Implementing a Discernment Phase for those Nominated in the Shepherd Selection Process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ

Aaron Walling
aaron@crcoc.org

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ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the results of a project that implemented a discernment phase for those nominated in the shepherd selection process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ. Occurring in the fall of 2010, this project involved nominees in a series of six one-hour, thirty-minute sessions designed to establish the theological foundations for shepherding and to explore its practical expression at Cinco Ranch. For the theological component, this project primarily utilized Ephesians 4:11-16, and for the practical side, it incorporated group interactions with those serving as shepherds along with the review of guiding leadership documents. The project’s design took into account the need to extend discernment practices to include the spouses as well and facilitated the development of shepherd mentoring relationships in which a shepherding couple provided pastoral care to a nominee couple during the course of the discernment phase.

Evaluation of the project revealed several key insights. First, nominees indeed desire an intentional time of reflection. Furthermore, the shared experience of discernment creates a natural camaraderie among those nominated. Due to the broad nature of the discernment experience, nominees assessed the theological, practical, and mentoring components as having varying degrees of effectiveness. However, both the nominees and the shepherds affirmed the value of the discernment process, attesting to the significance of a model of leadership rooted in the awareness that Christ gives the gift of leaders to his church.
IMPLEMENTING A DISCERNMENT PHASE FOR THOSE NOMINATED IN THE SHEPHERD SELECTION PROCESS AT THE CINCO RANCH CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology
Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

By
Aaron Walling
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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate’s committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

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Dean of the Graduate School

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Date

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Chair

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This project addressed the need for a discernment phase among those nominated in the shepherd selection process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ.\(^1\) Designed to facilitate both theological and practical conversations, the project involved assisting nominees as they determined their willingness to serve as shepherds at Cinco Ranch.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the ministry context at Cinco Ranch, describing both the current leadership structure and the general process for selecting shepherds, clarifies the problem and purpose of the project, and identifies delimitations. Chapter 2 outlines the conceptual framework for the project, moving from the contextual considerations of the nominees themselves, through the theoretical basis for the practice of discernment, and on to the theological foundations of divinely appointed church leadership.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach to the project by presenting the plan of implementation, describing specifically the nature of the ministry intervention, exploring the curriculum for the group sessions, and detailing the method of evaluation. Chapter 4 presents the data gleaned from three distinct angles of evaluation, identifying consistent themes as well as acknowledging apparent incongruities. Finally, in light of this analysis, chapter 5 suggests potential improvements for Cinco Ranch to consider in future shepherd selections and offers possible applications of this project to other congregational contexts.

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\(^1\) Hereinafter referred to simply as “Cinco Ranch.”
Title of Project

The title of this project is “Implementing a Discernment Phase for Those Nominated in the Shepherd Selection Process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ.” The project added one dimension—a discernment phase—to a broader process already in place for selecting shepherds at Cinco Ranch. Furthermore, rather than leading the congregation through a course of discernment as it nominated potential shepherds, the project’s goal was to assist those nominated in the selection process by helping them to discern their own willingness to serve as shepherds.

Ministry Context

In 1992 approximately twenty families started meeting in the back of a Kroger grocery store in Katy, Texas, and established the Westside Church of Christ. Located west of Houston, in a rapidly growing suburb, Westside increased its membership quickly. Within two weeks the newly formed congregation outgrew Kroger and began using other facilities, such as a sporting goods store and an elementary school. Eventually, Westside moved into an office complex and met there until 2001.

When more than two hundred Sunday morning attendees pushed the limits of its rented office space, Westside began looking for land on which to build. In 2001 the congregation moved into its multipurpose facility, located on a ten-acre plot in Cinco Ranch, a master-planned community within Katy. At that time Westside also changed its name to the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ. During subsequent years Cinco Ranch added a second facility for the youth and children’s ministries, with plans to eventually build a dedicated worship center.

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2 Hereinafter referred to simply as “Westside.”
The membership of Cinco Ranch consists of mostly white, middle- to upper-middle-class families. Katy, known in the Houston area for its quality school system, attracts a significant number of families. Accordingly, a recent breakdown of congregational demographics demonstrated that about fifty-five percent of Cinco Ranch’s family units include children still living at home. Furthermore, the demographics show that a dramatic shift occurred with the construction of the youth facility in 2007. Since then, Cinco Ranch has grown from four hundred to almost seven hundred attendees on a Sunday morning. Two-thirds of the new member families have children and teenagers in the youth ministries.

As this fairly young membership of Cinco Ranch continues to experience steady growth, the congregation recognizes the need for a strong leadership base to continue providing effective ministry and guidance. Prior to its recent selection process, six men served as shepherds at Cinco Ranch. The strain of leading a congregation of seven hundred members taxed the small group; more shepherds were needed. Therefore, in accordance with their history of appointing new shepherds every two or three years, the current shepherds commissioned a team of Cinco Ranch members to lead the congregation through a shepherd selection process in the fall of 2010.

Leadership Structure

At Cinco Ranch shepherds are appointed to direct the affairs of the local congregation, reflecting the restoration roots of the Church of Christ tradition.\(^3\) Cinco Ranch may, however, distinguish itself slightly in its preference of the term “shepherd”

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over the more traditional designation of “elder.” From the beginning the group meeting as Westside, and then later as Cinco Ranch, sought to cultivate a leadership structure focused foremost on caring for the membership rather than simply overseeing corporate processes. To communicate this emphasis on people over procedures, the leadership chose to identify itself as a group of shepherds. While they still make business decisions for various financial and legal aspects of the congregation, they ultimately dedicate themselves to leading the people of Cinco Ranch.

Even though nomenclature may differ slightly from other Church of Christ leadership structures, the identity and role of the shepherds at Cinco Ranch follow traditional patterns. For instance, Cinco Ranch selects only men to serve as its shepherds. Undoubtedly, the leadership encourages women to use their gifts within the community of faith. In fact, they hired a female minister to lead the children’s ministry, and they regard her as a full-fledged member of the ministry staff. Furthermore, the leaders demonstrate a willingness to break from traditional Church of Christ gender roles in the appointment of ministry leaders and to depart somewhat from its restoration roots in its eschewal of deacons. Traditionally the Churches of Christ have reserved the title of deacon for men. However, in seeking to include women in this capacity, Cinco Ranch opted for the term “ministry leader.” More than a game of semantics, the new term demonstrates Cinco Ranch’s desire to embrace gender inclusion and allow both women

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4 Since particular passages in Scripture simultaneously use the three different terms of “elder,” “shepherd,” and “ overseer” to describe the same leadership role (e.g., Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Pet. 5:1-2), the congregation welcomed this self-designation; see Ferguson, The Church of Christ, 319-23.
and men to use their talents to lead. Nevertheless, at this time, shepherding remains inclusive only of men.\(^5\)

In terms of their role, the shepherds at Cinco Ranch accept oversight of the affairs of the congregation. Even as they maintain a collaborative working environment with staff and ministry leaders, the shepherds make the final decisions on finances as well as future directions. Although in many instances ministry leaders report to various members of the staff, each staff member reports directly to the shepherds, and the shepherds collectively determine all issues related to employment. Thus Cinco Ranch needs shepherds who willingly embrace the responsibilities of leadership as well as graciously embody the heart of pastoral care.

