place, in biblical rhetoric, where there are no viable life support systems. ‘Grace’ is the occupying generosity of God that redefines the place.”⁹²

How a community views and lives with scarcity has an impact on the community itself. The blessing of scarcity has the ability to draw us together and form us as a healthy community. McKnight and Block comment: “Hospitality is the signature of not only an abundant community, but a confident one. . . . A wounded community does not have this capacity. Hospitality generates from trust and produces trust. It is what is missing in the world of fear and scarcity.”⁹³ Engaging these concepts of scarcity and abundance throughout the study period has encouraged Community to see how these concepts affect the congregation’s decision-making as our life together.

⁹⁰ The sermon was preached on June 28, 2015 (Lectionary 13, Year B). The primary text for the sermon was Mark 5:21–43, which covers the healing of the hemorrhaging woman bookended by the story of the raising of Jairus’ daughter.

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, Loc 262.

⁹² *Ibid.*, Loc 263.

⁹³ McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 79.

Theological Lenses

Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross is a central tenet of Lutheranism, especially as it is contrasted with the theology of glory. Luther first articulated a “theology of the cross” in his 1518 Heidelberg Disputation—specifically, theses 19-22 and 24.⁹⁴ Three themes expressed within the theology of the cross were especially beneficial for Community through this study: the hiddenness of God (*absconditus Dei*), relationship, and the difference between the theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) and the theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). Luther explained the differences this way:

Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's.⁹⁵

Pannenberg noticed, as can be seen in the previous quote, that Luther tended to focus on the righteousness of the cross as opposed to the righteousness we gain from our own good works.⁹⁶ Luther and St. Paul both use a theology of the cross to point out the “common denominator” of the self over against God as a means of righteousness.⁹⁷ Luther saw works righteousness as the human attempt to attain righteousness. Paul saw wisdom as the human attempt to attain righteousness. Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians

⁹⁴ Martin Luther, *Career of the Reformer I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, Luther's Works, edited by Helmut T. Lehmann, American ed., vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 40-41.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “A Theology of the Cross,” *Word & World* 8, no. 2 (1988): 162-163.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

1:10-17, noted that wisdom was the root cause of the division that existed within the Corinthian community.⁹⁸ Pannenberg said, “Paul's attack was directed against groups that claimed a specific spiritual experience and wisdom while denying a place of central importance to the cross of Christ. ... [This] claim to wisdom ... *had no use for the cross of Christ*, because it prided itself on its spiritual strength in contrast to others.”⁹⁹

The theology of the cross, whether from Paul’s view or Luther’s, has the effect of reorienting our perspective away from ourselves as the agent of righteousness and toward God as the One who justifies. My personal theology was forever changed while exegeting Romans 10:5-13 as I read from James D. G. Dunn. He writes: “In the typical Greek worldview, ‘righteousness’ is an idea or ideal against which the individual and individual action can be measured”—in other words, *righteousness*, according to Greek thought, was a moral category.¹⁰⁰ Dunn goes on to say, “in Hebrew thought ‘righteousness’ is a more relational concept.”¹⁰¹ I brought these concepts together when I wrote: “[According to the Hebrew concept of righteousness,] one was upright or righteous insofar as they maintained the relationship. Therefore, God is righteous in maintaining the relationship between God and humanity even though humanity does not exercise the same loyalty.”¹⁰² To be *righteous* in a moral relationship is to be good and do the right things. To be *righteous* in a covenant relationship with God is about the relationship itself. God

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid. (emphasis mine)

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Jeffrey M. Wilson, “Exegesis of Romans 10:5-13,” (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, 4/9/2002).

considers “the covenant partner as still in partnership, despite the latter’s continued failure. But the covenant partner could hardly fail to be transformed by a living relationship with the life-giving God.”¹⁰³ Our relationship with God is about what God is doing rather than what we are doing.

Our human logic and sense of justice draws us into the Greek worldview because approaching righteousness as a moral category gives us more control. Therefore, the third theme of the theology of the cross that I highlight is the hiddenness of God or the *absconditus Dei*, which drives home the concept that the starting point for theology cannot be human initiative or wisdom through theology, but only through God’s revelation.¹⁰⁴ Luther turns to Exodus 33:12-23 and the conversation in which Moses asks God to “show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18), and God agrees to protect Moses as God passes by: “Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:23). The commentary for this verse explains the theology of the cross as the author remarks: “God remains hidden even when most palpably present.”¹⁰⁵

Neal’s article follows Jürgen Moltmann’s theological journey toward his articulation of a theology of the cross.¹⁰⁶ Moltmann was born and raised in Germany, even serving in the German army under Hitler until “he surrendered in 1945 to the first

¹⁰³ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 344.

¹⁰⁴ David M. Whitford, “Martin Luther (1483—1546),” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/luther/>.

¹⁰⁵ Metzger and Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, OT 115.

¹⁰⁶ Ryan A. Neal, “Minority Report: Reconsidering Jürgen Moltmann's Turn to a Theology of the Cross,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 14, no. 1 (2012): 26-43.

British soldier he met.”¹⁰⁷ He was a prisoner of war in Belgium and “felt abandoned by God and human beings” until reading the story of Jesus’ passion.¹⁰⁸ It was when he read of Jesus’ suffering and death that he knew: “This is the one who understands you and is beside you when everyone else abandons you.”¹⁰⁹

The theology of the cross impels us to engage with the real world around us and the real people around us, rather than a candy-coated fantasy world of our own creation that operates according to our particular preferences. The theology of the cross is not only helpful when seeking revelation through a process of discernment, but it also informs our understanding of dialogue as it drives us into relationship with God and neighbor. Wells brings dialogue and discernment together in relation to interfaith dialogue, because, in these conversations, those involved assert “truth claims [that] are inevitably in some degree ‘exclusive.’”¹¹⁰ People in dialogue feel that their perspective or belief is the *correct* one, and their job is to persuade the other to believe as they do. How can we therefore engage in dialogue “in a way that avoids triumphalism and seeks to respect and learn from ... others?”¹¹¹

To follow Wells’ argument is for us to be our own authentic self in dialogue. Christianity, like other religions, makes its own truth claims. “Dialogue ... involves

¹⁰⁷ “The Gifford Lectures,” <http://www.giffordlectures.org/lecturers/j%C3%BCrgen-moltmann> (accessed 1/1/2016).

¹⁰⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), Kindle, Loc 37.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Harold Wells, “The Holy Spirit and Theology of the Cross: Significance for Dialogue,” *Theological Studies* 53, no. 3 (1992): 483.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 476.

disagreement and discernment.”¹¹² To be in dialogue with others who do not hold these truth claims for themselves, for whom the Christian truth claims are not consonant with their own “plausibility structures,” does not mean we must relativize our claims in order to be tolerant.¹¹³ Wells tells us that relativism is actually “quite intolerant” because we may end up being condescending toward the truth claims of the other.¹¹⁴ “In true dialogue, Christians must not only listen but also bear witness. The Muslim, Sikh, or atheist is not interested in so-called ‘dialogue’ with a *former* Christian.”¹¹⁵

Being theologians of the cross colors how we engage in dialogue—whether in the realm of inter-religious dialogue or differences of opinion within a congregation. In fact, Christians may find that it is easier to be in dialogue with people whose faith claims are completely different from their own than to dialogue with people who have the same faith claims yet have a different opinion about seemingly mundane tasks in the life of the church. Sometimes differences of opinion or preferences take on a moral quality when we feel we must stand our ground. The theology of the cross opens us up to asking the missional question: What is God doing among us? The theology of the cross opens us up to righteousness in our relationships in which we acknowledge the possibility that the other person is either right or has something of value worth hearing. The theology of the cross is a position of humility at the foot of the cross. Humility and being at the foot of the cross of the One who was crucified and died is not to be misunderstood as a position

¹¹² Ibid., 491.

¹¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), Kindle, Loc 173.

¹¹⁴ Wells, “The Holy Spirit and Theology of the Cross: Significance for Dialogue,” 483.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 491.

of weakness or relativism, but instead is the revelation of God and God's wisdom in the places we least expect to find Him.¹¹⁶

Luther's writing in thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation can also be used to apply the theology of the cross to dialogue. He says: "A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."¹¹⁷ The authenticity, reality, and truth that comes from being theologians of the cross helps us declare the reality that "[we] have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer [we] who live, but Christ who lives in [us]" (Galatians 2:20).

The difference between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross, the *absconditus Dei*, and the relational understanding of righteousness gave members of Community alternative ways to view themselves in relationship and in dialogue. Theologians of the cross engaging in healthy dialogue permits us to speak truth to one another, truly forgive one another, and live in a spirit of humility that reveals our unity in Christ as opposed to our individual weakness. Community has experienced that the theology of the "cross draws us into itself so that we become participants in the story" who are standing on holy ground as God reveals Himself in the places we least expect to find Him.¹¹⁸

Theology of Hope

The *cross* and *hope* may initially seem incompatible. The previous discussion on the theology of the cross helps us see that God is revealed in the most unlikely ways and

¹¹⁶ Pannenberg, "A Theology of the Cross," 164.

¹¹⁷ Luther, *Career of the Reformer I*, 53.

¹¹⁸ Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), Kindle, Loc 156.

places. Those of us who have experienced the struggles of life may be able to see God's hand in our own suffering, especially in retrospect. Hope is often much more difficult. Hope is what happens when we are in the middle of our suffering. Community may *hope* that its finances get better or we may *hope* that the downward trends we see in other parts of the church do not similarly affect us. The word *hope* used in this way is really nothing more than a wish or a dream. Is that what Christian hope is ... a wish or a dream? St. Paul writes, "hope does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:3). We have all had our hopes dashed as we hope for something that does not turn out the way we expected. There must be more to the idea of Christian hope.

Jürgen Moltmann, whose biography is briefly described in the previous section, journeyed from an idealistic hope to the cross. He wrote two books eight years apart that bookend and articulate this journey: *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*.¹¹⁹ Neal observes that there was a sense of optimism and hope in the early 1960s that shifted by the end of that decade due to a failure of those hopes and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.¹²⁰ Moltmann began interacting with liberation theologians such as José Míguez Bonino by the mid-1970s. Moltmann's own experiences, his disillusionment, and understanding of Latin American Liberation Theology led him to write a letter to Bonino in which he said: "Our hope can no longer afford to be childish and enthusiastic."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*; Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹²⁰ Neal, "Minority Report: Reconsidering Jürgen Moltmann's Turn to a Theology of the Cross," 37. Neal (p39) also refers to Cabestrero *Faith* p124.

¹²¹ Moltmann, "On Latin American Liberation Theology: An Open Letter to José Míguez Bonino," 63.

Moltmann elsewhere says: “Christian hope is no blind optimism. It is a discerning hope which sees suffering and yet believes in freedom. *Only through suffering and sacrifice does hope become clear-sighted and sage.*”¹²² Moltmann makes the connection with this statement to the hope Paul describes in Romans 5:3-5 in which Paul ties suffering to the “hope [that] does not disappoint us.”

Volf refers to Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope* as he draws a distinction between hope and optimism. He writes, “Optimism has to do with good things in the future that [we can] extrapolate about [based on the past and present] what is likely to happen in the future, and, if the prospects are good, become optimistic.”¹²³ Volf goes on to say, “Hope, on the other hand, has to do with good things in the future that come to us from ‘outside,’ from God; the future associated with hope ... is a gift of something new.”¹²⁴

Brueggemann pushes Moltmann’s argument further by describing hope as a process rather than a state of being or a concept to be mastered. Brueggemann sees that hope is actually part of the process of “loss and grief that makes hope credible.”¹²⁵ He goes on to say, “Without the preparatory work, the offer of hope is too easy and too much without context to have transformative power.”¹²⁶ Hope, therefore, is not something that a person or congregation simply *decides* to do. We are led to it. Experience shows us that every situation of longing, grief, and suffering will be over at some point. Brueggemann

¹²² Moltmann, “Politics and the Practice of Hope,” 291. (emphasis mine)

¹²³ Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, 55.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, 88.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

notices this reality in Isaiah 1:26 and uses the term “afterward.”¹²⁷ Every situation will have an *afterward*: “The poets [of Isaiah] teach us how to embrace ‘afterward’—by loss and grief and hope, eventually to act.”¹²⁸

The process of hope begins with a “commission: ‘Get you up’” and an “utterance” of the gospel, which Brueggemann defines as “news from outside the system that is sunk in loss and grief.”¹²⁹ This is a turn that Brueggemann sees in his exegesis of Isaiah 40:9. He points out that the proclamation is clearly divine, “but it requires a human utterer. The future turns on human utterance, and this is the *substance* of the utterance: ‘Here is your God,’ or ‘Behold your God.’”¹³⁰ The challenge to get up, pay attention, and to call attention to what God is doing moves us away from expectation based in naïve optimism, and toward expectation based on what God is doing that is wholly outside of us.

Embracing the afterward and acting in a way that moves toward that afterward is hope. Christians are driven through the process of discernment to ferret out which versions of the afterward are of our own creation and which is of God’s. To hope in an afterward ultimately is reduced to trust: Do we trust the discernment process and do we trust God’s version of the afterward? Community has several working definitions for theological terms we often use in worship and conversation, but which remain elusive in our practical application of those words. Faith is one of those words. We define faith as

¹²⁷ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 89.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

trust in action. The courage to hope in an afterward that may not proceed from logic, and then actually move toward that afterward is trust in action—*faith*.

Hope, when lived out in a congregation, is not an individualistic hope. In fact, Volf says, “When love shrinks to self-interest, and self-interest devolves into the experience of satisfaction, hope disappears as well.”¹³¹ A communal sense of hope acknowledges the Spirit at work in bringing about the Kingdom of God; it is “the recognizable presence of a future that has been promised but is not yet in sight.”¹³² Being “involved in the missionary dialogue ... mission might be defined as ‘hope in action.’”¹³³

Does our experience mirror Moltmann’s journey from optimistic hope to the cross? Are many of the congregations that are in decline in the United States experiencing the failed hopes that Moltmann did in the 1960s? Perhaps it is the work of the Holy Spirit in our congregations that is not abandoning us, but is driving us toward a deeper engagement with the cross, and, therefore, a deeper relationship with God. This deeper engagement with the cross changes the scorecard by which we measure the success and faithfulness of our congregations.¹³⁴ This deeper engagement changes us from being a

... theologian of glory ... [who] seeks works and success and therefore regards the knowledge of an almighty God who is always at work as being glorious and uplifting [to a] theologian of the cross ... [who] comes to knowledge of himself

¹³¹ Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good*, 61.

¹³² Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 63.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Loc 188.

¹³⁴ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, Loc 218.

where he knows God in his despised humanity, and calls human things by their real names and not by images of their attractive appearance.¹³⁵

I have seen this congregation struggle with what it truly means to hope, and how they might make concrete decisions based on hope. Learning to see through the lens of the theology of hope has further challenged the congregation as a whole, but especially the leaders to speak truthfully about our circumstances. The sometimes painful or frightening reality drives us to seek a hope that is beyond ourselves. Hope based in the present activity of God among us calls us to *get up, lift up our voices with strength and without fear*, and, as bearers of the good news, proclaim confidently, “Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9). This is hope that leads us out of the muck of the present situation toward God’s future.

Missio Dei

What is our purpose as *church* and how do we know if we are living in that purpose? Hunsburger wrote:

The Reformers emphasized as the ‘marks of the true church’ that such a church exists wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and (they sometimes added) church discipline exercised. . . . But, over time, these ‘marks’ narrowed the church’s definition of itself toward ‘a place where [certain things happen].’¹³⁶

A club, theater, grocery store, and church are all places where “certain things happen.” A healthy understanding of the *missio Dei* helped Community reframe our working definition of church from a place to a people, and our purpose from doing what we think

¹³⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 213.

¹³⁶ Hunsberger, “Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God,” Loc 1476.

is best given our limited means to pursuing God’s mission making use of God’s resources.

Newbigin tells us that “The ordinary Christian in the Western world who hears or reads the word ‘God’ does not immediately and inevitably think of the Triune Being—Father, Son, and Spirit. He thinks of ‘a supreme monad.’”¹³⁷ Christians still today view God (the supreme monad) as so high and so holy that God only puts up with us and has the least interaction possible with us so as to preserve His holiness.

The *missio Dei*, the mission of God, certainly originates in God and God’s will, but God actually engages in dialogue with humanity in the implementation of His mission. The audacity of *perichoresis* is that, “as members of the church, we are *invited* to participate in the social reality of the Godhead.”¹³⁸ The church as a relational body rather than a “place where certain things happen” is itself *perichoretic*—just as the Father could not exist in the same way without the Son and the Spirit, so the body of the church depends on each relationship. Volf explains it this way: “Each person gives of himself or herself to others, and each person in a unique way takes up others into himself or herself. This is the process of the mutual internalization of personal characteristics occurring in the church through the Holy Spirit indwelling Christians.”¹³⁹

Christians gather together and are, therefore, *church*. Volf further articulates that “The Holy Spirit indwelling them constitute[s] them through ecclesial relations as an

¹³⁷ Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, p 27.

¹³⁸ Kristine Stache, “Leadership and the Missional Church Conversation: Listening in on What Leaders in Four Denominational Systems Have to Say,” in *Missional Church & Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), Kindle, Loc 2271. (emphasis mine)

¹³⁹ Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, 211-212.

intimate communion of independent persons ... and as such they are instantiations of *the one church*,” therefore, whether I am alone or gathered with other believers, wherever I am, I am and remain an integral part of the body of Christ, the “church.”¹⁴⁰ It is necessary to clarify the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the relationships that form “church.” I do not constitute my own church, but, understood in the context of 1 Corinthians 12:27, we each remain both “one body” and “individual.” This extremely tight relationship, “this mutually internal abiding and interpenetration” has an effect on each person within the relationship and has a determinative effect on the character of those in relationship.¹⁴¹ This *perichoretic* relationship serves both as the foundation and motivation for the community to pursue the *missio Dei*.

Relationship begets mission as Bosch explains: “The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”¹⁴² The relationship between the church and God is such that we do not send ourselves, but are instead sent. Bosch quotes Moltmann and Aagaard: “‘It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church’ (Moltmann 1977: 64). Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission (Aagaard 1973: 13).”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

¹⁴² Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 381.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 382.

I have engaged the *missio Dei* throughout this research project to both open up Community's scope and make it deeper. God's concern does not lead us to exercise abundant generosity and forbearance only with those whom we do not know living in some distant place around the world. The *missio Dei* calls us to the harder work of exercising abundant generosity and forbearance with the person standing right beside us within the walls of the congregation.¹⁴⁴

Summary

Chapter 3 built on the theoretical lenses discussed in chapter 2, which are lenses that could be applied to any organization regardless of its religious affiliation. Nevertheless, the biblical and theological lenses presented offer insight into specific aspects of the life of this congregation. The biblical lens of the Valley of Dry Bones challenges the congregation to proclaim God's message of life regardless of what we see before our own eyes and regardless of our own judgment about the capacity for life. The Body of Christ calls us to see ourselves as necessary parts of one another, and, indeed, of Christ Himself. The Controversy at the Jerusalem Council offers an example from the early church about addressing a very difficult situation and emerging from that decision through dialogue and discernment. Scarcity and abundance took on deeper meaning as we explored that neither of these are clearly good or bad. God is revealed and blesses through scarcity. The theology of the cross helps us to see God in the places we least expect to find Him, which helps us constantly remain open to and aware of God's

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Consider also the comment by Jesus' disciples in John 6:60: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" The word for "difficult" is *scleros* (Strong's #4642). Are there aspects of the *missio Dei* that we deem hard, offensive, unacceptable, harsh or intolerable?

presence. The theology of hope challenges us to understand hope not simply as a wish or as blind optimism, but as confidence of God's presence and action in the future. The *missio Dei* maintains our focus on the mission of the church coming from God rather than being devised merely by our own best thinking. God's mission is accomplished in relationship with people and God's church.

Previous chapters have described the history and context of the congregation, and the biblical, theoretical and theological lenses that frame this study. Chapter 4 describes in detail the research methodology and design I employed as well as how the resulting data was analyzed.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous three chapters have established the history and rationale for this study, as well as providing frames that have given it theoretical, biblical, and theological perspective and focus. These chapters indicate *why* this research is necessary. The current chapter describes the social science methodology in detail and how it was implemented. It addresses the practical questions: What are we doing? How will this be accomplished? Who is involved? My specific research question is:

How might a participatory action research (PAR) intervention within Community that focuses on cultivating a culture of healthy dialogue lead to more faithful discernment while expressing respect for diverse opinions among members of the congregation as the body of Christ in mission?

The methodology used for this study is a transformative mixed-methods modified PAR.

Research Methodology

This section breaks down the statement that this is a “transformative mixed-methods modified PAR” into its component parts. It describes how these tools were used to answer the research question as informed by the theoretical, biblical, and theological frames described in chapters 2 and 3. The choice of a methodology depends completely on what the researcher and organization hope to gain from the research process. My motivation was for Community to learn and to change, enabling us to approach an answer to the research question, and positioning us well to move into God’s preferred future.

Transformative mixed-methods are well suited to environments requiring change, especially situations requiring social justice. The design was comprised of a quantitative baseline and end-line questionnaire, allowing us to test for the change effect, and then used qualitative instruments to engage people in the transformative process.¹ Mertens explores the ethical considerations that arise when employing the transformative paradigm because of the need to respect “cultural histories and norms.”² She cautions that no outside researcher should seek to transform a group or culture without understanding what is important to the people already living in that culture. This means the leader or pastor needs to be aware of his or her bias, and must seek to ensure that the transformation being sought is consonant with the context.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach provides a framework that involves participation, action, and research.³ Greenwood and Levin stress the point that AR is not a discipline but an approach or “research strategy.”⁴ AR, as a strategy, allows the researcher and the research team great flexibility to adjust and choose which research instruments best suit the circumstances and context.⁵

AR is distinct from other approaches regarding the role of the researcher.

Traditional research expects that the researcher will be separate from his or her subjects—

¹ Craig Van Gelder, “Research Methodologies: Quan, Qual, and Mixed Methods,” (July 2011), Research Methodologies_Qual&Quan_07.20.11_CVG.pdf.

² Donna M. Mertens, “Transformative Mixed Methods: Addressing Inequities,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 56 (2012): 3.

³ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 89. The authors describe at length the various fields represented under the aegis of AR thus giving credence to their contention that AR is an approach rather than a discipline (p7).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

—there is to be a distance between them. AR, on the other hand, expects that the researcher or research team actually becomes a part of the community being researched and are involved with developing solutions.⁶ AR “promotes broad participation in the research process” rather than distancing stakeholders from the research and learning process.⁷ A true PAR involves the whole congregation in determining the problem to be addressed and the course of action to be sought. This project was a modified PAR because it involved the whole congregation at strategic points, but not in every facet. The Action Research Team (ART) had the ability to alter the course, the interventions, and methods, but I provided the initial design.

Community, which has struggled with conflict and decision-making, initially thought that PAR’s inclusion of more people in the process would be a mistake. They thought such inclusion would necessarily lead to more conflict, more frustration, and that it would lengthen the time required to make a decision because there is no way to make everyone happy.⁸ They assumed PAR perpetuates what we have been doing previously—studying, thinking, talking, and getting stuck. Greenwood and Levin point out that “AR explicitly rejects the separation between thought and action.”⁹ People were also reluctant

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ In fact, a frequently heard phrase in the congregation is some variation of the statement: “The definition of a good compromise is that everyone comes away equally dissatisfied.”

⁹ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 5.

to engage with a PAR process because they knew it meant change since “action research is fundamentally about change.”¹⁰

Using a PAR with the Five Phases of Discernment as a primary tool helped frame the dialogue and discernment processes. It is also helpful to note that a PAR does not depend on 100% consensus. Community worked together as a congregation during the study period to focus on the role of healthy dialogue and the role of faith in discernment and decision-making. Differences are a reality when considering such a diverse population, and there should be no attempts to eliminate them. Greenwood and Levin say, “AR processes are not about erasing difference but about mapping them and mapping possible ways forward that respect the differences that the stakeholders either cannot or will not give up.”¹¹ They go on to say, “Democratic decisions are not synonymous with consensus-based processes. Decisions should build on the diversity and multidimensionality of the stakeholders.”¹² They promote a healthy view of democracy as they equate “democracy with the creation of arenas for lively debate and for decision making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups.”¹³

This methodology was chosen for its ability to build trust, build ownership, and bring about change. This project served as a catalyst for healthier dialogue and discernment, and the congregation has begun to see that “it’s easier to act your way into a

¹⁰ Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 1241. Greenwood and Levin also say that AR “is a research practice with a social change agenda” (p4).

¹¹ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 262.

¹² *Ibid.*, 265.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

new way of thinking, than think your way into a new way of acting.”¹⁴ Leaders and others who agree that destructive, divisive conflict have no place in Christ’s church want to help the congregation become more healthy and more faithful. I began this doctoral program in search of ways to help leaders better lead the church as it is emerging into something new before our very eyes. It is not possible to control how people behave or how they will react when conflict arises or when someone says or does something that upsets another person. A participatory action research (PAR) process seemed like the perfect fit for Community because it allows for us to progress through a process and arrive at potential solutions together. Change happens over time; however, this research project only describes changes that occurred over the course of the last year. I look forward to the time following the study period to see how the congregation continues to use and build upon the skills and processes of change they have learned through this study.

Biblical and Theological Grounding

“I am a rock, I am an island” may be good lyrics for Simon and Garfunkel, but they are not reflective of the functioning of a healthy congregation.¹⁵ The Bible sets the tone for inclusion not only of a particular people, but of all nations; not only of good and righteous people, but of sinners and the socially outcast. The church is to follow Jesus in our inclusion in what Russell describes as the “table principle” in which “God reaches out

¹⁴ Richard T. Pascale, Jerry Sternin, and Monique Sternin, *The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World's Toughest Problems* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2010), Kindle, 38.

¹⁵ Paul Simon, “I Am a Rock,” 1965, <http://www.paulsimon.com/us/music/paul-simon-songbook/i-am-rock> (accessed 9/3/2015).

to include all those whom society and religion have declared outsiders and invites them to gather round God's table of hospitality."¹⁶ The voices of the pastor, elected leaders, and those with informal leadership authority are to be heard *along with* rather than to the *exclusion of* other voices in the congregation.

St. Paul reminds us that a body must be made up of different parts and that those distinct parts are to function together (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). Reaching out and working together with fellow congregation members can be quite a challenge; however, the biblical witness pushes us beyond the boundaries of our own lives and our congregations. We are reminded in the Old Testament to care for the “widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor” (Zechariah 7:10, among others). The context of the Bible was one of a culture of hospitality with the effect of people being aware of and responsive to the needs of others.¹⁷ The New Testament continues to push further as we are charged to exercise hospitality “for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). Jesus speaks a series of “lost” stories—the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son (Luke 15). Jesus describes in each of these stories the tenacity of the one searching and the joy at finding what was once lost. Matthew 28 and Luke 10 contain two sending stories of Jesus. The entire book of the Acts of the Apostles is about the growth and expansion of the early Christian church throughout the known world.

¹⁶ Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1993), 25.

¹⁷ Rodney K. Duke, “Entry for 'Hospitality',” in *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/hospitality.html>, (accessed 9/4/2015).

It is clear from the biblical witness and our Christian theology that God is not interested in developing a “closed system” that is primarily interested in itself and eventually leads to its own demise, but an “open system that engages with its environment and continues to grow and evolve.”¹⁸ This research project reflects Jesus’ call to die to ourselves, meaning that we are not primarily driven by our own thoughts and desires, but by the greater purpose of God’s call.¹⁹ God calls us to be disciples who live a life of renewal and transformation (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24), and the reality that, as we follow, we are transformed as part of a community.

Research Design

This PAR, as a transformative mixed-methods study, involves both quantitative and qualitative instruments for the purpose of bringing about transformation or change. A *PAR* transformative mixed-methods study is “collaborative, in that the members of the system that is being studied participate actively in the cyclical process,” and it is also “a cyclical process of consciously and deliberately: (a) assessing a situation which is calling for change; (b) planning to take action; (c) taking action; and (d) evaluating the action, leading to further cycles of planning and so on.”²⁰

¹⁸ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1269. See also Van Gelder’s treatment of opened and closed systems Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Chapter 5.

¹⁹ Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again/from above (John 3:3-7). Jesus challenges His followers to take up their crosses and follow Him (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; and Luke 9:23). Romans 14:8 puts our lives solidly in God’s hands whether we are alive or dead: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.” Further, Jesus says: “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60).

²⁰ Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Loc 179.

The nature of a PAR is to be flexible and adapt to conditions that occur during the course of the study period. The original design of the study as presented in my thesis proposal is depicted in figure 4-1. This design envisioned the entire study being bookended by a baseline and end-line survey (QUAN and QUAL), which sought to highlight changes in each participant's perspective. It included one-on-one interviews (QUAL) conducted after both the baseline and end-line surveys to add depth and perspective to the survey results. There were to be five interventions which would be immediately debriefed by the Action Research Team (ART). Each intervention was to have been discussed by a focus group. Results from the debriefing sessions and focus groups formed a cyclical process and added to the body of knowledge the ART was accumulating. This cyclical process of intervention, feedback, and reflection created the learning environment for the ART, and the data collected was curated by them and be used to inform subsequent interventions.

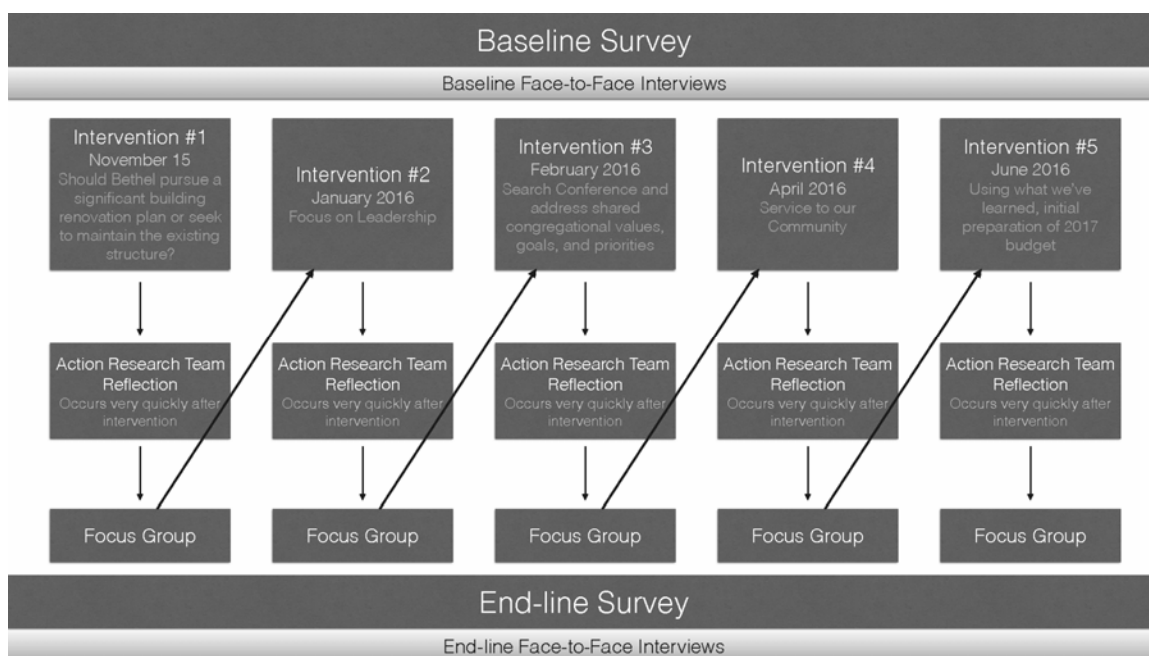


Figure 4-1. Original Research Design Overview

The actual research design differs from the original plan. The actual research design is depicted in figure 4-2. I initially designed five interventions, but the ART and I decided to conduct four. The originally planned ART debrief sessions occurred after the first two interventions only. Leaders who conducted the cottage meetings in Intervention 3 provided written summaries that served a debriefing purpose. The focus groups, instead of occurring as soon after the corresponding intervention as possible, did not occur until the end of the study period. I conducted end-line interviews, but did not conduct corresponding baseline interviews as planned. I also added a pre-session survey and post-session survey before and after Intervention 2. The lines in figure 4-2 reflect the influence of activities on subsequent activities.

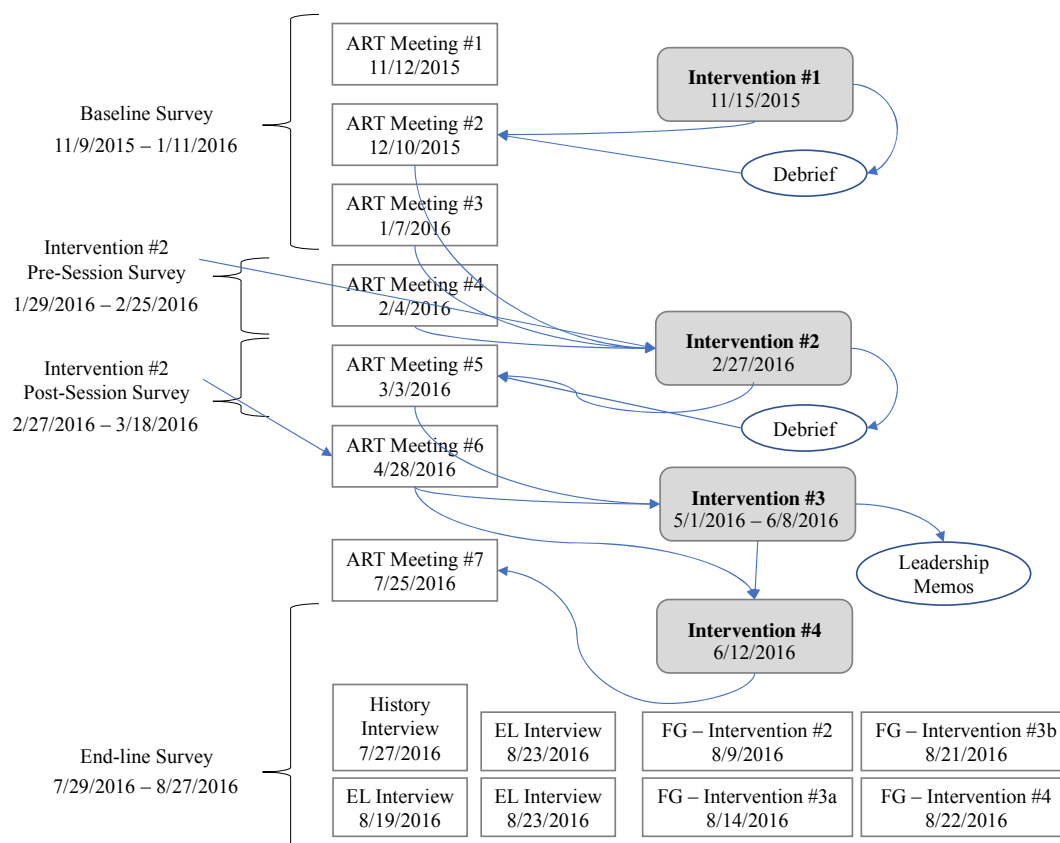


Figure 4-2. Actual Research Design Overview

The changes to the research design were made for several reasons. Time became a significant factor because my approval to conduct the study happened in close proximity to the formation of my PAR team (ART), the release of the baseline survey, and the first intervention. Intervention 1 had to happen when it did due to the timing of our annual congregational meeting. Thanksgiving holidays and other church-related events delayed scheduling the focus group for Intervention 1. This delay had a cascading effect on the remaining focus groups.

The ART and I did not foresee the mechanics of conducting debrief sessions after the cottage meetings in Intervention 3. The ART did not attend every cottage meeting, which meant that they had no ability to debrief each meeting. Scheduling the cottage meetings was affected by Lent and Easter, and we originally offered a short window of time in which cottage meetings could convene. The ART and I decided to extend the time period and increase the number of cottage meetings. The delayed start and additional time required for the cottage meetings extended the end of Intervention 3. Thus Intervention 4, which was intended to be a discernment session, was changed to a special congregational meeting. Intervention 3 became something of a search conference, and Intervention 4 allowed us to report what had been learned. Community Lutheran's program year ends in mid-June with the end of the public school year. The timing of Intervention 4 had to occur before mid-June. The end of the program year, the end of the research period, and the weariness of many of our leaders left no time or ability to conduct the fifth intervention, so it was not conducted.

Context and Unit of Analysis

Community Lutheran, as described in the historical information section above, often becomes stuck when faced with decisions and action. Conflict and discord tend to ensue, which has an impact on the congregation and on our dialogue, decision-making, and ability to live God's mission in our community. This project was intended to effect change throughout the whole congregation. The unit of analysis, therefore, was the entire congregation. Systemic change takes time and necessitates the development of new language and patterns. This project was designed to provide an impetus for systemic change by working with different groups in various contexts. The specific sample for each intervention and instrument will be addressed in the sections that follow.

Action Research Team

An Action Research Team (ART) that was comprised of a diverse group of people associated with Community was established with the assistance of my Journey Partner Team. The research team was created to be a demographically diverse team made up of a nonprobability purposive sample representing a broad spectrum of formal and informal groups within Community. I sought diversity in age, gender, experience, and activity with the congregation. I took into consideration the perspectives they brought to the discussion, and their ability to articulate their perspectives regardless of the views of the others in the group.

Their role was to work with me on reviewing the instruments and developing and focusing each of the interventions. Their feedback was very helpful in creating environments for safety and learning. Greenwood and Levin say, "Central to the cogenerative process in AR is its ability to create room for learning processes resulting in

interpretations and action designs that participants trust.”²¹ This safe place for learning is what Heifetz and Linsky refer to as a “holding environment,” which is “formed by a network of relationships” and gives a place where people can directly and creatively work through conflicts.²² The trust, safety, and focus of these holding environments allowed the organization to learn and to more effectively involve “people in learning about their own situation and helping to determine the decisions and steps to be taken in response.”²³ Together with the necessary “feedback loops,” the congregation was able to experiment and build the continuity of learning from intervention to intervention.²⁴ The research team accompanied me throughout the research process by collaboratively designing and reviewing each intervention, applying learnings from each intervention toward the ensuing intervention, and providing feedback based on my analysis and conclusions at the end of the research period. The Action Research Team and I participated in the practices of prayer and journaling for further reflection and to record answers to questions such as: “Where did you see God in this?”

Interventions

The original design for this study involved a series of five interventions that took place between the baseline and end-line questionnaires. All interventions were designed

²¹ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 94.

²² Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 102.

²³ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2505.

²⁴ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 2229; Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. Zscheile refers to two helpful concepts described by Govindarajan and Trimble: the “hypothesis of record,” (Loc 1868), and the “performance engine” (Loc 1830).

to follow a process and build upon the experiences and learnings from prior interventions as described in the “Spiral of Action Research Cycles.”²⁵ The research did not occur according to the original plan, but the concept of the research cycle remained. Each cycle began with the Action Research Team’s planning, and concluded with the combined reflections from the ART debrief and a focus group. Only one of the interventions had a relatively restricted population. All reasonable attempts were made to publicize and include the broadest possible participation, including those who felt disenfranchised and remained on the periphery of the congregation.

Intervention 1: To Build, Or Not To Build

The first intervention was unfolding during the writing of my thesis proposal. A Facilities Task Force responsible for discerning the purpose, location, and missional priorities for a possible future building, had been working for about one year when they became stuck. They were very intentional about including the congregation throughout the process rather than presenting them with a fully formed proposal that allowed very little input or opportunity for revision. A member of the task force on September 3, 2015, after listening to the ideas around the table, sat back and said: “Should we be working to improve the building like this? We will move forward if [the congregation] supports us.” This statement changed the flow of the meeting until someone articulated the question: “Should Community pursue a significant building renovation plan or seek to maintain the existing structure?” That question led to a larger conversation among church leaders, and the benefit of including this question as an intervention became clear.

²⁵ Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, Loc 502.

This intervention took the form of an informational meeting and was held on a Sunday morning between worship services. The ART was newly formed during the planning of this intervention, so the Facilities Task Force served the planning function with me. We decided to use the first fifteen minutes of the session to give a focused presentation that explained the background, shared the Facilities Task Force's current thinking, and shared where the task force was having difficulty. The short initial presentation was to allow as much time as possible to discussion. We agreed that there would be two primary goals from this intervention: (1) bring the congregation up to date, and (2) invite participants into the complexity of this decision with the Facilities Task Force. Conversations with the Council and Facilities Task Force made it clear that there had to be a next step. There was strong agreement between these two leadership groups that a vote to affirm the task force's progress and direction should be included as an agenda item at our Annual Congregational Meeting, which was held at the end of November 2015.

The population for Intervention 1 was a combination of an informed/purposive and convenience sample because specific people were invited, yet publicity was widely shared indicating that all were welcome who wished to participate. The Facilities Task Force provided food and support while I led the conversation for the sixty people in attendance. Discussion regarding the planning of this intervention included being clear with the congregation about what this session was and was not intended to do. We were clear that this session was not a vote and that it would not be the congregation's final opportunity to share and be involved in the process. We decided to host this event in a smaller room that was cozier and more conducive to conversation. Chairs were set up for

about forty people, but more chairs were required to accommodate the additional people. The action of simply having to add more chairs seemed to get everyone's attention and create a sense of excitement.

Members of the Facilities Task Force, my Journey Partner Team, and Action Research Team were scattered around the room, which was unintentional but proved very helpful to the overall experience. I initiated the conversation and fielded several questions, but referred as many questions as possible to task force members. Had we decided to conduct this intervention as a panel discussion, it would likely have reinforced the leadership/congregation and them/us divisions. However, the conversation was very *us* and egalitarian, and my role became that of facilitator. It was clear to participants that the task force was researching and bringing their findings back to the congregation for their consideration as opposed to the task force presenting a fully formed idea. This kind of discussion was a step toward building trust and involvement.

Intervention 2: Leadership Training

The purpose of this intervention was to give congregational leaders tools for use in their ministry teams. The ART and I conducted a pre-session survey to learn what was most pressing and needed by attendees. Their feedback was used to design the content of the leadership workshop. The resulting Leadership Workshop Handbook is included in appendix M. The workshop presented tools to help leaders include people in dialogue, make space in the conversation for diverse opinions and approaches, handle conflict, and actively involve their faith in decision-making. The population was an informed sample because it was to include all church council members, congregational officers, ministry team leaders, staff, task force leaders, and other informal leaders. The desired result was

to seed the congregation with stronger leaders, which would prepare leaders and the congregation for the ensuing interventions. This intervention was designed to prepare leaders for Intervention 3 in which they became much more intimately active in the research process.

We encountered several challenges with this intervention. Time and motivation are often concerns of parishioners in a bedroom and retiree community such as ours. Many people in our congregation have received leadership training, and are or have been leaders in their work environment. One member of the ART reflected: “What could we possibly teach them about leadership? Why should they come to something like this? How will it help them?” This intervention was originally planned for January with the third intervention in February. The ART and I realized the effort and lead-time involved in making the second intervention successful, and feeling the impact of the holidays, we therefore decided to postpone this intervention. The congregation’s annual leadership retreat at the end of February seemed like a natural time for this kind of intervention.

The invitation for this event focused on learning skills that help us work together better so we are more able to carry out God’s mission. Leaders in government, business, and the military certainly know how to lead, but leading in a church has very different dynamics. Leaders in business and the military have a clear hierarchy and decision-making protocols. Leaders in these environments rely on input from others, but, once a decision is made, everyone works to implement that decision. People who choose not to work toward a successful implementation are coached, disciplined, and potentially terminated. As an ART member observed, “In volunteer organizations, such as the

church, much more consensus is needed. Strict authoritarianism does not go far within a congregation.”

The ART and I worked together to focus on what outcomes would most benefit the participants and enable them to be effective in their teams. We decided on a workshop with three primary sessions. The first session focused on Dwelling in the Word, raising awareness of the effects of conflict and ineffective dialogue and presenting tools and language to help leaders become more analytical than emotional.²⁶ The second session focused on case studies discussed in small groups that either were generalized from real situations or were helpful in illustrating certain behaviors and responses. The tools presented in the first session were to be employed in the second. This session concluded with time for each group to debrief and to listen to the insights of the other groups. The third session convened after a lunch break, which allowed for further conversation on the tools and case studies and where we would go from there. It began with a time for reflection on leadership perspectives on the case studies, and focused on next steps. Participants were paired with a prayer partner, and they were given an agenda to follow for the next six months. The agenda involved intentional check-in times to review the tools given, current situations they were encountering, and mutual support.

Intervention 3: Intensive Listening

The purpose of the third intervention was three-fold: first, to include more people beyond those who typically attend congregational meetings; second, to guide participants

²⁶ See Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 40. on reactive versus performative and emergent leadership. Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 51ff. on the concept of “getting to the balcony” and the differences between technical and adaptive challenges.

through a discussion about *shared congregational values*; and, third, to update participants on the building process and elicit feedback. The original plan was to hold the third intervention at the end of February as part of the annual leadership retreat. The section above described the rationale for Intervention 2 being moved to the end of February. Intervention 3 had to be delayed until after Easter.

I was intrigued by Greenwood and Levin's discussion of search conferences as a means of building trust, building ownership, and generating knowledge.²⁷ The ART and I decided to hold a series of cottage meetings hosted primarily in members' homes, and led by members from Council and the Facilities Task Force who volunteered for these roles. The cottage meetings spanned the time period from May 1 through June 8. Leaders were given an interview protocol (see appendix P), and people were encouraged to sign up for the cottage meetings using SignUpGenius or a paper registration form.²⁸ Publicity was conducted using our monthly newsletter, weekly bulletin announcements, weekly eNews, and social media using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

I worked with the volunteers and Community's staff to identify potential hosts to welcome a group of members into their homes or serve as a group host at church. The host provided the space and determined how to provide childcare, while other participants provided food and non-alcoholic drinks. All hosts were encouraged to do everything possible to minimize distractions while making the environment warm and inviting. Distractions, even good distractions such as animals or children present, can be

²⁷ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 136ff.

²⁸ "Signupgenius," Charlotte, NC: SignUpGenius, Inc, <http://www.signupgenius.com/>.

enough to take the group off track, leaving them unable to complete their task in the allotted timeframe. Care was taken to help people feel comfortable so they could express themselves and also be focused on the discussion at hand. The population for this intervention was a convenience sample because it was open to the entire congregation, but those who actually participated opted to be involved.

The agenda for the cottage meetings involved six items. First, we allotted two hours for each meeting and encouraged people to come early for snacks and conversation to allow participants to feel like guests and be welcomed. The second was to begin with prayer and then allow each person a few minutes to introduce themselves. The third agenda item involved a major block of time—up to forty-five minutes. The congregation’s long-range planning process articulated values, but they had been discussed and decided upon within the Long-Range Planning Task Force. The ART and I wanted to accomplish two things with a values exercise: enable people to talk and work through differences, and see what values each group articulated. We used a resource from ThrivingChurch.com called *Core Values* as a guide for the values exercise.²⁹ Groups involved eight to fourteen participants and were given thirty-three values as seen in table 4-1—each listed on its own index card.

Table 4-1. Initial Values for Values Exercise

Abundance	Acceptance	Belonging
Caring for others	Change	Children
Community	Congregational Health	Courage
Education	Equality	Financial Security
Fun	Future	Gossip
Growth in Attendance	Growth in participation	Humility

²⁹ Thomas G. Bandy, “Core Values,” ThrivingChurch.com, <http://thrivingchurch.com/Portals/41/Assets/Visioning%20Tools/Values%20Process.pdf> (accessed 1/29/2017).

Lutheran traditions	Mission	Now
Past	Prayer	Relationships
Respect	Risk	Safety
Scarcity	Security	Serving others
Serving ourselves	Thrifty	Youth

A representative from Council led the values exercise. The initial instructions were for the group to review all thirty-three values that were laid out before them on a table with the group gathered around so all could see. They were given blank index cards to add values if they did not see a value they felt should be listed. The leader for this portion of the cottage meeting led the group through the narrative provided in appendix P which called upon the group to narrow the initial values down to ten, then to seven, and, finally, to five. Participants were allowed at each step to add values, combine values, or draw upon values that were previously cast aside. The caveat was that they could not increase the allotment of values for any phase of the game.

The fourth agenda item included a presentation and discussion regarding the building. A representative from the Facilities Task Force led this section. The content built upon the material presented in Intervention 1 by sharing updates and inviting feedback. Leaders articulated that we wanted to intentionally involve the congregation in the process and build ownership.

The fifth agenda item is a listening and awareness activity called “Eyes and Ears Moment.” This is a new addition to the life of the congregation as a result of this study and it appears on Council and staff meeting agendas. The cottage meetings concluded with a sending and blessing. The ART and I intentionally planned that I would not be present for the entire cottage meeting because we did not want my presence to skew the conversation and we wanted the leaders to be able to lead without my presence. We

decided that we wanted me to be present in some way, however, so I arrived at each cottage meeting when we anticipated the group had about fifteen minutes left. I would be present primarily to thank people for attending, thank the host and leaders, and answer any group questions that were not already addressed.

This intervention was complicated because it occurred over time, and neither the ART nor I were present for every cottage meeting. We relied on feedback from the cottage meeting leaders to inform our own learning for this intervention. This intervention did not fit the typical structure of a search conference, but it did fulfill the intent because “searching refers to a specific kind of cogenerative learning process. The core idea of searching is to create a situation where ordinary people can engage in structure knowledge generation based on systematic experimentation.”³⁰

Intervention 3, like the second intervention, required a next step. Leaders and my ART decided to convene a special congregational meeting to share what we heard as feedback regarding the building program and what we heard regarding what the groups felt were Community’s *shared congregational values*. The special congregational meeting was an important accountability step to reflect to the congregation what we heard and to give them an opportunity to react and clarify. These *shared congregational values* will be used to further clarify and articulate Community’s values which will guide the Council and ministry teams as they make decisions in the future.

³⁰ Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 136.

Intervention 4: Special Congregational Meeting

The original plan was for Intervention 4 to address “active ministry beyond our doors.” The purpose of this intervention was to engage the congregation using the Five Phases of Discernment in a discernment process about ministry needs God might be calling us to undertake for the sake of our local community. The congregation has been deeply committed to being involved in the community for many years by offering the use of our building to support groups and other community groups. I intended to make specific use of the Evangelism Cube, which I developed as part of an independent study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.³¹ The Evangelism Cube is best used as a diversification test using the three dimensions represented in figure 4.3. The majority of Community’s interaction with our local community is through the use of our building. This is a source of pride for the congregation, but it also allows us to say that we are active in the community without investigating other avenues of involvement. Building use as a form of ministry would be classified using the Evangelism Cube as passive | corporate | internal.³² The Evangelism Cube challenges us to ask questions about our level of involvement in other quadrants, such as: What are we doing that is active | individual | external?

³¹ Jeffrey M. Wilson, “Evangelism: The Work of the Church,” (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Fall 2001), 26-28.

³² The example of building use as an outreach tool is passive because it requires no active participation other than staff time. It is corporate because the hosting and support of the community groups is done on behalf of the corporate body of the congregation. It is internal because hosting community groups happens within the walls of the church.

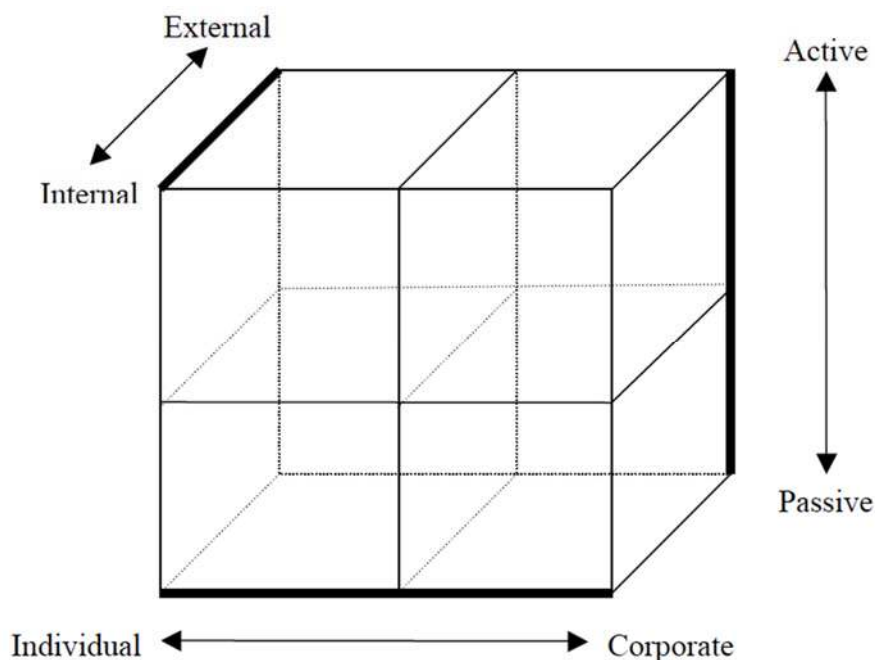


Figure 4-3. Evangelism Cube

The delays cited in the discussions above for Intervention 2 and Intervention 3 necessitated that Intervention 4 change to a special congregational meeting. The agenda for this meeting is listed in appendix S.

Participants in this intervention constituted both a purposive and a convenience sample of the entire congregation. Publicity included verbal announcements in worship, weekly bulletin insert, weekly eNews, monthly newsletter, social media, and a postcard mailing to each member household as required by our congregational constitution. The agenda for this special congregational meeting was intended to mirror the cottage meeting agenda to allow those who did not participate in those meetings to experience the values exercise and the facilities presentation. We realized that this would be a duplication for those who attended the cottage meetings but felt it would be a good experience for them to see how different groups progressed through the values

discussion. Intervention 4 included sharing from what we heard and learned through the cottage meetings.

Intervention 5: Draft 2017 Budget

The final intervention was intended to test and put into practice our learnings and experiences throughout the study period. However, the intervention did not occur for the reasons described above. It was to involve an informed sample of ministry team leaders, ministry team members, staff, and Council. Ministry team leaders were to begin the budget process with their ministry teams. They were going to engage in a process of discernment of God's calling for their ministry area and for the common good of the whole congregation, considering that "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:5).

This intervention was intended to encourage Council and the Finance Team to deal directly with God's call, abundance, and scarcity, while engaging in healthy dialogue and faithful discernment. The ART and I were specifically interested in watching for situations in which one team or individual seemed to take the conversation off track or to act in conflict with the shared congregational vision, values, and goals in such a way as to override other teams and change the direction of the discernment process. Nevertheless, this intervention could add value to the research process, and I intend to use the concepts of the planned Intervention 5 following the conclusion of the research period.

Instruments

Baseline Survey

I designed a questionnaire that was used at the beginning of the study process to understand the congregation's initial perspectives regarding the congregation's ability to have healthy dialogue and make faithful decisions. This served as a baseline survey (see appendix A). The questionnaire was field tested by my DMin cohort, my ART, and eight people evenly distributed between males and females and who are not part of the study population. These additional field testers included family, friends, and previous congregation members all of whom have some understanding of Community and its ministry. Changes that resulted from field-testing included giving instructions that would encourage someone who is new to the congregation and adjusting timeframes to reflect "during your time at Community."

The baseline questionnaire was introduced with a congregational letter, which outlined the purpose and benefit to the congregation and wider church, and solicited the congregation's support and involvement. This letter was also posted on our website and was available at the church for anyone who did not receive it. I included smaller articles that were distributed through our congregational email system (MailChimp) and published in our monthly newsletter, weekly announcements, and on my blog with links from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr.³³ A flier was posted in the church building for two weeks leading up to the survey period and a graphic was displayed on

³³ "MailChimp," Atlanta, GA: The Rocket Science Group, www.mailchimp.com.

our internal TV communication system. Paper copies were either mailed or delivered to the church office, and I manually entered those responses into SurveyMonkey.

The baseline questionnaire was then distributed to all members (active and inactive) and regular participants in the congregation over the age of eighteen. A cover letter clarified the purpose of the questionnaire, confidentiality, and implied consent. This group consisted of 596 recipients—fifty-seven people received paper surveys in the mail, and 539 people received an email invitation to the survey on SurveyMonkey. The responses were cleaned in IBM SPSS Statistics revealing that there were 114 electronic responses and four paper responses, an overall response rate of 19.8% (21.2% and 7.0%, respectively). I expected the response to be higher, and suspect that some people may have been put off by the length of the questionnaire. I know that at least a few of our homebound were not able to either physically or mentally complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained forty-eight questions of which twelve were open-ended questions. We noticed once the survey was published that participants did not progress through the survey as quickly as the field testers did. The result was that participants who took longer to answer the open-ended questions experienced a time-out from SurveyMonkey and their questionnaires were submitted as incomplete. Advice from SurveyMonkey technical support was to reduce the number of open-ended questions on the same page. I modified the questionnaire to reduce the number of questions per page and encouraged people to complete it.

Baseline Interviews

The intended design was to select interview participants from those who volunteered using a paper form or a link to an electronic form that were separate from

their questionnaire (see appendix A). I described above the impact of time and calendar events that resulted in the baseline interviews being removed from the actual research design.

The interviewees were to have constituted a purposive sample and were intended to delve deeper into perspectives gleaned from all responses to the questionnaire. They would have been guided by an interview protocol that I developed and reviewed with my ART who also field-tested the protocol (see appendix C). The baseline interviews would have been recorded for later transcription and analysis.

ART Debrief

The original intent was for the ART debrief to occupy a key role in the cyclical learning process as the ART and I were to meet for a very short debrief as soon after each intervention as possible to make observations while the event was still fresh. However, the ART debrief did not occur as planned for all interventions. Intervention 1 and Intervention 2 were the only interventions to be debriefed as planned. The protocol for these debriefing sessions is included as appendix E. Neither of the sessions were recorded because of the timeframe and location. My notes from these two debrief discussions were used for analysis.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were convened for three of the four interventions to gather reflections and perspectives from those who were participating in the intervention. A focus group for the first intervention was not conducted. Participants for the focus groups constituted a convenience sample of those who volunteered to participate in the focus group with the intent of having a group size of approximately eight people. Each person

was given an informed consent form to sign when the focus group met (appendix H). Efforts were made to ensure the sample consisted of a diverse population by age, gender, and point of view as expressed in the intervention. Focus group participants did not include members of my Journey Partner Team, Action Research Team, or participants in prior focus groups.

Each focus group was guided by the focus group protocol included in appendix F. The protocol was reviewed by my DMin cohort as well as my ART. All focus group sessions were audio recorded for later transcription and analysis.

Pre-Session and Post-Session Survey

The ART and I developed a questionnaire to be completed by all potential participants in Intervention 2. The population constituted an informed sample because Intervention 2 involved all Council leaders, ministry team leaders, and other informal leaders of the congregation. The purpose of the pre-session survey was to allow leaders to consider their own leadership style, the most common obstacles and frustrations they experience as leaders, and what topics would most benefit them. The ART and I made initial assumptions about the needs of the leaders, which enabled us to develop a draft of the Leadership Workshop Handbook. Survey responses enabled us to further hone the plans and resources for the workshop. The resulting Leadership Workshop Handbook is included in appendix M.

A post-session survey was shared with workshop participants to evaluate the helpfulness of the workshop, and determine what questions and unmet needs remained. Both questionnaires were developed quickly and tested within the ART, but field testing

outside of the ART was not conducted. Results of these questionnaires are included in chapter 5.

End-Line Survey

A slightly modified version of the baseline questionnaire was used at the end of the study period as an end line measure to gauge the effectiveness of the interventions (see appendix B). Questions that were part of the original baseline questionnaire referring to timeframes, such as question 44, “Considering decisions made *during your time at Community ...*,” were changed to “Considering decisions made *over the last year ...*.” The end line survey, like the baseline, was a census of every congregation member over the age of eighteen. The population was adjusted to include people who became active since the beginning of the study period. The end line survey received similar publicity as the baseline with the exception of the initial congregational letter.

End-Line Interviews

The end-line interview was the final official interaction with the congregation on this project. The purpose, like the baseline interview, was to conduct a one-on-one interview with participants who indicated as a part of the survey their willingness to be interviewed. Volunteers used a paper form or a link to an electronic form that were separate from their questionnaires (see appendix B) to preserve anonymity. The interviewees constituted a convenience and purposive sample, and were used to delve deeper into perspectives gleaned from all responses to the survey. These one-on-one interviews were guided by an interview protocol (see appendix D), which I developed and shared with my ART for review. All interviews were audio recorded for later

transcription and analysis. Each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the interview.

Analyzing the Data

The primary quantitative data were derived from baseline and end-line surveys. The questionnaires were coded for identification purposes so that t-tests could be conducted to see if there was a significant change between the baseline and end-line responses. This identification code consisted of a combination of eight characters—the first three indicated whether the questionnaire was baseline or end-line, the next character identified whether the questionnaire was paper or electronic, followed by a dash, and a three-digit sequence number that uniquely identified each participant. A code of BLSe-001 indicated that this was a baseline questionnaire taken electronically, and it corresponds to the first person on my list.

Participants who took the coded baseline and end-line questionnaires online entered their own data through the SurveyMonkey web interface. Participants who took the paper versions of these instruments returned their questionnaires, and I entered them manually into SurveyMonkey. Raw survey data were exported into a Microsoft Excel file where the data were cleaned and the document was formatted in preparation for being imported into IBM SPSS Statistics. Cleaning involved renaming columns to correspond to question numbers, indicating in the appropriate fields which items should be considered “skipped,” ensuring the data were of the correct data type, and examining the

data for errant or redundant keystrokes.³⁴ Some data required recoding once it was imported into SPSS to allow SPSS to properly calculate means or handle skipped items. The baseline and end-line questionnaires included twelve open-ended questions. These answers were treated as any document, memo, or transcription and were coded according to Charmaz' coding methods as described in greater detail below.

I used descriptive statistics to report total population (N), frequency, percentage, and mean. These descriptive statistics helped me understand the demographics of the respondents by age, gender, congregational involvement, and years of membership.

I used inferential statistics, such as the paired t-test, independent t-test, and ANOVA to compare means between the baseline and end-line questionnaires. The three-digit sequence number in the survey code was used to determine which respondents participated in both the baseline and end-line surveys. The paired t-test was used on this population to identify what, if any, change effect these respondents experienced between the two means expressed through the baseline and end-line questionnaires. I conducted independent t-tests on the population of respondents who participated in one but not both surveys. The ANOVA was used to compare multiple means to determine any change effect. I examined the p-value to determine significance. If the p-value is ≤ 0.05 , the difference between the means is considered statistically different. If the p-value is > 0.05 , the means are considered statistically the same.

Qualitative data constitutes the majority of data collected. Qualitative data includes results from the open-ended questions in the baseline and end-line

³⁴ For example, question 9 asks about commute time in minutes. Some respondents wrote "minutes" or "min" in addition to the number of minutes. Other participants excluded the dash in the survey code, or simply typed stray characters.

questionnaires, debriefing sessions with the ART, congregational documents, meeting notes, memos, and journals. Qualitative data also includes transcriptions of a congregational history interview, end-line interviews, ART meetings, and focus groups. I hired a transcriptionist through the Upwork online service.³⁵ The transcriptionist signed the confidentiality agreement, which is included in appendix K.

These data were processed according to Charmaz' guidelines for document analysis. Initial coding included word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident to generate *in vivo* codes.³⁶ My next phase of coding followed Charmaz again for focused coding which included the steps of initial clustering of *in vivo* codes into focused codes, followed by clustering the focused codes into axial codes, and finishing with theoretical coding that attempted to explain the interrelationships between the axial codes.³⁷

Summary

This chapter described the use of the transformative mixed-methods modified PAR methodology employed in this study. It detailed the differences between the research design as originally envisioned and the reality of PAR research in an active congregation. The cyclical process of a congregation learning and changing through the interventions between the baseline and end-line was preserved despite the variations and adjustments made through the research period. Chapter 4 concluded with a description of

³⁵ "Upwork," Mountain View, CA: Upwork Global, Inc, www.upwork.com (accessed 7/15/2016).

³⁶ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 45-54, 109-137.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

the instruments used for data collection and how those data were processed and analyzed.

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the research.

CHAPTER 5
RESULTS OF STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Chapter 4 described the research methodology and the rationale for choosing a transformative mixed-methods modified PAR as the framework for this study. Chapter 5 begins with a brief introduction to the research design and timeframe, then describes those who participated in all aspects of the research process. This chapter involves sharing research findings using descriptive statistics, reporting in-depth analysis of quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics, and, consistent with a PAR, dwelling on the qualitative data in the language of the people to gather insights in a deliberate manner. Results are summarized at the end of this chapter, which leads into chapter 6 as it brings the results into conversation with the lenses discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

The PAR methodology intentionally immerses the researcher in the data and helps the researcher minimize his or her own bias while remaining focused on the research question, which is:

How might a participatory action research (PAR) intervention within Community that focuses on cultivating a culture of healthy dialogue lead to more faithful discernment while expressing respect for diverse opinions among members of the congregation as the body of Christ in mission?

The process of exploring healthy dialogue and faithful discernment involving people with diverse opinions shed light on topics such as conflict, transparency, and precisely who is involved in which decisions.

Overview of the Research Project and Timelines

My thesis proposal for this project was approved by Luther Seminary on October 20, 2015, which enabled the actual research period to span November 2015 through June 2016 as planned. I began forming my PAR leadership team, which I refer to as my Action Research Team (ART), in October in anticipation of the approval of my thesis proposal. I also introduced and outlined the research process in a letter to the congregation dated October 19, 2015. This introductory letter was sent to 244 member households, including families who have been active in the congregation regardless of formal membership.

Chapter 4 described the emergence of a topic at a Facilities Task Force meeting that would both be important to the congregation and would benefit from being part of the research process. The timeframe required to address that topic altered the course at the beginning of the research period. The baseline questionnaire was released on November 9, 2015, while the ART was getting up to speed through their email review of only the materials. The ART met for the first time on November 12, 2015, and the first intervention was on November 15, 2015.

This study began with a baseline survey and involved four interventions, three focus groups, an end-line survey, and four one-on-one interviews. The questionnaires provided the quantitative data. The qualitative data came from open-ended questions in the questionnaires; transcriptions of focus groups, action research team meetings, Facilities Task Force meetings, and interviews; my personal notes from meetings and

conversations; official congregational meeting minutes; and other notes and journals.

These data were coded using Charmaz' methodology as described in chapter 4.

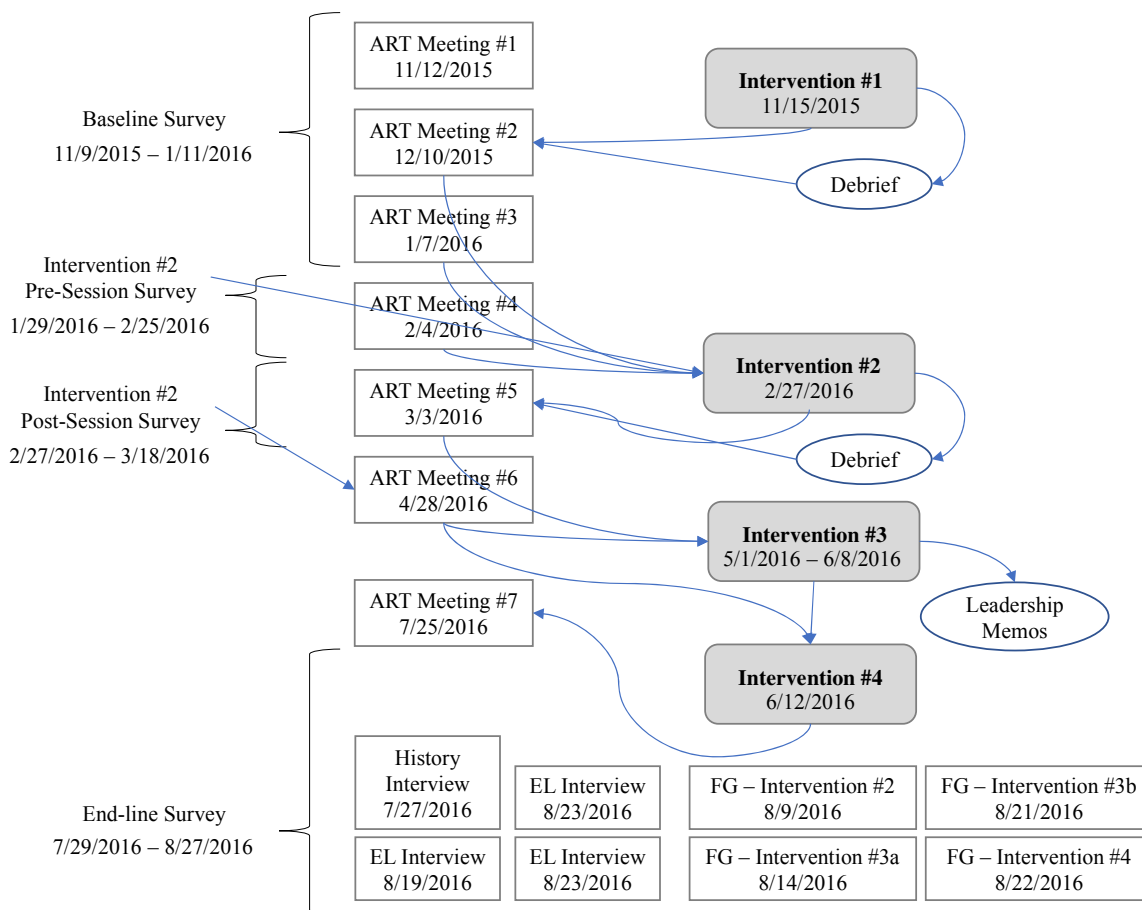


Figure 5-1 Diagram of Research Design

Comments made throughout this research process in various conversations and meetings indicated that people experience frustration at not being included, frustration that decisions take too long, and frustration that decisions are sometimes made only to be revoked and re-discussed. People acknowledged that there have been *big* conflicts at times in our congregation's history. Some people felt that conflict was not a current concern to the congregation because there are no significant issues beyond having enough money. People will readily admit the presence of frustration and other interpersonal conflict that affects ministry teams and relationships, but there does not appear to be a

desire to do anything to affect these conflicts because we cannot control everyone's behavior, and these are not big conflicts. The implication from some of these people is that perhaps I was looking for elements of conflict that were not actually present. The open-ended questions in the baseline and end-line questionnaire and conversations in focus groups and interviews shed much light on the importance of these interpersonal relationships.

A handful of keywords have arisen at leadership workshops, retreats, and Council meetings throughout my time at Community as leaders reflect together about what is working, what is not working, and where improvements may be made. The keywords *leadership*, *communication*, and *finances* have become an integral part of virtually all of these meetings and workshops. These words are evident in the present research project, but they have taken on more depth and context. Other words and phrases have emerged that I wish to draw the reader's attention to and are listed in table 5-1.

Table 5-1. Keywords and Key Phrases Emerging from the Research

Keywords	Key Phrases
1. Awareness	1. All talk and no action
2. Clarity	2. Building muscle
3. Expectations	3. Creating and maintaining a safe space
4. Inclusion	4. For the good of the whole
5. Mutuality	5. What's next?
6. Process	

All of the above terms should be familiar to the reader with the exception of "building muscle." My ART used this phrase to refer to the need to not merely have an idea about how to change behavior but implement that nascent idea. The concept illustrated the need to work at the behavior, develop it, and practice it in order to help

establish the behavior as normative. Building muscle calls to mind a person exercising or working out in a gym, but it also works when one considers *muscle memory*—the idea that practicing an action repetitively makes that action or response second nature.

Description of Participants

PAR Leadership Team

The PAR leadership team (ART) was comprised of both males and females; people with a variety of perspectives and church experience; and long-time members, newer members, and a young woman who has maintained a relationship with the congregation through her teenage, college, and young adult years. Table 5-2 describes the composition of this team. One of the team members, Cheryl, decided to withdrawal from the process after the first meeting, and she was not replaced.

Table 5-2. Action Research Team (ART) Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Alexis	F	Mid-40s	M	University staff
Jamie	F	Early 30s	S	Government scientist
Kristine	F	Early 20s	S	Public policy staff member
Cheryl	F	Late 60s	D	Administration for a service provider
Bill	M	Early 70s	M	Retired government employee
Brandon	M	Late 60s	M	Retired engineer

M = Married; D = Divorced; S = Single

Quantitative Participants

The baseline questionnaire was distributed both via email and the United States Postal Service. Fifty-six baseline paper questionnaires were mailed and SurveyMonkey questionnaires were emailed to 539 congregant email addresses. Social media, the

congregation's website, bulletin announcements, verbal announcements, and images posted on TV monitors in the church building were also used to garner attention to this research project and encourage involvement.

The baseline questionnaire was available from November 9, 2015, through January 11, 2016. It resulted in 118 valid responses—114 electronic and four paper questionnaires—for a response rate of 19.83% (21.15% electronic and 7.14% paper). The paper questionnaire responses were manually entered into SurveyMonkey.

Fifty-six end-line questionnaires were mailed and 555 SurveyMonkey questionnaires were emailed to the congregation. The end-line questionnaire was available from July 29, 2016, through August 27, 2016. It resulted in eighty-five valid responses—eighty-five electronic and zero paper questionnaires—for a response rate of 13.91% (15.32% electronic and 0.00% paper).

The resulting baseline and end-line data files were exported from SurveyMonkey, then cleaned and processed using SPSS. These files were merged to create a file for use in the independent t-test (N=203). The baseline and end-line files were sorted on a unique survey ID number and merged based on the survey ID number resulting in a file containing only respondents who completed both a baseline and end-line questionnaire (N=54). This file is suitable for the paired t-test (see table T-1).

The following tables present demographic data from the baseline and end-line questionnaires. Table 5-3 shows twice as many females than males took part in both surveys.

Table 5-3. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Gender

Gender	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Female	74	63.8	53	63.1
Male	42	36.2	31	36.9
Total (n)	116	100.0	84	100.0

Table 5-4 shows that each age group is represented, although both the baseline and end-line had more participants between the ages of 60 and 69. The median age for the baseline is 59, and the end-line is 61.

Table 5-4. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Age Group

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
19-39	15	12.9	13	15.7
40-49	22	19.0	9	10.8
50-59	23	19.8	15	18.1
60-69	29	25.0	28	33.7
70-79	15	12.9	14	16.9
80 and over	12	10.3	4	4.8
Total (n)	116	100.0	84	100.0
Median (years)	59		61	

Tables 5-5, 6, and 7 below, when taken together, indicate that I did not attain my goal of reaching a more diverse population, including less active or fringe members.

Table 5-5 shows that the vast majority of participants in the two surveys are married.

Table 5-5. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Relationship Status

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Married	85	73.3	62	73.8
Widowed	10	8.6	7	8.3
Divorced	6	5.2	3	3.6
Separated	2	1.7	3	3.6
Domestic Partnership	2	1.7	0	0.0
Single—Cohabiting	1	0.9	3	3.6
Single—Never married	10	8.6	5	6.0
Other	0	0.0	1	1.2
Total (n)	116	100.0	84	100.0

Table 5-6 shows that the vast majority of respondents are regular worshippers—75.7% of baseline respondents and 77.4% of end-line respondents said that they attend at least several times a month. I would have liked the number of people represented who are not regular worshippers to have been higher. It was helpful having 24.4% of not regular worshippers represented in the baseline analysis and 22.6% in the end-line so that their voices could be heard.

Table 5-6. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Worship Attendance

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Usually every week	60	52.2	39	46.4
Several times a month	27	23.5	26	31.0
About once a month	7	6.1	4	4.8
Several times a year	10	8.7	6	7.1
Twice a year or less	10	8.7	7	8.3
Other	1	0.9	2	2.4
Total (n)	115	100.0	84	100.0

Table 5-7 shows that the largest group of people who participated in the baseline and end-line surveys have been members for twenty years or more (40.9% and 41.0%,

respectively). People who have participated at Community for five or fewer years are strongly represented by 20.9% in the baseline and 26.5% in the end-line.

Table 5-7. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Length of Membership

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Less than 2 years	7	6.1	10	12.0
2 – 5 years	17	14.8	12	14.5
6 – 10 years	13	11.3	9	10.8
11 – 15 years	19	16.5	13	15.7
16 – 20 years	12	10.4	5	6.0
Over 20 years	47	40.9	34	41.0
Total (n)	115	100.0	83	100.0

Table 5-8 reports that baseline respondents with a bachelor’s degree or higher are 68.7% and 74.2% for end-line respondents, which may be reflective of the types of jobs and industry in this community. The general education level within the congregation is higher than the surrounding community, however. People over the age of twenty-five with a bachelor’s degree or higher in our immediate city is 29.1%.¹ That number is 38.1% in the surrounding county.²

Table 5-8. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Education

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Less than high school degree	1	0.9	0	0.0
High school degree or equivalent	10	8.6	5	6.0
Some college but no degree	20	17.2	8	9.5
Associate degree	4	3.4	8	9.5
Bachelor degree	44	37.9	23	27.4
Graduate Degree	37	31.9	40	47.6
Total (n)	116	100.0	84	100.0

¹ “Quickfacts,” United States Census Bureau, (URL hidden to preserve confidentiality) (accessed 10/7/2016).

² Ibid.

The Administration on Aging reports that 14.5% of the United States population is retired as of 2014.³ The percentage of baseline and end-line respondents in table 5-9 who are retired accounted for 31.9% and 44.0%, respectively, which is much higher than the national percentage.

Table 5-9. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Employment

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Currently employed	70	60.3	42	50.0
Currently not employed	4	3.4	1	1.2
Student	2	1.7	2	2.4
Retired	37	31.9	37	44.0
Homemaker/Stay-at-home	2	1.7	1	1.2
Other	1	0.9	1	1.2
Total (n)	116	100.0	84	100.0

Table 5-10 and table 5-11 taken together show the highest concentration of respondents in City 1 and City 2 (70.6%).⁴

Table 5-10. End-line Frequencies by Community in which Respondents Live⁵

	End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%
City 1	47	55.3
City 2	13	15.3
Other	9	10.6
City 3	4	4.7
City 4	2	2.4
City 5	1	1.2
City 6	1	1.2

³ Administration on Aging, "Aging Statistics," U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, http://www.aoa.acl.gov/aging_statistics/index.aspx (accessed 10/7/2016).

⁴ Specific community data was only gathered in the end-line questionnaire using Q47.

⁵ Actual city names are not presented to preserve anonymity. City 1 is the city in which the congregation is located (see chapter 1 for a description of this community). City 2 is a neighboring community that was previously a large family farm. According to www.city-data.com, City 2 experienced significant growth in the 1990s and explosive growth between 2000 and 2009. Increasingly, Community Lutheran's growth comes from City 2.

Table 5-10. End-line Frequencies by Community in which Respondents Live (continued)

End-line (N=85)		
	Freq.	%
City 7	1	1.2
City 8	1	1.2
Total	85	100.0

This area of the country is well-known for having lengthy commutes. The county in which the church is located has a mean commute time to work of 38.1 minutes, which is higher than the larger metropolitan area, the state, or the nation (32.7, 26.9, and 24.9, respectively).⁶ Anecdotal remarks from members of the congregation suggest that one-way commute times of an hour or more are not outside of the norm.

Table 5-11. Baseline and End-line Frequencies by Amount of Time to Get to Church

	Baseline (N=118)		End-line (N=85)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1-9 min	20	17.2	23	28.4
10-19 min	48	41.4	24	29.6
20-29 min	38	32.8	22	27.2
30 min and over	10	8.6	12	14.8
Total (n)	116	100.0	81	100.0
Median in minutes	15.0		15.0	

I wondered if commute time to church had an impact on worship attendance or participation in worship or the interventions for this project—perhaps worshippers simply do not wish to spend any more time in their cars. Baseline and end-line responses resulted in a median commute to church of 15 minutes. I conducted a cross-tabulation with Chi-square which showed no relationship that was statistically significant between commute

⁶ United States Census Bureau, “Commute Time,” DataUSA, 2014, www.datausa.io (accessed 10/15/2016).

time to church and worship attendance (baseline $X^2_{(15)} = 0.072$ and end-line $X^2_{(15)} = 0.075$).

ANOVA tests comparing the mean commute time with respondents who participated in at least one intervention showed that the only intervention in which there was a significant difference was Intervention 3. This intervention involved a series of cottage meetings scattered around the communities close to City 1 and City 2 from table 5-10. There were significant differences between those who have shorter versus longer commute times to church, $F_{(3,68)} = 2.867$, $p = 0.043$. The *post hoc* tests indicated that those whose commute is nine minutes or less (mean = 1.33) do not differ significantly from those whose commute is ten to nineteen minutes (mean = 1.59). There are significant differences, however, between those whose commute is nine minutes or less, and those whose commute is twenty to twenty-nine minutes (mean = 1.65) or thirty minutes or more (mean = 1.83).

Table 5-12. Results of ANOVA Test for Differences in Participation in Intervention 3 Based on Commute Time

	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Probability
Between Groups	1.965	3	0.655	2.867	0.043
Within Groups	12.535	68	0.228		
Total	17.500	71			

A typical female respondent for the baseline survey is married and fifty-four years old, has a bachelor's degree, is currently employed or retired, is a regular attender in worship, has been a member for over twenty years, and lives between ten and twenty

minutes from church.⁷ A typical male respondent for the baseline survey is also married but is sixty-six years old, has a bachelor's degree or higher, is either currently employed or retired, is a regular attender in worship, has been a member for over twenty years, and lives between ten and twenty minutes away from the church.

The end-line median age for females rose to fifty-nine years old, and the level of formal education by the respondents increased. Women in the baseline survey tended to be well educated, having either a bachelor's degree or graduate degree (43.24% and 25.68% respectively). That number rose to 75.00% with either a bachelor degree or graduate degree (34.62% and 40.38% respectively).⁸ The end-line median age for males rose to sixty-seven years old. The factors of employment, commute distance, tenure with the congregation, and worship attendance remained the same for both surveys.

Qualitative Participants

I conducted four interviews and four focus groups involving twenty-one people. The focus groups convened to address specific interventions.⁹ Three interviews were one-on-one end-line interviews. One interview addressed the history of the congregation and whether factions emerged at significant points of conflict.

⁷ Regular worship attendance includes the responses "several times a month" and "usually every week." Age is reported as the median.

⁸ The statistics regarding education levels were computed using the number of valid responses as opposed to the total number of respondents.

⁹ Two interviews pertaining to Intervention 3 were conducted due to scheduling difficulties among participants. There were four participants in the first focus group and three in the second.

Interviews

The four one-on-one interviews I conducted were with the people listed in table 5-13. The first three were end-line interviews.¹⁰ Two of these people were also participants in one of the focus groups. The fourth person, Juanita, has vast knowledge of the congregation, its inner-workings, and politics. I spoke with her to investigate the concept of factions and the role they may play in the conflict within the congregation. The interview with Juanita led me into document analysis from previous Council, congregation, and committee meetings.

Table 5-13. Interview Participants.

End-Line Interview Participants				
Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Brad	M	Late 60s	M	Retired school principal
Twila	F	Mid-60s	M	Retired
Fred	M	Early 70s	M	Tutor
Congregational History Interview Participant				
Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Juanita	F	Late 70s	M	Retired
M = Married				

¹⁰ Refer to chapter 4 for a description of the interviews and the explanation for there being no baseline interviews.

Qualitative Intervention Data

I convened four focus groups—two pertained to Intervention 3. There was not a focus group for Intervention 1 as described in chapter 4. I also collected other qualitative data as described below.

Intervention 1—Facilities Discussion Forum

Intervention 1 was a discussion forum that arose from our Facilities Task Force. The discussion title was “To build or not to build” and had fifty-five participants—thirty-one females and twenty-four males with a median age of sixty-three. It is worth noting that twenty-nine of the fifty-five participants (52.7%) are current leaders in some capacity—Council, ministry team, ART, JPT, or staff.

Intervention 2—Leadership Workshop

A group of fifty-two leaders, including Council, staff, and ministry team leaders, were invited to participate in Intervention 2, which was a leadership workshop. Thirty-six people participated in this intervention—a participation rate of 69.2%. Twenty were female and sixteen were male with a median age of 57.5. Participants in the focus group were members of the Church Council and are listed in table 5-14.

Table 5-14. Focus Group Participants for Intervention 2

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Sue	F	Mid-50s	M	Accountant
Bill	M	Late 60s	M	Retired
Linda	F	Early 50s	M	Admin
Sam	M	Mid-40s	M	Military
Kendra	F	Mid-50s	M	Retired analyst and stay-at-home mom
Ray	M	Early 70s	M	Retired
John	M	Late 60s	M	Retired

M = Married

Intervention 3—Cottage Meetings

Intervention 3 was a series of six cottage meetings—five were held in member homes and one cottage meeting was held at church. This intervention was open to the congregation and publicity was shared widely. Fifty-four people participated in these events—thirty-two of the participants were female and twenty-two were male with a median age of 60.¹¹ One of the goals of Intervention 3 was to include people beyond those who normally attend larger congregational meetings. A majority of those who participated in this intervention (70.4%) also participated in at least one of the previous two congregational meetings. Approximately one-third of the participants, however, did not attend one of the previous congregational meetings (29.6%). Table 5-15 describes the participants in the two focus groups for Intervention 3. Thirty-one (57.4%) of the participants are considered current leadership of the congregation.¹²

Table 5-15. Focus Group Participants for Intervention 3

Name	Group	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Mary	1	F	Mid-60s	M	Retired school teacher
Gina	1	F	Mid-60s	D	Consultant
Brandy	2	F	Mid-40s	M	Substitute teacher / volunteer
Tammy	1	F	Late 30s	M	Manager
Lydia	2	F	Mid-40s	M	Attorney
Samantha	2	F	Late 30s	M	School guidance counselor
Brad	1	M	Late 60s	M	Retired school principal

¹¹ The participation number is a net number. It corrects for hosts who hosted multiple cottage meetings, and council and Facilities Task Force leaders who lead multiple meetings. The total uncorrected number was sixty-one participants.

¹² Cottage meeting hosts are not considered leaders for the sake of this study.

M = Married; D = Divorced

Intervention 4—Special Congregational Meeting

Intervention 4 was a special congregational meeting that was intended to be the culmination of learnings from the previous interventions. It was attended by forty-one people—twenty females and twenty-one males with a median age of sixty-seven. Eighteen (43.9%) of the attendees are considered current leaders of the congregation. The majority of participants in Intervention 4 (73.2%) also participated in at least one of the previous two congregational meetings. The remaining 26.8% of the participants in Intervention 4 did not participate in a recent congregational meeting. The attendees were divided into five groups of roughly equal size.

Table 5-16 describes those who participated in the focus group for Intervention 4. The beginning portion of this intervention made use of the same values game used in Intervention 3. I chose the members of this focus group based on behaviors I observed during the intervention. Pete seemed disengaged at times. Christa became frustrated and felt her group was not listening to her or taking her seriously. She left the group and returned periodically, but would leave again in frustration. Twila participated in a cottage meeting in Intervention 3 and was familiar with the values exercise. She became the leader of the group which included Christa. My observation was that Twila was trying very hard to include people in the conversation, but had several factors working against her, including the noise in the room, people were in her group who had hearing deficiencies, and some people who wanted to talk but not listen. Mattie, like Twila, participated in a cottage meeting. She became the leader of another group which included

Nikki. Nikki, like Linda, became frustrated and left the group. She spoke with the Council president who explained the purpose of the exercise and that allowed Nikki to go back and re-engage productively in the activity.

Table 5-16. Focus Group Participants for Intervention 4

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Occupation
Mattie	F	Late 60s	M	Retired school teacher
Twila	F	Late 60s	M	Retired
Nikki	F	Mid-60s	M	Information Analyst
Pete	M	Mid-70s	M	Real Estate Agent
Christa	F	Late 70s	W	Retired

M = Married; W = Widowed

Quantitative Data

Introduction

My research question focuses on congregational health and faithfulness as dependent variables that I anticipate being affected by the interventions. Two questions specifically address health and faithfulness—Q30 and Q37. These questions and their supporting questions are explored in this section.

Congregational Health

Descriptive statistics conducted on baseline data show that 55.3% of respondents perceive Community’s decisions as being “healthy.”¹³ This figure is supported by a

¹³ Those who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” on Q30 constituted 55.30%.

median of 4.00 and mean of 3.71. The mode of 3 draws our attention to the fact that most respondents (N=36 or 38.0%) answered “both agree and disagree.” The only demographic that appears to have a contingent relationship regarding the respondents’ perception of congregational health is worship attendance as shown in table 5-17.¹⁴

Table 5-17. Results of Chi-Square Test for Independence Comparing Baseline Respondent Perceptions of Congregational Health (Q30) and Demographics

	N	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Probability
Worship Attendance	94	26.815	15	0.030

The baseline questionnaire describes a healthy congregation as one that involves most of the congregation, requires a high percentage of agreement, expects some conflict, and makes decisions relatively slowly. Table 5-18 highlights these questions and their means. Note that several questions address participation. Question 21 suggests that there must be between 50% and 75% agreement for a decision to be considered “healthy.” Question 24 substantiates this assertion with a mean of 71.66%. Question 28 reports a higher reliance on member participation than I would have expected with a mean of 5.82. Question 29 (mean = 5.02) also indicates the respondents’ belief that healthy decisions are made not by a few people within the congregation, but by a majority of the congregation. Baseline respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that the congregation fit their definition of “healthy” with a mean of 3.71.

¹⁴ Other demographics did not have a contingent relationship, including gender, age, relationship status, worship attendance, education, employment, tenure at Community, or commute

Table 5-18. Baseline Means for Questions Regarding Congregational Health.

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)
Q21 How much consensus must there be for a “healthy” decision?	5.50 (103)
Q25 How quickly are healthy decisions made?	3.68 (99)
Q26 How much conflict do healthy decisions involve?	4.11 (101)
Q27 How much communication do healthy decisions require?	6.22 (101)
Q28 How much membership participation do healthy decisions rely upon?	5.82 (101)
Q29 How much of the congregation should be involved in making decisions?	5.01 (101)
The above questions are on a continuum from 1 = least to 7 = greatest	
Q22 Is 100% consensus desirable?	1.97 (100)
1=Yes; 2=Sometimes; 3=No	
Q24 What percentage agreement is necessary before moving forward?	71.66 (98)
Q24 allowed the respondent to enter any percentage	
Q30 Community’s decisions fit my definition of “healthy”	3.71 (94)
1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree	

Table 5-18 presents a strong argument at the baseline for describing the congregation as active and involved. Table 5-19 presents the results of paired t-tests pertaining to the same nine questions addressed above.

Table 5-19. Paired T-Test Results Concerning Healthy Decision-Making

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q21 How much consensus must there be for a “healthy” decision?	5.53 (49)	5.49 (49)	48	0.423	0.674
Q25 How quickly are healthy decisions made?	3.70 (46)	3.70 (46)	45	0.000	1.000
Q26 How much conflict do healthy decisions involve?	3.94 (48)	3.85 (48)	47	0.418	0.678
Q27 How much communication do healthy decisions require?	6.30 (46)	6.41 (46)	45	-0.778	0.441
Q28 How much membership participation do health decisions rely upon?	5.85 (47)	5.74 (47)	46	0.868	0.390
Q29 How much of the congregation should be involved in making decisions?	4.88 (48)	5.17 (48)	47	-1.569	0.123
The above questions are on a continuum from 1 = least to 7 = greatest					
Q22 Is 100% consensus desirable?	2.00 (49)	2.10 (49)	48	-1.044	0.302
1=Yes; 2=Sometimes; 3=No					
Q24 What percentage agreement is necessary before moving forward?	71.02 (45)	69.14 (45)	44	1.066	0.292
Q24 allowed the respondent to enter any percentage					
Q30 Community’s decisions fit my definition of “healthy”	3.67 (43)	4.07 (43)	42	-3.560	0.001
1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

A clear indication from the baseline questionnaire is the desire for more openness and involvement. Question 29 asked respondents to indicate along a continuum how much of the congregation should be involved in making healthy decisions. On a scale of 1 to 7, 88.12% selected the mid-range or higher, with the greatest concentration selecting 4 (19.80%), 5 (30.69%) or 6 (23.76%).

The only change of significance is in Q30 indicating that respondents agree more strongly that the congregation's decisions fit their definition of "healthy"—a change in mean from 3.67 to 4.07; $t_{(42)} = -3.560$, $p = 0.001$. Comparing the means reflects at least some change in most of the questions. Respondents indicated slight decreases in questions pertaining to consensus (Q21, Q24, and Q28). The increase in the mean for Q22 is attributable to a decrease in the number of people who answered "yes" 100% consensus is desirable (baseline=31.5% to end-line=14.8%), and an increase in the number of people who answered "sometimes" (baseline=35.2% to end-line=51.9%). Slight increases in means are evident in Q27 and Q29, reflecting an increase in communication and congregational involvement, respectively.