Shepherd Selection Process

During a time of selection, the men serving as shepherds empower a ministry team to lead the process through which the congregation nominates and affirms those whom it perceives God calling to leadership. These shepherds intentionally seek to avoid any misperception of creating an inner circle of leadership and seek to confirm their own commitment to the voice of the congregation by submitting their names as well for reaffirmation. This move not only creates a perpetual sense of freshness and vitality among the shepherds and prevents any assumptions of service for life; it also allows new shepherds to perceive their service as a commitment to a specific season of time rather than an indefinite obligation. Each man will periodically have an opportunity to reevaluate his own desire to continue serving as a shepherd.

\(^5\) Addressing this issue lies outside the scope of this project, but for a better understanding of the biblical rationale used to justify the model of male leadership, see Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 52-66.
The process used by Cinco Ranch includes four phases: nomination, introspection, resolution, and affirmation. During the nomination phase, through sermons and special announcements, the preacher and the leader of the selection team publically explain to the congregation its role in the process and propose several qualities for them to consider as they begin to identify those gifted to serve. On a predetermined date, the congregation submits these names to the selection team, and those individuals receiving a certain percentage of votes are identified as potential nominees. Subsequently, the selection team contacts the men, either in person or by phone, to determine their willingness to serve. In the past, due to the constraints of the time table, nominees had to decide within the week. Typically, members turned in nominations on a Sunday, and the following Sunday the leader of the selection team announced the names of those willing to continue through the process. Unfortunately, this left nominees with little time for discernment.

Those men who accept the nomination are designated candidates, and the selection team guides the congregation through stages allowing for the consideration, approval, and affirmation of the candidates. Historically, the congregation has responded favorably to those who accepted their nomination. All candidates, including returning shepherds, have received the affirmation of the congregation; none have been denied. Therefore the nominee’s personal discernment of his own willingness to serve proves a pivotal point in the process.

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6 See appendix A.

7 See appendix A, noticing especially that nominations were due on Sunday, September 28, 2008, and nominees were introduced the following Sunday, October 5, 2008.
2008 Shepherd Selection

In 2008 Cinco Ranch averaged five hundred fifty attendants on Sunday mornings. At that time only four men served as shepherds, and each felt the strain of leading a growing congregation. Thus they commissioned a team to lead Cinco Ranch through a shepherd selection process, and the congregation identified fourteen men to potentially serve as shepherds, along with the four already in place. The selection team contacted each man during the subsequent week, but only two accepted the nomination and agreed to continue through the process. Guided by the official process, the selection team led Cinco Ranch through the next three phases, and the congregation both installed the new men and reaffirmed the four already serving as shepherds.

However, as the selection team met for post-selection assessment, members expressed a common sense of disappointment at the lack of willingness among nominees to continue through the process. Even though the shepherds never placed a numerical expectation on the team or the process, the team admitted its desire to impact Cinco Ranch’s leadership by facilitating the addition of more than two new shepherds. Through the course of their discussion, the team sensed a gap in the process. Why were those identified by the congregation as potential leaders so reticent to officially serve as shepherds? In what ways could the team enhance the process to encourage more men to accept their nominations? Clarity ensued as the team realized that while the congregation may nominate numerous individuals, the process offered no formal structure for discernment among the nominees; it lacked any means by which to help them determine if they should indeed accept their candidacy.
Possible Concerns of Nominees

Why did so many of the nominees hesitate to serve? Based on his extensive work in church consultations, Charles Siburt has proposed three potential categories of influence that may produce negative responses among nominees. Initially, various family considerations may affect a nominee’s decision. He may assume that balancing family, career, and shepherding will be too difficult, or he may wish to protect his wife and children from the pressures of church leadership. Furthermore, the nominee may in fact desire to serve as a shepherd but find his family less than supportive.

Misperception may also play a part in nominees’ declining their candidacy. As outsiders to the leadership structure, they may misunderstand the role and functions of a shepherd. They may presume the congregation inundates shepherds with a wide range of problems and needs and thereby anticipate late nights spent in the counsel and care of individual members. Even more, they may deduce that serving as a shepherd means attending long, unpleasant leadership meetings.

Finally, nominees may simply find themselves plagued by personal misgivings. They may doubt their own abilities to rise to the task, uncertain of their own patience, wisdom, or leadership. Awareness of specific sins or struggles from their past, coupled with the misperception of shepherds as men with a near-perfect record of life and faith, may lead them to believe their personal history precludes them from serving as a shepherd. Conversely, nominees may doubt the community of faith itself, questioning the

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8 Charles Siburt, “Helping Those Nominated as Elders to Say Yes instead of No” (Handout, Abilene Christian University, 2010).

9 Ibid.
congregation’s ability to treat them with grace and understanding as they transition into their leadership role.10

While only postulations, these categories highlight the variety of thoughts and concerns with which nominees must wrestle. Additionally, the current selection process at Cinco Ranch adds angst by requiring a hasty decision from nominees. Essentially, nominees have but a few days to learn of their nomination, wade through their apprehensions, and then accept or decline their candidacy. This lack of time and of a formal discernment phase forces nominees to draw their own conclusions about the demands of leadership. If the evidence of the 2008 selection process can be believed, the majority of individuals put into this position decline their nomination.

The commissioning of another shepherd selection in the fall of 2010 presented Cinco Ranch with an opportunity to adjust its process—specifically, to create a formal time of discernment for those nominated by the congregation, a time during which nominees could openly discuss the theological reasons for shepherding as well as discover the practical aspects of serving as shepherds at Cinco Ranch. Ideally, the shepherds already serving would provide valuable insight and candor regarding their own experience of shepherding at Cinco Ranch. At the very least, this time of discernment would offer nominees adequate time to prayerfully consider the prospect of serving as a shepherd. Regardless of whether they would ultimately accept or decline the nomination, nominees would be afforded the opportunity to make an informed decision about their potential leadership within the community of faith.

10 Ibid.
The Problem

This project addressed the need for a formal discernment phase for those nominated in the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch. All four phases of the process used by Cinco Ranch (nomination, introspection, resolution, and affirmation) focused on the congregation’s part in the process. The congregation identified and nominated specific men it deemed worthy of serving as shepherds. Once these men had confirmed their willingness to continue through the process, the congregation considered their credentials, approved their candidacy, and appointed them as shepherds.

The process was clearly missing a crucial component: intentional time for the nominees themselves to discern their willingness to serve as shepherds. Because the selection calendar mandated candidates be announced the week following the final Sunday of nominations, nominees had little opportunity to formally explore either the theological or practical implications of their service as shepherds. Without a forum for discussion, a nominee’s rationale for accepting or declining had the potential to be both random and uninformed. Cinco Ranch obviously needed a formalized discernment phase for those nominated in its shepherd selection process.

The Purpose

Accordingly, this project implemented a discernment phase for those nominated in the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch. No attempt was made to modify the selection process itself, only to insert the discernment phase into the process at the appropriate time—after individuals had been informed of their nomination but prior to

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11 Conceptually, the selection team designed the introspection phase to account for the need of these men, along with their spouses, to prayerfully consider their nomination. Chronologically, though, this introspection followed the individual’s initial decision to either accept or decline his nomination, a decision subsequently made public to the congregation. Thus, while encouraged to reflect on their selection, nominees lacked an intentional time of discernment prior to any official decision on their part.
their making any formal decision about their willingness to serve. The purpose of the project was to create an open dialogue with nominees regarding both the theological and practical aspects of serving as shepherds.

Furthermore, this project facilitated conversations between nominees and those currently serving as shepherds in order to allow nominees the opportunity to learn directly from those already in leadership. The project’s goal was not to solidify an affirmative response from every individual nominated, but simply to provide each nominee the chance to make an informed decision as he evaluated his desire to serve as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch.

**Delimitations**

Throughout this project I worked in conjunction with the shepherd selection team. The entire congregation participated in the selection process, but the project itself focused solely on those formally identified as nominees. Although the current shepherds submitted their own names for reaffirmation by the congregation, these shepherds were involved in this project only to the extent that they helped nominees discern their own willingness to serve. The discernment phase implemented by this project strictly targeted those newly nominated in the selection process.

In no way did I intend through this project to claim a general lack of discernment on the part of those nominated. The project addressed the lack of any formal discernment phase within the shepherd selection process. Undoubtedly, the potential shepherds identified by the congregation did exercise some form of discernment as they considered the prospect of accepting their nomination. This project provided a means for creating a formalized venue in which these men could discuss with each other both theological and
practical considerations as well as process their questions and concerns. In contrast to the previous model of fairly rapid discernment performed in isolation, the aim of this project involved initiating both formal and informal conversations among fellow nominees as well as with those currently serving as shepherds.

Conclusion

The Cinco Ranch shepherd selection process reflects a desire to preserve the sanctity of its leadership. Rather than hand-picking additional shepherds (thus creating an inner-circle of leadership), the shepherds at Cinco Ranch intentionally involve the congregation in the process of choosing its future leaders. By appointing a ministry team to lead the congregation through the selection, the shepherds ensure the integrity of the process.

Accordingly, the selection team faithfully administers its task by guiding the church body through four phases designed specifically to allow the congregation to nominate, evaluate, and affirm its leaders. Benefiting from the intentional planning of the selection team, the congregation receives ample time and opportunity to voice its opinion. Unfortunately, the lack in the current process of any formal time of discernment for those actually nominated results in nominees’ being rushed to make a quick, and possibly uninformed, decision regarding their willingness to serve as shepherds. Thus Cinco Ranch has needed a formalized discernment phase to be implemented into its shepherd selection process.
CHAPTER 2
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although Cinco Ranch invests considerable time in educating and involving the congregation in the shepherd selection process, no formal discernment phase has existed to provide those actually nominated with adequate time and resources for healthy deliberation. The candidates have historically been given less than a week after their notification of nomination to inform the selection team of their decision regarding candidacy. Undoubtedly, each nominee has made a personal effort to discern God’s will in the matter as he determined his own willingness to serve as a shepherd. However, no intentional process of discernment by which these nominees could formally consider both the theological and practical implications of their nominations has existed. This project found its genesis in the recognition of the need to provide such a formalized discernment phase specifically for those nominated in the shepherd selection process.

The Need for Discernment

A nomination to serve as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch creates a significant moment for both the nominee and the congregation. Prior to the nominating process, the selection team encourages members to identify those men who already reflect the heart and spirit of a shepherd.\footnote{The team accomplishes this goal through specific announcements, mail-outs, and e-mails, as well as coordinating an intentional sermon series with the preaching minister.} Thus the community of faith indicates by the very act of nomination its positive perception of the nominated individuals and declares that the way these men live and love already impacts the life of the congregation. By expressing its desire for these
men to serve as official shepherds, the congregation indicates its own discernment for the leadership needs of Cinco Ranch.

Apart from the communal implications associated with a nomination, these individuals also face a momentous decision in regard to their personal lives. To accept the nomination would naturally impact their families and their jobs as well as their interactions with those at Cinco Ranch. Their faith experience would likely even alter somewhat as they engaged in the formal leadership of the congregation. Expecting these men to respond to their nomination within a mere couple of days minimizes the pressures they face in determining their willingness to serve. Such pressures, in fact, necessitate a formalized process of discernment.

**Theoretical Foundations**

It comes as no surprise that the practice of discernment recurs throughout the history of the Christian faith. The teachings of early church fathers such as Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine, as well as the medieval writings of religious thinkers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Catherine of Sienna, show much thought and reflection about discernment among those desiring depth in their discipleship. More than four hundred fifty years ago, Ignatius of Loyola composed the now classic *Spiritual Exercises*; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, John Bunyan and Jonathan Edwards continued to develop this spiritual discipline. For centuries, then, convinced that God’s people should view reality from God’s perspective, disciples have sought to determine God’s will by

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2 For a thorough overview of the development of Christian teachings on discernment, see Mark McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth* (New York: Crossroads, 2004), 23-81.
engaging in various exercises.³ As Luke Timothy Johnson asserts, believers seek to root their identity in God, certain that “the one who is not seen is most real.”⁴

Robert Kinast explains that regardless of the terminology, whether one calls it “spiritual discernment” or “theological reflection,” the attempt to interpret the intersection between theology and experience ultimately seeks to disclose “the presence of God in people’s experience, a presence that invites them to encounter God where they are and to participate in the divine life which is offered to them there.”⁵ As Kinast explores five contemporary expressions of spiritual discernment, with ideologies ranging across the theological spectrum, he identifies commonalities within their overall movement. Each expression begins with a lived experience, seeking to correlate that experience with the sources of Christian tradition and to draw out practical implications for Christian living.⁶

Since this project assisted those encountering one such lived experience, namely receiving the congregation’s nomination to serve as a shepherd, the discernment phase needed to create a clear connection between their experience and the Christian tradition. Several sources of the Christian faith, including tradition, reason, communal perspective and even personal experience, could have been used to expose the prospective shepherds to this heritage. However, due to the time constraints of the selection process, this project needed to employ a manageable strategy for a six-week window of time. Therefore, while

³ Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1997), 55-64.


⁶ Ibid., 1.
this project utilized multiple angles of interaction with the Christian tradition, such as communal reflection and pastoral counsel, Johnson ultimately provided the most helpful approach to discernment with his emphasis on the role of Scripture in the decision-making process. In Johnson’s assessment, unless believers understand what God performed in the past, they will fail to ascertain his current activity. Thus believers must engage the Word of God in order to discover the necessary “interpretive tools for discerning the story of the present.”