Conducting independent t-tests on the nine questions identified above reveals that responses to Q24 and Q30 are statistically different in the same direction as reported by the paired t-test results. Question 24 showed a significant difference in the respondents' perception of how much agreement was required before moving forward with a decision. The mean percentage was reduced from 71.66% to 68.47%; $t_{(165)} = 1.999$, $p = 0.047$. There was an increase in the mean reflecting those who reported that "Community's decisions over the last 12 months fit your definition of 'healthy.'" The mean increased from 3.71 to 4.03; $t_{(160)} = -2.629$, $p = 0.009$.

Table 5-20. Independent T-Test Results Concerning Healthy Decision-Making

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q24 What percentage agreement is necessary before moving forward?	71.66 (98)	68.47 (69)	165	1.999	0.047
Q30 Community's decisions fit my definition of "healthy"	3.71 (94)	4.03 (68)	160	-2.629	0.009

What Are Components of Congregational Health?

A subtle theme that has run through this thesis is that people and groups of people cannot be painted with broad brushstrokes. Concepts such as congregational health likewise defy oversimplification. The quantitative data supports examination of congregational health through the following facets: involvement, communication, process, and impact. The reader may note that these are similar categories as the keywords and key phrases I mentioned in table 5-1.

Congregational Involvement in Decision-Making

The tables that follow build on the tables in the previous section, which showed movement toward less consensus but more involvement. The selected items from Q10 in table 5-21 and table 5-22 address both the availability of opportunities to have input into decision making and a critical element raised through the research—safety.

Table 5-21 highlights two of the watchwords identified in the introduction to this chapter. Statement *d* expresses that people feel they do not have adequate input into decisions made at Community (34.29%). Statement *g* indicates that people may not feel comfortable sharing their perspectives (24.07%). The idea of “creating safe spaces” is one of the watchwords that will be explored throughout this chapter. Statement *h* indicates that people do not feel they have time or opportunity to have input before a decision is made (24.30%), which is addressed through the keyword “process.”

Table 5-21. Baseline Question 10—Perceptions about Congregational Communication (N=118)

Statement	Agreement ¹⁵		Disagreement ¹⁶	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
d) I feel like I have adequate input into the decisions being made at Community	69	65.71	36	34.29
e) If I have information or a perspective I want to share, I know how to do that	90	82.57	19	17.43
f) If I share my perspective, I feel that I will be listened to and respected	84	71.25	22	20.75
g) I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives	82	75.93	26	24.07
h) There is ample opportunity for me to ask questions and have input <i>before</i> decisions are made	81	75.70	26	24.30

Paired t-test results for Q10 saw no significant movement between the baseline and end-line; however, each item increased. These results indicate that respondents increasingly feel as though they have “adequate input” and that there is “ample opportunity” for input. Respondents also felt slightly more that they knew how to share their perspectives. The concept of “safe space” will be explored in the qualitative section of this chapter, but Q10f and Q10g are two places in the questionnaire that address safety. Both items suggest an increase in the respondents’ ability to feel safe as they share their ideas and perspectives.

¹⁵ Agreement includes those who selected either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.”

¹⁶ Disagreement includes those who selected “Both Agree and Disagree,” “Agree,” or “Strongly Disagree.”

Table 5-22. Paired T-Test Results for Q10 Regarding Input and Involvement

Q10 For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
d) I feel like I have adequate input into the decisions begin made at Community	3.81 (48)	3.90 (48)	47	-0.540	0.592
e) If I have information or a perspective I want to share, I know how to do that	4.10 (49)	4.14 (49)	48	-0.256	0.799
f) If I share my perspective, I feel that I will be listened to and respected	4.11 (47)	4.23 (47)	46	-0.883	0.382
g) I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives	4.02 (50)	4.08 (50)	49	-0.394	0.695
h) There is ample opportunity for me to ask question and have input <i>before</i> decisions are made	3.90 (50)	4.04 (50)	49	-0.980	0.332

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Table 5-23 upon later reflection may be difficult to answer because some people noted the double negative—for example, answering “no” reads: “No, I do not feel like I have input into decisions.” If respondents interpreted the question as I intended, Q16g means that there was negative movement between the baseline and end-line. Respondents would have indicated that more of them *do* feel as though they have no input into decisions.

Table 5-23. Paired T-Test Results for Q16

Q16 Which of the following indicates how you have input into decisions at Community	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
g) I do not feel like I have input into decisions	1.94 (33)	1.88 (33)	49	-0.394	0.695

1=Yes; 2=No

Table 5-24, as the other tables in this section, does not show statistical significance. It does show movement in the respondents’ perception after a decision is

made. Question 41e shows positive movement toward more respondents who agree that they feel confident because he or she had an opportunity to have input.

Table 5-24. Paired T-Test Results for Q41

Q41 Once a decision is made ...	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
e) I feel confident in the decision because I had an opportunity to have input	3.85 (39)	3.97 (39)	38	-1.152	0.257

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Table 5-25 indicates that respondents tended to feel that decisions that did not go well were at least partially due to not having enough feedback from the congregation. I cannot say for sure why the mean increased, but it could be attributable to increased awareness of the need to have congregational feedback.

Table 5-25. Paired T-Test Results for Q47

Q47 Not all decisions go well. To what degree do you feel the following have influenced those decisions that have not gone well?	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
c) Not enough feedback from the congregation	2.60 (25)	2.80 (25)	24	-0.840	0.409

1=Very little; 2=Some; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Conducting an independent t-test highlights that there is a difference that was statistically significant between the means for the baseline and end-line Q10h. Respondents felt that they had ample opportunity to ask questions and have input before decisions were made.

Table 5-26. Independent T-Test Results for Q10 Regarding Involvement

Q10 For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
h) There is ample opportunity for me to ask questions and have input <i>before</i> decisions are made	3.87 (107)	4.11 (76)	181	-2.063	0.041

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Congregational Communication in the Decision-Making Process

Communication in any group can be difficult. Simply coordinating social plans with a group of three or four friends can be extremely frustrating. Coordinating and making decisions among hundreds of people in a congregation proves much more challenging, especially when some of them are very involved while others are loosely attached. The qualitative analysis, which will be discussed later in this chapter, helped to add depth and personality to the simple word *communication*.

Community is engaged in the conceptual phase of a building program, so people ask questions such as: “What’s going on?” and “What happened and why?” Communication usually involves receiving information with clarity from leaders before, during, and after decisions. Communication raises awareness of ideas, decisions, and the rationale involved. Involvement, as described above, tends to refer to the role of the congregation members in being aware of the communication, receiving it, and engaging it.

The baseline questionnaire indicates moderately strong support of Community’s communication, which is encouraging. One must also view the opposite perspective that these numbers represent. The fact that approximately one-third of the respondents who

have described themselves as active members of the church answered questions Q10*b*, Q10*c*, and Q10*i* that they disagree with the statements is worth the attention of congregational leaders. The bolded numbers in the Disagreement Percent column in table 5-27 draw out themes that reappear throughout the research.

Table 5-27. Baseline Question 10—Perceptions about Congregational Communication (N=118)

Statement	Agreement ¹⁷		Disagreement ¹⁸	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
a) I have a good understanding of the activities and events happening at Community	92	82.14	20	17.86
b) I am knowledgeable of the more significant decisions being made at Community	78	71.56	31	28.44
c) Before a <i>significant</i> congregational decision, I feel like I have the information I need	68	65.15	38	35.85
i) I know where to look for information about up-coming decisions	79	71.17	32	28.83

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Several respondents for Q10*c* (35.85%) do not feel they have the information they need before a significant decision. Fewer, but still a high percentage, reported that they do not know where to look for information about up-coming decisions (Q10*i* 28.83%), and that they do not feel knowledgeable about significant decisions being made at Community (Q10*b* 28.44%).

¹⁷ Agreement includes those who selected either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.”

¹⁸ Disagreement includes those who selected “Both Agree and Disagree,” “Agree,” or “Strongly Disagree.”

A cursory review of the paired t-test and independent t-test results for the questions relating to communication shows very little of significance.¹⁹ The independent t-test results for Q10c and the paired t-test results for Q47b are considered statistically significant and are described below.

Table 5-28. Paired T-Test Results for Q10 Regarding Communication

Q10 For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
a) I have a good understanding of the activities and events happening at Community	4.18 (51)	4.29 (51)	50	-0.799	0.428
b) I am knowledgeable of the more significant decisions being made at Community	4.04 (48)	4.10 (48)	47	-0.425	0.673
c) Before a significant congregational decision, I feel like I have the information I need	3.90 (48)	4.10 (48)	47	-1.401	0.168
i) I know where to look for information about up-coming decisions	3.76 (50)	3.98 (50)	49	-1.531	0.132

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Table 5-28 shows the paired t-test results for selected items within Q10. None of the items are statistically significant; however, the means of each increases. An increasing mean for each of these statements means that the respondents are moving more toward the “Strongly agree” side of the scale. The means themselves indicate that respondents agree that there is communication about up-coming decisions, they are provided the information they need, and they know where to find more information.

¹⁹ The questions I saw as pertinent to the topic of communication are Q10a, Q10b, Q10c, Q10i, Q11, Q14a, Q14c, Q27, Q41c, and Q47b.

Table 5-29. Paired T-Test Results for Q11 Regarding Communication

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q11 When decisions or goals change, how often does Community's leadership explain why this has happened?	2.07 (44)	1.98 (44)	43	0.781	0.439

1=Always; 2=Most of the time; 3=About half of the time; 4=Once in a while; 5=Never

Table 5-29 reports the results of the paired t-test for Q11. A decreasing mean in this case is positive. These results, like those in table 5-28, indicate that communication is happening already with the baseline mean of 2.07 and the end-line mean of 1.98 closely aligned to “most of the time;” $t_{(43)} = 0.781$, $p = 0.439$. The decreasing mean shows movement toward “always.”

Table 5-30. Paired T-Test Results for Q14 Regarding Communication

Q14 Assess the value of the following when making decisions at church	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
a) Transparency	4.63 (49)	4.55 (49)	48	1.000	0.322
c) Individuals open to changing their minds	4.40 (47)	4.30 (47)	46	1.044	0.302

1=Not important at all; 2=Not important; 3=Both important and unimportant; 4=Important; 5=Very important

Table 5-30 presents curious results. The paired t-test results for all six items in Q14 showed a decrease in mean. “Transparency” may have decreased because a goal through this project was to have people experience increased transparency. The same logic may be in place for “individuals open to changing their minds,” but I would still expect the mean for openness to have increased.

Table 5-31. Paired T-Test Results for Q27 Regarding Communication

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q27 In your experience, “healthy” decisions require 1=Very little communication to 7=Significant communication	6.30 (46)	6.41 (46)	45	-0.778	0.441

Table 5-31 shows the paired t-test results for Q27, which was a continuum with the lowest value as *1=Very little communication* to the highest value *7=Significant communication*. These results show slight movement toward an understanding of healthy decisions requiring significant communication; $t_{(45)} = -0.778$, $p = 0.441$.

Table 5-32. Paired T-Test Results for Q41 Regarding Communication

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q41 Once a decision is made ... c) the decision and rationale is communicated clearly to the congregation	3.90 (42)	4.12 (42)	46	1.044	0.302

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Table 5-32, like most of the previous tables in this section, show positive movement of an already strong response. The baseline mean = 3.90 and the end-line mean = 4.12 both indicate that respondents agree with the statement in Q41c. The increased mean indicates movement toward “strongly agree;” $t_{(46)} = 1.044$, $p = 0.302$.

Table 5-33. Paired T-Test Results for Q47 Regarding Communication

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q47 Not all decisions go well. To what degree do you feel the following have influenced those decisions that have not gone well at Community? b) Not enough information	2.96 (26)	2.54 (26)	25	2.101	0.046

1=Very little; 2=Some; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Question 47 asked respondents to reflect on decisions that did not go well at Community and to rate the influence of six items on those decisions. Table 5-33 shows that there was a difference that was statistically significant between the baseline mean = 2.96 and the end-line mean of 2.54; $t_{(25)} = 2.101$, $p = 0.046$. The baseline respondents indicated that not having enough information had much influence on decisions that did not go well at Community. The statistical significance is helpful, and I would expect to see the mean continue to decline given enough time and congregational experience with decision-making.

Table 5-34. Independent T-Test Results for Q10 Regarding Communication

Q10 For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
c) Before a significant congregational decision, I feel like I have the information I need	3.75 (106)	4.08 (75)	177	-1.178	0.012

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Conducting independent t-tests on the same questions as for the paired t-tests results in similar conclusions: that there was very little of statistical significance, but there was positive movement in each of them. The only item with a difference that had statistically significant means is Q10c. The baseline mean = 3.75 indicates agreement with the statement in Q10c, but a tendency toward “both agree and disagree.” The end-line mean = 4.08 shows statistically significant movement toward “agree;” $t_{(177)} = -1.178$, $p = 0.012$.

Congregational Decision-Making Process

What Influences the Decision-Making Process?

Decisions are not made in a vacuum. This section explores what respondents viewed as having influence on the congregation's decision-making. Question 13 explored the influence of bias, making decisions for the good of the whole congregation, and making decisions based on values and priorities. Question 13e and Q47d both examine the concept of making decisions based on shared congregational values and priorities for two reasons: to use the PAR to raise awareness and teach about shared values and priorities, and to better understand the congregation's understanding of our use of values and priorities.

Table 5-35. Paired T-Test Results for Q13 Regarding Influence

Q13 Based on your experience with decision-making at Community, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
b) I feel that biases play an undue role in affecting the outcome of decisions	2.72 (39)	2.64 (39)	38	0.595	0.555
d) I feel that decisions are made for the benefit of the <i>whole</i> congregation	3.79 (48)	3.85 (48)	47	-0.573	0.569
e) I feel that decisions are made based on the congregation's agreed upon values and priorities	3.81 (47)	3.83 (47)	46	-0.167	0.868
Q41 Once a decision is made ...					
d) I feel that decisions are made for the benefit of the <i>whole</i> congregation	3.88 (43)	4.02 (43)	42	-1.289	0.204
1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

All four statements show minor movement in a positive direction even though none of them is statistically significant. Question 13b decreasing mean is positive

because the baseline mean = 2.72 is reduced to an end-line mean = 2.64, which signifies that respondents tend toward disagreeing that bias plays an undue role in decision-making. Question 13d and Q41d are identical statements. The wording of the question in Q13 asks the respondent to reflect based on their experience in the congregation. The wording for Q41 asks about more current practices.

I did not anticipate a significant difference between the baseline and end-line for Q13e, but I was pleased to see movement in a positive direction and that respondents tend to agree that decisions are based on the congregation's agreed upon values and priorities.

Table 5-36. Paired T-Test Results for Q14 Regarding Influence

Q14 Assess the value of the following when making decisions at church.	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
d) Being aware of the financial costs	4.58 (50)	4.46 (50)	49	1.181	0.243
f) Keeping the peace	3.53 (47)	3.43 (47)	46	1.093	0.280

1=Not important at all; 2=Not important; 3=Both important and unimportant; 4=Important; 5=Very important

Table 5-36 shows that awareness of financial costs has an influence on making decisions at Community. The baseline mean = 4.58 and end-line mean = 4.46 both indicate that respondents answered between agree and strongly agree. The mean for the paired grouping decreased slightly but not in a statistically significant way. This decrease could indicate that people are not using financial costs as the sole factor in healthy decision-making. Keeping the peace (Q14f) likewise decreased slightly. This decrease could indicate that the congregation and congregational leaders are gaining confidence in their decision-making and decision-making process.

Table 5-37. Paired T-Test Results for Q47 Regarding Influence

Q47 Not all decisions go well. To what degree do you feel the following have influenced those decisions that have not gone well at Community?	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
d) Not focusing on the congregation's <i>shared</i> values and priorities	2.95 (22)	2.59 (22)	21	1.789	0.088
e) Financial implications	3.18 (28)	3.14 (28)	27	0.166	0.869

1=Very little; 2=Some; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Interpreters of results for paired t-tests in this study would normally expect to see increases in the mean from baseline to end-line to indicate positive change. Table 5-37 is one of the exceptions as a decreasing mean is positive. The questions ask what elements have influenced decisions that have *not* gone well. I would have expected Q47d to increase given the slight increase noted for Q13e in table 5-35. The slight decrease in Q47e is consonant with the decrease in Q14d perhaps indicating that financial implications play less of a role.

Table 5-38. Independent T-Test Results with Differences that were Statistically Significant Regarding Influence

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q13b I feel that biases play an undue role in affecting the outcome of decisions	3.00 (94)	2.62 (63)	155	2.297	0.023

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3= Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Q47d The influence of not focusing on the congregation's <i>shared</i> values and priorities for decision-making	2.98 (63)	2.49 (45)	106	2.609	0.010
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1=Very little; 2=Some; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Table 5-38 reports the results of independent t-tests for the same questions as those conducted by the paired t-tests earlier in this section. A difference that was statistically significant exists in Q13b between the baseline mean = 3.00 and the end-line mean = 2.62; $t_{(155)} = 2.297$, $p = 0.023$. This decrease signifies that respondents feel that they perceived bias played less of a role in decision-making at the end of the research period than at the beginning.

A difference that was statistically significant exists in Q47d between the baseline mean = 2.98 and the end-line mean = 2.49; $t_{(106)} = 2.609$, $p = 0.010$. This indicates that respondents feel that not focusing on shared values and priorities had less impact on decisions that have not gone well. These are the same findings as reported for the paired t-test with the exception that the independent t-test proved statistically significant.

Various respondents could also have interpreted the number of negatives in the combined question and statement in Q47d differently.

What Happens After a Decision is Made?

Communication and involvement play significant roles in the process of decision-making leading up to the point of making the decision. Van Gelder's Five Phases of Discernment were used throughout the research period, but no questions in the baseline or end-line were included to measure the effectiveness of this tool.²⁰ The qualitative analysis below explores the increased presence of the word "discernment" as the research period progressed.

²⁰ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 1879.

Decisions must ultimately be made by someone or some group of people. Table 5-39 displays a frequency analysis of Q15. The largest percentage of respondents in both the baseline (29.4%) and end-line (51.7%) believe that “decisions are primarily made by the pastor with Council in open session.” Those who believe that decisions are made by “Council only” increased as well—from 4.6% to 13.3%. Those who believe decisions are made by “the congregation” decreased from a baseline of 15.6% to an end-line of 11.7%. I do not know that there is any statistical value or if there are conclusions that may be drawn from these frequencies, but they may indicate that the congregation needs to gain clarity about its decision-making process and who makes decisions.

Table 5-39. Frequency on Baseline and End-line for Q15

Decisions are primarily made by ...	<i>n_b</i> (<i>P_b</i>)	<i>n_e</i> (<i>P_e</i>)
Pastor only	1 (0.9%)	1 (1.7%)
Council only	5 (4.6%)	8 (13.3%)
Pastor with Council in open session	32 (29.4%)	31 (51.7%)
Pastor with Council in closed session	9 (8.3%)	5 (8.3%)
Ministry teams	6 (5.5%)	3 (5.0%)
The congregation	17 (15.6%)	7 (11.7%)
Individuals	1 (0.9%)	1 (1.7%)
Other	6 (5.1%)	4 (6.7%)

The Pre-Session Survey in appendix N sheds further light on the need for clarity in the decision process. Question 6 asked how confident leaders felt that they and their team knew what the process was for making a decision at Community. Thirty leaders

reported that they felt confident in the decision process (mean = 4.0). The frequencies show us that 27.27% of leaders responded that they felt somewhere between *not confident* and *both confident and not confident*.

The decision-making process does not end with the decision itself. How a congregation and its leaders—the “winners” and the “losers”—carry on after the decision is also important for a congregation to be healthy.

Table 5-40. Paired T-Test Results for Q17 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q17 Considering your answers to questions 15 and 16 above, how good do you feel the decision-making process has been for the <u>whole</u> congregation?	3.74 (43)	4.14 (43)	42	-3.053	0.004
1=Not good at all; 2=Not good; 3=Both good and not good; 4=Good; 5=Very good					

Table 5-40 compares the baseline mean of Q17 = 3.74 and the end-line mean = 4.14. This analysis shows an increase in this mean which is statistically significant; $t_{(42)} = -3.053$, $p = 0.004$. This change indicates that respondents increasingly are perceiving that the decision-making process has been good for the whole congregation.

Table 5-41. Paired T-Test Results for Q25 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q25 In your experience, “healthy” decisions are made ...	3.70 (46)	3.70 (46)	45	0.000	1.000
1=Very slowly 7=Very quickly					

Table 5-41 asks respondents about their perspective about the speed with which decisions are made. The paired t-test showed the same mean for both the baseline and

end-line responses. The mean = 3.70 on a scale of 7 and where the midpoint is 4 indicates that respondents believed healthy decisions to be made slightly more slowly.

Table 5-42. Paired T-Test Results for Q41 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

Q41 Once a decision is made ...	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
a) It is implemented quickly	3.30 (37)	3.27 (37)	36	0.206	0.838
f) I feel confident in the leadership's handling of it	4.12 (41)	4.07 (41)	40	0.422	0.675

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Table 5-42 explores responses to Q41 and whether respondents perceived any changes to the speed of implementation after a decision is made or confidence in the leadership's handling of the decision. Neither item shows change that was statistically significant between the baseline and end-line. It is of note, however, that there was a slight decrease in *f* from the baseline mean = 4.12 to the end-line mean = 4.07. The timeframe of the research study may have been too short to affect any change in this item—confidence, like trust, takes time to build.

Table 5-43. Paired T-Test Results for Q47 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

Q47 Not all decisions go well. To what degree do you feel the following have influenced those decisions that have not gone well at Community?	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
a) The decision was rushed	2.68 (22)	2.32 (22)	21	1.402	0.176

1=Very little; 2=Some; 3=Much; 4=Very much

Table 5-43 uses Q47 to substantiate the results in table 5-41. There was no change that was statistically significant from the baseline to the end-line, but it indicates that decisions being rushed is not a major factor in decisions not going well at Community.

Table 5-44. Paired T-Test Results for Q41 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

Q41 Once a decision is made ...	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
b) the congregation is supportive	3.63 (40)	3.63 (40)	39	0.000	1.000
g) I am supportive even if I do not agree with the decision	3.93 (41)	4.10 (41)	40	-1.639	0.109

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Table 5-44 asked the respondents to consider the congregation's response as well as their own after a decision is made. Question 41b showed no change from the baseline mean of 3.63 to the end-line mean. This item shows that respondents tend to agree that the congregation is supportive following a decision. Questions 41g shows a slight increase in the mean from the baseline = 3.93 to the end-line = 4.10, but this change is not statistically significant. This indicates that respondents feel a bit more strongly that they are supportive even if they do not agree with the decision.

Table 5-45. Paired T-Test Results for Q39 Regarding Actions Following a Decision

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q39 After a decision is made at Community, I generally feel ...	4.05 (43)	4.14 (43)	42	-1.071	0.290

1=Very discouraged; 2=Discouraged; 3=Both hopeful and discouraged; 4=Hopeful; 5=Very hopeful

Table 5-45 asked respondents to consider how they generally feel after a decision is made at Community. There was a slight increase in the mean from the baseline = 4.05 to the end-line = 4.14 but this change is not statistically significant. These results indicate

that respondents generally feel hopeful following a decision with some tending toward “very hopeful.” Independent t-tests were conducted on all questions in this section. The results yield the same findings as those from the paired t-test.

What is the Role of Faithfulness in Congregational Decision-Making?

All organizations make decisions. Christian organizations do not make decisions based on logic alone because faith and faith practices influence those decisions. This section examines responses to baseline and end-line questionnaires regarding faithfulness.

Initial descriptive statistics show that 60.70% of respondents perceive Community’s decisions as being “faithful.”²¹ Stating that the majority of respondents view the congregation as “faithful” is encouraging to church leaders; however, 39.3% of respondents either question the congregation’s faithfulness or disagree (strongly disagree: N=1 or 1.1%; disagree: N=4 or 4.5%; both agree and disagree: N=30 or 33.7%). Table 5-46 shows the only two demographic variables which have a contingent relationship with respondent perspectives on congregational faithfulness.

Table 5-46. Results of Chi-Square Test for Independence Comparing the Respondent's Perspective of Congregational Faithfulness (Q37) and Demographics

	N	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Probability
Employment	89	42.221	16	0.000
Tenure	89	26.815	15	0.030

²¹ 60.70% is comprised of those who answered “agree” or “strongly agree” on Q37.

Table 5-47 and table 5-48 show paired t-test and independent t-test results for Q37 and Q13c. The scope of time in Q37 changes from decisions made “during my time at Community” in the baseline to “over the last 12 months” in the end-line.

Table 5-47. Paired T-Test Results for Q37 and Q13c Regarding Faithfulness

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q37 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community’s decisions (during my time at Community / over the last 12 months) fit your definition of “faithful”?	3.72 (39)	4.03 (39)	38	-2.508	0.017
Q13c I feel as though Community’s decisions are made based on God’s will for our congregation	3.66 (47)	3.81 (47)	46	-1.359	0.181

1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Both the paired t-test and independent t-test results showed a difference that was statistically significant between the baseline and end-line. The paired t-test results for Q37 showed a significant increase in mean from baseline = 3.72 to an end-line = 4.03; $t_{(38)} = 2.508$, $p = 0.017$. Likewise, the independent t-test results for Q37 showed a significant increase in mean from baseline = 3.73 to end-line = 4.11; $t_{(152)} = -2.799$, $p = 0.006$. This increase signifies that respondents tended to agree that decisions fit their definition of “faithful.”

Table 5-48. Independent T-Test Results for Q37 and Q13c Regarding Faithfulness

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q37 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community’s decisions (during my time at	3.73 (89)	4.11 (65)	152	-2.799	0.006

Community / over the last 12 months) fit your definition of “faithful”?

Q13c I feel as though Community’s decisions are made based on God’s will for our congregation	3.46 (100)	3.84 (74)	172	-2.939	0.004
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1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Question 13 asks respondents to consider whether they agree that the

congregation’s decisions are made based on God’s will for the congregation. The paired t-test results show an increase in mean from baseline = 3.66 to end-line = 3.81, but this is not a difference that was statistically significant. The independent t-test results, however, do indicate a significant difference from the baseline = 3.46 to end-line = 3.84; $t_{(172)} = -2.939$, $p = 0.004$.

Table 5-49. Paired and Independent T-Test Results for Q14e Regarding Faithfulness

Q14e Assess the value of the following when making decisions at church: Discerning God’s call	\bar{X}_b (N_b)	\bar{X}_e (N_e)	df	t-value	p
Paired t-test results	4.74 (46)	4.61 (46)	45	1.521	0.135
Independent t-test results	4.56 (102)	4.65 (79)	178	-0.968	0.334

1=Not important at all; 2=Not important; 3=Both important and unimportant; 4=Important; 5=Very important

Table 5-49 shows the paired t-test and independent t-test results for Q14e. The paired t-test results show the mean *decreasing* from baseline = 4.74 to end-line = 4.61. The independent t-test results, on the other hand, show the mean increasing from baseline = 4.56 to end-line = 4.65. I am unsure of the reasons for the decrease in the paired population and increase in the independent population. I would have expected both to increase due to awareness and teaching through the research period about discernment.

Table 5-50. Paired T-Test Results Regarding Faithfulness

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Q32 In your opinion, congregations that make “faithful” decisions 1=“Leave the Bible out of it” to 7=“Make significant use of the Bible”	5.02 (47)	5.34 (47)	46	-2.054	0.046
Q33 “Faithful” congregations tend to be 1=“What’s best for me” to 7=“What the congregation believes is God’s call”	5.81 (47)	6.09 (47)	46	-2.372	0.022
Q34 Regarding the role of finances, “faithful” decisions tend to be 1=“What makes sense financially” to 7=“What makes sense <i>regardless</i> of finances”	3.79 (47)	4.23 (47)	46	-1.634	0.109
Q35 In your opinion, congregations that make “faithful” decisions tend to engage in faith practices (such as prayer) 1=“Seldom” to 7= “Very Often”	5.62 (47)	5.94 (47)	46	-2.054	0.046
Q36 “Faithful” congregations engage in practices of spiritual discernment (i.e. listening to God and one another to determine what God wants) 1=“Very infrequently” to 5=“Very frequently”	3.89 (47)	4.04 (47)	46	-1.359	0.181

Questions Q32 through Q36 are continuum questions each of which exhibits positive change. Question 32 asks respondents to rate from one to seven along the continuum how much the Bible should be used in making faithful decisions from “leave the Bible out of it” to “make significant use of the Bible.” The mean changed significantly from 5.02 in the baseline to 5.34 in the end-line; $t_{(46)} = -2.054$, $p = 0.046$.

Respondents felt that faithful congregations tend to make more extensive use of the Bible in decision-making.

Question 33 asked respondents to rate from one to seven along a continuum whether faithful decisions should favor “what’s best for me” through “what the congregation believes is God’s call.” The mean changed significantly for this question as well from 5.81 to 6.09 marking a shift toward communal rather than individual thinking; $t_{(46)} = -2.372$, $p = 0.022$.

Question 34 addresses the very difficult decision between faith and finances. It asks whether “faithful” decisions tend to be those that make sense financially or those that make sense regardless of finances. Paired t-test results show an increase in the mean from baseline = 3.79 to end-line 4.23, but this increase is not statistically significant. The independent t-test results mirror the paired t-test results as they mark an increase from a baseline = 3.69 to an end-line = 4.16. This question is a continuum with 4 as the midpoint, which marks a move away from finances being the primary determiner in congregational decision-making for both paired and independent populations. This topic is addressed in greater detail in the qualitative section of this chapter.

Question 35 also experienced a significant change between the baseline and end-line. Question 35 asked how often congregations that are making faithful decisions engage in faith practices in their decision-making process. The scale is from 1 = “seldom” to 7 = “very often.” Respondents moved toward “very often” with a baseline mean = 5.62 to an end-line mean = 5.94; $t_{(46)} = -2.054$, $p = 0.046$.

Question 36, like Q35, asked respondents to consider practices of spiritual discernment. The paired t-test and independent t-test results both show an increase in

mean, but neither of them is statistically significant. The paired t-test results increased from a baseline = 3.89 to end-line = 4.04. The independent t-test results increased from a baseline = 3.92 to end-line = 4.06. The scale for Q36 notes that 4 = “Frequently.” Question 35 and Q36 considered together indicate that both paired and independent populations see spiritual practices and discernment as an important factor in the decision-making process of “faithful” congregations.

Is There a Difference in Perceptions of Congregational Health and Faithfulness?

One of the goals of this process was to include more people in the conversation. Ninety-nine people attended at least one intervention. Ninety-nine people also attended at least one congregational meeting over the last two years. The cross-tabulation table below indicates that these populations are not the same.

Table 5-51. Crosstab Showing Participation in Interventions and Congregational Meetings

	Did not attend either congregational meeting	Attended at least one congregational meeting	Total
Did not participate in any interventions	3	34	37
Participated in at least one intervention	34	65	99
Total	37	99	136

Table 5-52 asks whether there was a change in mean from the baseline to the end-line for Q30 and Q37 based on whether the respondent participated in any of the four interventions. Paired t-test baseline and end-line results for the population that did not participate in any interventions is listed first, followed by the results of those who did participate.

Table 5-52. Paired T-Test Results for Q30 and Q37 by Intervention Participation

	\bar{X}_b (N _b)	\bar{X}_e (N _e)	df	t-value	p
Did not participate in any interventions					
Q30 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community's decisions (during my time at Community / over the last 12 months) fit my definition of "healthy"?	3.90 (10)	4.00 (10)	9	-0.429	0.678
Participated in at least one intervention					
Q30 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community's decisions (during my time at Community / over the last 12 months) fit my definition of "healthy"?	3.61 (33)	4.09 (33)	32	-3.909	0.000
Did not participate in any interventions					
Q37 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community's decisions (during my time at Community / over the last 12 months) fit your definition of "faithful"?	4.00 (10)	4.10 (10)	9	-0.557	0.591
Participated in at least one intervention					
Q37 In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community's decisions (during my time at Community / over the last 12 months) fit your definition of "faithful"?	3.62 (29)	4.00 (29)	28	-2.491	0.019
1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Both agree and disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree					

Responses for Q30 in both populations increased. The increase in mean from baseline = 3.61 to end-line = 4.09 of those who participated in at least one intervention was statistically significant; $t_{(32)} = -3.909$, $p < 0.001$.

Responses for Q37 likewise increased for both populations. The increase in mean from baseline = 3.62 to end-line = 4.00 of those who participated in at least one intervention was statistically significant; $t_{(28)} = -2.491$, $p = 0.019$.

Summary of Quantitative Data

Baseline responses tended to support the original purpose of this research project—that conflict exists within the congregation around the concepts of communication, leadership, and decision-making. Some respondents reported not being heard or not being part of the process. The wide distribution of answers for Q15 tells a clear story even though there is no statistical significance. People are not clear on how decisions are made and by whom.

The comparison of baseline and end-line results indicates a general movement toward improved health and faithfulness in the congregation. Respondents in the baseline questionnaire reported feeling hopeful after a decision was made (Q39). End-line respondents felt even more hopeful. There was a change that was statistically significant between the baseline and end-line for Q17 indicating that respondents felt the decision-making process benefitted the *whole* congregation. Congregational focus on health and faithfulness in our decision-making, communicating, and relationships through this research project has been productive.

Qualitative Data

Introduction

Qualitative data were derived from open-ended questions in the baseline and end-line questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, meeting notes, documents, and journals.

Chapter 4 described the design of this research project and how people were selected to participate.

Baseline Qualitative Data

Baseline data is derived from five sources, including Facilities Task Force meeting notes, an ART meeting, and open-ended questions from the baseline questionnaire. Analysis of qualitative data from the baseline questionnaire yielded 201 *in vivo* codes. Table 5-53 below lists thirty-two focused codes which were derived from the *in vivo* codes resulting in the four axial codes.

Table 5-53. Baseline Survey Axial and Focused Codes from Baseline Questionnaire

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Congregational decision-making culture
FC-4	Dialogue should be respectful, welcome all points of view, not be overtaken by outspoken people, and allow all interested voices to be heard
FC-5	Leadership plays an important role in creating a safe space for people to share their views and express their concerns
FC-7	Decisions should not change drastically from one leadership team to its successor without an explanation of rationale
FC-9	Members share the responsibility in communication and dissemination by being involved, knowing the facts, asking questions, and discerning God's call
FC-10	Leaders are responsible for sharing accurate, timely, and accessible information
FC-12	Including members in the decision process helps them feel important, valued, needed, wanted, and worthy
FC-17	Honest disagreement should be viewed as a positive because it is a sign of diversity and eventually leads to a better decision with more buy-in
FC-22	Decision-makers and the congregation should enter decisions with an open mind, thoughtfully and prayerfully, and willing to compromise
FC-23	All reasonable efforts should be made to involve and re-engage congregation members
FC-30	The Holy Spirit speaks to people differently, so we should be open to what the Holy Spirit is doing and saying through others

Table 5-53. Baseline Survey Axial and Focused Codes from Baseline Questionnaire (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-2 Preparing for a decision	
FC-3	Decisions should be made through an open and transparent process of dialogue and decision-making
FC-6	People making a proposal for a decision should ensure that the right people are involved and that decision-makers have all of the information they need
FC-11	There should be adequate time before decisions are made for facts and God's call to be considered, and for member involvement
FC-14	Leadership and the decision-making process should be open—including others in the decision who are outside of formal leadership circles
FC-15	Leaders and decision-makers should be aware of their biases, not push a particular agenda, and consider what is best for the whole congregation
FC-16	Decision-makers should help get the congregation on the same page
FC-20	All reasonable options should be explored and understood
FC-21	A clear statement should be made defining the decision, explaining the rationale, and identifying a contact person
FC-25	Decisions involve dialogue with members in home groups
FC-27	Leaders should include information sharing and involving people in their planning timeline
AC-3 Making a decision	
FC-1	Decisions should not be made to appease a small, self-serving minority
FC-2	Decisions should be made based on facts, faith, and what's good for the whole congregation rather than who will be upset
FC-8	Dialogue is necessary, but, after discussion, a decision needs to be made
FC-13	Decisions should maintain the focus that we are about serving God and doing His will rather than serving ourselves and doing our will
FC-24	Decisions should consider both our faith and the practicalities like finances
FC-29	Major decisions should seek greater consensus
FC-31	The desire for consensus should not be used to stifle honest questions
FC-32	Decisions involve faith by using the Bible in context, including the verses that challenge our perspective
AC-4 Implementing a decision	
FC-18	The entire congregation should come together as one and support the decision
FC-19	Progress reports should be shared to keep the congregation informed
FC-26	The final decision and rationale should be clearly communicated

My coding initially appeared to follow a three-part decision-making process: preparing for a decision, making a decision, and implementing a decision. I noticed that

many of the focused codes either addressed concerns *outside* of a process or included the word “should.” These concerns and “should’s” clarify the respondents’ expectations or values when making decisions in a Christian congregation. Theoretical coding generated the diagram in figure 5-2. The congregational decision-making culture explains the values and expectations that serve as the foundation for the decision-making process—these must be in place as part of the congregation’s culture before the congregation can be prepared for healthy and faithful decision-making.

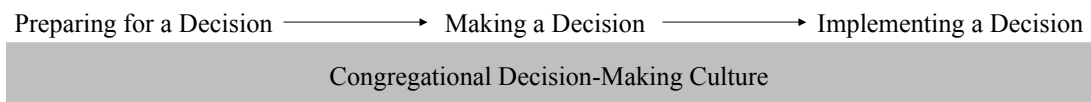


Figure 5-2. Theoretical Relationships of Axial Codes of Baseline Questionnaire

Specific observations from the data are worth mentioning here to give the reader further insight into comments from the baseline questionnaire respondents. Some respondents said that, in their experience, decisions were being handled well and with appropriate transparency. Virtually all respondents had comments to Q44 and Q45. Twenty-five of the sixty-one responses to Q44 identified some aspect having to do with the music director position; almost all of them having to do with the hiring or termination of a specific music director. The next most frequently mentioned topic is related to the purchase and installation of new pipes for the pipe organ—this topic was mentioned fourteen times in response to Q44. Issues raised largely dealt with finances along with questions of leadership. One such respondent wrote, “Budget seems to be the shield by which a lot of decisions are made; and I feel the budget is a manipulative tool used by a few self-serving interest groups.”

The responses also indicated that, not only did people have different opinions about major decisions in Community's past, but they did not even perceive or interpret the circumstances in the same manner. For example, most respondents indicated that they felt the decision to upgrade the organ was ill-advised. One respondent wrote that the "organ decision [was] made by a few with little and even erroneous information." A proponent for the organ upgrade wrote, "When the pipes were added to the organ, we went through this process, but the Council and pastor were very skeptical until we could assure them of the money raised." This statement is one in which the interpretation of circumstances hints at details and a resolution that do not match my own interpretation or the interpretation of several baseline respondents. An observer of the initiative to replace or upgrade the organ noted an apparent discrepancy between decisions made by two different Councils. This respondent wrote, "Council decided not to move forward on the purchase of a pipe organ, and the following year a Council with different membership changed direction to authorize the acquisition of a pipe organ."

These specific comments give fuller expression to the focused and axial codes. They also underscore the importance of applying the congregational decision-making values listed among the theoretical codes.

Table 5-54 is a compilation of focused and axial codes derived from thirty-three *in vivo* codes gathered from meeting notes from the Facilities Task Force as well as my ART *prior* to the first intervention and *prior* to the compilation of the baseline survey results.²² The perspective out of which the codes developed is worth noting specifically.

²² The Facilities Task Force meetings were held on September 3, 2016; October 8, 2016; and November 12, 2016. The ART meeting was held on November 12, 2016.

The focused and axial codes reflect the nature of leadership and task force discussions about how the congregation might move forward with decisions regarding a potential building program.

Table 5-54. Focused and Axial Codes from Conversations Prior to Intervention 1

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Understanding and contextualizing the problem
FC-2	Making connections for congregation members between concepts and needs
FC-3	Gathering lists of planned building maintenance items
FC-4	Understanding significant building issues
FC-9	Being aware of our mission, values, and relationships with community groups
FC-10	Focusing the question with the congregation: “Do we pursue a major building program in the next 5–10 years, or do we maintain the existing structure?”
FC-11	Anticipating member questions list: “Why are we considering this?”
FC-15	Discussing the risks involved with each option, including doing nothing
FC-17	Adding the contextual question: “How do we care for, maintain, and upgrade our own homes?”
AC-2	Developing a process
FC-6	Developing a plan with options, scenarios, and phases
FC-7	Actively and intentionally involving others in discussions and deliberations
FC-8	Consider ways to raise money
FC-12	Communicating with people to let them know about progress and opportunities
FC-13	Keeping ourselves focused on the process to answer congregation questions: “Then what?” and “What’s next?”
FC-14	Encouraging people to thoughtfully consider the options and challenges considering what is best for the whole congregation
FC-16	Thinking strategically about major milestones like congregational meetings and how to involve and inform people in advance of those milestone events
AC-3	Giving the task force authority and confidence to move forward
FC-1	Giving the task force the confidence that the congregation agrees with their concepts
FC-5	Affirming that the charter of the task force was to dream and discern God’s call first before considering costs and other practicalities

These axial codes address several keywords listed on page 158, even though they are early in the research process: *involvement*, *awareness*, and *process*. AC-1 and AC-2 raise issues of process, but AC-3 raises a learning that did not become apparent until one of the end-line interviews. The Facilities Task Force expressed very clearly through these meetings what they need from the congregation and the leadership—a concept I include under the word “mutuality.” FC-9 draws attention to the constant focus this task force has had on ensuring that “the building fits our mission,” a concept they heard from an early meeting with a Mission Investment Fund representative. Their request for support arose because the task force became stuck. The people researching financing options needed a better idea of a realistic cost for the project, and the congregation had been asking about the cost. The task force, however, was not able to get better cost or time estimates because the congregation did not fund the work of this task force when they decided to pursue building renovations. Hiring an architect who could answer these questions is impossible without the necessary funding.

I developed the theoretical coding in figure 5-3 using the focused and axial codes from table 5-54. The bold type reflects the three axial codes.

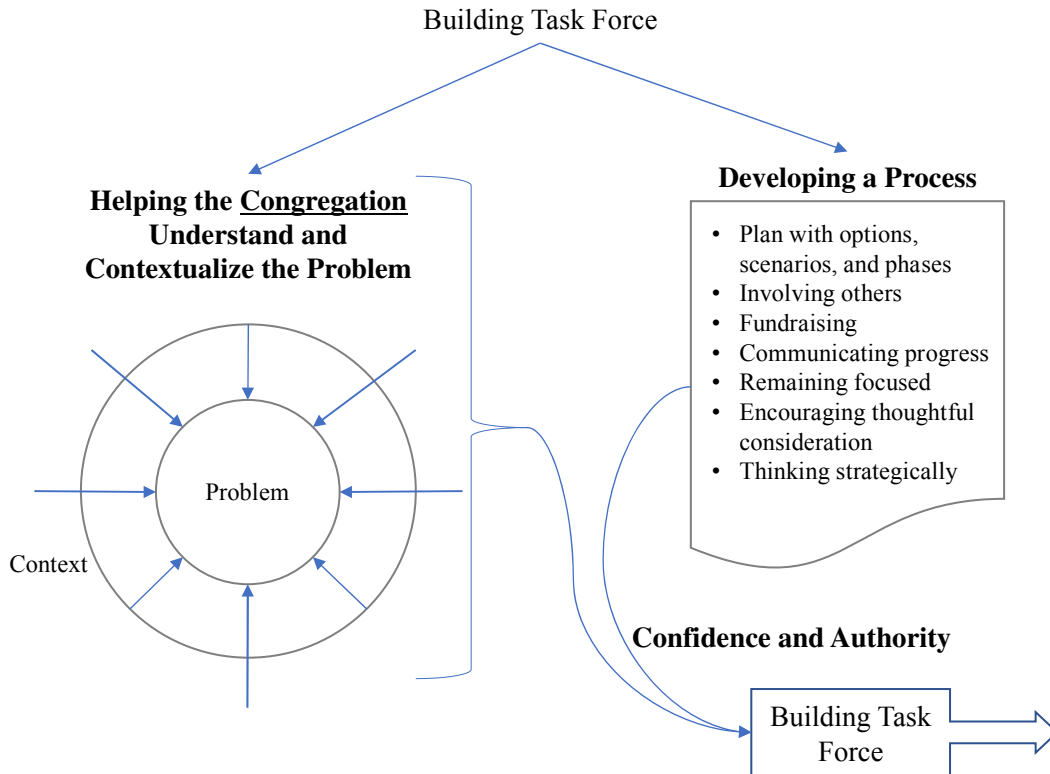


Figure 5-3. Theoretical Coding of Qualitative Data *Prior* to Intervention 1

The coding emerged from conversation with leaders, so it reflects what they felt were their goals or priorities for Intervention 1. The Facilities Task Force felt they needed to help the congregation understand and contextualize the problem. This understanding and contextualization comes from within and outside our congregational context. The Facilities Task Force felt they needed to involve the congregation in both the problem-solving and decision-making process regarding the future of our building. The congregation needs and deserves facts about the building's condition as well as what the task force learned through their needs assessment. The Facilities Task Force is also aware of the need to develop a process to guide them to making a decision and, eventually, implementing the decision. Congregational awareness and support along with a solid process should give the Facilities Task Force both the authority and the confidence to move forward.

Intervention 1—Facilities Discussion Forum

The first intervention was a facilities discussion forum held on November 15, 2016. The Facilities Task Force played the role of the ART for the first intervention because the ART was newly formed and was not yet prepared to take on their role. The Facilities Task Force helped me develop the curriculum, refine the focus question, and clarified the two goals we wanted to accomplish: (1) help the congregation members know what we know by making a fifteen-minute presentation detailing what the task force knows, and (2) invite congregation members into the challenge points by opening the rest of the discussion hour to questions and answers.²³ Fifty-five people participated in this discussion forum.

The ART debrief that occurred after the intervention reflected the positive energy in the room and the amount of thoughtful discussion. They felt that the coincidental location of Facilities Task Force team members scattered throughout the discussion area helped make the presentation feel more like a big conversation rather than a lecture; they liked that this arrangement promoted a family perspective instead of an *us* and *them* perspective that was the norm for these kinds of presentations.

Three additional observations are worth noting specifically. First, toward the end of the discussion forum, one of the esteemed elder members of the congregation said: “Well, I think we should get on with it. I think we should build.” Others followed suit. The ART noted that there was a shift in the conversation at that point. People had been

²³ The challenge points were intended to help participants dig deeper beyond “Do I like the idea or not?” and “If it costs too much, we shouldn’t do it.” The challenge points were: (1) identifying the options, (2) understanding the complexities of a pending failure of a major piece of equipment, (3) understanding the risks and impact of building, and (4) understanding the risks and impact if we do not build in the next three to five years.

challenging and asking tough questions, but they no longer spoke up after the endorsement of moving forward, thus stifling the dialogical nature of the conversation. Second, the ART and Facilities Task Force members remained in the room and talked with those seated next to them. These small moments allowed people to connect in a different way than they could in a larger group. Third, the discussion centered on money primarily and logistics secondarily.