Accordingly, this project was intended to help nominees frame their nominations within the parameters of Scripture as they determined their willingness to serve as shepherds at Cinco Ranch. If successful, such an approach would potentially provide nominees with a legitimate perspective from which to view their nomination—decreasing the chance that a nominee would respond in haste based on his own personal assessments or false assumptions or miss the divine opportunity inherent in his selection by simply

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9 An important distinction to note for this project, however, stems from Johnson’s exclusive interest in the communal practice of discernment. From the start, he resolutely denies any concern with the decision-making process of the individual, except as it pertains to the life of the group; see Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 13. Contrarily, I intended precisely with this project to assist individuals as they made personal decisions about their willingness to serve as shepherds. Johnson’s thrust targets a broader form of discernment as he seeks to describe the process by which the local assembly derives its self-understanding and faith commitments in light of Scripture. For Johnson, this type of discernment must take place in the context of community; see Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 26.

In the end, his insight still offered good perspective for a project designed to primarily support individuals in their decision-making process since even these seemingly personal decisions would require communal input and interaction. Ultimately, the nominees would not operate alone; they existed in community. Part of their faith identity already stemmed from their place within the local body of Cinco Ranch. Therefore, the effort in this project to incorporate communal interactions, through group discussions and shepherd mentoring relationships, complemented its aim to impact the particular discernment of individual nominees.
viewing his nomination as the result of a type of congregational, democratic process. Rooting the conversations in Scripture would equip nominees with a biblical perspective as they maneuvered the discernment process.

Because the broad range of considerations within individual discernment processes would certainly include some situations outside the scope of any particular scriptural response, biblical knowledge alone would have proven inadequate for nominees. These men needed to sort through not only the theological foundations but also the practical implications of their service as shepherds, specifically as it would relate to their families and careers. They faced questions regarding the logistics of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch as well as more personal inquiries into the impact of shepherding on their marriages, their children, and their jobs. Rather than ignoring this need for input from sources beyond Scripture, the project provided opportunities for these conversations as well; the use of specific group sessions and intentional shepherd mentoring relationships is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

Nevertheless, even these practical concerns could be appropriately addressed only when equipped with a proper biblical perspective. The men needed Scripture to inform their personal considerations. In fact, the selection process itself mandates that nominees base their discernment on more than individual concerns. The process is designed not as an election but as a contention that God often calls leaders into service through the voice of his people.¹⁰ To dismiss the congregation’s nomination without intentional reflection on Scripture could potentially subvert this divine initiative. Again, as Johnson asserts, Scripture itself provides the necessary “interpretive tools for discerning the story of the

Thus for the sake of relevancy to the nominees, this discernment phase targeted those theological issues most applicable to the determining process. I propose three primary categories of consideration that nominees need to explore.

First, nominees need to seek the source of their nomination, to decipher the voice inherent in this opportunity. Is the nomination simply from the congregation, or should they interpret any divine involvement? If they subsequently agree to become candidates, nominees should identify the functions of shepherding, clarifying the exact kinds of activities to which they would commit themselves. Finally, nominees must ascertain the goal of their service as shepherds, ensuring they comprehend the ultimate purpose of such leadership. Organized around these three categories, the project design implements a discernment phase that draws on both theoretical and theological foundations to appropriately assist nominees as they maneuver through such considerations.

Theological Foundations

This project could have employed a variety of passages to establish a theology for those considering serving as shepherds. For instance, the group sessions could have explored texts from 1 Timothy and Titus, which describe the character and quality of elders. However, while pertinent to the overall process, I assumed the specific questions addressed in those passages receive adequate attention in the introspection and resolution phases of shepherd selection. Ultimately, I sought to do more than simply lead nominees through discussions related to the structure and design of church leadership.

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12 For a description of the phases involved in Cinco Ranch’s shepherd selection process, see ch. 1. Interestingly, I discovered later through the group evaluations that both nominees and shepherds, in fact, desired to explore the Timothy and Titus texts. I will describe their feedback in greater detail in ch. 4.
Instead of merely educating nominees on the biblical basis for church polity, this project needed to establish firm theological foundations that would enable nominees to process their primary categories of questions—namely, the source, the function, and the goal of their potential shepherding. Nominees needed a scriptural framework through which they could view their own nomination and explore issues relevant to their personal discernment. Ephesians 4:11-16 offered such a structure.

Considering the Source

Set in the midst of a broader movement by the writer, Ephesians 4:1-16 serves as a connector between two main sections of thought. While the first three chapters pronounce for believers the privileges found in Christ, the author moves in chapter 4 to paraenesis, describing for his audience the way of life consistent with those privileges. Witherington actually refers to this section as an “overture” to what follows. Lincoln further confirms this with his own identification of thematic connections between this passage and the rest of Ephesians.

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13 The authorship of Ephesians engenders much debate. While Barth affirms the letter as a work of Paul, Lincoln claims the letter originated after the death of the apostle. Nevertheless, both men attest to the authoritative place of Ephesians within the New Testament canon. Interestingly, even those who claim pseudonymity continue to assert the primary influence of a Pauline theology. Thus, in either case, Paul influences the theology of the epistle; see Markus Barth, Ephesians 1-3 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 49; and Andrew Lincoln, Ephesians (Dallas: Word, 1990), lx-lxxiii.

For the purpose of this paper, I will avoid the ongoing authorship debate by using the terms “author” and “writer.” Furthermore, in line with traditional assessments, I will use male gender descriptions in reference to this writer. However, to avoid getting sidetracked in the group sessions on a seemingly superfluous issue to our discussions of discernment, I referred to Paul as the author.


15 Lincoln, Ephesians, 231. For instance, while the author describes love as an essential expression of believers in 4:4, 15, and 16, he has already laid the groundwork for this love in 1:15 and 3:17. Later, he will return again to this emphasis in 5:2. Furthermore, his interest in unity in 4:3 and 4:13 extends his earlier comments in 2:14-22 about the peace found in Christ as he builds both Jews and Gentiles into a whole building. Finally, even the dominant imagery of the head and body (4:12, 15, 16) has already appeared in the author’s earlier discussion about Christ’s place in the heavenly realms (1:22-23). These few
Specifically, in this pericope, the author builds a case for both the unity and diversity existing within the church. Initially, in Ephesians 4:1-6, he establishes the call to unity among believers as they share many foundational claims of the faith. He then shifts in Ephesians 4:7-16 to describing the intentional diversity of giftedness within the body of Christ. Rather than creating potential conflict for the church, Christ intends this diversity to stimulate the complete growth and maturity of his body.

Christ’s Position

Christ serves as the writer’s singular focus. Even in the midst of ecclesiological claims, Christology informs his rationale. At this point in the letter, the author has already asserted the place of Christ in the heavenly realms. Exalting him above all things, God appointed him as head over everything (Eph. 1:20-22). Now, in this position of authority, he shows care and concern for his people by giving gifts to his church. As Barth suggests, the author remains consistent throughout the rest of his letter by arguing “downward from God to Christ to people.”\textsuperscript{16}

For this reason, the strong christological emphasis and the segue in Ephesians 4:1-16 to the diversity of Christ’s gifts triggers for the writer a recollection of a particular psalm, which he quotes in Ephesians 4:8. While the specifics of his usage fall outside the scope of this project, the intended emphasis proves vital to the framing of what follows in Ephesians 4:11-16. Regarding this quotation, Lincoln attests to the clear christological use of Psalm 68:18.\textsuperscript{17} The psalmist’s description of the Lord’s ascending and giving gifts

\textsuperscript{16} Barth, Ephesians 4-6 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 429.

offers legitimate scriptural evidence for the place of Christ in the heavenly realms and his activity among those within his church.\(^{18}\)

Thus after citing Psalm 68:18, the writer immediately proceeds to explain its relevance to his current assertions. He offers commentary in Ephesians 4:9-10 on the nature of Christ’s ascending and descending, which then allows him to expound more clearly in verses 11-16 on the identity and intent of his gifts to the church.\(^{19}\) Therefore, while he may explore ecclesiological implications in this section, as well as in the duration of his letter, he establishes a firm christological foundation. As Lincoln asserts, this “ecclesiology has not swallowed up Christology.” Rather, it finds its meaning only as it relates to Christ.\(^{20}\) Best echoes this sentiment when he states that the principal theme of the epistle insists “Christ is the centre and life of the Church.”\(^{21}\)

**Christ’s Provision**

With Christ’s position firmly established, the writer continues by elaborating on the gifts Christ gives to his church. While other lists of gifts certainly exist within

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\(^{18}\) Timothy Gombis offers an interesting perspective as he compares the use of this psalm with the imagery of the Divine Warrior prevalent at the time. Gombis asserts that the writer of Ephesians employs the ideology of divine warfare in order to confirm the claim that Christ has indeed been exalted in the heavenly realms over the powers that oppose him. In light of the obvious divine conflict motif in Psalm 68 and the desire of the Ephesians author to establish Christ’s victorious place in the heavenly realms, Gombis’s proposal seems legitimate. In fact, his assessment powerfully aids interpretation in that the leaders’ being given as gifts to the church attests to Christ’s position of power and prominence; see Timothy G. Gombis, “Cosmic Lordship and Divine Gift-giving,” *Novum Testamentum* 47, no. 4 (2005), 373.


Scripture. Ephesians 4:11 describes the gifts of specific people, or as Barth indicates, Christ gives “particular servants” rather than “impersonal services.” Indeed, Christ blesses his body with individuals gifted to lead. Furthermore, their leadership stems not from personal persuasion or even communal selection; they lead strictly by the appointment of Christ himself. What an incredibly significant realization for those maneuvering the process of discernment—especially when the temptation arises to view their nomination as merely the result of the congregation’s preference. Based on this passage, a nomination to local leadership could very possibly convey a call from Christ himself. For this reason, Lincoln describes church leaders as a “royal largesse” that Christ distributes from his position of cosmic lordship. By his authority they proclaim his word and lead his people, playing a “vital role in both the maintenance of [the church’s] unity and in the preservation of its true teaching.”

One theme seems to connect the function of all five types of leaders, namely their commitment to preaching and teaching. Each leader clearly performs some aspect of proclaiming truth about Christ. For this reason, Barth refers to these individuals as

22 See Rom. 12:4-8 and 1 Cor. 12:7-11.
23 Barth, Ephesians 4-6, 436.
24 Ernest Best, Essays on Ephesians (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 172.
26 Ibid., 233.
27 Considering my congregational context, I anticipated an initial disconnect for nominees between the preaching and teaching shepherds described here in Ephesians and the role of shepherding at Cinco Ranch, primarily because the shepherds at Cinco Ranch rarely preach and only periodically teach in a public setting. However, the real problem arises from trying to read current expressions back into the original situations. Essentially, the author of Ephesians establishes the primacy of the Word among church leaders. Whether publicly while addressing a group or privately while mentoring a believer, church leaders filter their teaching and advice through the word of Christ. Accordingly, this principle will shape church leaders regardless of contextual factors. See Barth, Ephesians 4-6, 436; Best, “Ministry in Ephesians,” 167-68; and Lincoln, Ephesians, 249.
“ministers of the Word” and proceeds to identify several markers within the surrounding text that suggest the author’s intention to counter the threat of heretical teaching. Christ, then, gives leaders not simply to oversee the affairs of his church but to instill within his body the sanctity of his word.

While Fung correctly denies the writer’s intent to exhaust all forms of ministry with this enumeration, it behooves the modern reader to reflect on the identification of these specific gifts, especially given the explicit mention in Ephesians 4:11 of poimenas, the only occurrence of the noun in the New Testament. Best opts for a translation of “shepherds,” insisting such a translation maintains a firm distinction between the ancient imagery intended by the designation and the current connotations of the translation “pastor.” Cinco Ranch refers to its leaders as shepherds, and even though contextual considerations prevent an outright equation of the author’s terminology with its

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28 Barth, Ephesians 4-6, 436-37. Barth points to several verses as contextual clues that support his claim. The emphasis on faith and knowledge in 4:13, coupled with the reference in 4:14 to an inconsistent and vacillating teaching, seem to confirm this threat. A little less convincing but noteworthy nonetheless is Barth’s identification of the “proclamation of peace” in 2:17, fighting “the lie” in 4:25, and prohibiting “foul talk” in 4:29. For Barth, these markers verify the need for leaders to preach and teach the word; see also Best, Essays on Ephesians, 170.

To further enhance this rationale, Best interprets Ephesians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:5 as indications that the ministries of the apostles and prophets have ceased, thus the need for teachers of the Word exists; see Best, Essays on Ephesians, 157-8. Lincoln supports this claim as well with his proposal of a pseudonymous author in the post-apostolic period seeking to solidify the role of evangelists and pastors who continue the teaching ministries of the apostles and prophets; see Lincoln, Ephesians, 250.

Lincoln also identifies two primary questions of the text that may provide insight into the situation necessitating this letter. First he asks, “Why its emphasis on unity?” Then he asks, “Why its underlying of the significance of the role of the ministers of the word?” For Lincoln, these two questions indicate a clear need for ministers of the word; see Lincoln, Ephesians, 232. While the context of Ephesians may remain speculative, the writer seems intent on highlighting the teaching role of these leaders.

29 Ronald Fung, “The Nature of Ministry according to Paul,” Evangelical Quarterly 54 (1982), 139; also see Barth, Ephesians 4-6, 439.


31 Best, Essays on Ephesians, 167. Best distinguishes between the Western image of shepherding, which typically involves “driving” the sheep, as opposed to the author’s intended metaphor of “leading” them. Thomson alludes to the use of the term in the Hebrew Scriptures not only for the relationship between a shepherd and the sheep but also a ruler and the people; see J. G. S. S. Thomson, “The Shepherd-Ruler Concept in the OT and Its Application in the NT,” Scottish Journal of Theology 8 (1955), 406.
contemporary usage\(^{32}\) (since the congregation uses the term more to describe its leaders’ commitment to the care of the flock than to denote the explicit ministry of the word as alluded to in Ephesians), the similar language does provide a potential connection point for nominees as they consider specific Scripture to inform their own discernment concerning serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch.