I coded the ART debrief meeting notes, notes from two participants who are part of the Facilities Task Force, and my journal to arrive at the following axial codes. The focused and axial codes for Intervention 1 are contained in table 5-55 and are derived from fifty-seven *in vivo* codes.

Table 5-55. Focused and Axial Codes from Intervention 1

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Understanding ourselves and others through dialogue
FC-5	Creating safe space for discussion
FC-7	Challenging each other through dialogue
FC-9	Understanding assumptions, both our own and those of others
FC-11	Understanding the leader perspective of feeling stuck, alone, and frustrated
FC-12	Understanding the congregation perspective of feeling uncertain
FC-13	Worrying about the future (statistics, trends, membership, finances)
FC-14	Listening and hearing other points of view
FC-17	Asking: “How do members, guests, and the community perceive the church?”
FC-18	“Serving” as a value
FC-19	Normalizing voices so that all are heard
AC-2	Developing a plan
FC-10	Exploring funding options
FC-15	Sharing points of view
FC-16	Developing a building process that includes analysis and benchmarks

Table 5-55. Focused and Axial Codes from Intervention 1 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Involving the congregation
FC-3	Raising awareness
FC-4	Determining "voice of the people"
FC-20	Prioritizing needs and ideas
FC-6	Understanding limiting resources
FC-24	Participating
AC-4	Leading the congregation
FC-1	Wanting direction
FC-2	Clarifying "mission"
FC-8	Trusting leaders and planners
FC-21	Providing information
FC-22	Living out our shared congregational values
FC-23	Making a decision

Intervention 1 was the first opportunity in this research project to engage members of the congregation in face-to-face, large group dialogue. Participants were drawn together by curiosity and the topic relating to the building program. We presented the facts as we knew them, the Facilities Task Force learnings so far, the questions the task force was struggling with, and then invited the congregation into those questions. The conversation that ensued was lively, open, respectful, and represented the gamut of perspectives.

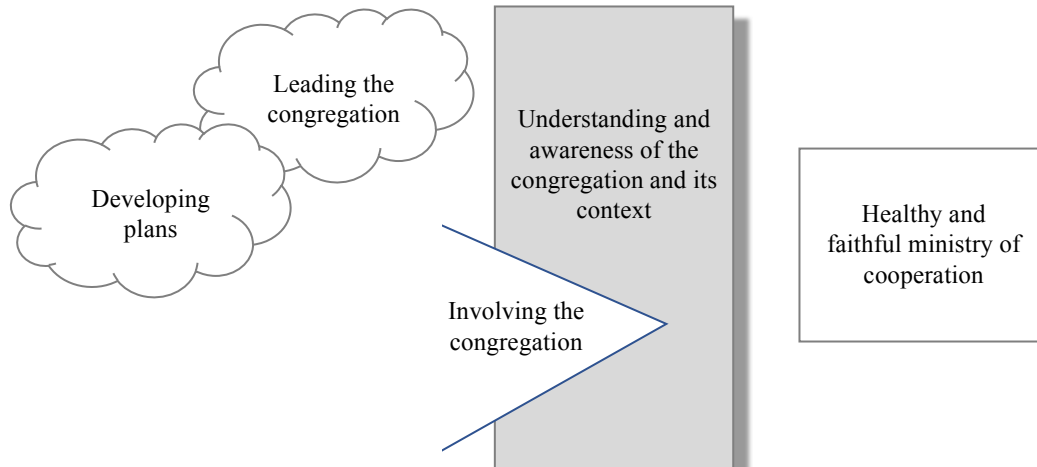


Figure 5-4. Theoretical Coding for Intervention 1

The theoretical coding as presented in figure 5-4 presents the desire of congregational leaders to “develop plans” and “lead the congregation.” “Understanding and awareness of the congregation and its context” can be a barrier to being a congregation with a “healthy and faithful ministry of cooperation” between leaders and the congregation. This barrier may exist if congregational leaders ignore or fail to prioritize such understanding and awareness. The way to break through the barrier of understanding and awareness is to involve and engage the congregation.

Intervention 2—Leadership Workshop

The second intervention was a leadership workshop held on Saturday, February 27, 2016. This intervention was attended by fifty-two formal and informal leaders of the congregation. Qualitative data for Intervention 2 was derived from seven sources: three ART meeting transcriptions and notes, ART debrief notes, focus group transcripts and notes, questionnaire responses from invitees in advance of the leadership workshop, and

questionnaire responses from participants as a follow-up to the workshop.²⁴ The focused codes are derived from 174 *in vivo* codes. The axial codes and corresponding focused codes are listed in table 5-56.

Table 5-56. Axial Codes from Intervention 2

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Knowledge and awareness of oneself and others
FC-3	Getting perspective (periscope moment)
FC-4	Relationships need work
FC-7	Raising awareness to help people see the issues
FC-16	Knowing the people on your team
FC-17	Reflecting on our own personal role and rationale when making decisions
FC-34	Creating space for people to connect and care for one-another
FC-46	Understanding your desire for action or inaction
FC-64	Understanding one's own personality and strengths
FC-75	Building awareness
FC-76	Awareness of symptoms of conflict
FC-77	Listening actively
FC-83	Knowing your story and how you come across to others
FC-88	Knowing people to assess their skills and actual productivity
FC-96	Knowing people to understand their motivation
FC-100	Understanding your own "decision threshold" ²⁵
AC-2	Managing Meetings
FC-23	Awareness of "rabbit holes" ²⁶
FC-28	Getting people back on track without shaming
FC-30	Bring closure to meetings with decisions and action items
FC-31	Managing meetings
FC-45	Following up on action items by leaders
FC-51	Being a good steward of time in meetings
FC-53	Preparing participants for a meeting
FC-92	Anticipating take away from meetings and workshops
FC-102	Developing continuity between meetings

²⁴ ART meeting dates were 12/10/2015, 1/7/2016, and 2/4/2016

²⁵ "Decision threshold" is defined here as understanding what it takes to get you to "yes" or "no".

²⁶ "Rabbit holes" are topics that garner attention and energy, but lead the group away from the topic at hand.

Table 5-56. Axial Codes from Intervention 2 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Congregational Culture
FC-9	Tenor of conversation governed by our values and identity
FC-13	Trusting groups to be “safe”
FC-18	Preparing for conversations
FC-19	Participating together fully in the pursuit of common goals
FC-21	Working together as a team
FC-24	Agreeing to listen, share responsibility, follow a process, and follow through on action items
FC-27	Developing a reliable feedback mechanism to assure people they are heard
FC-32	Seeding the congregation with trained leaders
FC-33	Stretching people outside comfort zone
FC-35	Taking responsibility for actions and projects
FC-44	Ensuring that faith plays a foundational role
FC-47	Reaching out actively as leaders
FC-49	Creating fertile soil and preparing hearts for ministry
FC-54	Modeling the body to children, congregation, and community
FC-55	Building relationships with intentionality
FC-56	Identifying and welcoming people to greater participation
FC-58	Living as people of faith
FC-59	Setting expectations that mistakes will happen
FC-63	Reconciling God's call and provision with limited resources
FC-66	Sharing responsibility
FC-67	Living and responding together as the body of Christ
FC-69	Trusting one another
FC-71	Exploring appropriate means for communication
FC-73	Working through conflict together
FC-74	Reflecting honestly on what adds value to our community
FC-78	Strengthening community reaction to growing as a goal
FC-81	Continuing prayer partners
FC-87	Allowing all voices to be heard and not just the loudest
FC-89	Establishing, identifying, living Community's culture based on a foundation of values
FC-91	Having courage and boldness
FC-94	Relating to people face-to-face
FC-101	Understanding roles of authority, leadership, and parts of the body
FC-104	Involving people
FC-107	Listening and disagreeing
FC-108	Ensuring the role of faith in team work and decision-making

Table 5-56. Axial Codes from Intervention 2 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-4	Leading in a congregational context
FC-2	Leading in a volunteer organization
FC-14	Focusing
FC-25	Feeling supported by person in charge
FC-26	Setting and managing expectations
FC-29	Agreeing upon deliverables, timelines, and action items
FC-36	Achieving goals together
FC-37	Maintaining agility in the congregation so we are able to move and respond quickly to movement of the Spirit
FC-39	Motivating a team toward action, discernment, involving others, and growing in their own leadership
FC-40	Practicing leadership—"building muscle"
FC-41	Taking action
FC-43	Getting to know people and ministries yourself rather than relying on assumptions or hearsay
FC-48	Keeping track of goals and priorities
FC-52	Clarifying roles—Council, ministry team, congregation, pastor
FC-57	Feeling frustrated when people don't follow through
FC-60	Engaging in ministry multiplication thru delegation and equipping leaders
FC-62	Maintaining accountability
FC-68	Sharing the frustration and resentment that comes with leadership, especially in a volunteer organization
FC-72	Becoming better able to deal with conflict within a team with strong personalities
FC-80	Identifying conflict—levels, kinds, impacts
FC-97	Developing communication skills
AC-5	Supporting teams and team leaders
FC-5	Ensuring teams have the people, financial and information support they need
FC-6	Recognizing who is in charge of a team
FC-8	Clarifying the role of leadership
FC-11	Respecting who is in charge of a team
FC-12	Understanding the needs of leaders for support and information
FC-15	Preparing people to be leaders
FC-20	Identifying leaders
FC-38	On-boarding new leaders with values, systems, process, etc. (enculturation)
FC-99	Building a diverse team
FC-105	Understanding needs of participants and leaders

Table 5-56. Axial Codes from Intervention 2 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and Corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-6	Making Decisions
FC-1	Communicating decisions clearly
FC-10	Using God's call and facts to make decisions
FC-22	Creating clear and more simple decision-making processes that are timely and consistent
FC-42	Enculturating decision-making process and values
FC-50	Paying attention and hearing people through decision processes (vertical and horizontal)
FC-61	Allowing time before decisions
FC-65	Allowing time after decisions for implementing decisions
FC-70	Interacting with people on teams and in the congregation before and after decisions
FC-79	Adopting a consistent process
FC-82	Defining projects along with vision, purpose, scope, priority, and desired outcomes/results
FC-84	Contemplating the implications of a decision or action
FC-85	Connecting the right people for discussion and decision-making
FC-86	Explaining discernment
FC-90	Avoiding delays and confusion because of bureaucracy
FC-93	Developing a ministry opportunity team to avoid silos, build trust, and communicate
FC-95	Clarifying the decision-making process and authority structure for approval
FC-98	Clarifying what is needed for a decision
FC-103	Considering abundance versus scarcity in decision-making
FC-106	Knowing when to wait/pause to reflect and consider next steps and people to include

Intervention 2 was the first intervention the ART and I were able to thoroughly discuss and thoughtfully design. Intervention 1 presented itself as I was completing my thesis proposal and the ART was newly formed. Discussions in preparation for this leadership workshop quickly raised issues of leadership, effectiveness of leadership training, past conflict, and the effects of conflict on the congregation and relationships.

“Leading in a congregational context” (AC-4) is very different from the leadership experience of many congregational leaders. The military and government

agencies have a clearly defined hierarchy and chain of command. Businesses also are clear about who the decision-makers are. Decision-making and structure represent significant differences between these leadership styles and leadership in the church. The ART identified that motivation and discipline are also significant. Organizations outside the church can offer incentives, such as pay increases, bonuses, and promotions. These organizations can also fire, demote, reassign, or engage in disciplinary conversations. Churches are also different from other volunteer organizations because other volunteer organizations are allowed by their members to operate with similar principles as businesses. Church members, however, may challenge that we are a *church* and not a *business*. Churches are also expected to be *nice*. The experience of some leaders and congregation members is quite the opposite of *nice*. One ART member pointed out that people who become entrenched in their position and are unhealthy in their disagreeing and arguing should take care to notice that they are being observed by children, fellow members of the congregation, and the community beyond the congregation. All behavior is “modeling” and creating impressions for others about who we are and what we value (i.e., our congregational culture).

The conflicts the ART discussed were mostly the significant conflicts in the memory of the team members. A member of the team grew frustrated during the planning phase for Intervention 2. He questioned whether leadership training on the topic of conflict would actually be of any use. He said:

I think leadership training is useful to a place like Community from the standpoint of being able to run a meeting, ... keep an agenda on track, ... delegate authority, ... but I just don't see an enormous amount of conflict on a day-to-day basis There may be some minor disagreements about this or that, but it's not something that's going to drive people from the church or cause people to stop talking to each other for the next ten years.

His statement helped the team articulate the presence of low-level, persistent conflict that eventually wears down and frustrates people to the point of disengaging. The team acknowledged that leadership in a congregation does have business components to it like “managing meetings” (AC-2), and “making decisions” (AC-6). The team clarified that leadership in a congregation is not as much *leadership apart from* the congregation as it is *leadership from among* the congregation. Consistent themes of *knowing* and *awareness* began to emerge which became the axial code: “Knowledge and awareness of self and others” (AC-1).

Congregational leaders leading from among the congregation also rely on the congregation. They do not have the same tools of motivation and discipline that are available in corporate, government, and military settings, so they must rely on a “congregational culture” (AC-3) of support from the congregation. They must also rely on the congregational structure itself to “support teams and team leaders” (AC-5).

The ART saw the leadership workshop as the perfect opportunity to begin training leaders in management techniques, but also the key factors involved in *knowing*. The hope is that trained and aware leaders would *seed* the congregation. The team began using the phrase “fertile soil” as part of our workshop strategy—the hearts and minds of the leaders must be ready and receptive to the concepts presented. A concern was raised by the ART challenging why a leader should come to this particular workshop. Many of our current leaders have been leaders for a long time in multiple venues. Many of them have received formal training through professional workshops or through their employers. This challenge helped the team to clarify our purpose and helped shape our invitation to the congregation’s leaders. Our goal was not to train them as if they had no

prior experience, but to address several points and invite them to interact with one another on those points. We crafted several case studies for small groups to process together.

The theoretical coding for Intervention 2 is depicted in the graphic in figure 5-5. The graphic shows that a leader is located within a team, which is located within the congregational culture, which is located within a context. The team and team leader are to be aware of, or “know,” the culture and context and be part of it. No team can exist separately from or outside of the culture or context. Awareness and knowing must also exist between the team and its leader. Support from the congregation and structure of the congregation, which is also located within the culture and context of the church, allows the team to make decisions and do the work to which they have been called.

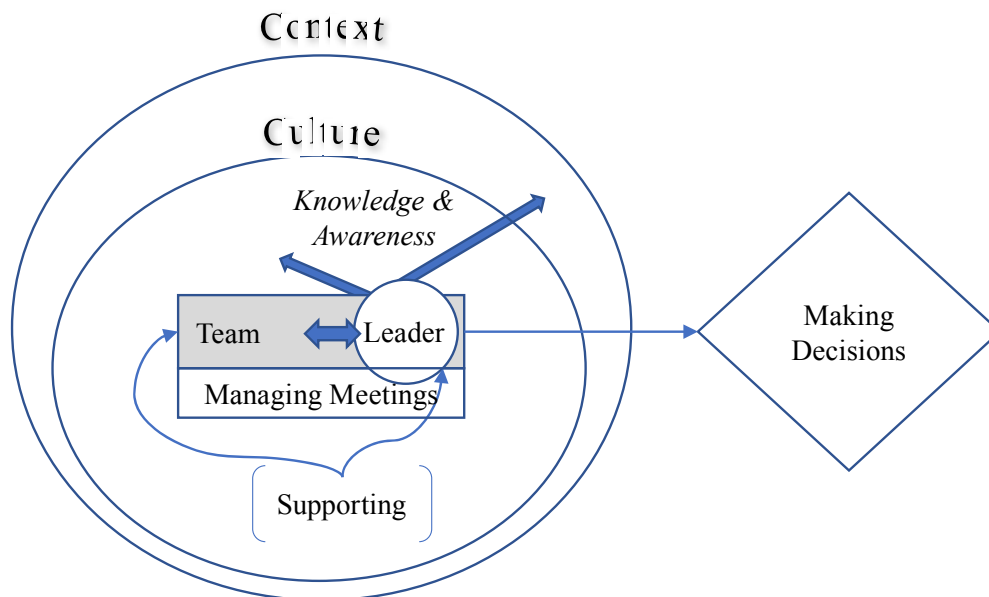


Figure 5-5. Theoretical Coding for Intervention 2

The ART, in the debrief session following the intervention, felt affirmed that many of the topics and issues that leaders brought up at the workshop were similar to the conversations in our planning meetings. We also noticed the group dynamics created

when people are first informed through a large group session, then allowed to interact and process in a small group setting. We felt that the conversation in Intervention 1 was egalitarian because it became not just a presentation, but a conversation among peers. The group was not aimed against one side or the other, but used their diversity of perspectives to raise questions together as a group toward the goal of solving the question: should we pursue a major building renovation in the next five to ten years or focus on maintenance of our existing facility? Similarly, we observed in Intervention 2 that group members were working together to analyze the case studies based on their diverse perspectives. This dynamic developed further in Interventions 3 and 4.

Intervention 3—Cottage Meetings

The third intervention was a series of six cottage meetings held between May 1 and June 8, 2016. This intervention was attended by fifty-four members of the congregation over the age of eighteen. Qualitative data for Intervention 3 was derived from fifteen sources: two ART meetings with accompanying notes and transcriptions, two Facilities Task Force meetings, ten notes submitted by leaders who attended the cottage meetings, and focus group transcripts and notes for Intervention 3.²⁷ I held two focus groups for Intervention 3 due to scheduling conflicts for participants. These focus groups not only explored the cottage meetings, but ventured into a discussion on topics relating to the involvement and time management philosophies of young families. The focused codes are derived from 174 *in vivo* codes.

²⁷ ART meeting dates were 3/3/2016 and 4/28/2016. Facilities Task Force meeting dates were 2/26/2016 and 4/14/2016

Table 5-57 lists the six axial codes and the corresponding focused codes that were derived from sixty-nine focused codes for meetings and discussions *prior* to Intervention 3.

Table 5-57. Axial Codes *Prior* to Intervention 3

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Creating safe space for open and focused conversations
FC-6	Creating a foundation for on-going healthy dialogue
FC-14	Creating multiple opportunities for engagement
FC-15	Creating and "opening up the space" for dialogue
FC-20	Thinking through projects thoroughly
FC-38	Ensuring enough time for dialogue
FC-61	Creating a forum for people to share
FC-62	Listening to participants ("eyes and ears")
AC-2	Developing a discernment process leading to action
FC-9	Having a decision-making chain of command and flow
FC-21	Using a framework to help make decisions
FC-25	Building on the congregation's story ("longevity of ideas")
FC-27	Considering timelines and benchmarks
FC-28	Including as many people as possible
FC-32	Discerning values
FC-33	Prioritizing values
FC-34	Being honest about lived versus aspirational values
FC-35	Clarifying individual versus congregational values
FC-44	Understanding the costs, including cost of doing nothing
FC-45	Working through a process like the Five Phases
FC-49	Bringing participants up to speed
FC-50	Working through a process to get shared values
FC-58	Communicating to the congregation about meetings
FC-64	Asking whether we are being financially responsible
FC-65	Recognizing that the congregation is not yet settled on what to do
FC-66	Asking whether we can be both faithful and financially responsible
FC-67	Worrying that the cost will be a burden
FC-68	Keeping the conversation about the building open

Table 5-57. Axial Codes *Prior* to Intervention 3 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Understanding our humanity and call into community
FC-10	Tending to become entrenched in ideas over vision and community
FC-17	Understanding why we become stuck before taking action
FC-22	Understanding from a participant point of view
FC-23	Determining exactly what the "voice of the people" is
FC-26	Understanding what people need to participate
FC-40	Clarifying purpose for attending
FC-41	Learning opportunities from real life
AC-4	Training and developing leaders
FC-1	Questioning the long range impact of training workshops
FC-2	Questioning whether our training is making a difference—how do we know?
FC-3	Hoping that training gives exposure to issues
FC-4	Setting and managing expectations
FC-5	Creating accountability that is encouraging rather than punitive
FC-7	Allowing bad behavior
FC-13	Paying attention to the "gaps" of information and authority
FC-16	Being aware that people decide at different speeds for different reasons
FC-18	Preparing leaders helps plant seeds throughout congregation
FC-24	Enabling people to identify various kinds of conflict
FC-29	Resisting assumptions that communication is happening
FC-30	Preparing for participant involvement
FC-31	Preparing for leadership feedback
FC-39	Setting is important
FC-48	Creating the content for the meeting
FC-57	Training and preparation for leaders
FC-69	Anticipating questions
AC-5	Creating a culture of healthy relationships
FC-8	Viewing congregational life like a covenant relationship
FC-11	Taking responsibility for our part in relationships
FC-12	Confronting others lovingly when conflict arises
FC-19	Listening actively helps build trust
FC-37	Listening to leaders ("eyes and ears")
FC-59	Listening more than talking

Table 5-57. Axial Codes *Prior* to Intervention 3 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-6	Discerning the use and future of the building
FC-36	Presenting building priorities and phases
FC-42	Realizing that we have to care for the building
FC-43	Considering impact of a yes or no vote
FC-46	Planning and preparing for the future
FC-47	Making a case for a deteriorating infrastructure
FC-51	Balancing dreaming with the reality of costs
FC-52	Valuing support for community groups
FC-53	Emphasizing that the building is a tool to accomplish the mission
FC-54	Congregational values should be reflected through the building
FC-55	Clarifying the short-term versus long-term projects
FC-56	Focusing outward instead of inward
FC-60	Wondering "How much is enough?"
FC-63	Asking what the congregation is unable to do because of building limitations

The focused and axial codes in table 5-57 were derived from planning meetings and reflect the desires of congregational leaders, Facilities Task Force members, and ART participants. These codes also reflect the accumulated learnings of these groups through the research period. Figure 5-6 describes the relationship between the axial codes.

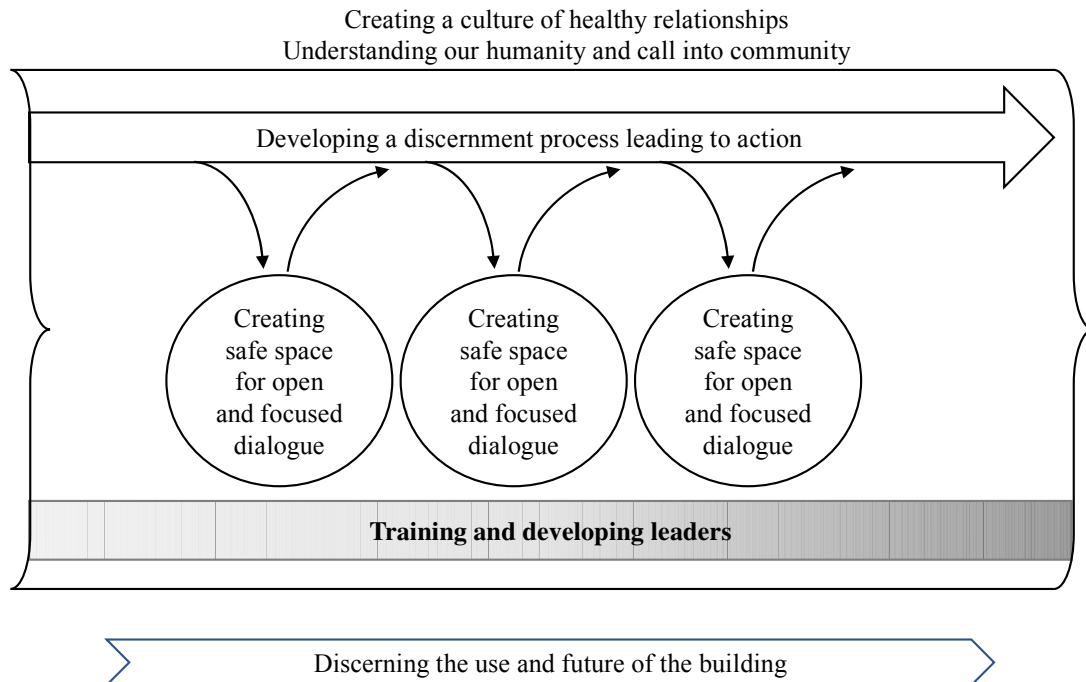


Figure 5-6. Theoretical Codes *Prior* to Intervention 3

The surrounding box in figure 5-6 represents the culture of the congregational community. This culture is one of healthy relationships (AC-5), which is related to understanding our mutual humanity and our call *into* community (AC-3). The brackets on the sides of the box indicate movement from some point in time to another point in time in the future. Leaders develop over time through training and processes of discernment. This growth is signified by the bar that becomes darker as the leaders receive training and as they develop (AC-4). The large arrow at the top accompanies the Five Phases of Discernment as a process that moves toward action (AC-2). This discernment process is influenced by safe space for open and focused dialogue (AC-1). The particular interest of leaders at the point in time leading up to Intervention 3 involved discerning the use and future of the building (AC-6). The focus of a conversation could be different, but the first five axial codes could remain the same. The figure has a definite movement forward into a deeper and more inclusive community of faith.

Table 5-58 lists the six axial codes that were derived from sixty-nine focused codes.

Table 5-58. Focused and Axial Codes *after* Intervention 3

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Living our individual and shared values in community
FC-4	Exploring the role of faith in risk
FC-6	Understanding how our values impact decisions
FC-10	Exercising love and compassion for those not in the majority
FC-16	Discussing values lays good foundation for building discussion
FC-17	Exercising freedom to add values in game
FC-19	Meeting in homes allowed people the time they needed
FC-21	Speaking against the flow can be challenging
FC-23	Creating a safe space at cottage meetings
FC-24	Valuing service to others
FC-35	Valuing the vertical and horizontal relationships in the church
FC-44	Observing that cottage meetings helped relationships
FC-50	Presenting was handled openly and respectfully
FC-56	Disagreeing can be good when we don't shut down
FC-57	Normalizing the conversation through cottage meetings
FC-78	Valuing that our building is not all about us
FC-79	Valuing our Lutheran tradition
FC-80	Valuing that we work together to support the community
FC-81	Fighting is not why people come to church
FC-84	Setting an important precedent of safety through cottage meetings
AC-2	Moving forward into an uncertain future with both risk and emotion
FC-3	Being concerned about overextending ourselves
FC-5	Being concerned about logistics
FC-9	Considering long-term functionality and flexibility of the building
FC-13	Having built enthusiasm, we don't want to lose momentum
FC-20	Experiencing excitement while dreaming, then sober judgment in practicalities
FC-25	Considering the impact on all building users
FC-28	Being concerned about over committing ourselves
FC-37	Questioning whether we are buying enough additional space
FC-42	Worrying about critical building issues
FC-65	Preparing for future generations
FC-83	Taking risks on human behavioral assumptions

Table 5-58. Focused and Axial Codes *after* Intervention 3 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Knowing oneself and others
FC-2	Diversifying groups is helpful for discernment
FC-8	Listening more thoroughly allows movement
FC-11	Developing a group personality
FC-15	Valuing strong personalities in a group
FC-22	Responding as a group to those who challenge ideas
FC-27	Noticing that groups of different people developed similar themes
FC-29	Understanding the nay-sayer's experience
FC-38	Noticing the variety of thoughts and perspectives
FC-45	Experiencing conversation as healthy and helpful even with differences
FC-46	Increasing respect for others through dialogue
FC-51	Acknowledging that the terminology we use is important
FC-52	Having an open mind and heart that is willing to hear allows change and conversion
FC-53	Keeping people in the conversation
FC-55	Negotiating together to make things work
FC-59	Understanding how older members expect to be heard
FC-60	Acknowledging that generations communicate differently
FC-62	Understanding that families have to weigh values and priorities
FC-64	Feeling judged about parental choices
FC-70	Wanting to be heard and taken seriously
FC-74	Getting to know each other
FC-75	Breaking down serving roles into "finite chunking"
FC-82	Stewarding people's time
AC-4	Leading the congregation through a process of discernment
FC-1	Assuming that people use the same definitions
FC-7	Reaching greater consensus in spite of differences
FC-14	Understanding that we can "lead a project to death"
FC-26	Clarifying what's next
FC-39	Acknowledging that 100% consensus is not possible
FC-43	Wondering if the congregation we will be able to risk
FC-47	Focusing conversation on the mission
FC-63	Experiencing frustration with the building conversation
FC-69	Using cottage meetings in the future on a regular basis
FC-72	Suggesting that congregational meetings build on cottage meetings

Table 5-58. Focused and Axial Codes *after* Intervention 3 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-5	Intentionally welcoming and involving
FC-30	Involving more people requires more lead time
FC-31	Including more young people in meetings
FC-32	Inviting people personally
FC-33	Meeting in homes was more intimate and relaxed
FC-48	Valuing including the congregation in the process
FC-58	Being reluctant to speak because not enough information
FC-61	Holding back on suggestions because of time
FC-66	Participating more because of smaller group size
FC-67	Sharing opinions is difficult when new to the congregation
FC-68	Arranging for children to come so parents could participate
FC-71	Being included in decision-making
FC-73	Mixing people up makes the community stronger
FC-76	Reaching out to involve others
FC-77	Involving requires multiple entry points
FC-85	Belonging involves reciprocity
AC-6	Leader's role in informing, guiding, and stretching
FC-12	Understanding expectations for the source of information
FC-18	Emerging leaders help guide conversation
FC-34	Raising awareness of building use
FC-36	Ensuring enough new information throughout the process
FC-40	Communicating the rationale and purpose for recommendations
FC-41	Maintaining awareness of the bigger picture
FC-49	Preparing leaders was beneficial
FC-54	Keeping people on track

The cottage meetings accomplished their primary published objectives of having a discussion about congregational values, sharing the latest information from the Facilities Task Force, and gathering feedback for the Facilities Task Force. The cottage meetings also allowed us to explore having congregational leaders (in this case, a Council representative and a Facilities Task Force representative) take a clear leadership role as they met with congregation members in homes located throughout the region around the congregation.

We learned that the advanced preparation for leaders was invaluable, we needed a larger window of time in which the cottage meetings would occur, we should have allowed more lead time for people to plan to attend, and we should have had a more solid plan to include fringe or non-active families. We also learned that even holding six cottage meetings was a drain on leaders who helped to facilitate the cottage meetings.

Reaction to the cottage meetings was largely positive. People expressed a sense of relief and hope. They said, “My voice is heard.” They clearly enjoyed being together as one participant noted: “I interacted with people I really hadn’t communicated with before, and it was nice to hear their input and also see that, in a lot of ways, we’re all kind of on the same page.”

A focus group member commented that “cottage meetings may be a paradigm shift for us.” I noted earlier in this chapter that the population of people who tend to attend the annual congregational meetings were not the same as the population who attended the cottage meetings. Several focus group participants agreed that they do not think the annual congregational meeting should be the only place where people’s voices may be heard. Another participant commented: “Members who are already deeply involved and know the history of the congregation may expect to go to a congregational meeting: ‘This is where I stand up and get heard.’”

One of the two focus groups was comprised of young women with children ranging from four years old through eighteen. All of them are active in the church, volunteer, and have at least part-time jobs. All of these ladies are smart, capable, and faithful women, yet they said they would never stand up at a congregational meeting to have their voice heard. None of them have been members for a long period of time, and

some of them have not been Lutheran for very long. They remarked that, when they see someone who they perceive to be a pillar of the congregation stand to speak, they simply do not feel confident enough to challenge that pillar. They acknowledge that there is congregational and denominational history that they simply do not know. There are sacred cows of which they are not aware.

This second focus group agreed that “people want to be part of the conversation.” They asked, “Can we make the cottage meetings such an integral part of how we make decisions that the culture shifts to: ‘If I don’t take part in these cottage meetings, I won’t be part of the conversation’?” A focus group participant commented, “I think it would be an interesting filter to make [annual congregational meetings] more efficient and more substantive, like you get more meat.” These members foresee the role and format of the annual congregational meeting changing as well. They wondered if the meeting could simply be a summary of where we are and where we’re going rather than a working meeting—it could be a part of the conversation instead of the only place where the conversation can occur. If these women are reluctant to speak, how many other people in the congregation must feel the same way? If our goal is to include, welcome, and hear the voices of our congregation, this element of our organizational structure and church life is impeding those voices.

The cottage meetings had a “normalizing” effect on the discernment process. A focus group discussion considered what would happen if a particular member was outspoken or created conflict in their small group. Their thinking was that the outspoken person would have had an opportunity to air their concerns and get it out of their system. It would also allow feedback to come to the attention of leaders who may be able to

address the member's concerns in advance of the congregational meeting or to be more prepared for the meeting itself. The feedback mechanism is important to reinforce that the person's concerns were heard, taken seriously, and were in the hands of someone who could address them.

The only negativity revolved around two topics: the reality of limited resources, and members' lack of confidence that something would happen as a result of the cottage meetings. Cottage meeting participants were very excited and motivated to make things happen, and they wanted to continue the momentum from these meetings. They have also been frustrated at the amount of time and effort used in making and implementing decisions.

The second focus group that was made up of only young women produced a significant learning. All of these women are very busy with work, home, and children, yet, they have found ways to engage with the church, especially through the women's ministry. The rhythm and pace of their lives is such that time is in very short supply. Their families are doing the best they can to make good decisions about where and how to use their time. They were clear that they have to weigh their family values and priorities and act accordingly. These women felt as though they were being asked to give all or nothing when people asked them to volunteer—either you sign on to meet and volunteer for multiple hours over a long period of time, or you do nothing. They used words to describe how they felt such as: bad, guilty, pressure, overextended, and drowning. All of them agreed that short-term, short-time commitment activities that are either social or service-oriented are best for them.

Older adults in both casual conversation and in meetings sometimes comment about the participation of young families and their regularity in worship. These comments may be accompanied by comments like: “They just need to make better decisions about participating at their church.” or “When we were parents of young children, we found a way to make it all work.” I hear judgment and comparison to what they did as parents when their children were young. The women in my focus group felt that judgement and did not want to be judged by people in their church.

The sense of judgment and lack of time both have an impact on the participation of these families, but I was very surprised to learn that the scarcity of their time actually has an impact on the feedback they offer. One focus group participant said that she did not feel she could make suggestions or offer feedback if she, personally, did not have time to help enact the change or implement an event. Others echoed her sentiments. I reflected with them by saying: “You were saying that you ... hold back on giving feedback or opinions because of the availability of time, and that’s not a judgment statement at all, but if we’re interested in how we get people’s opinions and how we get the best information, then what you’re saying is huge. What else are we not hearing?”

Figure 5-7 depicts the centrality of living our individual and shared values in community. A healthy and faithful community requires that people are self-reflective as each member of the community exercises self-reflection to be able to know oneself and others (AC-3). Knowing and understanding others requires that each member seeks to understand others through listening, valuing each other, and noticing differences in perspectives and generations such as the examples of both older members and families

with young children. Knowing oneself and others enables us to live our individual and shared values in community (AC-1).

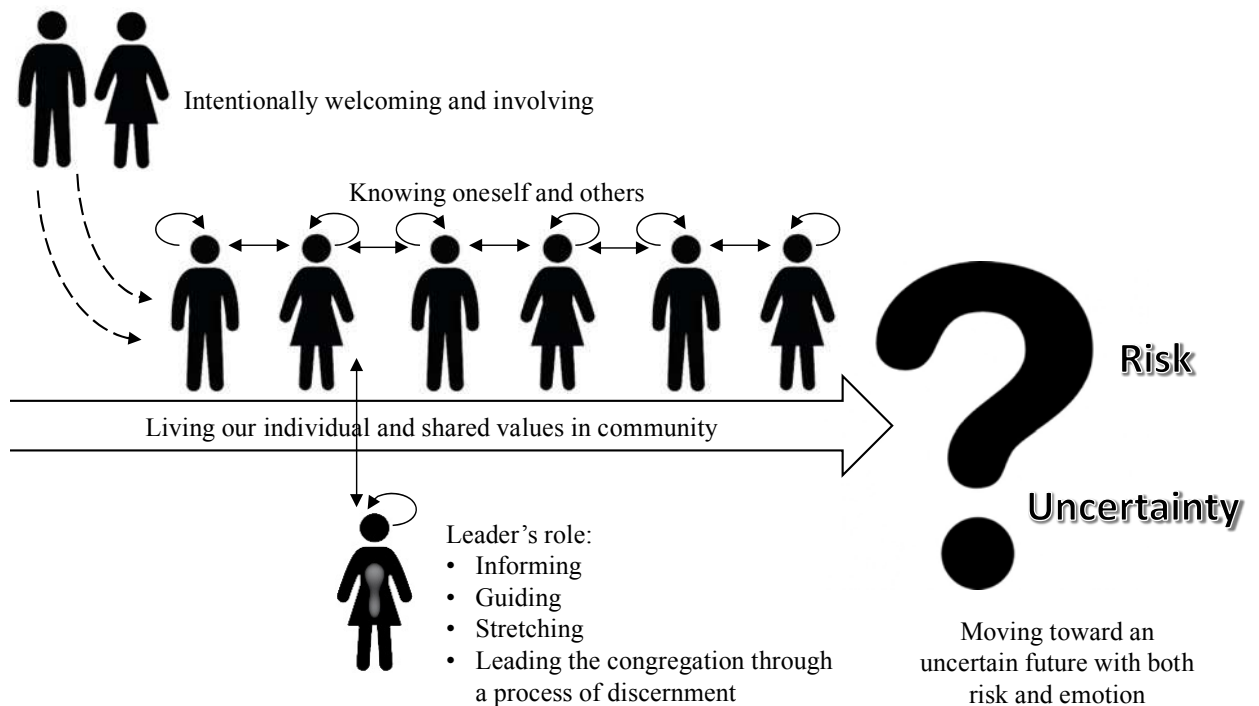


Figure 5-7. Theoretical Codes after Intervention 3

Such a congregation intentionally welcomes and involves others, and enculturates them into a community of knowing and being known (AC-5). Notice that the leader's role is not to control people or the conversation, but to support the growth and development of the community through sharing informing, guiding, and stretching the community (AC-6). Guiding is not accomplished based on the personal whims or preferences of the leader, but reinforces and continually applies the congregation's shared values. Leaders who are informing, guiding, and stretching are then positioned to lead the congregation through processes of discernment (AC-4). Having a well-designed process does not automatically result in healthy and faithful decisions. The future is uncertain, and meeting the uncertainty of the future is accompanied by risk and a range of emotions (AC-2).

The theoretical codes in figure 5-6 and figure 5-7 are fundamentally in alignment with one another, but they emphasize different aspects. Both figures identify the need for a congregational culture that involves an action-oriented discernment process, leadership, and significant interaction between people. Figure 5-6 highlights a higher-level perspective in which observing systems and interactions is more visible. I suspect the reasoning for this is related to the participants being leaders who were helping to plan the intervention. The desire to create safe space was evident. Figure 5-7 shares the perspectives of those who actually participated in the intervention. Their emphasis was very relational and communal. Those who contributed to the post-Intervention 3 feedback also clarified the role of leaders and congregation members—that congregation members have a responsibility to be informed and involved.

Intervention 4—Special Congregational Meeting

The fourth intervention was a special congregational meeting held on Sunday, June 12, 2016. The congregation's congregational meetings tend to start around 1:00 p.m. and are preceded by a potluck luncheon. Forty-one people participated in this intervention.

Qualitative data for Intervention 4 was derived from two sources: the focus group transcripts and notes for Intervention 4. The adjustments made to extend the time period of Intervention 3 and the timeframe required to conduct a congregational meeting before summer vacations created a time crunch. I did not convene the ART between the third and fourth interventions as designed because of the timing but also because planning for Intervention 4 had occurred in previous ART meetings. The focused codes for Intervention 4 are derived from eighty-three *in vivo* codes. Table 5-59 lists the four axial

codes and corresponding focused codes that were derived from fifty-two focused codes for Intervention 4.

Table 5-59. Axial Codes for Intervention 4

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Moving together as a whole body
FC-4	Feeling as though group leader wasn't listening
FC-11	Validating and assuring that all voices have equal opportunity to be heard
FC-15	Ensuring participation
FC-16	Ensuring transparency
FC-23	Creating opportunities for people to be together
FC-29	Valuing the perspectives of long-term and new members
FC-31	Acknowledging that we will seldom have 100% agreement
FC-33	Making decisions together as a body
FC-36	Agreeing on the percentage of agreement required to move forward
FC-42	Supporting decisions for the sake of mission
FC-44	Grounding ourselves in our shared congregational values
FC-45	Allowing time and transparency in decision-making
FC-46	Presenting initiatives with adequate information
FC-47	Sharing actions and decisions openly
FC-52	Charging Council with the task of representing the congregation's interests
AC-2	Living as individual members of the whole
FC-5	Emerging leadership in groups
FC-6	Handling people who assert their wants over the group
FC-9	Observing whether conversations happen in the open or in secret
FC-10	Creating factions of like-minded people
FC-14	Strengthening community by making decisions together
FC-20	Expecting that being heard means that others must agree
FC-21	Sharing ideas with the desire to do what is best for the whole congregation
FC-40	Accepting personal responsibility to be part of the family
FC-48	Expressing that communities require both individual and corporate responsibility

Table 5-59. Axial Codes for Intervention 4 (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Conducting ourselves as a Christian community
FC-1	Experiencing frustration because expectations of an event don't match publicity
FC-2	Experiencing frustration related to the environment
FC-3	Differing interpretations of word definitions
FC-7	Walking away when discussion gets too hot
FC-8	Remaining together even with disagreement
FC-17	Reacting to negative situations
FC-18	Engaging in critical self-reflection
FC-19	Observing that people will always disagree
FC-22	Exercising a spirit of generosity with one another
FC-30	Understanding that both wanting change and resisting change are normal
FC-34	Recognizing the presence of grief and loss in change
FC-35	Challenging the feeling that an action or decision is a personal attack
FC-38	Understanding the role of selfishness versus God's mission
FC-49	Modeling values and good behavior for others
FC-50	Understanding the difference between differences and division
AC-4	Remaining open and aware
FC-12	Being aware of the time-sensitive nature of issues
FC-13	Taking action
FC-24	Having our conversations influenced by our faith
FC-25	Assuming that everyone knows what we know
FC-26	Remaining open to group process
FC-27	Making assumptions about others
FC-28	Knowing the stories of the congregation
FC-32	Preparing people for meetings
FC-37	Focusing on our mission as an expression of our love for God
FC-39	Discerning God's will
FC-41	Measuring decisions against our mission constantly
FC-43	Articulating our actual values
FC-51	Maintaining focus on issues rather than on the squeaky wheel

The design of Intervention 4, as described in chapter 4, was to report on feedback from the cottage meetings regarding both the facilities plan and the values exercise. I also wanted to see what would happen if we conducted the values exercise again in a larger group setting. I was surprised how different the experience of the values exercise was in

the larger group setting as opposed to the small group setting. Approximately half (48.8%) of the participants for Intervention 4 also participated in Intervention 3. I did not anticipate the level of frustration some of them experienced at being asked to do the values exercise a second time.

I assumed that those who participated through the cottage meetings would be interested to observe the differences between the way their initial group functioned as opposed to a different group of people with the same agenda. A few participants left the meeting because they assumed the entire meeting would be a repeat of the cottage meetings based on the first few minutes of presentation. A few others left their group conversations but ended up returning after they calmed down. Some participants did not want to engage in the values exercise because they either do not like that kind of group interaction or they had already participated in the values exercise. Some participants who attended one or more of the cottage meetings asserted leadership and attempted to lead their group to draw similar conclusions to those of their cottage groups. Some participants were not able to fully participate because they could not hear adequately. Their hearing was inhibited because of the size of the room (this session was held in a gymnasium), the table arrangement (long tables instead of a circle), or because of their own hearing deficiencies.

I was also surprised at the emotion and the leadership exercised through the focus group meeting. Four of the focus group participants were specifically chosen because I knew they would speak their minds. I know all of them are faithful and have the interest of the church at heart, and yet conflict emerged between them. Two were leaders in separate groups, and two were participants in these leader's groups. Both participants

named that they felt the leaders did not listen to them or others in the group. The leaders in both cases did not react or become defensive. They received what the participants had to say, and asked questions or made comments some of which challenged the perception of the participants.

One member of the focus group voiced a willingness to allow fracture within the community of the congregation during the heated discussion. She commented on the possibility of a new or renovated building as she said:

Well, there was a couple of us sitting over to the side [during the values exercise] that had the thought ... “If you wanted to, just go ahead and build a new building and forget about us, and leave us alone that want to stay here and like it the way it is.” If that’s the plan ... then make that the plan and go for it. Go for it and those people will come forward and say, “Yes, we want the new building. We’ll work for it. We’ll do it.” And those that don’t want it, don’t care about that will stay here and say, “Okay, we like this little old building and we’ll die here.”

The focus group listened and challenged this participant. I acknowledged the need for her perspective to be heard, but also the perspective of those who feel a new or renovated building is needed. I asked, “How is it that we, as a church, view decisions like that? Is it my decision as a pastor to say, ‘This is the way we’re going to go?’ Do we let the loudest voices have their say and make a decision that way?” The focus group worked through the conflict and was able to move into a very productive conversation. It is interesting to note that the participant quoted above as not wanting to do anything significant to the building began speaking of necessary building improvements that have been talked about through the Facilities Task Force discussions.

The focus group reflected on their own conflict and the conflict that they have witnessed as I asked, “Where is the focus of that conversation at that point for the group?” Any agenda that the leader has or group safety that has been created is disrupted. We recounted a theme through the research, “the stewardship of time,” and a missional

understanding of meetings as I observed: “The attention goes away from the issue onto the person. Is that where we want the attention?”

A participant articulated that people have differing understandings of what it means to be heard. She said that “people are heard ... but if others don’t agree with them, then they’re out of it.” They may think that “‘because it’s my opinion, then everyone ought to be agreeing with it,’ and that’s a hard one for all of us to get over. It’s hard to be adult or generous about it.” The group picked up on the term *generosity* and wondered how, as a Christian community, we can exercise a generosity of spirit in our conversations and dealings with one another.

Synthesizing the comments from the focus group, the common theme seemed to be *knowing*. Knowing was important both in terms of knowing the other person and being known by them. Knowing also became important with regard to knowing the history and the stories of a congregation.