Even more, the possible connection of this word with the following term may further enhance the nominees’ concept of biblical shepherding. Unlike the other gifts mentioned in the list, only one article governs shepherds and teachers, possibly indicating two functions of one person. Although the writer uses a similar construction in Ephesians 2:20 in reference to apostles and prophets, Barth attests that the conjunction \(kai\) does not always mean “and” but can also carry the idea of “that is” or “in particular.”\(^{33}\) Accordingly, he translates these two terms together as “teaching shepherds.”\(^{34}\) Clarke, as well, offers the suggestion of “the pastors who teach.”\(^{35}\)

However, a dogmatic attempt to strictly define these terms or, even more, to devise a blueprint for modern offices, may actually miss the writer’s point.\(^{36}\) Lincoln accurately reminds us that the writer speaks not of “activities or positions” but rather of

\(^{32}\) Best blatantly denies the need to even cross-identify these titles with those in other parts of the New Testament, considering it sufficient to realize these titles were known to both the writer and the readers; see Best, *Essays on Ephesians*, 161.

\(^{33}\) Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 438.

\(^{34}\) Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 425. Witherington takes a similar approach; see Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians*, 290.


“groups of persons” who lead.\textsuperscript{37} To focus the discussion on particular offices may actually overlook the writer’s primary thrust, namely that Christ gives his church leaders.\textsuperscript{38} Such awareness could prove vital as nominees consider the source of their nomination. Potentially, the christological claims of Ephesians 4:11-16 could suggest to a nominee that his opportunity to serve as a shepherd might extend beyond the congregation’s desire. The nomination may, in fact, carry within it the very call of Christ. As Barth states, “Christ gives the church the officers she needs, not vice versa.”\textsuperscript{39}

Considering the Function

After identifying these groups of leaders given to the church by Christ, the writer describes the nature of their ministry. These leaders do not merely proclaim the word to instill cognitive comprehension; they ensure that God’s people recognize the implications of that word, and they connect the realities of Christ’s power and place in the heavenly realms with the reality of that same power for individual lives and for the life of the church. By rooting their proclamation in the Scriptures and the apostolic tradition, these leaders facilitate the church’s growth.\textsuperscript{40} This function enables the perpetual development of the church.

Accordingly, these leaders refuse to use their giftedness as an excuse for ecclesial cloistering; rather, they recognize the need for intimate involvement in the life of the church. Christ gives them as gifts not to establish positions of prestige but to provide his

\textsuperscript{37} Lincoln, \textit{Ephesians}, 252.

\textsuperscript{38} Best notes that no one on the list in Ephesians 4:11 is actually referred to as a leader; see Best, \textit{Essays on Ephesians}, 169. However, I propose that whether they are called ministers or leaders or even servants, they function in the same way, namely to teach and lead and serve the body of Christ.

\textsuperscript{39} Barth, \textit{Ephesians 4-6}, 435.

\textsuperscript{40} Lincoln, \textit{Ephesians}, 266.
people with authentic leadership through ministers who, as Lincoln contends, are specifically “characterized by devotion to the service of the saints.” In fact, O’Neill compares the relationship between Christ and these ministers to the purely secular relationship between masters and servants. Essentially, servants serve their master in two ways: they wait on the master, and they wait on the master’s guests. Their identity as servants of the master naturally orients them to a position of service to those within the master’s care. Thus these leaders given by Christ intentionally engage in ministry benefiting his church.

Few would disagree that these ministers should be oriented toward the service of the saints. But what is the exact nature of this function? Specifically, in Ephesians 4:12, does the author intend to describe three separate functions of leadership or to give a threefold description of one primary function? In other words, do leaders engage in three distinct tasks of preparing God’s people, performing works of service, and building up the body of Christ; or do they dedicate themselves to preparing God’s people to perform works of service that build up the body of Christ? According to the former interpretation, leaders engage in various forms of service that benefit the church, whereas the latter understanding suggests leaders primarily serve the church by helping the believers perform the actual works of service.

The author’s switch in preposition from pros to eis within this string of phrases serves as the primary point of debate, especially since an article follows the initial pros

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41 Ibid., 254.

but not the subsequent two uses of *eis.* Those who favor a threefold description of one purpose claim the prepositional change indicates a shift in thought on the part of the writer. He changes prepositions to highlight a transition from the responsibility of leaders to that of believers. If he had actually intended three distinct functions of leaders, he would simply have used the same preposition throughout the series.

Barth and Best, among others, opt for such an interpretation. Best cites the apparent shift in Ephesians 4:13 from focus on the role of the leader to focus on the entire community as evidence that Ephesians 4:12 contains a “movement from ‘ministers’ to ‘saints.’” Lincoln, on the other hand, views the change of preposition as insufficient proof, insisting that “no grammatical or linguistic grounds for making a specific link between the two phrases” exists. Page, too, points to the seemingly interchangeable use of various prepositions in Hellenistic Greek, including *pros* to *eis.*

Since grammar provides little foundation for solidifying a particular understanding, Gordon proceeds a step further and challenges the current translation of *katartismos.* Specifically, he questions whether “equip” accurately reflects the original

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44 Barth, *Ephesians 4-6,* 479; Best, *A Critical Commentary on Ephesians,* 398.


46 Lincoln, *Ephesians,* 253. Even Barth admits the wording of the Greek does not permit a clear decision; see Barth, *Ephesians 4-6,* 478.

47 Sydney Page, “Whose Ministry?—A Reappraisal of Ephesians 4:12,” *Novum Testamentum* 47, no. 1 (2005), 28. Specifically, he offers in-depth analysis of six passages cited by O’Neill as containing a similar prepositional arrangement with no apparent change in meaning (Wisd. of Sol.15:15; Test. Jud. 14:3; Test. Zeb. 5:1; Rom. 3:26 and 15:2; and Philem. 5); also see O’Neill, “The Work of Ministry,” 338.
Greek. After exploring five distinct uses of the term within the New Testament,\(^48\) Gordon ultimately opts for understanding the term as “gathering, uniting, or ordering the saints into visible communion and mutual cooperation one with another,”\(^49\) an interpretation that has merit, given the nature of the writer’s move toward the head and body imagery of Ephesians 4:16.

Page also claims that, while the word itself connotes a wide range of meanings from “setting a bone” to “completing a garment,” little lexical support exists for the contemporary usage of “to prepare” or “to equip.” In fact, even among those New Testament uses he identifies as carrying the sense of “to prepare for a purpose,” he contends the verb refers to “causing [something] to happen” as opposed to “equipping persons with what they need to be able to accomplish a particular task.”\(^50\) Instead, he suggests considerable evidence that the kataartismos word group could more accurately imply “moral or spiritual maturation,” an idea that fits well with the thrust of Ephesians 4:12. Ultimately, Page opts for the translation rendered by Davis: “for bringing saints to maturity.”\(^51\)

Historical considerations may, in fact, offer the best insight to this ongoing debate. As Page indicates, most translations prior to the mid-twentieth century opted for

\(^{48}\) T. David Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1994), 72-74. The specific uses that he cites include the idea of “mending” (Matt. 4:21), “preparing” (Matt. 21:16), church unity (1 Cor. 1:10), Christian sanctification (2 Cor. 13:9), and restoration (Gal. 6:1).

\(^{49}\) Ibid., 74.

\(^{50}\) Page, “Whose Ministry,” 34; see also Hamann, “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12,” 44.

three parallel phrases referring to the ministry of these Christ-given leaders.\textsuperscript{52} Davis further points to the growing interest in the role of laity since World War II, citing specifically the shift in translation to a “newer ‘egalitarian’ understanding of the text” with the Revised Standard Version of 1946.\textsuperscript{53} Given the more contemporary nature of this controversy, Davis asks if the recent understanding of the passage actually derives from “new textual discoveries or exegetical insights, or whether perhaps the change is reflective of a more egalitarian, democratic postwar Zeitgeist that has influenced both churches and Bible translators.”\textsuperscript{54}

Such discussion, then, actually seems rooted in more recent ecclesiological concerns of the relationship between clergy and laity. While valuable for the contemporary church, this debate may, in fact, miss the writer’s christological intent. He aims not necessarily to establish a hierarchy within the church but to confirm Christ’s ongoing provision for his people. As Lincoln attests, the writer has already indicated in Ephesians 4:7 that Christ gives gifts to all believers. Therefore, none exclusively receive endowment; all benefit from his grace.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Page, “Whose Ministry,” 27.


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 170. Davis’s use of the term Zeitgeist to describe the cultural milieu stems directly from his interaction with an article by Gundry in which the writer explores the historical influences of societal circumstances on eschatological understandings; see Stanley Gundry, “Hermeneutics or Zeitgeist as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies?” \textit{Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society} 20, no. 1 (1977), 45-55.


\textsuperscript{55} Lincoln, \textit{Ephesians}, 253.
However, Christ blesses his body with clear leadership as they grow up into him, the head. Functionally, these leaders ensure the growth and development of the church by proclaiming the word and performing acts of ministry. Christ specifically intends their service to prepare his people and to build his body. The writer emphasizes the role of these leaders in Ephesians 4:12, not to indicate their prominence but rather to attest to the ongoing activity of Christ within his church. These leaders serve the church strictly on behalf of Christ. Therefore, by acknowledging the role they play, the church ultimately proclaims Christ’s prominence as the head over all things.

Considering the Goal

In Ephesians 4:11-16, the writer portrays the church’s identity and purpose as found in Christ. The initial lack of reference to the local congregation indicates the writer’s focus on the church universal.\(^{56}\) Certainly his claims apply to the smaller church setting, but his bigger vision explores the relationship between the one Christ and his singular church. Accordingly, Barth calls this passage a “locus classicus, pointing out the coherence of the church’s origins, order and destiny.” He goes on to say that “certain ministries are given by Christ (4:11) in order that the church fulfill her present task (4:12) and, at the end, reach the goal set for her (4:13).”\(^{57}\)

Having ascended higher than the heavens, Christ gives leaders to his church for a particular reason. As Fung indicates, these leaders accomplish the “immediate purpose of equipping the saints and the ultimate goal of promoting the church’s growth to

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\(^{57}\) Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 478.
maturity.”\textsuperscript{58} Comparison with other Pauline passages describing giftedness highlights this corporate focus of Ephesians 4:11-16. While the author of both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 addresses unity, he places primary emphasis on diversity, in order to establish the significance of each individual member’s contribution to the body.\textsuperscript{59} However, Ephesians 4 serves a different purpose. Undoubtedly, as Ephesians 4:7 attests, the author understands the diversity of Christ’s gifts, but in Ephesians 4:11-16, this diversity clearly fades into the backdrop of unity.\textsuperscript{60} The leaders listed in Ephesians serve the church on behalf of Christ for a sole reason, namely to build up his body.

For this reason, the author utilizes both body and building metaphors throughout his letter.\textsuperscript{61} These images accomplish more than simply describing the church; they point to Christ. In each case, the writer uses the imagery to creatively portray the relationship between Christ and the church. His first mention of the church as a body, in Ephesians 1:23, ties directly to his claim of Christ as the head. Then, as he shifts to the picture of a building in Ephesians 2:20-22, he again asserts Christ’s identity as the chief cornerstone. Therefore, even in this ecclesiological imagery, the author makes christological claims.

Best recognizes this christological accent by noting the lack of emphasis in Ephesians 4:11-16 on the obedience of the members of the body to the head. Rather, the stress lies on the “organic connection of Body and Head, and on the increase of the Body

\textsuperscript{58} Fung, “The Nature of Ministry,” 143.

\textsuperscript{59} Consider both Rom. 12:4-6 and 1 Cor. 12:12ff., in which the author seeks to establish each member’s unique giftedness.

\textsuperscript{60} Lincoln, Ephesians, 230.

\textsuperscript{61} The author uses body imagery in 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4; 4:25; 5:23; and 5:30. He also expands on this metaphor by referring to Christ as the head in 1:10; 1:22; and 5:23. Furthermore, he utilizes the language of building in 2:20-22 and even 4:29.
as derived ultimately from the Head.” 62 Christ alone provides his body with sustenance and energy. As Lincoln states, the head serves as “both the goal and the source of the Church’s growth.” 63 Thus the significance of these metaphors rests in their ability to communicate Christ first, and then his church. As Howard affirms, “Christ is head not because the church is his body, but because all things have been subjected under his feet.” 64

From his position of power and prominence, then, Christ gives leaders to his church for the purpose of maturing his body. As Lincoln asserts, during this interim growing time the church needs help to “progress toward the eschatological goals of unity and maturity.” 65 As indicated by Ephesians 4:14, the church faces pressures that threaten to inhibit its growth and development. 66 Christ provides leaders for exactly this situation, namely to “prevent believers in their immaturity from falling prey to false teaching and to lead them from the instability which ends in error to the stability of the truth.” 67

These leaders recognize the goal of their giftedness, specifically to facilitate the growth of the body into the fullness of the head. Willingly, they dedicate themselves to teaching, training, proclaiming, preparing, serving, and building the community of faith; selflessly, they give of themselves so that the church might grow fully into the whole

62 Best, One Body in Christ, 151.
63 Lincoln, Ephesians, 261.
65 Lincoln, Ephesians, 257.
66 Best understands this threat to most likely stem from “false ethical teaching rather than erroneous doctrine” because false doctrine does not form a prominent theme in this letter; see Best, Essays on Ephesians, 170. Furthermore, Lincoln points to the following paraenesis as an indication of the author’s primarily ethical concerns; see Lincoln, Ephesians, 258.
67 Lincoln, Ephesians, 259.
measure of Christ. Furthermore, even in the face of threatening pressures, rather than instill dread or panic, these leaders mature the body by cultivating an environment of love. As Lincoln says, “love is the lifeblood of this body” and it is “indispensable.” Such dedication, therefore, fulfills Christ’s intent in giving the gift of leaders to his church.