A focus group member said that her experience in the church was that new people want to “come in and immediately want to change things. Maybe not necessarily because there needs to be change.” She gave an example of a new leader who came to a service organization. There was a large hall where people could gather for senior activities. A set of doors had been installed at the end of a long corridor leading to the social hall. The new leader did not like the doors and had them removed. These doors had been installed by the previous leader to help break a draft blowing down a long corridor and into the social hall, but the new leader did not take the time to get to know that story.

Knowing has to do with leaders and members being aware of their history and their context. Knowing has to do with *listening*—and listening as distinct from *hearing*.

Listening implies not only hearing, but also respect and thoughtful consideration of the other. Knowing, listening, and respect allow a congregation to move together. Moving together as a body, living as individual members of the whole, living our values and identity as a Christian community, and remaining open and aware as axial codes called me to the simplicity and the complexity of the nervous system of the human body as in figure 5-8.

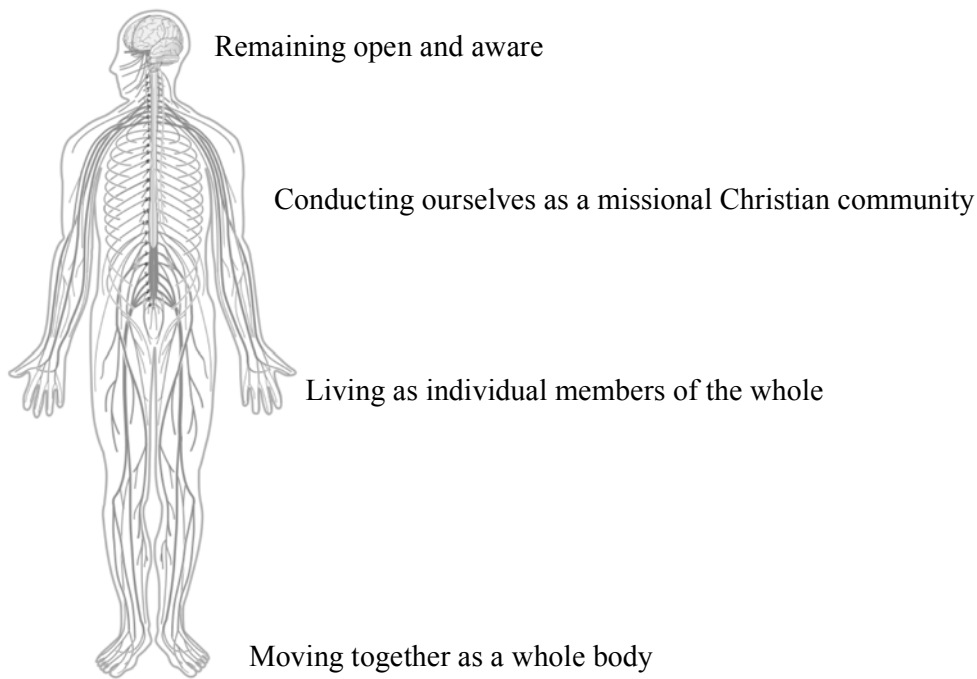


Figure 5-8. Theoretical Coding for Intervention 4

The human body cannot function appropriately if various parts of the body do not move along with the others (AC-1). It is not a healthy body if it is unable to be aware of the stimulus affecting one or more parts of the body, or if it is not able to act or react in a timely way. For example, a hand perceives the heat from a stove, but, if that message is not sent to or received by the brain, the brain does not have the information it needs to take action. Likewise, if the brain does not send or the hand does not receive the message to move away from the heat, a part of the body remains in peril. A healthy body must be

aware of what is happening around and with it by remaining open and aware (AC-4).

Moving together involves each of the members of the body living with a perspective of the whole body (AC-2). A recurrent theme throughout this paper is the role of conflict.

Moving together as a whole body includes how we respond to conflict and how we handle ourselves as a Christian community (AC-3).

Christians are referred to as “the body of Christ,” yet we do not all move in the same way as a human body moves. The focus group acknowledged that 100% consensus is not likely in any congregation. They suggested that a combination of listening, respect, calling people to consider the greater good, and being able “to constantly measure [the proposal] against our mission.” They also suggested that clear and consistent communication from leaders, such as the Council, would be beneficial for informing, building trust, and involving the congregation. Members of this focus group as follow-up to our discussion made a recommendation to Council regarding publishing a sense of the agenda before the Council meeting with an invitation to the congregation as well as a brief recap of decisions and actions following the meeting. We are in the process of implementing that recommendation at the time of this writing. Another focus group participant commented on the benefits of simply spending time together. She said, “The more you spend time with each other, the more you talk, the more you agree to disagree; that’s where there’s fertile ground for compromise.”

This focus group felt that information, getting people together, and recalling the mission when making decisions could be helpful in the future. A participant said that respect goes a long way—“If I feel listened to, I’m much more willing to just state: ‘You know what? As long as I’m on record as having a strong feeling against this, I will go

along with the rest of you.” This participant also said that calling people to consider the “mission statement, and, even if you disagree, do you think, for the sake of getting to that place [of fulfilling our mission, would you] be willing to agree to disagree?”

I observed through the focus group conversations that “values and assumptions ... go hand in hand. We assume that, because we’re a Christian church, we’re listening to God. Well, that’s a value, and so we’ve got to ground ourselves in our shared congregational values.”

The fourth intervention was, in my view, the most raw of the interventions. I saw dynamics and personalities emerge that exhibited the tension and conflict that I have witnessed in my time serving at Community. This conversation showed how leaders and congregation members can work together relying upon the shared congregational values of mission and respect to spend time together and truly hear one another. Coming together in this way “we get the best kind of consensus that this is what we should do to maintain who we are as a Christian community. And that’s really what our bottom line should be.”

Values Exercise

I treat the values exercise as its own section because of the overlap between Intervention 3 and Intervention 4. Leaders from each of the cottage meetings in Intervention 3 and group leaders for the breakout groups in Intervention 4 collected results from the values exercise using the feedback form included with the Cottage Meeting Leader Guide found in appendix P. The top five, seven, and ten values determined by each of the eleven groups (six cottage meeting groups, and five break-out groups) are listed in appendix Q.

Table 5-60 lists only the values receiving the highest scores. I have listed six values since two values resulted in a tie. The numbers in the “Top Five” column represent the number of groups (N = 11) which included that value in their top five. The “Appear” column represents that frequency in a percentage.

Table 5-60. Values Exercise Results from Top Five

	Top Five	Appear
Mission	10	90.91%
Lutheran Traditions	7	63.64%
Congregational Health	6	54.55%
Education	4	36.36%
Prayer	4	36.36%
Relationships	3	27.27%

An examination of the full table results shown in appendix U shows that values rated very high in the Top Ten did not end up in the Top Five. The values *Youth*, *Caring for Others*, *Community*, and *Security*, for example, were among those that ranked highly in the initial round. Leadership memos offered insight regarding the discussions in these groups. Many teams struggled to narrow their values because each of the values held a great deal of meaning. The teams remarked that simply working with one word was difficult because one word could have a variety of definitions depending on one’s perspective. We noticed that each team followed the rules of the values exercise, but developed their own group dynamic or group personality. They worked together to devise their own definitions of the words, and many decided to stack the values so they all understood which values were considered part of the main value card. One cottage meeting group, for example, selected *Discipleship* as one of their top five. The values that they assumed within this value were *Humility*, *Growth in Attendance*, *Welcoming*,

Serving Ourselves, Caring for Others, Relationships, Serving Others, Evangelism, Growth in Participation, Equality, and Community.

End-Line Qualitative Data

End-line qualitative data is derived from five sources: three end-line interviews, the end-line questionnaire open-ended questions, and an interview regarding congregational history. The interviewees were introduced earlier in this chapter in table 5-13. Twila, Brad, and Fred were interviewed individually using the end-line interview protocol. I combined the three end-line interviews for analysis since they addressed similar themes. Juanita was interviewed separately without a predesigned protocol. The purpose of Juanita's interview was to explore the congregation's history and whether factions played a role in fomenting conflict in the congregation. The sections that follow describe the *in vivo*, focused, and axial codes from these data sources.

End-line Questionnaire

Analysis of the open-ended questions from the end-line questionnaire yielded 326 *in vivo* codes. Further analysis of the *in vivo* codes resulted in sixty-five focused codes, and four axial codes as shown in table 5-61.

Table 5-61. Axial Codes for End-line Questionnaire Responses

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Discerning God's call together based on values
FC-4	Deciding and explaining Pastor Jeff's sabbatical
FC-7	Creating new ministries
FC-8	Selecting Sunday School curricula
FC-10	Pursuing ministry outreach
FC-15	Explaining rationale for decisions
FC-19	Having access to decision-makers
FC-27	Being willing to change
FC-31	Leadership being more deliberate about involving
FC-34	Not allowing decisions to be driven by a few people
FC-35	Being willing to compromise
FC-38	Coordinating projects that cross teams
FC-40	Determining how much agreement is required to move forward
FC-44	Seeking win-win solutions
FC-45	Praying for clear thinking and God's leading
FC-47	Tying decisions to mission
FC-55	Determining shared vision for comparison of new initiatives
FC-56	Leaders directing the group but not deciding for the group
FC-58	Sharing how we each hear God
FC-59	Working together for the greater good
FC-60	Taking time to dwell with God and remain open to God
FC-63	Handling bullies
FC-64	Discerning God's call
FC-65	Serving others
AC-2	Valuing an open and inclusive process
FC-5	Presenting ideas
FC-6	Discussing values
FC-9	Feeling that discussion is closed
FC-11	Deciding about time-sensitive issues
FC-13	Having an open forum for sharing information and discussion
FC-14	Treating people with respect
FC-22	Congregation being supportive
FC-25	Giving the congregation a sense of ownership
FC-26	Maintaining transparency
FC-28	Needing broader congregational participation
FC-37	Sharing power
FC-41	Encouraging differing views
FC-46	Informing and being informed
FC-49	Listening to and respecting each other
FC-50	Reaching out and including others besides the core membership
FC-57	Exercising communal traits

Table 5-61. Axial Codes for End-line Questionnaire Responses (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-3	Considering many factors
FC-1	Managing the budget
FC-3	Exploring options for building renovations
FC-12	Prioritizing projects with a financial impact
FC-16	Making better decisions that move us forward and make sense financially
FC-17	Considering the needs of all
FC-20	Being honest and learning from past mistakes
FC-21	Keeping a whole church context in mind
FC-29	Being limited by finances
FC-36	Listening to all demographic segments of the congregation
FC-51	Focusing on the whole rather than on individuals
FC-52	Researching thoroughly and presenting options
AC-4	Following an action-oriented, faithful process
FC-2	Deciding to pause the search for a music director
FC-18	Following process
FC-23	Allowing enough time to have input before a decision is made
FC-24	Thinking strategically
FC-30	Wanting to see efficient progress
FC-32	Needing clear process and communication
FC-33	Avoiding the process becoming bogged down (stagnation)
FC-39	Being willing to change one's mind
FC-42	Wasting time and energy attempting 100% consensus
FC-43	Allowing time for implementation to work
FC-48	Sharing progress
FC-53	Establishing a decision process with timeframes
FC-54	Willingness to take risks
FC-61	Establishing clear vision, mission, and values
FC-62	Deciding based on vision, mission, and values

The fundamental shift between the baseline and end-line questionnaires was from answering based on “your time at Community” in the baseline to “over the last twelve months.” Most respondents gave helpful and constructive comments. Only a few respondents used the anonymity and the platform of a survey to air grievances, even if those grievances occurred long ago or if conditions changed from what had upset them. For example, one respondent wrote:

Same old, same old. Lack of leadership continues. ... As a small congregation, Community tries to do too many things. Streamline the programs and get congregational buy in on each. The programs will then be strongly supported and growth and program expansion can then occur.

This sentiment has been voiced many times during my tenure. I pay attention to it, but also challenge it by asking: “What are we currently doing that you would suggest that we stop doing? And what would the impact of that action be?”

Both baseline and end-line questionnaires proved a good forum for respondents to vent their frustration. Question 20 specifically invited negative feedback. The feeling that decisions were being made in secret and by small groups of people was still evident as people wrote: “I don’t see broad enough participation;” “I don’t get a lot of direct input into the decisions;” “Most decisions are being driven by a few;” and “Things are not transparent, and it seems to me that there is too much secrecy.” One respondent even said: “I feel that things are very negative at this time.” The nature of this kind of research project is that the research notices the majority opinions—both qualitative and quantitative, but also the minority positions to mine them for what others might not be saying.

The majority of the comments throughout the end-line questionnaire were positive. They reflected that respondents felt hopeful, energized, and involved. A respondent to Q51 said, “I’ve felt more involved in this community this past year than I ever have before.” A number of respondents expressed frustration at Intervention 4, the special congregational meeting. They felt it was too repetitive with what they experienced in the cottage meetings.

The cottage meetings received many positive comments. People felt as though they were “generally well organized and worthwhile.” Other comments reflecting on the research period and the cottage meetings, in particular, are worth quoting below:

- “I was able to provide direct feedback and voice my opinion.”
- “Felt that small group discussions come to a consensus much quicker than larger groups.”
- “This process has brought an awareness to the congregation about how Community functions. People seem to be more aware and involved.”
- “I felt we could discuss the spiritual life at Community at a deeper level during the cottage meetings. Small groups are powerful and a place to really get to know the people involved in the church.”
- “I was encouraged by people’s willingness to try new things/new styles of communicating even if they didn’t seem particularly sold on it.”
- “I appreciated the frank discussions on people’s different motivations to serve. ‘Prayerful consideration’ should be our mantra.”
- “I believe we had become a stagnant congregation with no direction. I am much more hopeful that as a body of Christ, Community can make a more significant impact on our community.”
- “Genuine feeling of open communication—no hidden agendas.”
- “We have started some new lines of communication.”
- “I feel more included in the decision-making process but understand if my opinion is not acted upon.”
- “I have always felt good/hopeful about Community, but understanding more process and getting to know more members, I feel more comfortable, and that feeling of community/family breeds hope.”
- “I think there has been a lot of open discussion and different formats for providing input. I think all of these activities have and will help our communication and decision-making in the future.”
- “I feel as though Pastor Jeff is working hard to draw members into active participation by using God’s will as his compass and tries to make Community feel like a stable and open environment.”

These comments reflect the positive, focused, and energetic outcome of the cottage meetings. Respondents also offered challenges in the midst of their enthusiasm. Some people indicated that they have been through these kinds of meetings in the past, and, given Community’s history, they want to see action. Another respondent noted that, “While the dialogue is happening in some areas, there is still a feeling overall of Community being stagnant.” A person, presumably one of the cottage meeting leaders

wrote, “Cottage meetings are very time-consuming for leadership, but I think they are a great way to build relationship among congregation members.”

The end-line questionnaire revealed more subtle data as well. Respondents generally feel that the congregation is both healthy and faithful. One person honored both our present and our past by writing: “I believe that Community is faithfully and truly moving forward. I would like to add ‘changing’ but I think that would diminish the faithful decision of historical times.” Respondents generally feel ready to encourage each other and the congregation’s leaders, while they also admit that communication and leadership remain concerns. Respondents either explicitly or implicitly articulated congregational values. A clear message was for all people to listen to each other, for leaders not to be secretive, to trust the congregation with matters that affect us, to not waste people’s time, to inform people, to give people opportunities to be involved, and to follow through on decisions. One person observed an “overwhelming response that Community is all about service to others. In our discerning God’s call that was abundantly clear that our purpose and calling is to serve others both in our church building and in our community.”

Some respondents commented on my research project itself. They appreciated the time and effort that I put into the project, and they noted that the congregation has already realized benefits from it. One person commented that “the fact that this research project was even initiated is a significant step toward a healthy and faithful congregation. People innately want to feel included, so bringing more communication and awareness to them offers hope for the future.”

The *in vivo*, focused, and axial codes from the end-line questionnaire brought to my mind the image of stewardship as shown in figure 5-9. I introduce this graphic to focus these codes and shape their interpretation. Stewards are called to be good and faithful managers of what is not theirs, yet treating what they manage as if it was their own. Stewarding leaders are called to be caretakers of the church facilities, the people, and the mission of their particular congregation.



Figure 5-9. Image of Stewardship²⁸

The seed in this image has begun to sprout. This seed could be the beginning of a new ministry, a new way of doing something, a person who is developing in faith, or a person who feels on the fringe of the congregation. Stewardship in this situation is about being aware of what is new and fragile, taking it gently in hand, and nurturing it. This graphic may invite the reader to ask: Why is this seedling out of the ground? Where is it going? The person is likely moving it to a better location for some reason and to prepare it for what is next—perhaps the seedling was sprouted in a greenhouse and is being transplanted outside. Stewardship implies growth, movement, and preparation.

²⁸ Gold, Lou. "Soil in Hand." Digital image. Flickr. March 23, 2008. Accessed December 28, 2016. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/visionshare/2485658243>.

Stewardship implies doing for the sake of the other as opposed to a self-interested perspective that might otherwise have the person in the picture walk by and not notice the new seedling or even trample it underfoot.

Figure 5-10 depicts the centrality of God's call to the Christian community. God's call is available to all in the community, but, as a respondent indicated, God speaks to us differently.

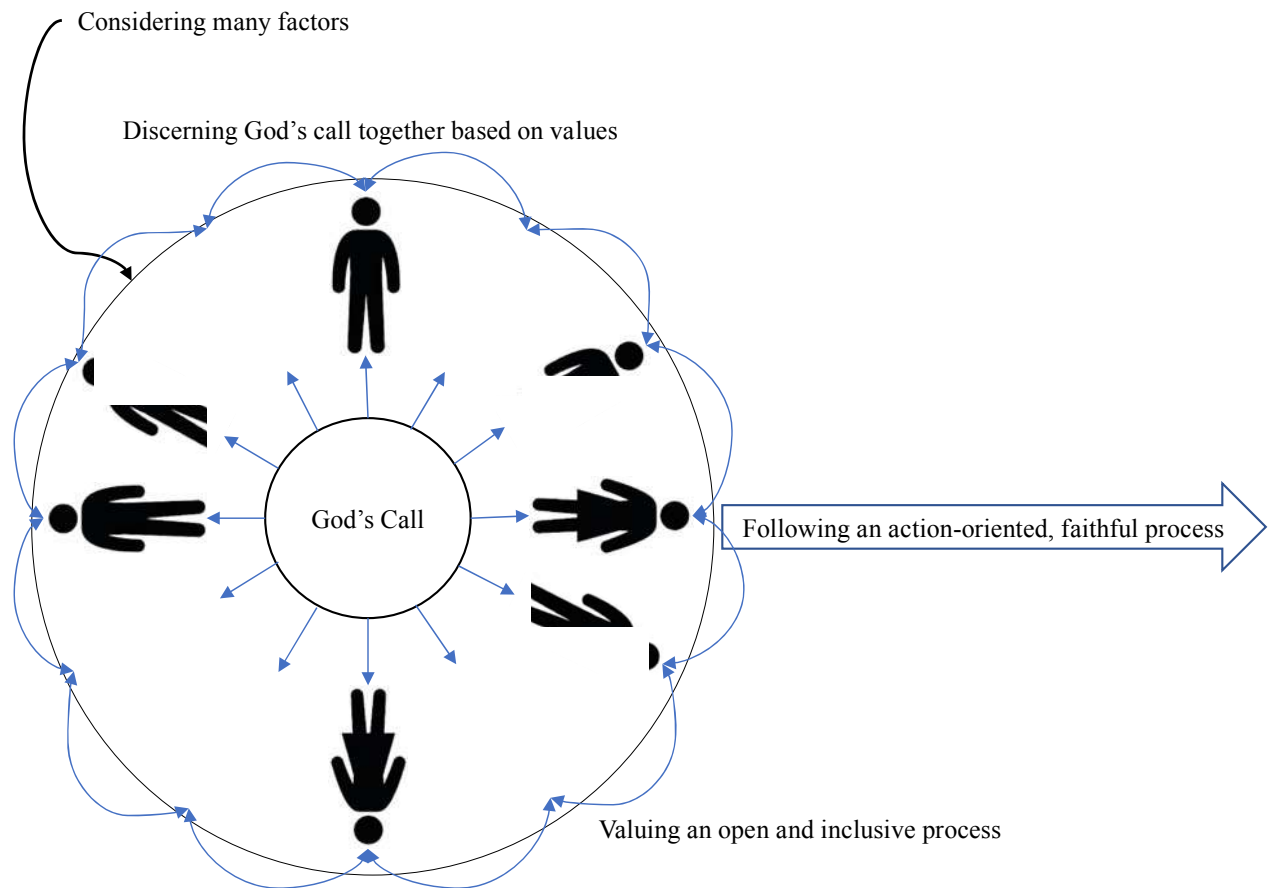


Figure 5-10. Theoretical Coding for End-line Questionnaire Responses

Stewarding leaders work alongside stewarding members to discern God's call together based on values (AC-1), to value an open and inclusive process (AC-2), to consider many factors (AC-3), and to follow and action-oriented and faithful process (AC-4).

End-line Interviews

Analysis of the end-line interviews conducted with Twila, Brad, and Fred yielded 209 *in vivo* codes. Further analysis of the *in vivo* codes resulted in sixty-one focused codes, and four axial codes as shown in table 5-62.

Table 5-62. Axial Codes for Combined End-line Interviews

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Leading teams and the congregation
FC-1	Understanding group dynamics
FC-5	Getting difficult people on board
FC-6	Getting people in opposition on board
FC-9	Working together once a decision is made
FC-13	Being aware of those who have something to say
FC-15	Ensuring that all team members have a role and purpose
FC-16	Being a good steward of team members' time
FC-17	Leading volunteers and holding them accountable
FC-19	Sharing tasks across team members
FC-24	Handling bullying behavior so the group can remain focused
FC-30	Having healthy leadership impacts the need for control
FC-33	Keeping people with differences in the room when heated
FC-38	Leading by setting the tone of culture and relationships
FC-46	Finding the line between consensus and action
FC-48	Being prepared to make informed decisions
FC-28	Sharing in a smaller setting is helpful
FC-45	Making decisions in churches is not unilateral
FC-58	Following God nimbly

Table 5-62. Axial Codes for Combined End-line Interviews (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-2	Connecting people with each other and process
FC-11	Ensuring that accurate information gets out
FC-12	Communicating well requires knowledge of people and structures
FC-14	Building greater involvement through relationships
FC-20	Building a foundation of the community in relationship
FC-21	Disagreeing with others in a healthy relationship
FC-22	Arriving at a better decision through healthy dissension and questioning
FC-23	Engaging, disengaging, and re-engaging in conflictual conversations
FC-25	Creating a safe and holy space to engage the issue at hand
FC-26	Creating a culture that continually prepares new leaders
FC-27	Involving all parts of the body in the ministry
FC-29	Identifying strong leaders to see projects through
FC-34	Reconciling together around truth
FC-36	Getting to the other side of conflict
FC-40	Involving younger generations
FC-42	Knowing people allows sharing
FC-47	Meeting the needs of people who seek transparency and those who seek action
FC-49	Trusting leaders
FC-50	Allowing for an organic component in our process
FC-52	Communicating about progress
FC-53	Communicating about up-coming decisions
FC-56	Knowing the next step
FC-57	Reaching fringe members
FC-60	Gathering casually outside of church
FC-61	Making connections
AC-3	Mutual responsibility
FC-2	Being aware of one's impact on the group
FC-3	Listening well
FC-8	Taking personal responsibility, initiative, and ownership
FC-18	Taking ownership of actions and following through
FC-31	Being respectful allows people to talk about disagreements
FC-32	Noticing and being aware of others to exercise care and concern
FC-35	Exercising courage to meet one's adversary face-to-face
FC-39	Reacting to one another affects the other person
FC-41	Drawing strength from the community
FC-43	Reflecting on why conflict is occurring
FC-44	Expecting mutual honesty
FC-55	Mutual responsibility for health and faithfulness
FC-59	Putting learning into action

Table 5-62. Axial Codes for Combined End-line Interviews (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-4	Knowing individual and communal values and motivation
FC-4	Feeling listened to, understood, and respected
FC-7	Focusing on our purpose as a church
FC-10	Being people of love, respect, humility, and confidence
FC-37	Being a witness to others on handling differences
FC-51	Living our values
FC-54	Understanding why people give

The three end-line interviews were very different because of the personalities and perspectives involved. The themes of these conversations, however, converged to create four axial codes which address facets of *relationship*. The topic of process was clearly present as well, but it was used in the context of the effect on interpersonal relationships or relationships between the leadership and the congregation.

I invited Fred to participate in the interview because of the development of our relationship over time. Fred and I were on opposite sides of the largest conflict in the congregation during my tenure so far. This conflict involved a music director and is explored in the next section in which I interviewed Juanita regarding congregational history. Fred and I reflected briefly on our participation in the conflict and how we were able to emerge from it. I summarized both of our comments when I noted that at the end of a very contentious congregational meeting, “you and I embraced and shared the peace of Christ and we forgave each other.” We lived forgiveness and lived grace to each other. Fred’s perspective was that “we’ve lost some good people just because they were not willing to do exactly that ... step forward and meet their adversary face-to-face and say, ‘Okay, we have some issues ... but I want to stay within this family.’”

Getting to the other side of conflict, according to Fred, requires people being heard, loved, respected, and decisions made as we live the gospel. The congregation remains whole as we do these things and as we move together. Fred also commented on our Christian witness to our community as we deal with differences. He said that there are many bad examples of dealing with differences. Our church can offer an alternative as we “show the community that we have open arms, we welcome people in, and don’t push away.” We offer a culture of welcome and hospitality.

Fred is a tutor and brought the richness of his experience into the conversation as we addressed congregational leadership. He said that a good tutor does not simply give students the answers; instead, they ask good questions and shape the conversation to lead their students to think and challenge. Fred said that a good leader takes the same path: we want leaders that aren’t “going to just get the answer ... but lead us in getting to the answer.” Good leaders don’t “cut people off or shut people down,” but promote dialogue. He said that, just like an educator “can’t turn the light [of understanding] on for someone else,” a leader can’t make members of the congregation see or understand a proposal in the same way.

We reflected on the interventions and congregational conflict, and he noted that people have very different reactions to ideas and one another, and these reactions have an effect on others. The effect can be to cause offense, to build trust, and to put at ease, among others. We cannot control what these reactions will be, but can put these reactions within the context of education. He noted: “Where there’s friction, that’s where learning happens.” This friction is consonant with the description of conflict theory and resistance described in chapter 2.

Fred told the story of a time when he was a confirmation teacher. He and the other two adult leaders intentionally created a safe space for the students. One of his students eventually revealed that he had a significant drug problem. That student checked himself into a detox program as a result of that class. Fred said, “His friends gave him enough love to give him the strength to go” get the help he needed.

Twila has been very active in the congregation over the years, including serving on Council and as Council president. She is also a mother to three young adult women, two of whom are married and have children of their own who also participate at Community. I have always experienced Twila as being a very positive and energetic person who is focused on accomplishing things. Our conversation in the end-line interview flowed very naturally, as our conversations often do. We tend to have grand thoughts together, and we emerge from our conversations energized and with a plan of action.

Our conversation tended to focus on conflict and involving the congregation in helpful ways that move the congregation forward. Twila tends to be very open and welcoming to comments, including criticism. She welcomes disagreement because she feels that dissension or disagreement brings up questions that make for a better decision. Disagreement raises thoughts and questions that people may not have considered, so we can “take whatever your idea is to the table, and we will come up with an idea that nobody came in with but it will be better than any one idea that came individually.”

The differences that allow us to think and approach situations differently are really a blessing to be celebrated. She recalled that, during the recent Olympics, she saw an Apple commercial in which the poet, Maya Angelou, recited her poem, “Human

Family.” Twila was captivated by the repeated phrase: “We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike.”²⁹

We noted how people generally tend to focus on and expand differences rather than claiming that which unites us. Threads of *relationship* as a topic were woven through our conversation and came to a climactic point when she said: “You can go through things together no matter what the relationship is ... everything is built around that.” Twila’s reflections on relationship as a foundation that holds people together brought about one of the major learnings from our conversation. Relationships that serve as the foundation of our lives that help us go through life are those *covenantal* relationships. We spoke of the vows that we make in marriage that are “promises to one another.” We recounted the words from the Bible that “the two shall become one flesh” (Mark 10:8) and from the wedding service: “Those whom God has joined together let no one separate.”³⁰ We spoke of the vows that are made in baptism and affirmed in confirmation to be an active part of the body of the congregation. We are made members of the body of Christ—sisters and brothers—family. The common thread in these relationships is that God did the work of joining together and creating the community. Therefore, “God joined this congregation together” as a covenant community. “We can have differences, but we can’t have division” because “those whom God has joined together ... no one [should] separate.”

²⁹ Maya Angelou, “Human Family,” in *I Shall Not Be Moved* (New York: Random House, 1990).

³⁰ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada., “Marriage,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006).

A covenantal relationship relies upon mutuality and involvement, both of which are major themes for Twila. Twila believes that all people in a congregation should take an active part “because, when you’re baptized, you’re sent forth to spread God’s word and say you’re a member of the body of Christ.” We each have a personal responsibility to the mission of the church *and* to how we conduct ourselves in our relationships and as part of the congregational community. She said that we feel more of a sense of ownership when we are involved. She also began to frame involvement in terms of stewardship because we are involved through using our time, talent, and treasure. We wondered together whether “stewardship is the *how* of involvement.”

Brad, like Twila, is focused on action. Our conversation dwelt on the effective functioning of a leadership team, levels of transparency, the reciprocal relationship between leaders and those whom they serve, and how values guide both the congregation and the individuals who constitute the congregation.

Brad spoke of his frustration with congregational decision-making and leadership because so much time and talk is involved with little to show for it. He recalled a meeting in which a team leader reported on what seemed to be the entirety of the team’s research process and their findings. He appreciated the work that was involved, but grew frustrated. He said, “We were getting every detail of every discussion that had happened ... that was really hard for me.” He offered his experience with a school board as an alternative. He said, “The members knew, in advance, what the issues were and had a chance to talk to their constituents and were ready to make a decision when they came to the meeting. Yes, there was some discussion. It was fairly quick, but it wasn’t all hashed out there in public.” Brad’s comments highlight the important role of executive

leadership in clarifying the agenda and decisions to be made, the connections of Council and team leaders to the congregation, and being prepared with all of the information necessary to make a decision.

We observed that not all decisions are alike. A decision to switch brand of paper towels requires less congregational involvement and less transparency than the congregational budget, for example. A congregational decision-making process should take these levels of transparency into account to ensure that people are involved where they need to be. People like Brad who are more action-oriented experience overly transparent congregational leaders as frustrating, cumbersome, and laborious.

A significant learning from this conversation was the mutual responsibility for health and faithfulness. I had been focusing throughout this project on the health and faithfulness of the *whole* congregation and the need for leaders to communicate. This interview helped me see that “there are decisions we make on the congregational level, but there are also decisions that people make on an individual and family level.” Families make decisions about: Should we go to church? Should we be involved, and, if so, where? How much should we give? We wondered: Is it possible to have a healthy and faithful congregation if the individual members of that body are not healthy and faithful?

We continued to explore the idea of mutual responsibility in noting that congregational leaders must be transparent and trust-worthy. However, individuals also bear some responsibility for being involved and taking the initiative to know what is happening in their congregation. Thus involvement is also mutual. Brad reflected on his own involvement as one of the men who cares for the church’s lawn. The church cannot suppose that the people in the pews will simply undertake tasks simply because we think

they ought to be done. There is a role for motivation. He asked: “Why do I do that [mow the lawn and get hot and sweaty]?” It comes down to this: “It’s important to me that God’s house be presentable for God. It’s important to me that people coming to our church assume that we care enough to take care of God’s house. It’s important to me to have fellowship with” the others who help take care of the church yard. “That’s how I make that decision.” We all have different motivations based on what we value. We may not always articulate it as: “‘This is a way for me to glorify God,’ but I think that’s the base ... the motivation.” “We do these things because ... that’s our unity. That’s why we’re a congregation. That’s why we’re here instead of” with any other congregation in town. I reflected with Brad using *values* language as I said, “You’re talking about the underlying value being ‘we do this because of who we are as people of God.’” Personal action occurs, however, when our individual values outweigh any costs or negatives.

The axial codes outlined in table 5-62 and explained above may be visualized with the use of an Egyptian ship. Figure 5-11 depicts a sailing ship that sails with some purpose and destination in mind, people on-board carrying out their duties, and the wind filling its sails.³¹

³¹ George C. V. Holmes, “Ancient and Modern Ships: Part I,” London: Wyman and Sons, 1906, <http://www.hellenicaworld.com/Technology/Literature/GeorgeCVHolmes/en/AncientAndModernShips.html> (accessed 1/2/2017).

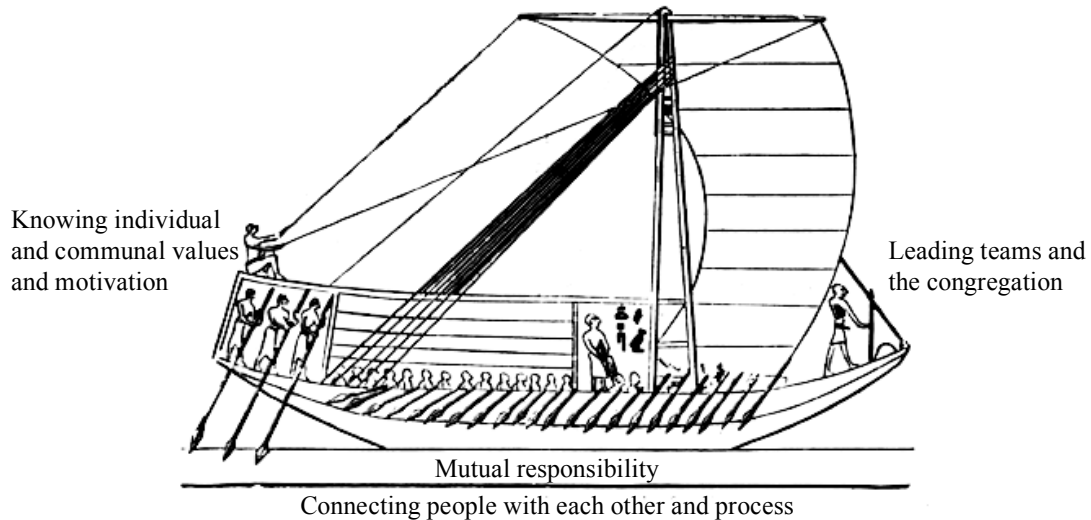


Figure 5-11. Theoretical Coding for End-line Interviews³²

Obvious differences exist between ancient Egyptian and modern North American leadership techniques. This figure, however, shows that each person has a role within teams. The role of leaders is significant on ships as well as in congregations. Leaders help to clarify the direction of the ship (congregation) and what each team needs to do to work together to accomplish the purpose of the entire ship, which matches the axial code: leading teams and the congregation (AC-1). The entire ship will not function as intended or achieve its goals unless all team members pull their own weight and fulfill their role. Each person exercises mutual responsibility not only to the leaders but the other members of their team (AC-3). Each person must be connected with each other and the process (AC-2). These connections help people understand the value of their role and how it fits into the bigger picture. People need to know how their tasks, no matter how large or small, affect their teammates and the ability of the ship to accomplish its purpose. Leaders and each person must know their individual and communal values as well as

³² Source: W. S. Lindsay, "The History of Merchant Shipping and Ancient Commerce," 1874.

what motivates them (AC-4). These values and motivation help keep the congregation moving forward.

Precedent exists for relating ships to the church. The Latin word for ship is *navis* from which we get the English word *nave*, which is used to refer to the sanctuary. The use of the word *nave* further makes the point that the church is about movement and purpose, and the church requires each member of the body of the church to actively participate in that movement.

Congregational History Interview

I met with Juanita, a long-time member of the congregation who has in-depth knowledge and experience as a member and congregational leader. She has served both as a formal and an informal leader of the congregation for years. The purpose of this interview was to explore the significant conflicts in the congregation's history to determine if there were any common themes or factions that perpetuated or stirred up conflict in the congregation.

The context for the formation of this congregation began in the wake of the Civil War. The founders of the congregation moved from Pennsylvania, Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, and Maryland. A congregation member recorded Community's history in a short book published for the 100th anniversary of the congregation. I used this book and congregational lore to begin creating a congregational genogram when I was called to serve as their pastor. This genogram details the pastors and other lay leaders, dates, conflicts, and significant places in which the congregation felt the Holy Spirit was moving.

Juanita and I spent time reviewing, updating, and correcting the genogram as we looked for common elements. She had very helpful insights into the relationships and dynamics at work with various pastors and lay leaders. Juanita's recollection was that the more recent significant conflict had to do with money, the music program, or both. We used a recent conflict involving a music director as a case study. Conflict surrounded this person's tenure from the time he was hired to the time the decision was made not to renew his contract. The conflict resulted in several people leaving the congregation when he was hired, several leaving during his time at Community, people reducing their giving, and people leaving at the end of his employment.

Volumes could be written from a leadership and congregation member perspective about the entire experience. I was interested in exploring with Juanita the question: "At which point did the conflict begin?" Figure 5-12 identifies significant benchmarks on a timeline, and, specifically, where divisions occurred.

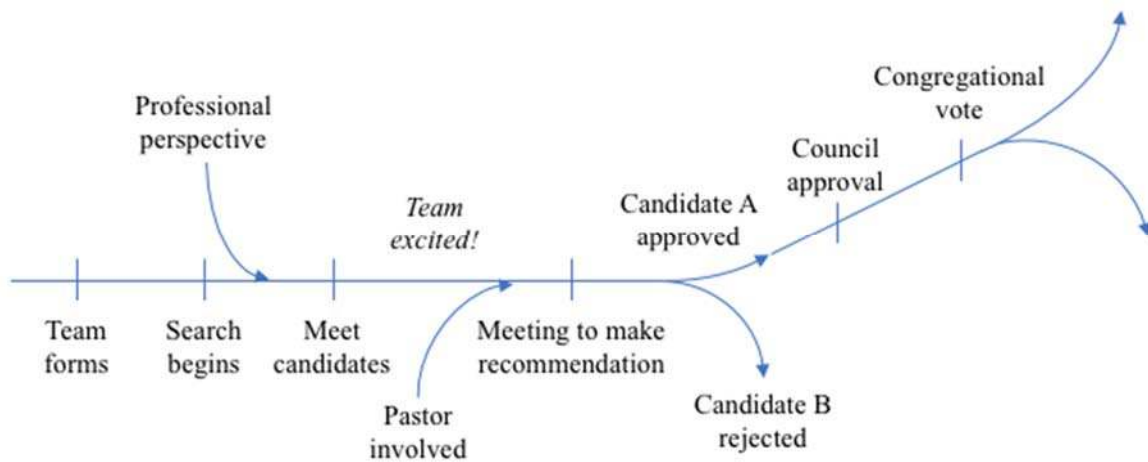


Figure 5-12. Timeline Diagram of a Significant Personnel Conflict

The timeline shows a meeting of the music search team to make a decision whether to recommend Candidate A or Candidate B. Meeting notes from the time and conversations indicate that there was likely no conflict amongst the search team prior to the

recommendation meeting. Conflict began to appear following that meeting. The search team's recommendation to Council was met with questions, but did not appear to have significant conflict. The congregational meeting had significant challenges and questions. These questions were not about the candidate's musical abilities because his résumé amazed the congregation, but the questions revolved around money. Hiring this music director involved a significant increase in the budget. The amount exceeded what the Council could approve without congregational approval. Language was used at the congregational meeting to encourage people to trust, hope, risk, and have faith.

The conversation with Juanita, and a review of the search team notes, Council minutes, and congregational meeting minutes led us to conclude that there was nothing wrong with the process. The right groups had insight and they made decisions according to both the congregation's constitution and what made sense to the leaders. Interventions, meetings, and focus groups have spent considerable time discussing process and communication. The communication appeared to be in order.

Juanita and I concluded that something happened in the meeting of the music search team that recommended Candidate A that is not recorded in the notes, but can be read by following the events that transpired after that meeting. We suspect that concerns were either not raised or that they were raised but either not heard or overruled. This is curious because the meeting minutes from a special meeting of the Council on May 24, 2004, reported that "the search committee ... met on May 17th and voted unanimously to select [Candidate A]."³³ Council voted at that meeting to accept the search team's

³³ It is worth noting that a side conversation at the end of this project with a person who was on the search committee noted that at least two people voted against Candidate A, so the report of the vote as "unanimous" is inaccurate.

recommendation of Candidate A—there was only one dissenting vote. The Council followed that vote with two other unanimous votes: one to approve the compensation package, and the other to approve vacation and continuing education days.

A special congregational meeting was called for June 6, 2004, to approve the compensation package. The pastor called for a point of personal privilege before the vote was cast to thank “everyone for their loving, thoughtful and honest contributions to the discussion.” There were 104 ballots cast: 65.4% (68) voted yes, 33.7% (35) voted no, and 1.0% (1) voted to abstain. Average worship attendance for Community in 2004 was 318 meaning that 21.4% of the worshipping community made the decision to move forward with the music search team’s recommendation. Attendance dropped to 273 in 2005. The senior pastor left the congregation in 2005, and average worship attendance has declined virtually every year since then.

I noted 119 *in vivo* codes from the interview, my notes, and the meeting minutes for the search team, Council, and the congregational meeting. Table 5-63 lists the four axial codes that I derived from forty-six focused codes.

Table 5-63. Axial Codes for Congregational History Interview

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
AC-1	Being a faith community that builds healthy relationships
FC-5	Understanding when seeds of conflict/division are planted
FC-7	Supporting staff
FC-9	Discerning legitimate concerns
FC-14	Relating with community
FC-15	Living our identity and faith
FC-17	Determining what business practices are appropriate for congregations
FC-18	Understanding the relationship between leaders and the people they work with
FC-19	Reaching out intentionally to those who feel differently
FC-20	Handling tense working relationships among staff
FC-21	Having your voice heard

FC-23 Taking sides and the health of the congregation

Table 5-63. Axial Codes for Congregational History Interview (continued)

Axial Codes (AC) and corresponding Focused Codes (FC)	
FC-30	Viewing the actions of others in the best possible light
FC-34	Identifying the source of friction
FC-37	Planning for succession
FC-45	Avoiding expressions of superiority when educating or informing
FC-46	Being honest about what makes or breaks relationships
AC-2	Following a process of discernment based on shared congregational values
FC-2	Being asked: "Why are we doing this?"
FC-3	Deciding who should be involved in decision-making
FC-6	Feeling listened to
FC-10	Ensure that people are informed going into a vote
FC-16	Deciding the level of transparency regarding personnel issues
FC-25	Using the governance of the church to further an agenda
FC-27	Knowing when to stop fighting for the good of the congregation
FC-28	Agreeing to and following process
FC-29	Gaining insight into why some may not follow process
FC-31	Discerning the Spirit when opposing viewpoints
FC-32	Enculturating the process of decision-making
FC-35	Acknowledging the need for healthy resistance
FC-38	Supporting leaders starting on an idea
FC-40	Adjusting the process to match the size and scope of a project
AC-3	Reacting to conflict with a spirit of humility and awareness of the common good
FC-1	Reacting to declining finances
FC-22	Anticipating the impact of a decision beyond a particular ministry area
FC-24	Taking actions and decisions personally
FC-26	Influencing already strained relationships with legalistic terminology
FC-39	Being fearful of people
FC-43	Understanding that change feels like loss or grief
AC-4	Setting and managing realistic expectations throughout the congregation
FC-4	Accepting mutual responsibility in communication
FC-8	Being as informed as possible
FC-11	Defining boundaries
FC-12	Addressing differences appropriately
FC-13	Setting expectations of staff
FC-33	Establishing strong leaders who can see projects through to completion
FC-36	Building communal ownership
FC-41	Recognizing the responsibility to the congregation that leaders assume
FC-42	Expecting mutual honesty

FC-44 Knowing the history, traditions, and meaning

It is difficult to adequately described the causes and circumstances surrounding the conflict that spanned the five years from June 2004 to June 2009. I believe we can ascribe to the members of the music search team the value of trying to do the best thing for the future of the congregation. Perhaps this desire clouded the judgment of some team members such that they saw the tremendous talent and opportunities that lay before them with Candidate A. Perhaps information or perspectives were overlooked or ignored.

Juanita's and my examination of the conflicts at Community indicates that conflicts do not arise as a part of factions, but they arise out of issues—the issue of finance, the issue of process, the issue of leadership. These issues in combination with a desire for change or forward movement championed by a charismatic leader resulted in conflict for Community. Any resistance that challenges the forward movement has been seen as subversive, curmudgeonly, or people lacking faith, hope, vision, and trust. We found that *healthy* resistance, which is resistance that is both offered and received in a healthy manner, is helpful because it ends up yielding a better decision with broader ownership.

This interview also brought to light that all decisions require a different process because there “isn't a set formula for all processes.” Decisions also require different levels of involvement by ministry teams, leadership, and the congregation. There needs to be a process can be known, can be followed, and is responsive in a timely manner. Figure 5-13 depicts the theoretical coding showing the relationships between the axial codes outlined above.

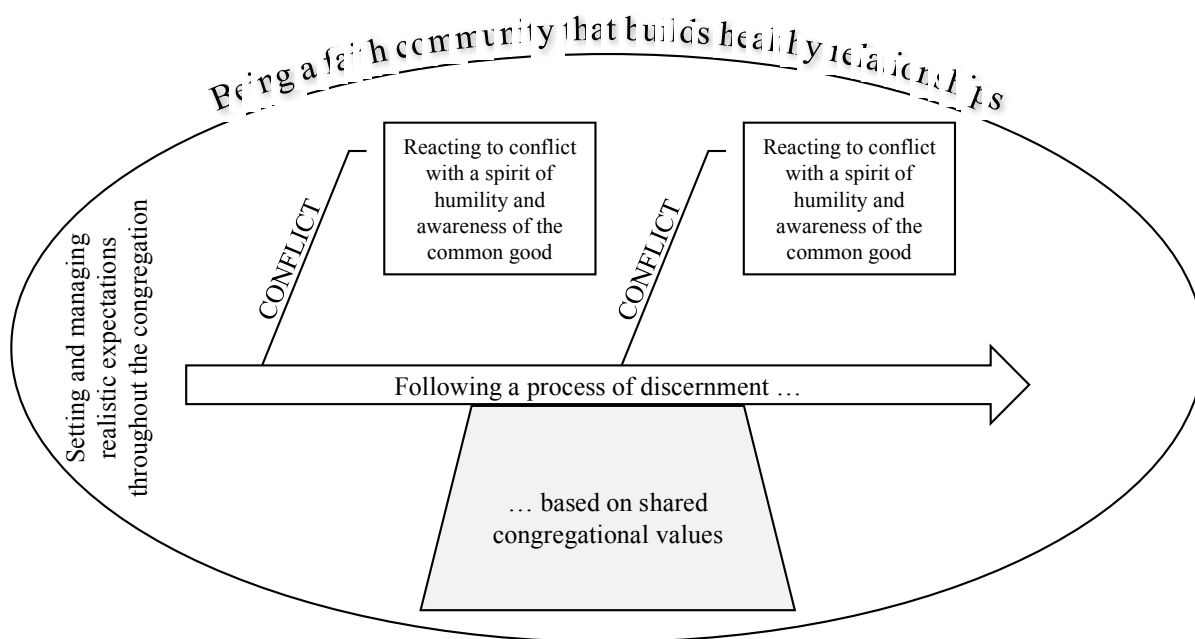


Figure 5-13. Theoretical Coding for Congregational History Interview

All ideas and processes in a congregation occur within the context of a faith community that builds healthy relationships (AC-1). These relationships must be based on honesty, trust, love, and a mutual commitment to involvement and pursuit of the common good. Leaders help to set and manage realistic expectations within the congregation on a regular basis, but, specifically, at the beginning of any discernment process (AC-4). The process of discernment in a healthy and faithful congregation is based on the congregation's shared values (AC-2).

This paper has repeatedly noted the value and role of healthy and faithful resistance as a means of achieving a healthy and faithful decision. Discernment processes must include safe space for healthy resistance and conflict reacting to it with a spirit of humility and awareness of the common good (AC-3). There must also be some provision for identifying those who resist based on their own desires and those who resist any change. Those who resist out of fear or uncertainty should be heard. The congregation's history of conflict needs to be considered when responding to resistance. Some people

who are not accustomed to being heard may have developed patterns that appear inappropriate because they have needed to find ways to have their voice heard. Leaders take the lead in setting expectations for a process, clearly articulate the need and rationale, and model effective, thoughtful, and respectful responses to resistance.

Summary of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from the baseline and end-line questionnaires added depth to the quantitative data by allowing me to hear respondents express themselves using their own words. The anonymity of the surveys allowed respondents to be very honest in their comments, and I learned a great deal from them. The focus groups and interviews were worth their weight in gold. The survey data reflected on the past while the focus groups and interviews allowed a level of creativity and problem-solving that is not possible without face-to-face dialogue.

Summary

Chapter 5 has presented qualitative and quantitative data that provide insights for understanding how those who tend to be active in the congregation perceive the congregation's decision-making with regard to health and faithfulness. The data also point out areas for further development as in decisions where faith and finances are in opposition. Chapter 6 brings the variables; data; and theoretical, theological, and biblical frames into conversation to draw conclusions.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the research process are described in detail and interpreted in chapter 5. I have referred to Van Gelder's Five Phases of Discernment throughout this paper and throughout the research process with the congregation in relation to specific decisions or projects.¹ These elements call to mind my favorite description of vocation from Frederick Buechner: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."² This research project fit into the Five Phases as it was a period of deep listening, or *attending*, to the congregation's frustrations, hopes, dreams, and sense of call.

The nature of a participatory action research project (PAR) is two-fold: that the researcher is part of the research process, and that people are involved in their own process of action and change. My desire was for the congregation to grow as a *missional* congregation, which calls us specifically to vocation. The history of this congregation is described in the introductory chapter, chapter 1. The methodology and specific research

¹ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 1879.

² Frederick Buechner, "National Vocation Awareness Week," 2016, <http://www.frederickbuechner.com/blog/2016/11/6/national-vocation-awareness-week> (accessed 1/6/2017).

design is described in chapter 4, which is focused on answering my central research question:

How might a participatory action research (PAR) intervention within Community that focuses on cultivating a culture of healthy dialogue lead to more faithful discernment while expressing respect for diverse opinions among members of the congregation as the body of Christ in mission?

This chapter outlines the major findings of this project and synthesizes those findings through the biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses explored in chapters 2 and 3. The chapter concludes with a description of the limitations of design and methodology, and with questions for future research.

Summary of Major Findings

I articulated themes that I noticed through the data as key words and key phrases listed in table 5-1. These key words and key phrases together with the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data may be summarized using the three categories listed in table 6-1 as clarity, culture, and process. This section explains these categories in greater detail in light of the data.

Table 6-1. Categories of Major Findings

-
1. Clarity of roles, process, and identity.
 2. Culture of healthy and faithful relationships of mutuality.
 3. Process that leads to action based on shared congregational values.
-

Clarity of Roles, Process, and Identity

Clarity was a subtle yet very present theme through the research. The baseline and end-line results showed that people were not sure exactly what the decision-making

process was. This was confirmed during Intervention 2 when leaders of the congregation were stymied as we discussed a decision-making process. Many people have been frustrated by decisions in the congregation in the past, and several leaders who participated in the Leadership Workshop had been involved with decisions that did not go well. Attendees even commented while their groups were processing the case studies for that intervention that we needed to develop a decision-making process.

The congregation reported not feeling involved, that decisions were made by a few self-serving people, and that information was either not distributed to them or the information was not complete or truthful. Leaders felt pressure to make decisions quickly but to also include people. Many of these leaders have experience with leadership outside the congregation—in military, government, or business, and leading a non-profit staffed primarily by volunteers is a difficult transition. Leaders experience further difficulty when we talk about following God’s call rather than relying solely on our own wants, desires, and ability to articulate a future. Involving the whole congregation is a difficult concept because leaders are afraid of their own time commitment required to publicize and reach out to the congregation, and of the amount of time it will take for people to discuss, debate, and come to consensus. This fear of time calls to mind yet again the desire to be responsive and act quickly.

Quantitative results from the baseline and end-line questionnaires acknowledge that 100% consensus is not realistic no matter how desirable it may be. Respondents said they felt that decisions involving a significant amount of money or that significantly affected the congregation should require a higher level of consensus—certainly beyond a simple majority. Qualitative responses clarified that there are actually *levels* of decision-

making and *levels* of transparency. Decisions regarding the brand of toilet paper require a different level of decision-making with a different process than decisions regarding the future of the building. Decisions regarding personnel requires a different level of transparency than deciding which color to paint the kitchen. There is not a *one size fits all* process for discerning and making decisions.

Qualitative and quantitative respondents tended to address large decisions and large conflicts in their responses. Those interviewed acknowledged that small, local decisions (i.e. decisions that affect only one ministry team or for which there is little or no expenditure) do not require the same attention, documentation, and involvement as larger, more global decisions which are the levels of decision-making requiring clearer definition of roles, flow, timelines, and budget.

The major conflict discussed in chapter 5 in the congregational history interview had to do with a previous music director. Members of the congregation wanted to be involved in the decision regarding whether he should remain employed at Community. The matter could have been settled if I were willing to open his personnel file to the congregation, but I felt that, as much as he and I disagreed, he was due that level of privacy. I also did not feel it was appropriate for the entire congregation to serve as the congregation's personnel committee, which would set a bad precedent for future personnel matters. This example points out that not all decisions should be made by the entire congregation because they do not have all the information necessary to make a decision. The issue is the level of trust the congregation has in the senior pastor to make personnel decisions.

Leaders throughout the research process have been challenged by questions about the basis of their decisions. This point was highlighted in a baseline questionnaire response in which a respondent pointed out an inconsistency between a specific decision made during one Council term and the next. The respondent wrote, “2 years ago, Council decided not to move forward on the purchase of a pipe organ, and the following year a Council with different membership changed direction to authorize the acquisition of a pipe organ.” Responses to baseline and end-line questionnaires challenged Council to represent the congregation they were elected to serve rather than their own or other special interests. Now leaders have begun using phraseology similar to the following: “making decisions based on our shared congregational values, mission, and vision.”

An end-line interview related leadership to being a teacher. The interviewee’s perspective was that the role of leaders is not to make decisions for the congregation any more than it is for a teacher to give students the answers for a test. Teachers and leaders guide the conversation and the discovery process. Clarifying the role and purpose of leadership can help leaders become more comfortable in this guiding, mentoring process.

Culture of Healthy and Faithful Relationships of Mutuality

A statement I made in chapter 5 is worth repeating here because it frames this finding. My research was designed with the concept of a healthy and faithful congregation as a monolith—I was looking at the congregation too broadly. Perhaps I was looking at the health and faithfulness of the congregation as a *whole body* rather than the health and faithfulness of the individual members that come together and are part of the body. More is said on this topic as I put this learning in deeper conversation with the biblical frame of “The Body of Christ.”

Both quantitative and qualitative responses shared that people tended to not feel listened to, respected, or valued as part of decision-making processes. Examples were given of experiences supporting each respondent's perspective. Reasons for not feeling involved included simply not knowing about decisions, having decisions rushed so voters felt their only option was to go along with the recommendation by rubber stamping the decision, having their perspectives listened to but with little or no effect on the outcome, or that decisions are made by a small group of self-interested people. Members of the congregation felt like pawns, they felt used for their presence and their money, and their distrust of congregational leaders grew.

A congregational leader who participated in the focus group for Intervention 2 said: "I came to this job thinking *process* needed work, and, as I found out, it's *relationships* that needed work. Process will come along with it ... it's the people that matter more." We may never have a perfect process or be able to include everyone, but we can become a more healthy and faithful body. The interviews addressed involvement and inclusion frequently. These words were treated somewhat differently; whereas inclusion tended to address the efforts from congregational leaders to include people, involvement tended to be used with the words "personal initiative" and "personal responsibility" put forth by congregation members in addressing the required effort on behalf of congregation members.

Significant time was spent in conversations throughout the research process about simply bringing people together. Several people remarked that they enjoyed the cottage meetings because they were able to meet and interact with people whom they previously did not know well. The conversation had a purpose and allowed the small groups to talk

about deeper matters of faith and the future of the church while also laughing and having fun together. A key phrase was “creating a safe space.” The ART described a safe space as intentionally creating a time and place in which all people are heard, valued, and respected. Spending time together helps us know and understand each other better. Another focus group participant said, “The more you spend time with each other, the more you talk, the more you agree to disagree; that’s where there’s fertile ground for compromise.”

I learned a great deal about knowing and being known from one of my focus groups for Intervention 3. This group was made up of young women, most with young children. Their perspective was invaluable. They said that the more formal, larger group setting of the annual congregational meeting was not a place where they would readily speak up, especially if they were challenging an older, established member of the congregation. Smaller groups in more intimate settings were appealing to them. This focus group also recommended using cottage meetings as a regular part of the process leading up to our annual congregational meeting. They acknowledge that this would change the nature of that meeting, but having cottage meetings would involve more people, disseminate the facts and issues related to decisions earlier and more broadly, and get the congregation’s feedback in advance of a formal vote.

A criticism of our younger families is that they are not as involved as families in prior generations. These younger families feel judged and criticized for making the decisions they feel are best for their families. Listening to these families and understanding their perspectives helped me see that they usually feel that they cannot make long-term, open-ended commitments. This does not mean, however, that they do

not want to be involved. The focus group for Intervention 3 said that they actually will not offer their feedback, perspectives, or suggestions if they do not feel that they can be part of the implementation—this is a decision they feel is based in their own integrity. They see people around them working very hard, and they do not feel they can make suggestions and then leave to let those already burdened people do the work of implementing their idea.

Interviews and focus groups also addressed the topic of having a meeting or conversation with people when there is contention or difficult personalities involved. They acknowledged that each person's reactions have an effect on others in the group. They noted that some people feel it is their right to say whatever they wish to say, and the speaker seems to have made little or no attempt to make his or her words palatable. The speaker is then offended when others react with similar lack of tact. I have addressed mutuality between leaders and congregation members, but the research also pointed out the importance of mutuality in all relationships, and that we live out this mutuality based on our values—who we are as a congregation both individually and collectively.

We believe a value of the congregation should be to listen to, love, and respect each other. This value becomes stressed when people do not agree. Interviews acknowledged that there are times when the conversation becomes too heated to be productive. Sometimes people need a break to step away and cool off. The challenge for the person stepping away and for the group they left is to encourage everyone to come back to the table—essentially, to say: “You matter so much to us that we need your voice at the table, even if it doesn't agree with others.” Healthy and faithful members of a group can exercise this encouraging role very well. The dynamic changes when a person

does not agree with the direction the group is taking and will not yield to the group even after their perspective has been heard. The group must decide when it is all right to move forward even when there is not 100% consensus. A further challenge is the presence of a difficult personality or a bully. A focus group addressed this dynamic as we noted how groups change when people have an outburst, get angry, or leave the table. We noted that the attention shifts from the purpose of the group toward the person who is upset. A challenge for a leader is to attempt to settle the person to keep him or her at the table, or allow a graceful exit, in order to return the group to its discussion. Care and concern needs to be extended to the person who is upset, but the people at the table are also there for a reason, and they want to accomplish their purpose.

Process that Leads to Action Based on Shared Congregational Values

People had much to say about Community's process for decision-making.

Processes can be challenging in a congregation because processes commit people to actions, timelines, and accountability. Some people in the congregation are of the mindset that churches are not supposed to act like a business. The discussion above about the importance of relationships may give people the impression that the church must either be *business-y* and have a strict process, or focus on relationships without the benefit of process. Feedback from the congregation reveals frustration at the lack of process, that people want the congregation to make good use of their time (stewardship of time), and people want to know what is happening in their church and why. These sentiments point to wanting a *process that leads to action based on shared congregational values* (see figure 5-2).

The congregation's concerns with the preparation phase of decision-making relate to the mutuality of being included and involved as discussed above, receiving accurate information, and having enough time for adequate input. The most frequent complaint was that the preparation phase takes too long. One focus group participant commented that it is possible to "lead a project to death." Others commented that the amount of time wears volunteers out, lessens congregational motivation and momentum, and frustrates leaders. A word often repeated was "stagnant," which is interesting given that we have many meetings, discussions, and documentation—in other words, a lot of activity. Respondents expressed a desire for action. The ART reflected on why some people seem unable to make a decision; they raise questions and say they need more time. The ART suggested that a helpful means of progressing from a concept through to a decision involves each decision maker remaining self-aware and understanding his or her own *decision threshold*. The ART defined one's decision threshold as understanding what it personally takes to get to a yes or no answer, and why.

A number of people were not familiar with the word *discernment* before this study. Discussing God's call and faith practices that assist us in listening for God highlighted the difficulty of making decisions solely based on faith versus solely based on finances or other limiting resources. Table 5-50 notes that the congregation experienced growth between the baseline and end-line questionnaires. People moved more toward viewing faithful decisions as those which "make sense *regardless* of finances." Good stewardship requires that we not lose track of the realities of people and finances. Perhaps these realities prepare us to listen and discern more clearly, for if we

had no limits, we could do whatever we want and potentially lose sight of the discernment process itself.

Respondents expressed frustration that, not only were they not involved during the planning and preparation phase, they were not involved after the decision was made. They did not receive adequate communication or an explanation of the rationale. Others expressed that, once a decision was made, they wondered if the plan would be implemented. They pointed out that some decisions were made only to be reconsidered or completely repealed because someone in the congregation was upset about it.

Understanding the Findings Through Theoretical, Biblical, and Theological Lenses

Theoretical Lenses

Change Theory

Change may be seen as harsh and unsympathetic. Change agents may be viewed as wanting change for change's sake. The reality is that life is about constant change. Some changes happen to us while other changes are the result of conscious decisions. The section on Change Theory in chapter 2 recalls that there is an element of change that triggers feelings of grief and loss, which may then fall into Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' stages of grief. Congregations going through the change process "are not only dealing with the effects of change, but the anticipation of it."³ The finding described above as the "process that leads to action based on shared congregational values" describes the frustration that

³ Jeffrey M. Wilson, "A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment Amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue" (Unpublished, Luther Seminary, 2017), 42.

many in the congregation experience through the decision-making process. If people are faced with change, the length of time to get to a decision could expose them to prolonged grief, which includes denial, anger, and depression. Prolonged exposure to these emotions certainly takes its toll on people, their relationships, and their ability to trust. The people at Community who are against a proposed change may expect that the church would take a long time to make a decision based on prior experience. If a decision is eventually made, their experience also dictates that the implementation will likewise be slow or never happen.

A note of guidance and grace to congregational leaders comes from Rosabeth Moss Kanter in the form of Kanter's Law, which states: "Everything looks like a failure in the middle."⁴ Leaders will encounter resistance, stages of grief, distractions, and even boredom as a team or the whole congregation moves through change. Kanter encourages leaders to expect and prepare for the "miserable middles of change."⁵

I have noted that *involvement* is a key issue for many in the congregation. Change, even good change, can be very difficult for people to accept, especially if it is change that *happens to them*. A participant in one of the focus groups commented that she could go along with the decision of the group as long as she was on record as having reservations. A story that I told several times through this process was of a man who opposed the proposal for a new organ in his church. He let that opposition be known far and wide. The congregation held a meeting to vote on whether to approve the organ purchase, and the proposal passed. Immediately after the results of the vote were announced, the man

⁴ Kanter, "Change Is Hardest in the Middle."

⁵ Ibid.

stood up and asked for a moment of personal privilege. All eyes turned to this man and everyone anticipated what he might do in response—Would he be angry? Would he leave the church? Instead, he walked toward the front of the church and handed the president of the congregation a check, which would end up being the largest single donation of the appeal. The man said: “You all know that I opposed the purchase of this organ, but I offer this check in support of the organ program because our congregation believes this is the right thing to do, and I support our congregation.”

A difficult component of change is *control*. The desire for congregation members to be involved is a desire for control. The desire by congregation members and leaders for a process is a desire for control. The thrust of the missional church is precisely that we are not in control. I have mentioned that change brings about feelings of loss and grief, as well as about control, but change also brings concerns about trust, relationships, power, motivation, and vision. We pursue control, yet change upsets our ability to control or to maintain equilibrium. Margaret Wheatley writes: “in venerating equilibrium, we have blinded ourselves to the processes that foster life.”⁶

Change, despite the fear and anxiety it elicits, has the potential to draw us closer to God as we seek God’s call, as well as closer to our fellow congregation members when we meet the processes that lead to change together. Change, in this way, can be a holy process rather than an insurmountable hindrance or adversary.⁷

⁶ Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1262.

⁷ Wilson, “A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment Amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue,” 41, 45.

Conflict Theory

Conflict occurs when there are “two or more ideas in the same place at the same time.”⁸ People tend to avoid conflict because it makes them uncomfortable or may make them feel as if there is something wrong with a community that has conflict. The discussion in chapter 2 regarding conflict theory provided a helpful analogy to electricity that I referred to often throughout the research process. An electrical circuit must have resistance. A circuit without resistance is not able to regulate the amount of current passing through components in the circuit and will short circuit or burn out one or more components. A congregation without resistance will attempt to implement every decision as quickly as possible without regard for finances, whether it fits with the mission of the congregation, or whether the time is right to implement the idea. The effect of unfettered projects and change will, like a circuit board without resistors, frustrate and burn out volunteers.

Conflict was a regular topic in meetings, interviews, and the surveys. Comments revealed that people are afraid of conflict or even “allergic to conflict, seeing it primarily as a source of danger.”⁹ Their worry is that conflict will lead to division in the church with the likely outcome of lower financial giving and people leaving the church. The fear of conflict binds the hands of leaders who become too afraid to enact change or make decisions, which also has the effect of creating conflict. This fear affects what leaders communicate about a decision and when they communicate. The congregation sees that

⁸ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 2880.

⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Loc 101.

they receive little or no information, or the information is too late, which perpetuates feelings of mistrust and that the congregation is not involved. Participants at no point in the research process identified themselves as the source of conflict. They also justified their actions as being for the good of the congregation regardless of which side of the issue they chose.

My assumption and generalization based on the data and the general tenor of public discourse in our country is that receiving resistance or responding to conflict in a healthy manner is not a commonly found trait in our culture. The ART began using the phrase “creating a safe space” early in our meetings. The safe space is the holding environment that Heifetz describes as a place to “generate adaptive work because it contains and regulates the stresses that work generates.”¹⁰ Community experienced these safe spaces in the group discussion regarding whether to build or not to build in Intervention 1. Our leaders learned about conflict and worked through case studies involving conflict in Intervention 2. Those who participated in the cottage meetings in Intervention 3 experienced safe space and responded positively to those environments. They felt that they were able to speak, be listened to, and be respected.

The environment for the special congregational meeting in Intervention 4 was not a positive experience for several reasons. The presence of conflict and heat was palpable. The data addressed the frustration with the room where we met and the setup of the room. It also addressed difficult personalities within the groups and frustration that much of the content of the meeting was a repeat of the content from the cottage meetings. I suspect that the changes we instituted by conducting the special congregational meeting using an

¹⁰ Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Loc 1269.

open discussion format in our gym generated some of the heat of conflict for people expecting a typical, formal meeting in the sanctuary in which the leader addressed the congregation from the front. I could not verify this suspicion through the data, however.

Chaos Theory

Chaos theory can be most easily summed up by the concept of sensitive dependence as described by the butterfly effect.¹¹ It describes how a small and seemingly insignificant change can have unforeseen and unintended consequences. A tendency may be to assume that the butterfly effect only applies to negative causes or effects. A balanced approach to chaos theory is to see that small, positive actions can yield larger positive effects as well. It also offers the insight that what appears to be random, chaotic behavior, when examined from a distance and from other perspectives can reveal underlying patterns. Chaos theory also speaks to the human desire to control, to avoid chaos, and to seek equilibrium.

Concepts that arose regularly through this project are awareness, listening, paying attention, and creating safe space. Some people may consider these insignificant or irrelevant when considering how to help a congregation become healthier or more faithful in their discernment and decision-making. Yet the cottage meetings and focus groups allowed people the opportunity to be heard in a safe space. Together we were able to observe from a different perspective. We witnessed disequilibrium in a safe context as it led to the emergence of something new and as it allowed seeds of trust to take root in new

¹¹ See chapter 2, footnote 61.

and old relationships—trust that, in some cases, had been threatened through previous conflicts.

The lens of chaos theory allowed me and other leaders to look differently at conflict, resistance, and otherwise unexpressed needs and perspectives. Leaders who tended to see conflict as only the *significant* conflicts that threaten to divide the congregation were able to see that the smaller, seemingly *insignificant* interpersonal conflicts have an affect over time as they slowly wear people down and burn them out.

Congregational leaders and I were better able to observe, ask questions, and empathize rather than trying to control and manipulate. We learned that people in the congregation want to be involved, but their ways of being involved are changing. I was able to gain perspective on an aspect of congregational life that had remained elusive— young families, their involvement in the congregation, the sense of judgment they often feel, and the daily stresses with which they contend. Chaos theory helped us change our language from chaos as being descriptive of our feelings of being out of control toward chaos being descriptive of the relational dynamic through which something new emerges.

Systems Theory

Systems theory describes everything that exists in terms of its relationship with other things. Systems apply at the atomic and subatomic level as well as at the level of solar systems and universes. The people in our congregations are affected by the other relational elements of their lives—their family history, relationships they have had over time, the current family relationships, work, school, and friendships.

Systems theory plays out in our congregation through each individual's experience at Community that forms their relationship with and impressions of the

congregation as a whole. The people who perceive the congregation as being led by a small group of self-serving people have experiences to support their perspective. The same applies for those who describe the congregation as one of conflict, that never makes a decision, and that is all talk but no action.

Systems also play a role in the reactions people have to other personality types in the congregation. A woman in Intervention 4 who also participated in the focus group for that intervention was feeling as if she was not being listened to or valued, a feeling exacerbated by her own family history. Her story calls attention to the idea that we cannot make assumptions about the background and history of those who are participants in a decision or discussion. This project emphasized the importance of creating safe space, and about knowing and being known. People long to be noticed and to matter to other people. Simply being aware of one another and acknowledging each other is helpful, but, beyond that, people want relationships of mutuality in which people not only know the other but are also known by them.

Leadership Theory

Leadership theory, which has evolved over time, is used to describe people who use various styles and methods to lead people. Leadership takes place within groups of friends, in families, in churches, and wherever groups of people gather to accomplish something together. Leadership theory involves not only the person who is leading but the people the leader is leading and the goals the leader and group are trying to accomplish together.

All four interventions called upon leaders to participate, listen, learn, and lead. The first intervention relied primarily on members of the Facilities Task Force. Their

leadership was especially helpful as they sat scattered throughout the room when the discussion was being held. They readily answered questions, creating a much more communal conversation. The second intervention engaged both formal and informal leaders of the congregation. The goal was to train leaders with organizational, conflict, discernment, and mission-oriented skills to enable them to seed the congregation with these ways of thinking.

The third intervention required a great deal of time from our Council and Facilities Task Force as they paired up to lead cottage meetings. Participants in the cottage meetings remarked at how well-prepared the leaders were and how ably they led the sessions. The fourth intervention allowed leaders to emerge from within several small groups to accomplish the values game. Participants in the fourth intervention did not have as many compliments to their leaders as in the third intervention. These leaders were not prepared for leading these groups because they were not selected in advance, with the exception that some of them participated in the values game in one of the cottage meetings. The setting of the meeting in the church gymnasium, the amount of time available to complete the exercise, and the fact that several people also participated in the cottage meetings created further tensions. The implementation of the fourth intervention was far from ideal; however, we observed the value of clearly identifying and preparing leaders in advance. The advanced preparation we conducted in intervention three conveyed the purpose of the gatherings and the spirit in which we wanted the gatherings conducted. This preparation allowed for more uniformity and confidence as the leader guided their groups. The focus groups for Intervention 3 and the end-line questionnaire both gave leaders high marks for preparation.

People have many expectations of their leaders. This project affirmed the complexity of leadership in a congregational setting as leaders rely on similar tools and skill sets as leaders in other environments, yet with the added component of spiritual discernment. This project also affirmed the statement made in chapter 2 that “the literature is clear that harsher, more authoritarian styles are not effective. An alternative is to see leaders as meaning-makers.”¹² The task of congregational leadership can be overwhelming, but the concept of mutuality discovered through an end-line survey reinforces an aspect of leadership articulated in Ephesians 4:12 which is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” The nuance is that equipping and building up involve actions inclusive of both leaders and the congregation.

Biblical Lenses

Valley of Dry Bones—Ezekiel 37:1-14

The story of the Valley of Dry Bones is the familiar conversation between Ezekiel and God. God told Ezekiel to look out over a valley filled with dry bones and asked the crucial question: “Can these bones live?” Ezekiel 37 is among the oracles of hope and follows Ezekiel 36 in which God proclaims promises using “I will” statements twenty-one times. It is clear that this story is one of hope despite the apparent hopelessness of the circumstances. This story also locates the source of hope in God alone. The role of Ezekiel is to prophesy to the dry bones. God is clear that the purpose of revivification is

¹² Wilson, “A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment Amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue,” 70.

that “the nations shall know that I am the Lord ... when through you I display my holiness before their eyes” (Ezekiel 36:23).

Community has a series of stories that they tell about themselves, and, over time, the stories not only reflect their past but can form their future. Community’s story includes fear, limited resources, difficult personalities, and a myriad of decisions that have not gone well. Community is faced with either the prospect of continuing to tell itself these stories or of listening to the stories of what God will do through us. Their focus on limited resources, decision-making processes, leadership, communication, and conflict serve as distractions of what we, through our human agency can and cannot accomplish. Continuing to tell ourselves the past story of ourselves is like looking over the valley filled with dry bones. It is impossible for us to say, organize, or do anything to make those bones live.

Intervention 3, in particular, enabled people to wrestle together with what is possible versus impossible and what God can accomplish through us. The lack of sufficient financial resources presents the most significant reason for people to doubt our ability to do what we feel God is calling us to do. We are ultimately led to the same conclusion as Ezekiel: “O Lord God, you know” (Ezekiel 37:3), because we know that the tasks before us may seem impossible.

The Body of Christ—1 Corinthians 12

The body of Christ is a prominent metaphor the church uses to describe the relationship we have with Christ, who is the head of the body, and with fellow members of the congregation. 1 Corinthians 12:27 tells us that “now [we] are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” Being members of the body of Christ is not the same as

being a member of a gym or a club. Being a member of a body is not a casual affiliation, because, by definition, it means that *each* part works *together* to accomplish the work of the body. This working together relies on two-way communication. For example, if the hand detects heat, it sends a message to the brain. However, it is not sufficient for the brain to have simply received the message, for the brain must send its own message to the hand giving it instructions on how to respond. The hand must then take action based on the message it received from the brain. If any piece of this communication fails, injury and pain could be the result.

The image of the body of Christ as an active and unified body was central to this project. This metaphor was used in preaching and teaching. Participants in the research project made some references to the body of Christ. The lens was evident relationally through concepts of listening, awareness, consensus, working together for the good of the whole congregation, and mutuality. Participants wanted to be listened to by others and to listen to them as well. They acknowledged that each person (member of the body) must be aware of the body, but also the community in which the body is located. They noted that decisions affecting more of the body should require a higher level of consensus. Mutuality within the body of Christ was a learning I had not anticipated. A person who participated in both a focus group and an end-line interview noted that it is not just the congregation's role to communicate, but that each member of the body has a personal responsibility to take the initiative to be aware of what is happening within the body.

Respondents also became more familiar with and conversant in the language of discernment. The body of Christ seeks to discern not their own will or preferences, but the will of God. My own reflections on God's agency versus human agency in the

leadership of a congregation let me to this line of thinking: How is a human body formed? The body itself has nothing to do with its own design and formation. However, inherently, the human body is interested in self-preservation, generally meaning the body maintains its health, strength, and vitality. People sometimes make choices for various reasons that seem to defy logic and bring harm to another part of their body or the whole body. Perhaps the body of Christ is like our own bodies in this regard, too; we cause discord, hurt, or conflict even though to do so defies logic, harms the body, and potentially devalues a part of the body.

Controversy at the Jerusalem Council—Acts 15:1-35

The controversy at the Jerusalem Council is recorded in Acts 15. The crux of the controversy was whether Gentile believers, through whom the gifts and presence of the Spirit was evident, had to receive the mark of circumcision to become part of the people of God. Paul and Barnabas met with the elders of the church in Jerusalem to decide what to do. The Jerusalem Council did not figure prominently in the teaching, questionnaires, or feedback from participants. It did, however, serve as background information for me, and can be used effectively as a lens through which to view respondent data.

I saw evidence of this lens when discussing how to handle conflict, how much consensus should be involved in a decision, and how decision-makers know when to move forward with a decision. Virtually every respondent to the baseline and end-line surveys indicated that achieving 100% consensus was desirable, but not realistic given the diversity of opinion among congregation members. Focus group participants for Intervention 4 addressed the dynamic of allowing people the space to leave the discussion for a time to cool off, if that was needed, but that there was a need to encourage the

person to gracefully re-join the conversation. A phrase we returned to is “how do we keep people in the room?” This sentiment spoke to the respect and the value that the team placed on individuals of the team and their desire to hear even divergent views. Another focus group participant remarked that differences make for better decisions.

Community Lutheran refers to God’s grace frequently, and we define it as *love beyond what we deserve*. A question for this congregation is: How does conflict and controversy work alongside God’s grace? Are they mutually exclusive? Conflict reveals differences, but not necessarily division. God’s grace and living in unity as the body of Christ helps us see others in the congregation with differences not as our adversaries, but as part of a beloved community in a continual process of discernment. Any congregation will have people we like and do not like, people with whom we get along well and those we would rather avoid. Nevertheless, the theology of the cross, discussed elsewhere, challenges us to see God in the places—and in the people—where we least expect to find Him. God is not absent from controversy and conflict, but the Spirit is working through it, as we see at the Council of Jerusalem. Congregational leaders are tasked with providing a venue and a safe space where these conversations, controversies, and conflicts can happen. In such a community and in such a safe space, the community gathered in the Spirit “receives enough love to do difficult things” (paraphrase from end-line interview).

Scarcity and God’s Abundance—Exodus

Scarcity and God’s abundance are recurrent themes throughout the book of Exodus. God’s people journeyed from the safety and abundance of Egypt to the scarcity and uncertainty of the wilderness. Exodus tells us that the people took livestock and other

possessions from Egypt with them into the wilderness, but, even the most well-supplied could only last so long without replenishment. The Hebrew people in the wilderness had no choice but to rely on God for everything. They grumbled and complained when they felt they did not have enough or when they grew weary of what they had.

I preached, wrote, and spoke on scarcity and abundance throughout the research period, and some people began to use this language. The concepts were very much present, regardless of the actual terms used. The most frequent and obvious references to scarcity were in relation to limited financial resources. I have asked several times over the last two years: Do we believe that God has provided all that we need in order to do what God has called us to do?

The congregation continues to struggle with belief in God's abundance when confronted with the reality of limitations. The only survey question relating directly to scarcity and abundance is Q34. The data show that there was movement between the baseline and end-line questionnaires from "what makes sense financially" toward "what makes sense regardless of finances." I believe this movement reflects that people are thinking and engaging this topic. I expect that congregation members seeking to exercise good stewardship as a faithful and healthy congregation would likely vacillate around a mean of 4.0, which is what this data presents.

Observations through the research period have also shown the congregation that scarcity, like resistance, should not be looked upon negatively as if it was a bad omen. We found that scarcity can be a blessing. Scarcity can serve as a form of resistance to help our discernment, because there would be little reason to question without it. Scarcity

can give us the motivation to seek God and to listen to God; otherwise, we may be tempted to do what the congregation wants instead of seeking out and relying upon God.

Theological Lenses

Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross is the belief that we see and experience God in the places we least expect to find God—a baby lying in a manger, Jesus spending time with the diseased and outcast, and hanging as a condemned man on a cross. The theology of the cross was not widely taught by name during this study, but the concepts were presented through the Leadership Workshop in Intervention 2, through new member classes, and in sermons and conversations.

The theology of the cross as a lens helps us observe behavior and the circumstances before us, see them for how they present themselves, but also see them through their opposites. Matthew 25 reminds us that we serve Christ when we serve the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40). We can see Christ in the person who is our adversary in conflict, in resistance, and in scarcity. We can see the order and movement of God through the randomness of behavior. We can discern the call of God despite declining income and declining attendance numbers.

This lens opens us up to be able to lower our anxiety, which enables us to listen, love, and respect the other because they are fellow children of God and parts of the same body of which we are a part. Research participants, especially those who took part in focus groups and interviews, spoke a great deal about listening, respect, awareness, and about knowing and being known. Continuing to teach about the theology of the cross specifically in relation to conflictual situations could help further open congregation

members to one another and help them see God in the places where they least expect to find God.

Theology of Hope

The theology of hope challenges us to articulate the difference between popular conceptions of hope and the hope rooted in God. Moltmann wrote, “Christian hope is no blind optimism. It is a discerning hope which sees suffering and yet believes in freedom.”¹³ Comments made by survey participants and those who participated in the interventions show that many in the congregation understand hope primarily in terms of its popular conception as being synonymous with the words wish, dream, and want. The only question that directly asked about hope (Q39) was phrased in such a way that the word hope could have been replaced with optimistic. Respondents’ perspectives of feeling more hopeful increased through the research period, but this question did not measure hope in the deeper sense discussed in this paper.

The conversation regarding hope during the research period followed a similar path as the conversation regarding scarcity. Suffering, like scarcity, drives us to look beyond ourselves for hope. We reflected through conversations, teaching, and preaching along with Moltmann that “only through suffering and sacrifice does hope become clear-sighted and sage.”¹⁴ The congregation would probably not describe their experience as suffering or sacrifice, but they would likely articulate experiences of fear, scarcity, and conflict. Congregational memory reinforces those situations in which the congregation

¹³ Moltmann, “Politics and the Practice of Hope,” 291.

¹⁴ Ibid.

decided to take a risk and to extend themselves have not turned out well. These experiences have made them reluctant, insecure, and tentative. The result is that they have tended to turn inward toward their own strength and resources rather than relying on the hope that comes from outside of them.

Some congregation members speak of hope, faith, and risk. They speak of facing the future with confidence. Their words tend to carry little weight besides being emotionally moving. People listen to them and are challenged, but some people are focused completely on logic and limitations. One respondent in the end-line questionnaire said: “Sometimes practicality has to win out over spiritual.” The theology of hope remains a topic for Community as we wrestle with how this congregation discerns, decides, and moves confidently in the power of the Spirit fully aware of the reality of limitations.

Missio Dei

Missio Dei is the mission of God. Pursuing the mission of God should be a central function of every Christian congregation, so the value of this lens may appear to be of little effect. Daubert reminds us that “a commitment to the *missio Dei* means believing that God is already at work in the world.”¹⁵ Van Gelder and Zscheile note: “The emergence of this conception of the mission of God reframes our understanding of mission from being church-centric to becoming theocentric.”¹⁶ *Missio Dei* in this light

¹⁵ Dave Daubert, “Vision-Discerning Vs. Vision-Casting: How Shared Vision Can Raise up Communities of Leaders Rather Than Mere Leaders of Communities,” in *Missional Church & Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2009), Kindle, Loc 1818.

¹⁶ Van Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, Loc 425.

takes on a deeper meaning than simply referring to the mission of God. *Missio Dei* properly understood is similar to the difference between *exegetis* and *eisegetis* in biblical studies—the role and function of the church flows *out of* God’s purpose (*exegetis*) and activity rather than the role and function of the church flowing *into* (*eisegetis*), or determining, God’s purpose and activity.

This perspective on *missio Dei* was helpful as Community reflected on its decision-making and what influences their decisions. The frequency with which people identified significant influences other than God on decisions were cause for attention. Participants said that decisions were being made by a small group of self-interested people, being made primarily due to financial limitations, and they questioned whether decisions were being made for the good of the whole congregation. The use of concepts such as discernment, God’s will, and spiritual practices raised the level of awareness of God’s activity in the congregation and through individuals within that body. I used questions to direct conversations toward discerning God’s mission and how it may challenge or inform what we feel is our mission as a congregation. I saw other leaders begin asking these questions and saw others increasing awareness of God’s presence and motivation. An interview participant noted that there were many reasons he and his wife volunteer to do things at church instead of doing them through other organizations. These reasons, while not initially described in necessarily church language, ultimately, have to do with their desire to serve and glorify God.

Community Lutheran struggles with decision-making based on faith versus “reality,” as described elsewhere. Deciding based on faith alone seems irresponsible. Deciding based on reality alone seems lacking in faith and perhaps overly business-like.

Decision-making at Community has involved the congregation wrestling with which to privilege over the other. This struggle may be seen through comments that the church is supposed to be a church and not a business. The *missio Dei* puts this argument in context. Business-like practices do not define or influence the mission of God; they are a means of faithfully carrying out the work that God is already doing. Van Gelder writes it succinctly: “The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does.”¹⁷ Community has been able to better discern who they are as a congregation constituted in Christ and how they may better participate in the work God is already doing in our community, rather than simply relying on their own best plans, wants, and doing them within the limitations we perceive.

Generalizability and Limitations of This Study

This research project was designed as a transformative mixed-methods modified PAR with the intent of affecting change within the congregation toward more faithful and healthy decision-making. The design itself requires that there is enough interest within the congregation to both see the needs and desire to address them. The implementation of this project at Community Lutheran required many hours on behalf of the ART, Council members, and other leaders. I was seeking to instigate change not only to behavior, but to congregational culture itself.

Community was ripe for this opportunity because many are frustrated that a congregation like ours becomes stuck in the decision-making process. Some people in the congregation tend to focus on our limitations and why we can't do something. Several

¹⁷ Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), Kindle, Loc 592.

people through this research process have articulated their thankfulness for the congregation, its mission, and its values. Leaders and congregation members were willing to engage in this process with me, and be honest, loving, and mission-oriented in their feedback. The training I received through the doctor of ministry program at Luther Seminary prepared me to be the leader and researcher of such a process.

Not all congregations require this kind of cultural change. Not all congregations would be willing or able to undertake such a study. All congregations, however, would benefit from the kind of deep assessment of the relationship between the leadership and the congregation that this study provided. The social science methodology, including the independent, dependent, and intervening variables could remain valid for other contexts. The goals sought after by using the research design could also remain valid for other contexts, but the interventions would have to be adjusted. The first intervention was specific to our context, but other similar far-reaching questions could be addressed using a similar discussion forum. The leadership workshop in the second intervention and cottage meetings in the third intervention would likely work well as presented in this study in other contexts. I would suggest redesigning the fourth intervention given the frustration people experienced and the gains achieved through that intervention. I was surprised at the applicability and generalizability of this topic for other conversations within our congregation. Politics in the wake of the recent election have created division within our country and our congregation at the time of this writing. The lenses and learnings from this project have prepared me well to walk with the congregation through this contentious time.

A limitation for this study would be the need to either have a pastor trained in this approach, or have a trained facilitator who could make the commitment to accompany the leader and congregation through their research process. I also would not suggest that a pastor new to a congregation conduct this kind of change process. The pastor should have credibility within the congregation first. The congregation knew me and my motivations because, by the time we started the process, I had been with them for over eight years.

Time became a significant limitation throughout this process. The ART would have benefitted by having more time to ensure they understood the process and their role in it. One ART member commented that it seemed as though I had the process entirely mapped out. More time would have allowed them to participate with me in the drafting of my thesis proposal and would have allowed them to be ready to begin the research process upon approval from Luther's Institutional Review Board. The effect of time on the research process may be seen in the differences between the diagrams depicting my original research design and my actual design. Adjustments had to be made to allow the ART to get up to speed, for availability of the ART and other leaders to meet, for my schedule through Advent and Easter, and in consideration of the flow of activity through the year, such as the end of the school year in mid-June.

A goal articulated through my methodology was to intentionally include fringe or inactive members. The findings of this project tended to be limited to *insiders*—members who already have a strong affiliation with the congregation. The ART and I spent a significant amount of time designing and documenting the interventions so that we did not spend as much time intentionally involving people. The research process and interventions generated interest and increased involvement by those who are already

involved in the congregation, but they have not been involved in discernment and decision-making.

Questions for Future Research

The process for developing my current research question was difficult because I had many topics I wished to address. Narrowing the topic had the effect of both excluding questions I wanted answered and raising deeper questions that I may not have noticed with a broader research question.

An entire thesis could be written on scarcity and abundance. This study revealed that scarcity is not always negative, and, by implication, that abundance is not always positive. Further exploration of these topics could help a congregation engage with both more fully. Delving further into the influence of scarcity and abundance on decision-making could further develop a concept I introduced in chapter 5, i.e., the decision-making threshold. I would be interested in knowing what enables a person to make decisions based on their faith. Does a faithful decision always have to make sense logically? Can a faithful decision challenge or defy logic?

This research project attempted to include fringe and marginal members. I would be interested in exploring how this outreach might be accomplished in a manner that is authentic, continues to build the relationship after the study period, and opens connected and disconnected members to the perspectives of the other. My project revealed the difficulty younger and newer members have in expressing their perspectives for fear of judgment or feeling embarrassed at their lack of knowledge. I have heard remarks through my years at Community Lutheran that diminish the role and importance of

younger and newer voices. One can see that simply including fringe and marginal members is not as simple as sending a mailing or writing an article for the newsletter.

Further research may also be undertaken to build upon the findings in this study. It is a worthy goal to increase a congregation's ability to dialogue together and arrive at healthier and more faithful decisions despite differences. I would like to investigate moving the congregation into productive, courageous conversations in which we undertake difficult and divisive topics. Can we continue to grow in our health and faithfulness? Can we continue being a learning community?

I would also be interested in seeing research into the development of a decision-making process that is both healthy and faithful. The Five Phases of Discernment provides a very helpful framework, but does not guide congregation members through the various components of the decision-making process. A more granular implementation of the Five Phases could be very beneficial to a congregation. Such a process could describe *how* the community may be involved in communal discernment so their voices are heard, and *how* to ensure the right people are involved and have the information they need. This study articulated that all decisions require process, but not all decisions require the *same* process. It also noted the frustration members feel with a process that involves seemingly unending data collection and conversation. Do congregations develop decision-making processes for every conceivable scenario, including which people need to be involved and the development of a timeline that involves the congregation? If so, how is that strategy implemented—through ministry team leader training, or development of a team that focuses on accompanying ideas through a custom process?

Summary

This research project showed that God is, in fact, present within our community despite our differences. It also affirmed that this congregation, which has had a history of conflict, poor communication, and conflicted leadership, can change and come together as the people of God—the body of Christ. Growing in health and faithfulness requires us to focus on God and be aware of God’s presence with us everywhere and at all times, even the mundane and conflictual times. Making healthy and faithful decisions as a Christian congregation requires that we listen to one another with love and respect, and that we are honest with one another, including being honest with our questions and concerns that challenge leaders and fellow congregation members.

Life in a congregation is messy because things do not go according to plan, and people do not act or respond as we anticipate. We hold on to what unites us as a particular congregation in this time and place and with these people. We proclaim the truth that the church is God’s church and the mission is God’s mission.

I have seen good people on both sides of any given issue become frustrated or hurt through interpersonal conflict, decisions, and even indecision at Community. People’s experience at Community has improved through this study as openness and dialogue have enabled us to become more reflective of the Kingdom of God. We are better able to focus on God’s mission rather than being distracted by bickering and conflict. This project also empowered our leaders and the congregation to work together to find new ways to open ourselves to God, discern God’s call, and remove obstacles to our ability to respond to that call. We realize that we will never rid ourselves of differences or conflict, but the strong biblical witness emphasizing unity amid diversity

(Acts 15, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12) is not only an ideal characteristic of the Kingdom of God, but is a reality through the ongoing dialogue and discernment of a congregation.

All members of the church will not be happy with every decision, but I hope Community will be able to ultimately say “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28) and then move forward as one body trusting that the Holy Spirit has been active through our process of listening and waiting.

EPILOGUE

The Church has been a regular presence my entire life. Teachings and relationships from the congregations I have known formed how I relate to and understand God, my life, and the world around me. I have not always felt close to God or excited about church, yet, even when I tried to not believe, God was there, especially through the practice of prayer. It is very difficult to be a non-believer when one feels called to pray regularly.

I have grown to love the Church as I have aged, but I am saddened at the behavior of some Christians. Differences become disagreement and discord, which can become division. Churches are full of people who have differences of opinion, background, and values while our culture currently exhibits the mode of public discourse as divisive with the goal is to win at all costs. Community Lutheran has repeatedly heard the working definition of the Kingdom of God as a means of challenging divisive discourse. We teach that the Kingdom of God is wherever God's influence is—God's Kingdom is with us when God influences us. Unfortunately, the Church's internal and external witness is weakened as some of us reveal the reality of who we are when we are under stress. Church people may say that Jesus makes a difference in our lives and say that Jesus calls us to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, and yet our actions reveal quite the opposite.

I entered this doctoral process because I wanted to begin to address the negative trends that are so publicly touted in the media as the decline of the church. Much fear and

anxiety surrounds this topic accompanied by either hopelessness or hip new ideas attempting to entice new worshippers. These methods appear to me to be church or institution focused as they attempt to address the survival of the church. I am concerned that these attempts are focused on what is wrong with *those people* outside the church and why *they* do not come to church, while not looking at what we do inside the church.

This doctoral process has helped me to gain perspective on my congregation within our context. This is important because we cannot separate the congregation from the context, and we cannot operate as God's Church in isolation. The study has helped me learn more deeply who the people are in this congregation, and where opportunities exist for them to grow toward being more of a *missional* congregation. I have learned about my own strengths and weaknesses, how I handle conflict, what my default leadership styles are, and how I can grow toward being more of a *missional* leader. The program has stretched me to read books that I would not normally read, and sometimes did not enjoy reading. The qualitative and quantitative projects undertaken in CL-7531 and CL-7532 stretched me to ensure that I live my life as a missional leader as an *open* rather than *closed system*.¹

Every phase of this project has opened doors for me, helped me to see God at work, and has brought about a profound sense of hopefulness for the future of God's Church. Focusing and narrowing my research question, and deciding which lenses I would use to guide the research was difficult but allowed me to learn more deeply. Exploring the biblical, theological, and theoretical lenses was, perhaps, the aspect of the

¹ Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, Loc 2018 ff; Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Loc 1262 ff.

research process I enjoyed the most. These lenses, whether or not expressly taught, gave me tools. The theology of the cross and resistance theory, which I addressed through the lens of conflict theory, have helped me immensely in virtually every conversation as a leader and as a pastoral care giver. Very pressing matters in our country at the time of this writing have given added pressure to the congregation. These external pressures have forced me to examine my role as pastoral leader of a congregation very geographically close to Washington, D.C. and very politically diverse. These pressures force us to examine who we are (our congregational values), how we will create a safe place for these diverse perspectives, and how we will be the body of Christ living out the mission of God (*missio Dei*).

Lesslie Newbigin explored plausibility structures in terms of religious pluralism.² Plausibility structures provide a helpful means of being in relationship with others, whether differences exist in culture, gender, age, belief system, or perspective on a congregational decision. Plausibility structures make room for the post-modern concept that you and I may have differing, but equally valid perspectives. This does not mean that *truth* is subjective, but that our perspectives on truth or our way of articulating truth differ. I believe this concept creates more space for curiosity, listening, and grace.

The Congregational Mission and Leadership course of study has helped to ease my own anxiety about the future of the church. I began this program with the thought in mind that “I don’t want the church to fail on my watch.” The concept of mutual responsibility between leaders and congregation members articulated in this paper also holds true in our relationship with God. The church is God’s church. We speak at

² Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Loc 835.

Community about the “gospel grammar” that God is always the subject as a means of preserving God’s agency. It is not my responsibility to ensure the success or the survival of God’s Church; however, mutual responsibility means that God will do God’s part, but I am not to remain idle or lazy. I have an active role to play as I pray: “Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Luther reminds us that, when we pray these words, we pray that God would be at work through us.³

The learning and effectiveness of this research project are not complete. I will continue to use and share the tools I have learned through this process. This study, these lenses, these people of God who gather at Community Lutheran Church, the Holy Spirit—all of these have helped me stand with Elijah surveying the landscape as God asks *me* the question: “Mortal, can these bones live?” I, like Elijah, can only answer: “O Lord GOD, you know.” My role is not to make the dry bones live or conjure up the breath of life, but to do as God asks and to speak as God directs. God gives people and congregations what we cannot simply conjure up for ourselves—hope!

³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 445-449.

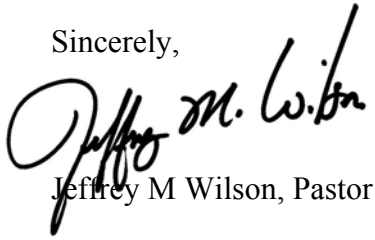
APPENDIX A

BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church Communication & Decision-Making Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey. Please take a moment to review the information below. If you have any questions, please contact me at 000-000-0000 email: pastorwilson@communitylc.org.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey M Wilson, Pastor

Purpose

You are invited to participate in a study of your perspectives on how Community communicates, shares ideas, makes decisions, and reacts to those decisions. I hope to learn about how Community's decision-making is influenced by the Holy Spirit as a guide for our conversations and decisions. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are affiliated with Community and have perspectives that could be useful in this study.

This survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability and as candidly as possible. You may find that you cannot answer some questions because of your experience or amount of time you have been with Community. If this is your situation, please answer as many questions as possible, but read all questions to be familiar with what is being asked.

Consent

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to help me understand the feelings of Community members as I begin my study process. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to give me meaningful insight that I would not have otherwise. The only cost to you is the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. Only summary results will be used for analysis. Your responses will be very helpful as Community, its leaders, and the congregation seek to more fully discern God's call.

Voluntary Participation

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Luther Seminary, Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, or me as your pastor. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

PART I. Background Information

- Q1. Survey Code _____
- Q2. What is your gender?
 Female
 Male
- Q3. In what year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976) _____
- Q4. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?
 Married
 Widowed
 Divorced
 Separated
 In a domestic partnership or civil union
 Single, but cohabiting with a significant other
 Single, never married
 Other (please specify): _____
- Q5. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
 Less than high school degree
 High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 Some college but no degree
 Associate degree
 Bachelor degree
 Graduate degree
- Q6. Which of the following best describes your current employment? I am ...
 Currently employed
 Currently not employed
 A student
 Retired
 Other (please specify): _____

- Q7. On average, how many times do you attend worship services in this congregation?
- Usually every week
 - Several times a month
 - About once a month
 - Several times a year
 - Twice a year or less
 - Other _____
- Q8. How long have you been a member or participated at Community?
- Less than 2 years
 - 2 – 5 years
 - 6 – 10 years
 - 11 – 15 years
 - 16 – 20 years
 - Over 20 years
- Q9. Approximately how many minutes does it take you to get to Community from your home or primary residence?

Q10. For each of the statements below, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Both Agree and Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't know
I have a good understanding of the activities and events happening at Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am knowledgeable of the more significant decisions being made at Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Before a <i>significant</i> congregational decision, I feel like I have the information I need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel like I have adequate input into the decisions being made at Community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I have information or a perspective I want to share, I know how to do that	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I share my perspective, I feel that I will be listened to and respected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is ample opportunity for me to ask questions and have input <i>before</i> decisions are made	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know where to look for information about up-coming decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q11. When decisions or goals change, how often does Community's leadership explain why this has happened?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Once in a while
- Never
- Don't know

Q12. How do you most often receive communication from the church?

- Monthly newsletter
- Weekly eNews email
- Weekly bulletin announcements
- Verbal announcements at Sunday worship

Q14. Assess the value of each of the following when making decisions at church?

	Not important at all	Not important	Both important and unimportant	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
Transparency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public conversation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individuals open to changing their minds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being aware of the financial costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discerning God's call	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Keeping the peace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART III. How a significant decision is made

Q15. Select the option below which best represents how significant decisions are currently made at Community? (Please choose only 1 from the list below)

- Decisions are primarily made by pastor only
- Decisions are primarily made by Council only
- Decisions are primarily made by pastor with Council in open session
- Decisions are primarily made by pastor with Council in closed session
- Decisions are primarily made by ministry teams
- Decisions are primarily made by the congregation
- Decisions are primarily made by individuals
- I don't know
- Other (please specify): _____

Q16. Which of the following indicates how you have offered input into decisions at Community? (Please answer for yourself and do not generalize to other congregation members.)

	Yes	No
Filling out surveys	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversations with pastor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversations with Council member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conversations with ministry team leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participating in congregational votes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open conversation where people air their concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I do not feel like I have input into decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify): _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q17. Considering your answers to questions 14 and 15 above, how good do you feel the decision-making process has been for the whole congregation during your time at Community?

Not good at all	Not good	Both good and not good	Good	Very Good	Don't Know
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

Q18. Considering your answers to questions 14 and 15, if possible, please give an example of a decision made in this manner.

Q19. What has been positive about this decision-making process?

Q20. What has been negative about this decision-making process?

PART IV. What is a “healthy” decision?

In each of the following questions, indicate what you believe must be present to have a “healthy” decision? (Please indicate where along each spectrum most closely expresses how you feel)

Q21. How much consensus must there be for a "healthy" decision?

0%			50%			100%
Agreement			Agreement			Agreement
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

Q22. Is 100% consensus desirable?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- I don't know

Q23. Please elaborate on your answer to question 21. _____

Q24. What percentage of agreement do you think would be necessary before moving forward with a decision? (Please write a number as a percent) _____

Q25. In your experience, "healthy" decisions are made...

Very Slowly
1 2 3 4 3 2 Very Quickly
1

Q26. In your experience, "healthy" decisions involve...

Little
Conflict
1 2 3 4 3 2 Significant
Conflict
1

Q27. In your experience, "healthy" decisions require...

Very little
Communication
1 2 3 4 3 2 Significant
Communication
1

Q28. "Healthy" decisions rely upon...

Very little
Member Participation
1 2 3 4 3 2 Extensive
Member Participation
1

Q29. Considering the number of people involved in making a decision, "healthy" decisions are made by...

A small
group within
the congregation
1 2 3 4 3 2 The entire
congregation
1

Q30. In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement:
Community's decisions during my time at Community fit my definition of "healthy"?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Both Agree and Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
□	□	□	□	□	□

Q31. In your opinion, what else must be present for a "healthy" decision?

PART V. What is a “faithful” decision?

In each of the following questions, indicate what you believe must be present to have a “faithful” decision? (Please indicate where along each spectrum most closely expresses how you feel)

Q32. In your opinion, congregations that make "faithful" decisions...

Leave the Bible Out of it						Make significant use of the Bible
1	2	3	4	3	2	1

Q33. “Faithful” decisions tend to be ...

What’s best For me						What the congregation believes is God’s call
1	2	3	4	3	2	1

Q34. Regarding the role of finances, "faithful" decisions tend to be...

What makes sense financially						What makes sense <i>regardless</i> of finances
1	2	3	4	3	2	1

Q35. In your opinion, congregations that make "faithful" decisions tend to engage in faith practices (such as prayer) ...

Seldom						Very often
1	2	3	4	3	2	1

Q36. "Faithful" congregations engage in practices of spiritual discernment (i.e. listening to God and one another to determine what God wants) ...

Very infrequently	Infrequently	Both Frequently and Infrequently	Frequently	Very Frequently	Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q37. In your experience, what is your level of agreement with the statement: Community's decisions during my time at Community fit my definition of “faithful”?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Both Agree and Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q38. In your opinion, what else must be present for a "faithful" decision?

PART VI. What happens *after* a decision is made?

Q39. After a decision is made at Community, I generally feel ...

Very Discouraged 1	Discouraged 2	Both Hopeful and Discouraged 3	Hopeful 4	Very Hopeful 5	Don't know 8
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Q40. If there are other feelings that you have after a decision has been made, briefly describe them below.

Q41. Once a decision is made...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Both Agree and Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
it is implemented quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the congregation is supportive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the decision and rationale is communicated clearly to the congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel it benefits the <i>whole</i> congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident in the decision because I had an opportunity to have input	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident in the leadership's handling of it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am supportive even if I do not agree with the decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q42. Considering decisions made during your time at Community, is there a decision that stands out to you as a decision and implementation that went well? If so, briefly describe what the decision was about.

Q43. From your perspective, briefly describe what went well with the decision and implementation you mentioned in question 41?

Q44. Considering decisions made during your time at Community, is there a decision that stands out to you as a decision and implementation that did not go well? If so, briefly describe what the decision was about.

Q45. From your perspective, briefly describe what did not go well with the decision and implementation you mentioned in question 43?

Q46. What would you say to those who feel differently than you about a decision that was made?

Q47. Not all decisions go well. To what degree do you feel the following have influenced those decisions that have not gone well at Community?

	Very little	Some	Much	Very much	Don't Know
The decision was rushed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not enough information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not enough feedback from the congregation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not focusing on the congregation's <i>shared</i> values and priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial implications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lacking spiritual practices of prayer and discernment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART VII. Conclusion

Q48. Would you be willing to talk with Pastor Jeff about your answers in a one-on-one interview about issues in the research?

- Yes
- No

If you answered “Yes” to question 47, please complete the attached form.

PART VIII. Response for One-On-One Interviews

Thank you for completing the survey. If you would be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview with Pastor Jeff, please respond in one of the following ways:

- Complete this form and return it to the church office separately from your survey (i.e. in a separate envelop, scanned and emailed, or dropped off at the church office)

- Complete the form online at tinyurl.com/CELC-interview

The interviews will allow Pastor Jeff to gain deeper understanding regarding questions on the survey. Not everyone who offers to participate in the one-on-one interview will actually be interviewed. Pastor Jeff will select a group that will be able to represent different perspectives within the congregation. The more people who volunteer to participate, the richer the pool of people and perspectives Pastor Jeff has to choose from. If you do become one of the interviewees, Pastor Jeff will contact you and explain the “informed consent form” that outlines what will be happening in your interview.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Jeff by phone at (555) 111-1234 or email at pastorwilson@CommunityLutheran.org.

Name _____

Phone number _____

Email Address _____

- Yes, I would like to participate in a one-on-one interview with Pastor Jeff

APPENDIX B

END-LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Q17, Q30, Q37, Q42, Q44 from “during my time at Community” to “over the last 12 months.”

The end line questionnaire will repeat the baseline survey from Appendix D with the modifications of scope—I will ask about the past 12 months instead of the past 5 years in questions 29, 30 and 40. The following questions will be appended to the survey.

Q48. In which community do you live?

- City 1
- City 2
- City 3
- City 4
- City 5
- City 6
- City 7
- City 8
- Other _____

Q49. Over the last twelve months, have you participated in any of the following related to this research process:

	Yes	No
Initial congregational survey (November 2015)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
“To Build Or Not TO Build” Discussion (11/15/2015)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership Workshop (2/27/2016)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cottage Meetings (May – June 2016)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special Congregational Meeting (6/12/2016)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus group following one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
One-on-one interview with Pastor Jeff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action Research Team member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q50. If you were not able to participate in one or more item in question 49, please elaborate.

Q51. If you participated in one or more of the activities in question 49, do you have any positive comments about those experiences?

Q52. If you participated in one or more of the activities listed in question 49, do you have any negative comments about those experiences?

Q53. If you participated in one or more of the activities listed in question 49, please share something you learned or experience that you think will have a positive impact on the way Community discerns God's call and makes decisions?

Q54. To what extent would you say that you are more hopeful about Community's future as a healthy and faithful congregation than you were 12 months ago.

Much less hopeful 1	Less hopeful 2	Both hopeful and not hopeful 3	More hopeful 4	Much more hopeful 5	Don't know 8
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Q55. Briefly explain your answer to question 54 above?

APPENDIX C

BASELINE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL COMMUNITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The following interview protocol will be used at Community Evangelical Lutheran Church as part of the baseline assessment tools within a mixed methods transformative study. This protocol picks up on themes from the survey that warrant further exploration and would benefit by the richness of interviews.

1. Tell me a little about your role and participation at Community?
 - a. How long?
 - b. If you have you been in a decision-making role at Community, describe your role and experience as a decision-maker.
2. What has been your experience with the congregation's decision-making?
 - a. What barriers, if any, have you experienced?
3. From your perspective, who has the power and authority to make decisions at Community?
 - a. To what extent do you feel the congregation and leadership are clear on the question of power and authority? Explain.
 - b. Once a decision is made, to what extent is the decision implemented smoothly?
 - i. Why or why not?
 - c. Give me an example, if you can, of a recent decision that went well?
4. How would you describe a "healthy" decision-making process?
 - a. How would you describe an "un-healthy" one?
5. How would you describe a decision-making process that is "faithful"?
 - a. How would you describe an "unfaithful" one?
6. In your opinion, to what extent has Community made decisions that fit your definition of a "healthy" or "faithful" decision-making process?
 - a. Please explain.

7. When decisions are made at Community, many groups and individuals are often involved. Who do you feel has the strongest voice in those decisions?
 - a. To what extent do you feel you have a voice in those decisions?
 - b. Tell me more about that.
 - c. What role do you feel God plays in Community's decision-making?

8. In the future, when Community has to make decisions, what would you suggest as the best way to make those decisions in a way that reflects God's call?
 - a. What do you think the impact would be on the congregation?
 - b. How would it affect those who were not in favor of the decision?
 - c. How would it affect you if you were not in favor of the decision?

What have we not talked about or that you would like to clarify that you feel would be helpful for me to know?

APPENDIX D

END LINE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL COMMUNITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

The end line interview protocol will repeat the baseline interview protocol from Appendix F. The following questions will be appended to the interview.

9. If you indicated in your survey that you participated in one or more of the activities related to my study over the past year, how would you describe your involvement?
 - a. In what ways was it helpful?
 - b. In what ways was it challenging?

10. To what extent do you feel more or less hopeful about the congregation's ability to engage in healthy dialogue and make faithful decisions than you did 12 months ago. Tell me more about that.

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH TEAM REFLECTION PROTOCOL COMMUNITY LUTHERAN CHURCH

The following discussion questions will be used by the Action Research Team to evaluate each intervention, articulate learnings, and consider how the learnings affect future interventions.

1. Where did you see God at work?
2. What went well? Why?
3. What didn't go well? Why?
4. How did the choice of venue or format affect the dialogue and outcome?
5. To what extent do our observations match what we expected to happen? Explain.
6. What, if anything, do we need to alter in our process or for the next intervention because of our observations in this intervention?

APPENDIX F

PAR FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Date of Focus Group Session:

Those Present:

Intervention Being Evaluated:

Discussion Questions:

1. Based on your observation of the publicity and discussion during the intervention, what was the intended goal of this intervention?
 - a. To what extent do you think the group achieved those goals?
2. To what extent did the session remain on track and focused, or did it stray?
 - a. What specific topics seemed to start people in another direction?
3. While we are talking about topics...
 - a. If there were any topics that made you or other people uncomfortable, what were they?
 - b. If there were any topics that seemed to stir up energy or passion, what were they?
4. Let's reflect on the process itself . . .
 - a. Tell me about the moments in this intervention that you would describe as the "low" points.
 - i. If there were times of conflict or tension, how did those resolve?
 - b. Tell me about the moments in this intervention that you would describe as the "high" points.
5. What key insights did you learn from this process?
 - a. What did you notice was helpful?
 - b. What did you notice was not helpful?
 - c. What would you try differently next time?
6. To what extent did the venue promote or detract from dialogue?
 - a. To what extent did the format of the dialogue promote or detract?
 - b. Is there anything that would have made it better?
 - c. Is there anything we should avoid in the future?

7. After participating in this intervention, what do you expect to be the outcome or the next step?
8. What else would be helpful for us to discuss that has not yet been shared?

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT ACTION RESEARCH TEAM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue

You are invited to be in a research study regarding faithful discernment and decision-making in Christian congregations. You were selected as a possible participant because of your unique perspectives on Community, you care about its future, and I believe you will bring your faith, honesty, and intellect to this process. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

I am conducting this study as part of my doctoral thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisor is Dr. Craig Van Gelder.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore Community's discernment and decision-making process. As a Christian congregation, we make decisions differently from any other organization because we do not make decisions at the sole discretion of the pastor, council, or any other leader. We are led by God alone. We are also a human institution that must work within human constraints. As humans, we don't always see eye-to-eye—there is conflict around decisions and change. This research project seeks to help us become better at relying on our faith to hear God's call, discern how we may respond, and work together to overcome our differences so we may better serve God's mission in the area.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to participate as a member of the Action Research Team. This team will work closely with me to refine my plan to involve the congregation in this process, develop "interventions", debrief those interventions, and review my observations as this project nears its completion.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with this study. The only risk or cost to you is your time.

There are no direct benefits of participating in this study.

Indirect benefits to yourself and the congregation of participation include growth in faith; a congregation that is more healthy and able to address conflict and change focused on the mission of God; and potentially improved skills and relationships at church, home, and at work.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home; only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or

video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

If tape recordings or videotapes are made, only my advisor and I will have access to them unless I decide to use a transcriptionist. If a transcriptionist is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

All raw data from this study will be destroyed by 5/31/2020 as federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/or with other cooperating institutions, Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, or the pastoral relationship between you and the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffrey M. Wilson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at pastorwilson@communitylc.org.

Phone: 555-555-1234.

You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, via email at CVanGeld@luthersem.edu.

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

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to be audiotaped:

Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT FOCUS GROUP

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue

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Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to participate as a participant of a focus group. The focus group will convene following one of a series of "interventions." Our purpose will be to debrief and dig deeper into the dynamics surrounding an intervention.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with this study. The only risk or cost to you is your time.

There are no direct benefits of participating in this study.

Indirect benefits to yourself and the congregation of participation include growth in faith; a congregation that is more healthy and able to address conflict and change focused on the mission of God; and potentially improved skills and relationships at church, home, and at work.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home; only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or

video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

If tape recordings or videotapes are made, only my advisor and I will have access to them unless I decide to use a transcriptionist. If a transcriptionist is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

All raw data from this study will be destroyed by 5/31/2020 as federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/or with other cooperating institutions, Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, or the pastoral relationship between you and the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffrey M. Wilson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at pastorwilson@communitylc.org.

Phone: 555-555-1234.

You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, via email at CVanGeld@luthersem.edu.

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

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to be audiotaped:

Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT INTERVIEWS

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue

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Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore Community's discernment and decision-making process. As a Christian congregation, we make decisions differently from any other organization because we do not make decisions at the sole discretion of the pastor, council, or any other leader. We are led by God alone. We are also a human institution that must work within human constraints. As humans, we don't always see eye-to-eye—there is conflict around decisions and change. This research project seeks to help us become better at relying on our faith to hear God's call, discern how we may respond, and work together to overcome our differences so we may better serve God's mission in the area.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to participate as in a one-on-one interview following a congregational survey. We will establish a time when we can have an hour to an hour and a half of uninterrupted time together.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with this study. The only risk or cost to you is your time.

There are no direct benefits of participating in this study.

Indirect benefits to yourself and the congregation of participation include helping me understand your perspective which will enable me to better understand the congregation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my home; only my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or

video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number to be studied.

If tape recordings or videotapes are made, only my advisor and I will have access to them unless I decide to use a transcriptionist. If a transcriptionist is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

All raw data from this study will be destroyed by 5/31/2020 as federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary and/or with other cooperating institutions, Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, or the pastoral relationship between you and the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jeffrey M. Wilson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at pastorwilson@communitylc.org.

Phone: 555-555-1234.

You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Craig Van Gelder, via email at CVanGeld@luthersem.edu.

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

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of investigator _____ Date _____

I consent to be audiotaped:

Signature _____ Date _____

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX J

IMPLIED CONSENT FORM BASELINE AND END LINE QUANTITATIVE SURVEYS

Implied Consent Letter for Baseline Surveys

A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue:
Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue

November 2015

Dear Congregation Member,

You are invited to participate in a study of your perspectives on the communication and decision-making at Community. I hope to learn about Community's decision-making and our reliance upon the Holy Spirit to guide our conversations and decisions. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your affiliation with Community and have perspectives that could be useful in this study.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to help me understand the feelings of Community members as I begin my study process. This survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to give me meaningful insight that I would not have otherwise. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Luther Seminary, Community Evangelical Lutheran Church, or me as your pastor. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact Jeff Wilson cell: 555-555-1234 email: pastorwilson@communitylc.org.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M Wilson

APPENDIX K

TRANSCRIPTIONIST NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Pastor Jeff Wilson related to his research study titled "A Congregation Engaging in Missional Dialogue: Strengthening Discernment amid Diversity through Healthy Congregational Dialogue." I understand that the files are being used for an academic thesis at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and that Pastor Wilson has promised confidentiality to all those participating in this study. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Pastor Jeff Wilson.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To delete all electronic or paper files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

If I have any questions or concerns about confidentiality or the project, I may reach Pastor Wilson directly at jwilson004@luthersem.edu.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX L

DISCUSSION FORUM OUTLINE – INTERVENTION #1

Long Range Planning Facilities Task Force

Discussion Forum

November 15, 2015 9:30am – 10:30am

The following is an outline of the plan and implementation of the discussion forum on November 15, 2015.

Context

Title: To Build, or Not to Build. That is the Question.

Date & Time: November 15, 2015 @ 9:30am

Location: Great Hall – the LRP Facilities TF will assist with goodies, setup, and facilitating

Purpose: To address the question “Do we pursue a major building expansion in the next 5 – 10 years, or do we focus on maintenance of our existing building and grounds?”

- Help congregation members know what we know
- Invite congregation members into the challenge points

Background: The LRP Facilities TF feels they need clarity on the congregation’s answer to this question before moving forward. The history of the congregation’s finances make the team reluctant to go too far along developing plans and spending money if the congregation is not with them.

Anticipated Outcomes:

- Greater awareness of the current condition of the building
- Greater awareness of the options and that there are costs to each
 - Do nothing – not really an option
 - Maintenance – just up-keep or also improvements such as lighting and environment?
 - Renovation
 - Rebuild

- Awareness of our need to be good stewards of the building and land
- Awareness of the many ways in which Community feels called to be a part of our community
- Desire by the congregation to explore further to find out what costs are involved and how we might meet those costs
- Agenda item at the congregational meeting – MOTION: to reaffirm the congregation's approval of the Long Range Plan section on space, and to encourage the Long Range Plan Implementation Team to move forward with the exploration of costs and the congregation's ability to raise and support the necessary funding.

Preparation

Publicity

- Monthly newsletter
- Weekly bulletin announcements
- Weekly eNews
- Verbal Announcements
- Narthex monitor
- Community website
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

Publicity Text:

To Build, or Not to Build. That is the Question.

Community's Long Range Plan that was ratified on February 9, 2014, said the congregation should (1) address worship space, (2) create a welcoming entrance and addresses building functions, and (3) allow for mission expansion. The Facilities Task Force created as a result of the Long Range Plan has been working on ways to accomplish all three of these objectives. Recently, they asked themselves: "We are coming up with a lot of ideas and plans, but we really don't know what the congregation wants to do - do we pursue the significant renovations, or do we delay renovations and put our money and effort into maintaining our existing structure?"

On Sunday, November 15, beginning at 9:30am, the congregation is invited to a discussion to help the people focusing on the building to have a sense of the will of the congregation. If you have questions, please talk with the Facilities Task Force chair, or Pastor Jeff.

Handouts

- Comment/Question cards

Setup

- Food – pastries?
- Host coffee hour?

Timeframe

- 9:15am – fellowship begins
- 9:30am – 10:30am discussion
- Can stay as late as 10:45am
 - If it's going well, how do we continue the discussion?
 - Don't want to rush
 - Evening or afternoon after church?

People who should be specifically invited

- *List of individuals*
- LRP Facilities TF
- Mission Council

Introductory Material

- What is needed to maintain the current building? It is anticipated that it will be in excess of \$100,000.
 - What is the real price for the boiler?
 - What else is included in the estimate?
- Deficiencies of the current building
- Discuss phases
- Describe options from LRP Facilities TF (see PowerPoint) – these are not set in stone, just concepts
- Missions – volume of use

Welcome & Purpose

Why are we here?

- This is an “information session” to share where the LRP Facilities TF is and to hear your questions and concerns. We have learned a lot since we began meeting on _____.
- To address the question “Do we pursue a major building expansion in the next 5 – 10 years, or do we focus on maintenance of our existing building and grounds?”
- LRP direction to address space
- We can't get better numbers because better numbers cost money – we're stuck

Introduce others who are present to help in the discussion

Frame the Conversation

What do we know that they need to know?

- Current condition of the building – consult LRP Facilities TF wish list (lighting, kitchen, storage, etc)
- Teach: we need to be good stewards of the building and land
- Share: there are many ways Community feels called to be a part of our community – this is part of our mission
- LRP Facilities TF made a conscious decision early on to dream and discern; otherwise, we would shoot down every idea before we gave it a chance.
- We know there are financial limitations and we are at the point where we need to understand what those limitations are.

What are the sticking points that they can help us wrestle with? (Challenge Questions)

- Options and that there are costs to each
 - Do nothing – not really an option
 - Maintenance – just up-keep or also improvements such as lighting and environment?
 - Renovation
 - Rebuild
- If we don't build in the next 3-5 years, what will that impact be?
 - Evangelism
 - We still have money to spend on maintenance, and, as the building ages, we will have to spend even more.
- We know we don't have 10 years left in the boiler. If we pursue renovations involving the office/preschool hallway, the boiler system will be replaced with an efficient central heating and cooling system.
- What are risks in building?
- What are risks in not building?

Then What?

- Annual Congregational Meeting (11/22) will seek to affirm the Long Range Plan on the subject of the building/space. With this approval, the LRP Facilities TF and the LRP Financing TF can continue/begin their work.
 - **DRAFT MOTION:** to reaffirm the congregation's approval of the Long Range Plan section on space, and to encourage the Long Range Plan Facilities Task Force and Long Range Plan Financing Task Force to move forward with the exploration of costs and the congregation's ability to raise and support the necessary funding.
 - Since the architect fees were not funded, the Building Community Christmas Bazaar (2014) and Community Fall Festival (2015) have raised approximately \$11,200 with \$1,000 of that spent on architect fees.
 - I propose a congregational meeting – possibly in Feb/Mar/Apr to review progress

- Leading up to the congregational meeting, perhaps in Jan/Feb, we host a series of cottage meetings (in homes, at church) with 1 member of Council and 1 member of LRP Facilities TF
- The cottage meetings give us a chance to hear from the congregation and share what we're thinking
- The cottage meetings will also address shared congregational values, goals and priorities
- In advance of the Special Spring Congregational Meeting, we can ...
 - Explore further to find out what costs are involved and how we might meet those costs

APPENDIX M

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP HANDBOOK – INTERVENTION #2

Agenda

Time	Description
8:30a – 9:00a	Goodies & Fellowship
9:00a – 10:30a	<u>Session 1</u> Welcome & Introduction Devotion Discussion of Community leadership concepts and frame
10:30a – 10:45a	Break
10:45a – 11:45p	<u>Session 2</u> Case Study Debrief
11:45p – 12:15p	Lunch
12:15p – 1:00p	<u>Session 3</u> Comments, Reflections and Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cottage meetings• Accountability teams

Session 1: Congregational Leadership

Welcome & Introduction

Vocabulary

- Technical Challenges/Change
- Adaptive Challenges/Change

Focus: To help each of us work together better, focus ourselves on God's call, and become better at healthy dialogue and faithful discernment to the glory of God.

Your focus: What do you really need to get out of today's workshop?

Dwelling in the Word: Ezekiel 37:1-14 "The Valley of Dry Bones"

¹The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit

within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

Awareness

Leadership Reflection

Who is *actually* on your team? (i.e. they are engaged in the ministry and come to meetings)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Think about each person

- Why are they on this team?
- What are their gifts – what do they bring to the ministry?
- Do they have gifts or potential that is not being utilized?

What other teams/leaders do you interact with?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Are there people, concepts, or topics that usually get you stuck?

Vocabulary

- Body of Christ
- Chaos
- Conflict or Heat

- Systems

Management & Leadership

Vocabulary

- Management
- Leadership
- Missional
- Missional Leadership
- Listening
- “Getting to the balcony”
- Stewardship
- Change

Managers are largely responsible for the stability and the efficient and smooth working of an organization. Leaders are quite different. They do not ask the management question, are we doing things right? They ask the more difficult question, are we doing the right things? Leaders step out into the future to discern what God is calling the congregation to do in the next chapter of its life. Managers are the voice of stability in the congregation (and therefore sensitive to measures of happiness or satisfaction); leaders are the voice of change in the congregation (and more sensitive to measures of purpose and faithfulness).¹



The church doesn't have a mission
God's mission has a church

¹ Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Loc 289.

Process & Clarity

Challenge Questions

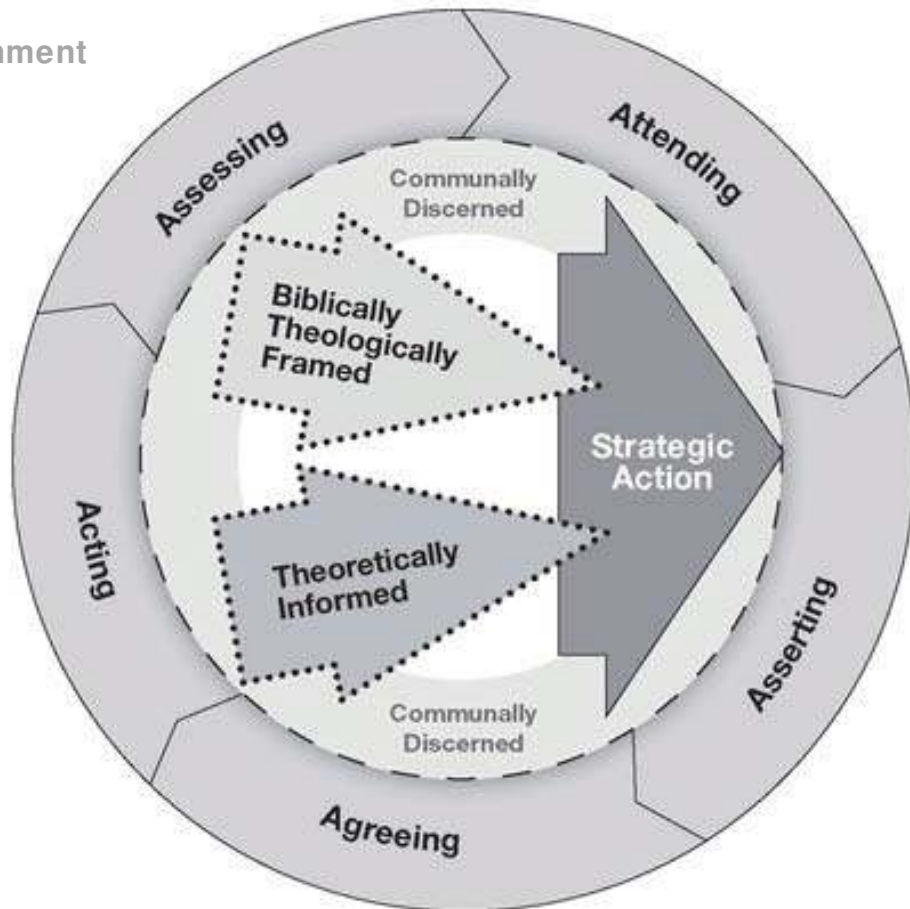
- Are we clear when we create teams, task forces, roles, etc?
- Do we have a sensible, understandable, faithful process that helps members and leaders discern what ideas should become action?
 - Not every idea is a good one?
 - Not every good idea is right for Community?
 - How do we decide?

Steven Covey's Quadrant

	Urgent	Not Urgent				
Important	<p style="text-align: center;">Quad I</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crisis Pressing Problems Deadline Driven </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress Burn-out Crisis management Always putting out fires </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crisis Pressing Problems Deadline Driven 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress Burn-out Crisis management Always putting out fires 	<p style="text-align: center;">Quad II</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention, capability improvement Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision, perspective Balance Discipline Control Few crisis </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention, capability improvement Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision, perspective Balance Discipline Control Few crisis
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Not Important	<p style="text-align: center;">Quad III</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interruptions, some callers Some email, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short term focus Crisis management Reputation – chameleon character See goals/ plans as worthless Feel victimized, out of control Shallow or broken relationships </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interruptions, some callers Some email, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short term focus Crisis management Reputation – chameleon character See goals/ plans as worthless Feel victimized, out of control Shallow or broken relationships 	<p style="text-align: center;">Quad IV</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trivia, busy work Some email Personal social media Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total irresponsibility Fired from jobs Dependent on others or institutions for basics </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trivia, busy work Some email Personal social media Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Results</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total irresponsibility Fired from jobs Dependent on others or institutions for basics
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Decision-making & Discernment

Five Phases of Discernment



Vocabulary

- Scarcity
- Abundance
- Faith
- Discernment
- Attending
- Asserting
- Agreeing
- Acting
- Assessing

Communication

Vocabulary

- “Rabbit holes”

- Dialogue
- Transparency

Meetings

Challenge Questions

- What happens in meetings that you lead or attend?
 - How much dialogue occurs? Listening?
- How productive are your meetings?
- Do your meetings stay on track?
 - Does the presence or absence of a published agenda help focus?

Supporting Information

See pages 12 and following for:

- Meeting Etiquette
- Email Etiquette
- Rhythm of the Year
- Leadership Monthly Timeline
- Ideas for meeting agendas, minutes, reports to Council, and proposal forms
- See page 12 for a sample leadership monthly timeline

Vocabulary

- Stewardship of Time

Preparation

	Healthy Meeting	Unhealthy Meeting
Prayer		
Agenda		
Purpose for the meeting		
Participants Prepared		
Information available to make decisions		
Notes with action items and POCs recorded		

Involvement

Challenge Questions

- When people want to be involved, do we involve them?
- When people get involved, do we support them?

- What is the experience of people new in leadership positions or new to Community?
- Do we seek to just fill positions with warm bodies or do we see positions as ministry opportunities?

Vocabulary

- Free will

Session 2: Case Studies

Case Study #1

Suzy, who is passionate about Christian Education, researches and comes up with a great idea that she believes is important enough to share with the entire congregation. She fires off some emails to leaders of different ministries informing them of her plan and that it needs to be implemented right away. Afterwards, she feels great because she has done a great thing for the church. She's surprised the next day when she gets emails and phone calls from angry congregation members some asking strongly worded questions, some blaming her, some saying they won't comply and still others putting up other roadblocks. By the end of the day, Suzy is confused, hurt, and deflated. Why didn't they see that this is such a good idea and it will be so good for the congregation? Why did they have to react in this way.

Case Study #2

Doug is a fiscal conservative. He manages his own family's money well by having solid investments and sticking close to their budget. They rarely use credit cards, and, when they do, they pay off the balance immediately. He is confounded when he watches how the church conducts its business. It seems so loosey-goosey. Well-meaning and passionate congregation members who want to see the church grow and attract new families often want to spend more money. They seem less concerned with the budget and living within the congregation's means. They say things like: "You just have to have faith." "God will provide." When Doug speaks up, he feels the eyes of others in the congregation who just want to move forward. He sometimes feels like an outcast. He feels as though others think he is paying too much attention to "business" matters instead of being faithful and trusting God. He cares deeply for the church and wants the ministry to continue. He's tired of being called an old fuddy-duddy, curmudgeon, and nay-sayer.

Case Study #3

Stella came to the church at a critical time in her life; therefore, she feels a strong personal connection to the church. She wants to invite others to see and experience what happened to her. Stella is used to being a doer. She doesn't like to sit around and talk about things, she wants to make decisions and act on those decisions. Stella has some ideas for evangelism, but they cost money and they will require more people and time. She learned that, not only did she have to talk to the Evangelism team, but they felt there needed to be a proposal that went to Council for approval because Evangelism didn't have money in their budget. By the time the conversation got to Council, 3 months had past since she initially talked with the Evangelism chair. She's frustrated that the process takes so long and that there were so many steps. The week following the Council meeting, she got a call from the cluster coordinator responsible for Evangelism who said the Council had more questions and concerns about the money. Council would like Stella to revised her proposal to address their questions and to attend the next Council meeting to answer questions. By the time of the second Council meeting, at least 4 months would have passed.

Case Study #4

The pastor has been making decisions and moving the church in a direction you don't agree with. You hear the theory and theology behind it, but something doesn't feel right. When you speak to the pastor, it seems like he's got an answer for everything and isn't really hearing your concerns. You've talked with other people in the church. Some seem to be following what the pastor is saying – you see them a “towing the party line.” Other people see your point and they may be frustrated, too.

Discussion Questions

- Observe what is going on from different perspectives
- Why is this going on?
- How do you progress through this?
- How do you lead?
- What and who do you draw on to help you?
- How does your faith guide you?
- How does faith guide the conversations and disagreements?

Session 3: Reflection & Next Steps

Comments and Reflections

Next Steps

- Cottage meetings
- Accountability teams
- Focus group (DMin)

Accountability Team Agenda

For six months starting in March:

- Check in with your partner 1-2 times each month. This can be a phone call, talking for a few minutes during coffee hour, or whatever works for the partners. It is strongly suggested NOT to do this via text or email.
- Structure: talk through meeting checklist (for more, see the Leader Timeline on page 12)
 - Agenda published about 1 week in advance of the meeting
 - Notes after the meeting with clearly marked action items, decisions, and people assigned to be responsible for making those things happen.
 - Leadership review of action items and begin building next agenda after the meeting
 - Submit report to Ministry Team or Council
- Relationships:
 - Talk about the dynamics of your team. What are you noticing about how they work together? Do you notice gifts that are not being utilized?
 - Are people being heard? Are some people being shut down while others are dominating the conversation? What are some ways to deal with this?
 - Are people building upon each other's ideas?
 - How each leader is feeling?

Resources

Leadership Monthly Timeline

The following is an outline that may be helpful for ministry and task force leaders. The idea is that meetings are not stand-alone events, but rather an on-going conversation. Tasks during the month should reflect that conversational nature.

Week following your meeting:

- Make lists
 - What needs to be communicated to other Ministry Teams/people?
 - What needs to be communicated to the Church Office?
 - What needs to be communicated to the congregation (newsletter, calendar or other article; eNews; bulletin; Sunday announcements; special congregational mailing; social media)?
 - Who has the action for the above items?
- Based on this meeting, what needs to happen at the next meeting? Build initial agenda carrying items over from the previous agenda.
- What kind of follow-up would be helpful (with pastor, church office, Council member, Ministry Team leader, etc)?

About 2 weeks before your meeting:

- Review your lists and consider if progress has been made. It is possible that progress has been made, but nothing has been communicated. Check in with people who had action items.
- Check in with the team to see if they have agenda items that you don't know about.
- Review the agenda for the next meeting.

Approximately 1 week before your meeting:

- Send reminder e-mail to your team with a draft agenda. Be clear what people should do to prepare for a meeting, and what materials they should bring with them versus what will be provided for them (i.e. handouts)

Meeting Etiquette

Meetings are an important way that we come together to organize and do the work of God through His church. An important concept when organizing meetings is the *Stewardship of Time*. As leaders, we are called to be good stewards of the money entrusted to us, people's time, and their abilities. It is not good stewardship to have a meeting at which nothing is decided and that has no clear purpose. There is value in Christian fellowship when we get together at meetings, but people carve out time from their day, rush home from work, eat dinner in the car, and make childcare arrangements because they are expecting to do something important and that will make a difference in the life of our congregation. To exercise good Stewardship of Time:

- Keep in mind that people generally want to *do* ministry. Meetings should focus on this.
- Ensure that the meeting date, time, and location are on the church calendar. This may be done through the church office.
- Begin the meeting on time. It is best to have a meeting that is focused and can be completed within an hour. No regular meeting should be longer than an hour and a half.
- Begin each meeting with prayer and devotion.
- Have a published agenda.
- Have written notes from the meeting detailing decisions, next steps, action items, and the person assigned to enact those next steps or action items.

Email Etiquette

Email is a very effective tool for reaching out to a number of people quickly and easily. It is best used for setting up meetings, sharing documents, and providing information people need to make decisions. Extreme caution should be exercised when using email on confidential or sensitive matters. Be aware that there may be a time in your email communication that it starts to feel like a conversation or it feels as though communication isn't happening; that is a good time for either a phone call or a face-to-face meeting.

Exercise good email etiquette by:

- Using a sensible subject.
- Having a clear point to your email.
- Helping your readers with a clear statement of what you are asking them to do with the information:
 - Is the email for information only?
 - Does the email require further action from the recipient?
 - Is there a specific response or timeframe involved?
 - Is the author seeking feedback or a perspective?
- Being mindful of the length of an email message. Some emails just have to be long. Consider a brief statement of the purpose and what action you require at the beginning of an email.

- Sending to the people who need to see the information – care should be taken to avoid numerous reply all's.
- Being aware of what and how much you are forwarding. Sometimes people forward an email, which also forward an entire string of conversation.
- Knowing when to stop emailing and have a phone call or personal conversation.
- Using extreme caution if you feel you need to forward another person's email to people not on their distribution list. Communication marked "confidential" should NEVER be forwarded without the author's permission.
- Considering the recipient and how they might receive your message. A good guideline would be to discuss ideas, proposals, etc personally follow up with an email rather than the email being the first a person or team hears of it.
- Being aware that ALL CAPS constitutes yelling.
- Using larger font sizes, colors, and exclamation points sparingly. Formatting does not always look the way you designed it in the recipient's email.
- Not distributing spam or forwarding "cute" things from the internet
- Allowing adequate time for a response as not everyone is able to check their email through the course of the day.
- Giving yourself time to respond. If you receive something that upsets you, just walk away. Come back to it later after you've thought and prayed about it.

Brief Description of Ministry Teams

Administration

The Administration Team is specific to the administration of the church and its day-to-day functions. It is essentially led by the Senior Pastor, and includes the church staff, the Finance Team, Communications, various Task Forces, building use, etc.

Building & Grounds

This team oversees the general upkeep of the church grounds and the facility itself. Included in this team are C.R.E.W., maintenance for the cemetery, and various improvements to the structure.

Evangelism & Outreach

The Evangelism team is responsible for educating and encouraging the congregation in its own evangelism and outreach. All evangelism and outreach efforts are not locating in this ministry alone. All ministries and individuals within the congregation have something to do with evangelism.

Congregational Care

Congregational Care is a very diverse ministry team, charged with overseeing the well-being of our membership and attending to their specific needs where possible. Some of the works that this team does include food preparation/delivery, in-home communion, Stephen Ministry, the parish nurse, the Shepherding Team, etc.

Christian Education

The Christian Education team is charged with addressing the educational needs of our congregation. Included under the umbrella of this ministry team is Sunday School, Confirmation, First Communion, Adult Education, VBS, and special workshops.

Fellowship & Hospitality

The F & H team is a group of ministries that address the fellowship and gathering opportunities here at Community. Some examples of this team's members include the coffee hour between worship services, Lenten Soup Suppers, and the Annual Rally Day and Congregational Picnic.

Preschool

Community Lutheran Preschool (CLP) has been in existence since 1972. During those years, the school has prepared local children with a solid educational foundation for entry into the public (or private) school systems, provided a means for socialization at an early age, and has also provided spiritual guidance for the children within the classroom, as well as during chapel time.

Stewardship

Community's Stewardship Ministry team is tasked with leading Community's members in good stewardship. Good stewardship is not limited to money, time or talents used for the church. God is also interested in how we use these through our whole lives. We believe that we are called to serve God Here, Near, and Far. The Here Team is concerned with empowering the work of ministry throughout the whole congregation. Therefore, action such as the annual pledge drive and time and talent process are Here Team activities. The Near Team is concerned with serving God in our community. The Far Team serves God in places beyond our community and around the world (Companion Synod Sunday, Namibian children's dresses, etc.).

Worship & Music

The W & M team oversees the behind-the-scenes operations involved in our worship experiences here at Community. Included in this team are the Altar Guild, greeters, lectors, ushers, worship and communion assistants, acolytes, crucifers, music ministries, and all vocal and bell choirs.

Youth & Family

In conjunction with Community's Director for Youth & Family Ministries, this team seeks to advance opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship for this demographic. Examples of the ministries within this Team are: the Senior High group (including, but not limited to, the ELCA Youth Gathering, etc.), the collegiate correspondence ministry, etc.

Ministry Team Roles

Community's ministry teams and task forces address a variety of needs and may organized themselves very differently from other ministry teams. However, each of them has the same types of roles that must be filled. It is important to note that these are roles that may be filled by one person or ten.

Chair

Responsibilities: Lead meetings, develop meeting agenda, coordinate with pastor(s) and Mission Council, work with Administrative Assistant to maintain church calendar, develop team members, develop and maintain ministry team vision and planning, ensures application of core values, with Council Liaison, coordinates with other Ministry Teams.

Budget Manager

Responsibilities: Assist with developing yearly ministry team budget (in consultation with Finance Team). Maintains operating budget for Ministry Team with more granular detail than annual church budget.

Involvement Coordinator

Responsibilities: In a timely manner, work with the Membership Assistant and the congregation to recruit and engage people in the ministry team and its activities.

Communications

Responsibilities: Take minutes/meeting notes at Ministry Team Meetings. Work with Chair to notify congregation of ministry team activities (newsletter, bulletins, Web site, e-mail, etc.). Work with Mission Council liaison to provide updates/reports to the Mission Council (summary and action items).

Ministry Team Leadership List

As of 2/17/2016

Strengthening Faith

Leader names

Christian Education Ministry Team

Leader names

Cradle Roll

Leader names

Sunday School

Leader names

Confirmation

Leader names

First Communion

Leader names

Adult Forum

Leader names

FisH

Leader names

Workshops

Leader names

Summer Faith Formation

Leader names

VBS

Leader names

New Member Class

Evangelism Ministry Team

Youth & Family Ministry Team

Leader names

Preschool

Leader names

Boy Scouts

Leader names

Sustaining Faith

Leader names

Worship & Music Ministry Team

Leader names

Altar Guild

Leader names

Ushers

Leader names

Lectors

Leader names

Acolytes/Crucifers

Leader names

Sound Crew

Leader names

Worship Assistants / Communion Assistants

Leader names

Music

Leader names

Adult Choir

Leader names

Joyful Ringers I

Leader names

Joyful Ringers II

Leader names

Adult Bell Choir I

Leader names

Adult Bell Choir II

Leader names

Music Search Task Force

Leader names

Fellowship & Hospitality Ministry Team

Leader names

Congregational Care Ministry Team

Leader names

Stephens Ministry

Leader names

Shepherding Team

Leader names

Community Cares

Leader names

Home Communion

Leader names

Barnabas

Leader names

Sharing Faith

Leader names

Stewardship Ministry Team

Leader names

Here

Leader names

Near

Leader names

Far

Leader names

Environment

Leader names

Community Garden

Leader names

Evangelism & Outreach Ministry Team

Leader names

Communications

Leader names

Website

Leader names

Social Media

Leader names

Google Apps Administrator

Leader names

Narthex Display

Leader names

Signs

Leader names

Fliers

Leader names

Newspaper

Leader names

Community Groups

Leader names

Supporting Faith

Leader names

Administration

Leader names

Finance Team

Leader names

Building & Grounds Ministry Team

Leader names

CREW

Leader names

Building Manager

Leader names

Kitchen Manager

Leader names

Personnel Committee

Leader names

Long Range Planning Task Force

Leader names

Organizational Structure Task Force

Leader names

Funding Task Force

Leader names

Facilities Task Force

Leader names

Mission Council

Leader names

Finance/Tellers

Leader names

Nominating Committee

Leader names

Audit Committee

Leader names

Personnel Committee

Leader names

Call Committee

not active

Task Forces

See Task Forces individually above

Rhythm of the Year

Adapted from Community's *Rhythm of the Year* document.

Every congregation has a natural flow, or “rhythm,” that governs their year, often around “anchor” events, such as Rally Day and our Annual Congregational meeting. Congregations also have a “program year” which is often different from the calendar year. Community's program year begins in September with Rally Day and all of the other activities that start again for the fall. Our program year essentially ends in June with Music Sunday and Teacher Appreciation. The calendar outlined below starts in May, which may seem awkward at first. Notice that May ends up being one of those pivotal times when we prepare for the end of one program year and begin to lay the groundwork for the next program year.

May

- May is a time of reflection and projection as Ministry Teams review what they have and have not done over the past year, and as they begin to look forward to the coming year. This kind of review should not be judgmental or guilt-producing, but just an honest assessment of the past year. The Ministry Teams will likely find that there are also things they accomplished and didn't anticipate.
- By the end of May, Ministry Teams should...
 - Complete their annual report
 - Have a draft calendar for the next program year in preparation for the Consolidated Ministry Workshop in June. Calendar items should be sent to the person who will be consolidating the calendar items on a master planning calendar. This should include how the Stewardship year-round emphasis will work and when we are supporting various ministries.
 - Review publicity related to each ministry area (print, web, time & talent sheets, brochures, etc) and consider what needs to be updated, removed, or new publicity
- Annual Personnel Reviews (including pastor)
- Would we want to consider some kind of year-end wrap-up similar to the Ministry Fair where we share and celebrate with the congregation what we've done the past year?
- Mail giving statements (covering Jan – Apr) to all members regardless of amount given and include a letter listing accomplishments and activities since Jan 1, and what we're looking forward to between May and August.

June

- Consolidated Ministry Workshop (usually the first Saturday in June). This meeting is to review the calendar for the program year based on calendar details submitted in May.
- All Community Groups will be asked to renew their intention to use space at Community by the end of June. This process involves ensuring we have current

contact information, that we know who has keys to the building, and that the groups are aware of the regulations regarding building use, especially any changes from last year. We will have calendar information from the Consolidated Ministry Workshop and can address any conflicts in July based on Community's planning calendar and room use requests.

July

- Based on the calendar planning done by the Ministry Teams, they begin preparing their budget for the next program year, which will be submitted to the Finance Team by Aug 1.

August

- Ministry Teams present their budget numbers to the Finance Committee – **DUE: August 1.** Ministry Teams, with their budget manager, have input into the budget process based on plans. At the Ministry Team level, the budget can have as much detail as the team desires. At the congregational level, we don't see all the detail so we can manage percentages and priorities.
- Begin formation of annual committees:
 - Nominations
 - Compensation
 - Audit

September

- At their regularly scheduled meeting, the Mission Council receives a *draft* budget from the Finance Committee and offers feedback to the Finance Committee
- Ministry Fair (end of Sept/beginning of Oct)
- Mail giving statements (covering May – Aug) to all members regardless of amount given and include a letter listing accomplishments and activities since May 1, and what we're looking forward to between September and December.
- Begin consideration of the topic for the Community Mission and Ministry Retreat (CMMR)

October

- At their regularly scheduled meeting, the Mission Council approves and makes available to the congregation a *proposed* budget
- Stewardship financial drive (year-round emphasis)

November

- Publicity
 - Publicize the Annual Congregational Meeting
 - Publicize the nominees for Council
 - Publicize the items to be voted upon at the Annual Congregational Meeting

- Annual Congregational Meeting:
 - Approve budget
 - Elect Council members
 - Vote on those to serve as delegates to the Synod Assembly
 - Proposals for congregational consideration (e.g. Long Range Planning recommendations)
 - By the time we get to the congregational meeting, the proposals should be well-known to the congregation – they should be involved in the process so that this is not the first time they are hearing this information.
- Mission Council establishes theme for the next year beginning in Advent.
- Stewardship: Ensure that Time & Talent results are shared with Ministry Team Leaders

December

- Stewardship makes recommendations to Council for the division of the Lenten Offerings in concert with Christian Education because Sunday School offerings are a stewardship consideration as well.

January

- Epiphany Season Sermons
 - Sermons through Epiphany are about reaching out and reaching forward - that baby Jesus sure is cute lying there in the manger, but Jesus grew and so do we.
- Mail giving statements (covering Sept – Dec) to all members regardless of amount given and include a letter listing accomplishments and activities since Aug 1, and what we're looking forward to between January and April.
- If Council did not approve the Stewardship recommendations for Lenten Offerings in December, they should make that decision at this meeting in order to publicize it.

February

- Annual Leadership Retreat
 - Leadership Retreat at the end of Feb to keep the energy, engagement and ideas going (this is where the ripple effects of the pebbles from the Jan retreat start spreading)

Sample Forms

Meeting AGENDA for ...

MEETING INFORMATION

Objective of meeting: -

Date: m/d/yyyy

Time – Begin: 0:00pm

End: -

Location: -

Attendees: -

Absent: -

Note taker: -

Type of Meeting: -

PREPARATION

Please read: --

Please bring: --

PRAYER AND DEVOTIONS

-

ACTION ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Item

Responsible

Name

Due Date

Date

AGENDA ITEMS

Item

Responsible

Name

Due Date

Date

NEW ACTION ITEMS

Item

Responsible

Name

Due Date

Date

PUBLICITY

What needs to be reporting in the weekly bulletin, newsletter, Facebook, webpage, weekly eNews, etc?

Item

Responsible

Name

Due Date

Date

OTHER NOTES OR INFORMATION

This is a detailed notes section

FUTURE MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

Responsible Due Date

Next meeting: m/d/yyyy @ 0:00pm

List items suggested by meeting attendees

[MinistryTeamName] Ministry Team Meeting Minutes

MEETING INFORMATION

Date/Time: date | start time - end time

Location: room name/number

Facilitator: Leader name

Note Taker: name

Objective:

Agenda:

1.

Attendees: -

Next Mtg Date/Time: date | start time - end time

Location: room name/number

Topic Discussed

brief summary of comments

ACTION: what will be done

DECISION: what was decided

POC: who is the point of contact who is responsible for communicating and/or taking action

FUTURE MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

- List of items that should appear on the next agenda

TICKLER LIST

Some teams may prefer to have a list of upcoming actions that they don't want to forget. This could be a reminder of when to start publicity or when to follow-up on an action.

PARKING LOT

Items that should be addressed/discussed at some future date. The parking lot helps items from being forgotten.

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church
Draft Ministry Proposal

Proposal Name
Presented date

BACKGROUND

-

VISION

-

SCOPE

-

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

-

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

-

PROPOSAL

Wording for the motion to be approved at ministry teams and Council

Name:	<u>Proposal Name</u>		
Submitted by:	<u>Presenters</u>	Approved [Ministry Team]:	<u>Date & status</u>
	<u></u>	Approved Council	<u>Date & status</u>

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church
Ministry Report

[Name] Ministry Team
[Month and Year for Council meeting]

FOR INFORMATION:

- List information, decisions, important up-coming events for which Council needs information.
- Are there any obstacles that you are experiencing or that you foresee?

FOR ACTION:

List specific resolution or "No Council action required at this time."

OBSTACLES:

Are there obstacles or barriers to your team doing what it needs to do?

NEEDS:

List specific needs or "No needs at this time"

GOALS:

What progress has the ministry team made toward its goals?

Are there things you are learning about your goals or ways to work with other teams?

Are there other items emerging as having higher priority requiring the stated goals being put on the back burner?

A similar format may be used for Resolutions and Policies.

APPENDIX N

INTERVENTION #2 – INITIAL SURVEY OF LEADERS

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church
Leadership Workshop Pre-Session Survey

This survey should take 5-10 minutes and will help the Workshop organizers in their final preparations to ensure they are addressing leadership concerns that you have and experience.

The questions below are designed to help you reflect on your own leadership and how we work together as leaders. The church is different from any other place you have exercised leadership. Many of you have had leadership training and experience in other settings, and you have had experience in other congregations. As leaders, we have a role to bring our faith and our God-given gifts in service to God, fellow congregation members, and our community.

Thank you for your time!

PART I. Perspective on Your Leadership

These questions give us an idea of how you understand yourself as a leader.

Q1. How do you describe your leadership style?

Q2. How do you describe your communication style?

Q3. How do you describe your leadership style?

Q4. How well supported do you feel in your role?

Not supported at all		Both supported and not supported		Very Supported	Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5. What are the 2 – 3 biggest challenges you experience as a leader

PART II. Perspectives on Working Together at Community

These questions help us understand what you see and experience as a leader.

Q6. How confident do you feel that you and your team know what the process is for making decisions at Community? (i.e. when decisions can be made in your team or task force, when they need to go to Council, and when the pastor needs to be involved?)

Not Confident		Both Confident and Not Confident		Very Confident	Don't Know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q7. Describe a recent decision or action that your team took. How did it go? Was it well received? Was there conflict? Were people well informed?

Q8. Do you feel that your meetings are productive and stay on track? If so, to what do you attribute this? If not, how would you describe what's happening?

Q9. What role does faith play in your meetings and decisions?

Q10. What 2 – 3 topics or questions would you like to see addressed at the Leadership Workshop to make us better leaders and better followers?

APPENDIX O

INTERVENTION #2 – FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF LEADERS

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church Leadership Workshop Post-Session Survey

If you would like a PDF version of the Community Leadership Workshop handout, you may download: [pdf](#)

Introduction

- Q1. Did you attend the Community Leadership Workshop on Saturday, February 27, 2016?
- Yes
 - No

SESSION I. Congregational Leadership

Q2. Please rate the following topics that were covered in Session 1 on their relevance to your ministry leadership.

	Not relevant at all		Both relevant and not relevant		Very Relevant	Don't know
Dwelling in the Word	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness of self and others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Management & Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Process & Clarity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decision-making & Discernment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Challenge Questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resources (graphics and materials included at the end of the handout)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q3. Is there a topic you would have like to have spent more time on?

Q4. Is there a topic you thought we could have done without?

SESSION II. Case Studies

Q5. To what extent were the following helpful to you?

	Not helpful at all		Both helpful and not helpful		Very helpful	Don't know
Case study discussions with your small group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debriefing session in the large group as you processed your own group's scenario	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debriefing session in the large group as you heard about how other groups processed their scenarios	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SESSION III. Reflection & Next Steps

Q6. Regarding the Prayer Partner concept introduced in Session 3, how strongly do you feel about the following?

	Disagree		Agree and Disagree		Agree	Don't know
Having a Prayer Partner will be helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My Prayer Partner and I will do our best to keep in touch and support each other over the next six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a Prayer Partner is a good idea, but it will end up being just one more thing to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a Prayer Partner won't work for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:						

Conclusion

Q7. What were the biggest take-aways for you?

Q8. How do you foresee applying that take-away?

Q9. If the workshop didn't address issues that were a concern to you, what did we miss?

Q10. Are there leadership topics you would like to learn more about?

Q11. Is there anything you would like to share about the workshop and Community's leadership?

APPENDIX P

INTERVENTION #3 – COTTAGE MEETING LEADER GUIDE

Introduction

This packet is for use by Cottage Meeting co-leaders. It helps accomplish a few goals: guide the conversation, record who participated, and provide an outline for a report of what happened.

The Materials section describes what materials you will want to have for your cottage meeting. Then, what follows is part outline and part script. The two main sessions should involve a lot of talking from congregation members. Please take notes of their comments. The notes do not need to be verbatim, but the sense of it is important.

Please ensure that someone is taking notes of their observations. It may work best for the note taker to be the Council or Facilities Rep that is *not* presenting at the time.

Host: _____

Date:

Council Representative: _____

Time: _____ -

LRP Facilities Representative: _____

Attendees:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Time	Description
------	-------------

	Gathering & Fellowship
[10 min]	Welcome, Introduction & Opening Prayer
[30 – 45 min]	Discussion on Community's Values
[30 – 45 min]	Discussion on Community's Building
[10 min]	Eyes & Ears Moment
[5 min]	Sending & Blessing

Materials

- Leader Packet (this document – PJ will make copies)
- Leader copy of “Building and Grounds Rationale” (PJ will make copies)
- PowerPoint for discussion, computer, TV or other display
- Participant Packet (PJ will make copies)
- Index cards (PJ will supply)
- Sharpies (PJ will supply)
- Table (like a coffee table or card table) to spread out index cards and for people to gather around to see

Things to be aware of...

- Rabbit holes – getting sidetracked or too far in the weeds
- This is about Community's *future*. There will certainly be discussion about the past, what has worked, what has not worked, etc. Use your judgment as to when discussion of Community's past becomes its own rabbit hole.

Welcome, Opening Prayer & Introductions

[This section led by Council Rep :: 5-10 minutes]

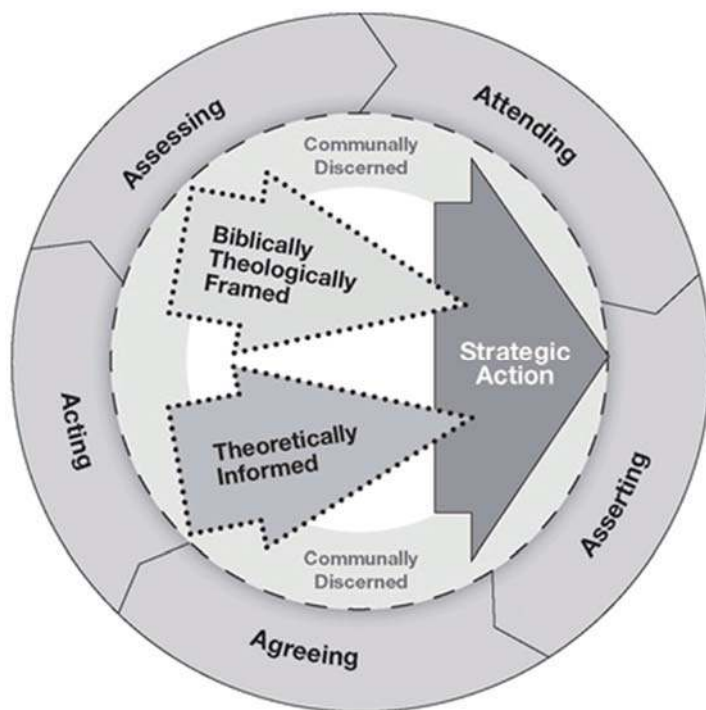
- Gather people and welcome them – thank host(s)
- The purpose of these cottage meetings is to
 - learn from you what you believe Community's core values are
 - share updates about the building process
 - get some feedback from you about what we've done and what we believe is our direction
 - We need your thoughts, questions, and challenges
- What will happen from here – We will collect responses from this and the other cottage meetings. We anticipate that there will be a special congregational meeting in June.
- A note on active and loving listening
 - Some of the discussion may be upsetting. People may have thoughts on what our values are that you don't agree with. Pay attention to your feelings and speak up.
 - Ensure that you are listening more than you are talking.

- Everyone who wants to speak should be able to do so.
- We want to give time to this, but we want to progress through it, too.
- Opening Prayer: The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, thank you for each person here today/tonight. Bless our conversation and help us to pay attention to where Your Holy Spirit is leading even if it doesn't make sense to us right now, and even if we disagree with others. Help us to be open to what You are doing among us. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen!**
- Introduction of participants – very brief, just name and how long a member/participant at Community.

Discussion of Community's Values

[This section led by Council Rep :: 30-45 minutes]

- Today/tonight, there will be two big conversations. The overall process we're using is called the Five Phases of Discernment (see Participant Handout)
 - Attending is the one that really takes a lot of time and prayer. Attending is about *listening* – listening to the Holy Spirit, to ourselves, to our fellow congregation members, and to our community.
 - As we *attend* (listen), themes and patterns will emerge as things we feel the Holy Spirit may be calling us to. At some point, someone has to *assert* an idea or direction. They may say: "Based on our discernment, I feel the Holy Spirit is calling us to become more of a resource congregation – a congregation that provides space, provides learning and other opportunities to our community, etc."
 - Once an assertion is made, we begin the process of reacting to it through open and healthy dialogue. We learn more about it through the Bible, prayer, and conversation. Sometimes conversation may become heated, but we love each other through the heat. We remain in the room together. We also don't rush the process. Eventually, we will have molded the original assertion to the point where we *agree* to either accept it and move forward, or reject it. The important thing is that our



direction is not the product of one person's preferences and the direction is forwarded or impeded by the loudest voices. Our direction is guided by the Holy Spirit as discerned by the congregation and rooted in Scripture.

- Values
 - Each of us has values that guide our decision-making, and those values are prioritized often without our thinking about it.
 - We all probably chose where to live because of our values.
 - Some of us put up with really long commutes so we can live in a place with a lower cost of living, or better schools, or better quality of life
 - Our values are behind the question: If your house was on fire, what would you get out first? Second? Third?
- Congregations have values, too, and our *shared congregational values* help us make decisions. If we're not clear on who we are and what we value, decisions become really hard to make.
 - Congregations also don't just make up their values based on what *we* want and how *we* feel. The values of Christian congregations are also shaped by our faith.
- Today/tonight, we will play a values game.
 - Our goal is to work together to see what our congregational values are. These are not what some call "aspirational" values, or values that we *want* to have, think we *should* have, or *ought* to have. These are values that we *actually* have.
 - I've got some index cards with a couple of value words written on them.
 - Now ... imagine you are an early settler and you are about to begin a journey across the continent to resettle in a new place. You don't know exactly where the new home will be, what the climate will be, or any of the challenges that will face you. All you know is that the journey will be long and arduous.
 - Being in a congregation is kind of like being on a journey. The congregation, its members, the community, and our culture are always changing. So, knowing who we are helps us along our congregational journey.
 - If we were settlers moving across country in a wagon ... we know we can't take everything with us. So, our **first step** is to make a list of everything that is important to us as a congregation.
 - [Lay out index cards on a table where everyone can see them. As you drop values in the next few steps, keep them grouped together.]
 - These index cards are just a few ideas.
 - Look through these and ask yourself: "Are the things that are important to me and to our congregation here?"

- If you see something that's missing, use the Sharpies to write others that aren't already here. Remember: these are values – or things that are important – not only to you, but to the congregation.
 - Now that we have a pretty good sense of what is important for us, our **second step** is for us *together* to choose the top ten. What?!? Yes ... 10. We can't take everything with us. That means we'll have to leave some things ... some maybe important things behind. It doesn't mean those things aren't important, it just means that, when it comes down to it, we need these 10 most of all.
 - [give them time to talk this through :: 15 minutes]
 - Great! Now, we're loaded up and our journey can begin. But ... we're now crossing the desert. Our horses are tired and water supplies are getting low. The wagon wheels are getting caught in the sand. We have to lighten our load. We have to get rid of three more to bring us to a total of seven.
 - [keep the 3 separate from the big stack that was set aside]
 - Wow ... that was pretty tough. But ... we're underway again.
 - Rats ... mountains. There's no way we can get up those mountains. We need to drop another two to bring us to a total of five!
 - [keep the 2 separate from the other two stacks]
- [lay out the five the group chose, next to the others they dropped ... put them in groups: (1) the first large pile from which they chose the initial 10, (2) the three they dropped after that, and (3) the two they dropped after that.]
 - [make note of these for the final report]
- Looking at the five we chose and looking at the ones we dropped before ...
 - Are there values you wish you hadn't dropped?
 - If so, which one(s) and which of the five would you drop to replace it?
 - Are there others you would like to have added?
 - If so, what and which of the five would you drop to replace it?
- [DEBRIEF TOGETHER]
- Tell me about this experience for you ... was it tough?
 - What made it tough?
- Did you feel that there were times you gave way on something you thought was a value because others in the group felt differently?
- Talk about the importance of *listening* to each other in this process.

- You may want to take a moment and jot down our groupings in your Participant Packet: top 5, next 2, and next 3 that get us to the top 10.
- [Transition to building discussion] Thank you for giving this some good thought and discussion. We'll now switch gears a bit and talk about another important part of our journey together ... our building.

Discussion of Community's Building

[This section led by LRP Facilities TF Rep :: 30-45 minutes]

- [PowerPoint]
- As we said at the beginning, listening is a very important part of this process, but asking good questions is, too. We need to be able to honestly and lovingly ask, challenge, and disagree.
- History: How did we get here?
 - Congregation founded on July 28, 1889
 - First building at *location* in 1895
 - First phase building on *location* 1970 – cost: approx. \$300,000
 - With the 4.07% inflation since 1970, the \$300,000 investment from 1970 is worth \$1,882,162 in 2016 dollars.
 - Second phase building on *location* 1986 – cost: \$465,000
 - With the 2.61% inflation since 1986, the \$465,000 investment from 1986 is worth \$1,006,260 in 2016 dollars.
- Why are we having this conversation? What about the money, etc?
 - The building is heavily used, some things need to be replaced or are outdated (lights, wiring, windows, ceiling tiles, etc). The building is getting worn down.
- What we've done so far
 - Talked with all ministry teams, including the Preschool
 - Considered what we feel God is calling our congregation to do and be – this is based on what we have observed in the congregation from our past and present activities and interests
 - Visited other churches to see what they've done and where we would improve on what they've done
 - Talked with architects – decided to pursue a proposal from *architect*
- What we're hearing with finances
 - The LRP Financing Task Force is researching options: mortgage, grants, etc
- What we believe is a good direction and how we think about the phases and priorities based on mission and what we've heard from the congregation.
 - It would be great to tie in values, goals, and priorities discussed in the first half of the session with what we've discussed at Facilities TF.
 - The architect will not do any remodeling in the sanctuary. The only thing that *may* be necessary is fire suppression. Other cosmetic and

improvement projects are on the B&G 5 year plan and are assumed within the normal budget process (i.e. lighting, carpet, windows, etc).

Info Box – Building Use Contributions

Our average over the last several years has been in the neighborhood of \$14,000.

2015 was up to \$17,171 (there were three large funerals that made sizable gifts)

2014 - \$14,001

2013 - \$14,101

2012 - \$14,416

2011 - \$14,621

This year so far we have taken in \$4,890, so *staff member* estimates that we are on track to take in at least \$14,000 in 2016.

These numbers represent all giving for building use, non-inclusive of what the preschool gives.

Info Box – LRP Facilities Task Force Proposal with Phases

Updated – 2/16/2016

Priorities – Updated/full kitchen, more storage space, larger narthex, sanctuary lighting, shower, multipurpose room (bridal party/funerals), reconfigure offices, conference room

Proposal

Immediate things to address – lighting in sanctuary, minor kitchen update, paint wing 1, bathrooms

Phase 1

- Rebuild 1st wing and make it two story w/ basic elevator, update fellowship hall
 - Addresses need for storage, narthex, conference room, multipurpose room, office layout, boiler, HVAC, choir room, windows, ADA upgrades
- Updated/full kitchen, shower
- Gym modification as effected by the kitchen and showers

Phase 2

- Redo 2nd wing – Turn into Preschool area
 - Need 2 exits and bathrooms
 - Finish gym modification

Eyes & Ears Moment

[This section led by Council Rep]

- Ask if there are other things they are seeing or feeling that they would like to share with Council or the Facilities TF

Sending

- Notes from our time together will go to Pastor Jeff, Council, and the Long Range Planning Facilities Task Force.
 - Would anyone like to volunteer to be in a focus group, which is a one-time group that will meet for about 1½ hours, to meet with Pastor Jeff to share your thoughts and reactions to this cottage meeting? Audio recording. Anonymous in the paper.
- Special Congregational Meeting where your ideas and feedback are shared to the whole congregation. Depending on what happens between now and then with the building discussion, there may be decisions to be made.

Blessing

- Pray the Lord's Prayer together
 - The leader blesses the gathering by saying: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. In the name of the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**
-

Roles

- Cottage Meeting Host. Provide a space where your guests can be seated comfortably and as free from distractions as possible. Please share with any family members that this is a social gathering, but it's also a meeting. It's a good idea to have some kind of food like appetizers or desserts. Some hosts may prefer to have others bring food while others may prefer to prepare it themselves. Please let me know your preference. If you decide to make alcohol available, I suggest only beer and wine and that care be taken to encourage moderation. Do you have a large screen TV or projector that could be connected to a laptop and used to display a slideshow?
- Council Member. Co-lead the discussion with the Facilities TF Member. The specific area for leadership is the discussion on values, goals, and priorities.
- LRP Facilities Task Force Member. Co-lead the discussion with the Council Member. The specific area for leadership is the discussion on the building.
- Participant. Sign up, participate in the conversation in a loving, open, and honest way. Listen. If you would like to bring something, sign up for that as well.

Cottage Meeting Hosts

Family Name – can accommodate # (in addition to themselves)

	Council Member	LRP Facilities TF Member
Sunday May 1 2:00p – 4:00p	Name	name

Debriefing the Experience

Briefly describe the environment (day/night, weather, what room, was there a mood or energy in the room?)

Values

List the top 10 below in groups

Top 5	
Next 2 (this makes the top 7)	
Next 3 (this makes the top 10)	

- How well did the group work together on this project?
- Did people engage and take it seriously?
- Are there any comments you would like to share about your observations of this exercise?

Building Discussion

- Did people feel as though the Facilities TF understandings the needs of the congregation and God's call?

- How did people generally feel about the direction of the building?
- Where there objections, concerns, or challenges to the TF's ideas?
- What ideas were raised that we didn't think of?
- Based on your conversation, do you feel confident in moving forward with our current plan or do you think we need to modify some things? Explain.
- Do you feel that everyone who had something to say had an opportunity to be heard whether they were for, against, or simply questioning?

Eyes & Ears Moment

- If you had time to do Eyes and Ears, what did people bring up?

Your impression of the conversation

- Are there general comments or observations you would like to share?

APPENDIX Q

INTERVENTION #3 – VALUES EXERCISE RESULTS

This appendix lists the values decided upon at each of the cottage meetings using the values exercised described in chapter 4. The values exercise began with a list of thirty-three values listed on index cards. The exercise allowed participants to add values if there were values they felt were not represented. The first round in the exercise was to arrive at each group’s top ten values. The tables below have three sections. Each group’s first round results are listed in column one of each table. The second round was to narrow their top ten down to a list of seven. The third and final round was to narrow the list further to their top five.

Table Q-1. Values Exercise Results from Cottage Meetings 1 - 3

Cottage Meeting 1	Cottage Meeting 2	Cottage Meeting 3
Top 5		
Congregational Health	Congregational Health	Education
Discipleship	Education	Lutheran Traditions
Education	Mission	Prayer
Lutheran Traditions	Security	Serving Others
Mission	Youth	Youth
Top 7		
Communication	Acceptance	Growth in Participation
Prayer	Lutheran Traditions	Welcoming
Top 10		
Change	Community	Community
Past	Courage	Fun
Youth	Prayer	<didn't have a 10th>

Table Q-2. Values Exercise Results from Cottage Meetings 4 - 5

Cottage Meeting 4	Cottage Meeting 5	Cottage Meeting 6
Top 5		
Family	Lutheran Traditions	Relationships
Financially Smart	Community	Lutheran Traditions
Love for one another	Courage	Congregational Health
Lutheran Traditions	Mission	Mission
Mission	Prayer	Serving Others
Top 7		
Congregational Health	Education	Security
Courage	Humility	Education
Top 10		
Change	Caring for others	Future
Serving Others	Future	Family
Spiritual Growth	Security	Fun

Table Q-3. Values Exercise Results from Congregational Meeting Groups 1 - 3

Congregational Meeting Group 1	Congregational Meeting Group 2	Congregational Meeting Group 3
Top 5		
Change	Mission	Mission
Financial Security	Congregational Health	Caring for Others
Mission	Lutheran Traditions	Children
Lutheran Traditions	Discipleship	Congregational Health
Congregational Health	Community	Financial Security
Top 7		
Growth in Participation	Security	Lutheran Traditions
Courage	Caring for Others	Acceptance
Top 10		
Security	Past	Respect
Abundance	Education	Humility
Growth in Attendance	Music	Music

Table Q-4. Values Exercise Results from Congregational Meeting Groups 4 - 5

Congregational Meeting Group 4	Congregational Meeting Group 5
Top 5	
Relationships	Growth in Participation
Prayer	Mission
Faith	Prayer
Mission	Relationships
Caring for Others	Education
Top 7	
Congregational Health	Respect
Lutheran Traditions	Security
Top 10	
Change	Youth
Youth	Lutheran Traditions
Future	Communication

Table Q-5 compiles the data from the tables above. The numbers in the “Top 10,” “Top 7,” and “Top 5” columns represent the number of groups that selected each value at each successive stage of the values exercise. The “appear” column indicates the frequency with which each value appears per category. The table is sorted by frequency of values from the “Top 5” category.

Table Q-5. Compilation of Values from All Groups

	Top 10	appear	Top 7	appear	Top 5	appear
Mission	10	90.91%	10	90.91%	10	90.91%
Lutheran Traditions	11	100.00%	10	90.91%	7	63.64%
Congregational Health	8	72.73%	8	72.73%	6	54.55%
Education	7	63.64%	6	54.55%	4	36.36%
Prayer	6	54.55%	5	45.45%	4	36.36%
Relationships	3	27.27%	3	27.27%	3	27.27%
Caring for Others	4	36.36%	3	27.27%	2	18.18%
Youth	5	45.45%	2	18.18%	2	18.18%
Community	4	36.36%	2	18.18%	2	18.18%
Serving Others	3	27.27%	2	18.18%	2	18.18%
Discipleship	2	18.18%	2	18.18%	2	18.18%
Financial Security	2	18.18%	2	18.18%	2	18.18%
Security	6	54.55%	4	36.36%	1	9.09%
Courage	4	36.36%	3	27.27%	1	9.09%
Growth in Participation	3	27.27%	3	27.27%	1	9.09%
Change	4	36.36%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Family	2	18.18%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Children	1	9.09%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Faith	1	9.09%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Financially Smart	1	9.09%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Love for one another	1	9.09%	1	9.09%	1	9.09%
Acceptance	2	18.18%	2	18.18%	0	0.00%
Communication	2	18.18%	1	9.09%	0	0.00%
Humility	2	18.18%	1	9.09%	0	0.00%
Respect	2	18.18%	1	9.09%	0	0.00%
Welcoming	1	9.09%	1	9.09%	0	0.00%
Future	3	27.27%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Fun	2	18.18%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Music	2	18.18%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Past	2	18.18%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Abundance	1	9.09%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Growth in Attendance	1	9.09%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Spiritual Growth	1	9.09%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Lutheran Traditions & Culture	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	34	109	77		55	

APPENDIX R

INTERVENTION #3 – COTTAGE MEETING PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Introduction

This packet is for use by Cottage Meeting participants. It may be helpful for you to record who was at this meeting. You may also want to use it to make notes or write down questions that you have to either answer at this discussion or at another time.

Host: _____ Date: _____

Council Representative: _____ Time: _____ - _____

LRP Facilities Representative: _____

Attendees:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Purpose

The purpose of these cottage meetings is to:

- Learn with you what you believe are Community’s core values
- Share updates about the building process
- Receive feedback from you about the LRP Facilities Task Force’s progress and their ideas for the direction of the building program. We need your thoughts, questions, and loving challenges.

Next Steps

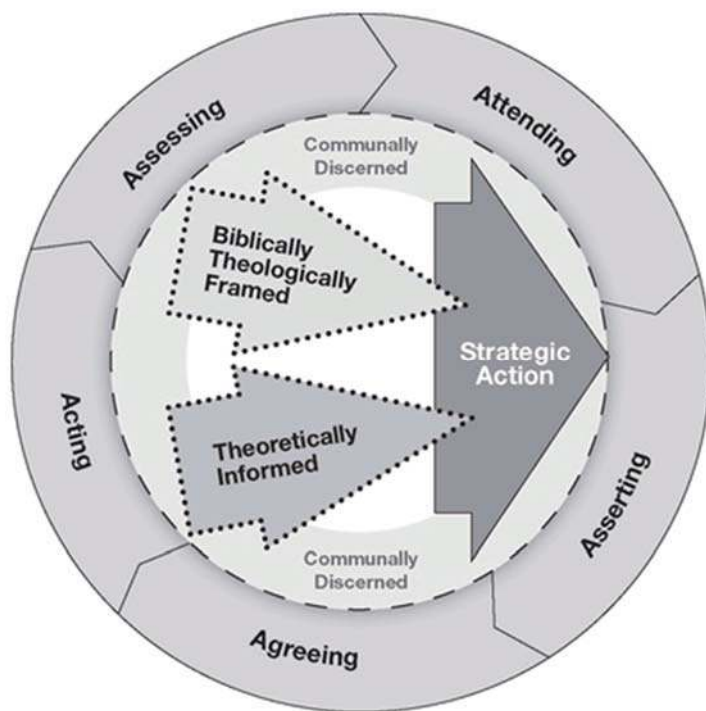
Responses from our values discussion and our building discussion will be collected along with what we learn from the other cottage meetings. We will share what we heard as soon as the responses are collated. We anticipate that there will be a special

congregational meeting in June to review our values. If there is more to report regarding conversations with the architect, we will share those at that time.

Discernment

Discernment is a process of listening that leads us to take some kind of action. Discernment in the Christian church centers our listening on God and God's call. Since God doesn't often speak directly to us through visions, burning bushes, clouds, or angels as He did in the Bible, we join together as a Christian community to help each other listen. We use our faith practices, especially prayer and worship, to help us pay attention. We use the Bible and theology to guide us. The Five Phases of Discernment is a graphical way to describe how we move through stages and ultimately come to a decision. Sometimes this process takes time, and, if the process takes too long, people can become weary and distracted by other things in their lives. The Five Phases helps us remain focused on moving forward *together* as a community of faith.

- Attending is about *listening* – listening to the Holy Spirit, to ourselves, to our fellow congregation members, and to our community. This phase takes a lot of time and prayer.
- Asserting is the phase in which we say: “Based on our discernment, I feel the Holy Spirit is calling us to” Over time and through conversation, themes and patterns will emerge that get our attention as something we feel the Holy Spirit may be calling us to.
- Agreeing is the phase where we react to an assertion through open and healthy dialogue. We learn more about it through the Bible, prayer, and conversation. Sometimes conversation may become heated, but we love each other through the heat. We remain in the room together. We also don't rush the process. Eventually, we will have molded the original assertion to the point where we *agree* to either accept it and move forward, or reject it. The important thing is that our direction is not the product of one person's preferences and the direction is forwarded or impeded by the loudest voices. Our direction is guided by the Holy Spirit as discerned by the congregation and rooted in Scripture.



Values

Building

My Reflections

- What are your take-aways?
- Do you have any lingering questions?
- Do you have questions, ideas, and concerns, and do you know where you can go with those to have them heard?

APPENDIX S

INTERVENTION #4 – SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Community Evangelical Lutheran Church
Special Congregational Meeting
Sunday, June 12, 2016 @ 1:00pm
Called at Mission Council Meeting – May 10, 2016

Location: Gym

Preparation

- Potluck meal
- Participant handouts
- Values cards with extras and pens
- Nametags
- TV cart with projection

Purpose:

1. to share what was learned through the cottage meetings regarding shared congregational values and Community's facilities
2. to provide an update on Pastor Jeff's doctoral program as the research period comes to an end in July

Agenda

- 12:50pm & 12:55pm – alert people that meeting starts at 1:00pm
- **START: 1:00pm** Welcome, Purpose & Prayer [5 min | el: 5 min]
- Review agenda:
 - will do values exercise together, but I'll combine your results with the results of those who attended Cottage Meetings
 - will share learnings about the building
 - will invite your comments and participation
- Discussion of Community's Values [30 min | el: 35 min]
 - Values exercise (encourage people who have done this as part of a Cottage Meeting surround themselves with a new group)
- President [5 min | el: 40 min]

- Debrief of Community Values [5 min | el: 45 min]
 - Not that others weren't important, but these seemed to come to the top
 - Several groups reported that it was difficult to prioritize these values because they were just one word that could be (and probably were being) interpreted in different ways by different people.
 - There were differences of opinion, but people seemed very much able to work together to arrive at compromise.
 - Importance of listening
 - Do any of these surprise you?
 - Ken Siekmann – joy!
 - These values won't become what we publish as “Community's values” but it helps us along in the conversation to see there are many beliefs and experiences within Community.

- Discussion on Community's Building [15 min | el: 60 min]
 - [slide] 5 Phases of Discernment
 - [slide] Community Discussion timeline
 - [slide] Foundation
 - [slide] Options considered
 - [slide] There's some confusion. Actually, two things going on...
 - B&G 5-year plan to address things like the lighting in the sanctuary
 - The feeling seemed to be that the sanctuary was doing pretty well, but needed new lighting, carpet, and double-paned windows.
 - More major building renovation
 - [2 slides] Details about building & grounds
 - [slide] Priorities
 - [slide] Quote from Congregational Profile
 - [6 slides] Architect ideas
 - Phases – how to address the most and highest priority needs (boiler)?
 - [slide] Feedback
 - People excited about possibilities and artist renderings
 - Ended up leaving the meeting cautiously optimistic. Cost dampened the excitement.
 - [slide] What we're hearing
 - Mission
 - Examine programmatic activities of the church – don't just make assumptions. In particular, the long-term viability of the preschool
 - Cost
 - Are we being financially responsible?
 - Alternative approaches
 - Take better care of existing building

- Better use of the gym, possibly dividing it to preserve the space for meals but creating classroom space above.
- Impact
 - Questions to ensure we're thinking through all of the steps and ramifications of decisions
- Personal and Congregational Involvement
 - Increase membership and involvement
 - Each family needs to understand that approving any kind of expenditure means that they must increase their giving
- Specifics about the space, usage, and flow
 - Some of these won't be known until we work through them with an architect
 - Why we can't do nothing – costs of doing nothing
 - We've been dreaming
- Now, with your feedback, we're ready to begin looking at things more in detail
 - [slide] Critical discernment question: If we are faced with the challenge between cost and mission, which do we choose?
 - Values discussion would say mission
 - But there's always that lingering fear of "what if?" What if we can't pay the bills, what if we lose members or don't gain new members, what if ... what if ... what if?
 - I think there are members of this congregation who are both faithful and ready to move forward ... full steam ahead! And they probably feel that people who are focusing on finances are being too cautious.
 - I think there are members of this congregation who are both faithful and cautious or concerned about finances. They probably feel as if others are being irresponsible or that, unchecked, they will run amuck and spend us into a situation from which we cannot recover.
 - The reality is that we need both of these views to hold both perspectives in check.
 - We have to do something with this building, but the building itself cannot be the sole focus of our ministry
 - We could, for example, easily spend a few hundred thousand dollars for maintenance and upkeep on the building. Talk with *Building & Grounds Chair* and *Council Representative* if you'd like to see a list they put together showing both building and financial risks. Their total is around \$100,000 but some of those items are not cost out yet.

- We could easily spend \$100,000 - \$250,000 to address maintenance and more critical building items, such as lighting, flooring, electrical, ceiling tiles and grids. We could spend all of that money with no difference in the physical layout of the building.
 - These are some of the things the Facilities TF will be looking into
 - If you are interested in serving on this team, please talk with me.
- General Comments
 - People like the outreach and that we are not just considering ourselves and our own needs, but the needs of those in our community and how we serve others.
- [slide] DMin Update [10 min | el: 80 min]
 - I began my doctoral program seeing the trends in Christian churches in the United States and the ensuing fear in church leaders and church members
 - While there is currently growth in evangelical or non-denominational congregations, that growth is projected to be short-lived because of the larger trends in church affiliation and participation. Add to that the controversies surrounding financial and sexual misconduct and the perspective of Millennials who have a deep suspicion of institutions.
 - I see churches retreating.
 - I am not a perfect pastor or leader and this is not a perfect congregation.
 - Lutheran giving per household across the United States is roughly 1.3% and regular attendance in a church is no longer considered *most* Sundays. Instead, most people consider regular attendance to be 2 or more Sundays a month. Consider that many people give when they are in attendance, you can see that churches are being cut off in both involvement and financially.
 - Lutherans have also not been big proponents of pushing the 10% tithe because the amount we give has no bearing on God's love for us ... and we believe that grace is the foundation of our relationship with God.
 - I don't know each of your giving patters or what your income is, but, can you imagine if each family increased their giving by just 1% and signed up for online giving? Money problems would begin to fade away allowing us to focus less on where to find money and more on how we reach out and do more effective ministry.
 - More effective ministry ... more faithful decision-making ... involvement by the congregation in discerning God's call for us ... building trust among our congregation and between the congregation members and

leaders ... these are the things I began my doctoral program seeking to address.

- [slide] Research question
- I have found that there's A LOT more to these questions than simply studying our congregation for a year or even two.
 - I have found that our people actually like being together and talking about this church
 - I've heard deep passion alongside deep concern
 - I've heard people wanting to honor the past and simpler ways of doing things while also wanting to do what's best for the congregation as a whole
 - I've heard people who are ready to embrace with open arms whatever God has in store for us
- Community is no longer a small country church. We are not a sleepy little place. We are not an insignificant congregation in our synod.
 - Out of about 75 congregations in the *Synod*, Community is the 13th largest congregation in terms of worship attendance, and the 14th largest in terms of giving. That puts us in the top 20% of congregations in our synod.
 - Our doors are almost always open to serve members of our congregation, and our community groups, preschool and Boy Scouts are part of our decision-making.
- [slide] Doctoral Program – submit paper in February 2017, defend, then graduate.
- [slide] Next Steps [10 min | el: 70 min]
 - Values – live with these for a bit and dig into them
 - LRP Facilities TF – continue conversations with architect
 - Funds to pay for architect currently from Christmas Bazaar and Fall Festival
 - Develop timeline/benchmarks
 - LRP Financing TF – continue researching methods of paying for a building
 - Mortgage, but also grants, special gifts, etc
 - Capital Campaign at some point – possibly spring 2017 – architect fees
 - We'll have to do something else for the building itself.
- Thank yous
 - Thank JPT, ART, Council, Ministry Team Leaders, the congregation for traveling along this journey with me and for the congregation.
 - **Journey Partner Team:** *list of members*
 - **Action Research Team:** *list of members*
 - In some cases, this has meant more of your time and effort.
 - Thank you
- **END: 2:30pm** Sending & Blessing
 - Sing doxology

APPENDIX T

ADDITIONAL RESULTS DATA

Table T-1. List of Data Files Used with Number of Valid Records

Data files used in this study	N
Baseline responses	118
End-line responses	85
Merged baseline and end-line responses for independent t-test	203
Merged baseline and end-line responses for paired t-test	54

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