**Conclusion**

Men nominated in the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch undoubtedly deal with a variety of questions as they determine their willingness to serve. As they maneuver through the theological aspects of these questions, they are likely to find themselves seeking more information within three distinct categories: the source of their nomination, the function of their potential service, and the ultimate goal of their shepherding (should they agree to proceed). Personal practices of discernment, while necessary, are inadequate to the immensity of the task; the significance of a nomination to serve as a shepherd of Christ’s church necessitated the implementation of a formalized process at Cinco Ranch.

Specifically, this process needed to provide perspective for potential shepherds by creating a connection between their experience of nomination and the Christian tradition, primarily that revealed in Scripture. In Ephesians 4:11-16 the author addresses all three categories of consideration by confirming that Christ gives the gift of leaders to his church to serve the body and build it up to maturity. This text, therefore, offered nominees a theologically informed lens through which they could consider their own nomination and discern their potential candidacy.

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68 Ibid., 264.
This project implemented a discernment phase for those nominated in the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch. While the selection team engaged in deliberate discussions to develop a strategy for leading the congregation through the process of selecting shepherds, the needs of the nominees themselves received only minimal consideration. Previous selections neither granted much time for nominees to reflect on their willingness to serve nor allowed for official opportunities to ask questions about the specifics of shepherding. The purpose of this project was to assist these individuals by providing a formalized time of discernment as they contemplated their nominations. This chapter proposes the plan of implementation by detailing the ministry intervention, describing the curriculum, and explaining the method of evaluation.

Ministry Intervention

Through this project I aimed solely to address the gap in the current shepherd selection process related to the lack of a formal time of discernment for those nominated by the congregation—not to modify in any way the general design or structure of the congregation’s method for choosing its shepherds. The responsibility for determining the need for any broader modifications lay with the shepherd selection team. The discernment phase discussed herein merely enhanced an otherwise unchallenged selection process at Cinco Ranch.
This exclusive focus on the discernment needs of the nominee and his family offered two specific components. First, nominees participated, in the context of group sessions, in discussions regarding the theological and practical aspects of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch. The second element of the project addressed the needs of the nominee and his spouse by creating an intentional mentoring relationship between the nominee couple and a particular shepherding couple from the current set of shepherds.

Group Sessions

On Sunday, August 29, 2010, upon completion of the nomination phase, the shepherd selection team compiled a list of nominees and then contacted each nominee by that evening. The selection team intended in this initial contact only to notify these individuals of their identification by the congregation as potential shepherds. The nominees then received a letter of invitation to participate in a time of discernment designed specifically for their needs. While a letter may seem rather formal, it also provided the nominees with a consistent preliminary contact from me, the project leader. As nominees became aware of their nomination, I wanted to curb any apprehension on their part as to the next step in the process. Therefore, I sent a copy of this letter via e-mail by Monday morning, August 30, thus ensuring a quick communication. However, I also mailed a hard copy on that same Monday to doubly ensure they received the letter.

The letter itself expressed admiration that the congregation deemed the individual worthy of nomination, recognizing that the nominee must already live in such a way as to

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1 See appendix B for a calendar of the 2010 shepherd selection process.

2 Individuals must be identified on either a total of twenty-five nomination forms or at least fifteen percent of the total nomination forms submitted in order to receive the congregation’s nomination.

3 See appendix C.
demonstrate the heart of a shepherd. The letter continued by acknowledging potential reactions on the part of the nominee. For example, perhaps a nominee had prepared himself for this day, looking forward to the chance to serve as a shepherd among God’s people. On the other hand, a nominee might feel apprehension or even fear at the prospect of stepping into church leadership. Either way, the letter encouraged the nominee to refrain from making any immediate decision regarding his candidacy but instead to participate with other nominees in a formal time of discernment.

The letter also assured the nominee of the selection team’s intentions not to employ this discernment phase to pressure individuals into a particular outcome. The selection team simply intended this segment of the process to help the nominees in making an informed decision about their future as possible shepherds at Cinco Ranch. Because the entire selection process attests to the congregation’s belief that God moves among his people to recognize those whom he desires to call into leadership, the letter strongly asserted the need for the nominees to participate in this particular phase. The community of faith had identified them as potential shepherds. Such identification should not be taken lightly; in fact, it obliged them in a way to consider this possibility in a formalized manner. The letter concluded by preparing the nominee for contact from me within the following week to answer any questions as well as to solidify the nominee’s involvement in the process.

Those who agreed to participate then met in group sessions for an hour and a half on Wednesday nights for six successive weeks, beginning on September 8, 2010, and ending October 13, 2010. The sessions convened in Room 107 at the Cinco Ranch building. The space provided both comfortable seating and a configuration for
appropriate interactions. In the first session, I explained to nominees the importance of exposure to the entire discernment process and requested their compliance to attend each session. I committed to record each session on video in case a nominee had to be absent, and I asked participants to view any missed sessions prior to returning to the group.

As project leader, I facilitated the group sessions, guiding the conversations through both the theological and practical aspects of shepherding at Cinco Ranch. Those already serving as shepherds attended each meeting, offering support and encouragement to the nominees as they maneuvered this time of discernment. Their attendance established valuable connections among current shepherds and nominees. Since these nominees could potentially join our current shepherds in leadership, this time of discernment also set the stage for the future transition of new leaders into the shepherding group.

Delimitations

While this type of discernment certainly involves the entire family, group sessions focused solely on the nominees themselves. Spouses were not included in the sessions. Twelve men agreed to participate in this formalized phase, inviting spouses to participate in these sessions would have doubled the class size; numbers alone would have drastically altered the group dynamics of these sessions.

Furthermore, the nature of the discussions aimed to provide a theological as well as practical basis for serving as a shepherd. This focus differs slightly from the potential concerns of the family unit, which it seems likely would revolve more around issues of time commitment and the impact of church leadership on the shepherd’s family. To

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4 The congregation nominated thirteen men, but one declined. I will describe his decision in further detail in ch. 4.
ensure the discernment phase addressed these multiple factors influencing a nominee’s
decision, the project included an aspect of intentional pastoral care for the nominee and
his spouse through shepherd mentoring relationships.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, each session was video recorded to ensure access by all
nominees to the discussions of discernment. If a nominee missed a session, he was asked
to view the recording before the next session in order to maintain the integrity of this
project. In hindsight however, the presence of a video camera in the group sessions may
have actually weakened the project by inhibiting interactions among those in attendance.
Intimidation at the prospect of being filmed, or even posturing for a favorable
representation, may have influenced participants’ open and honest reflections in the
group discussions. A nominee’s experience of the sessions via recording may have also
differed considerably from that of those who experienced the discussions in person.
However, despite these unavoidable factors, for providing all nominees with the same
information, even in the case of an absence, video recording still proved the best option.

Shepherd Mentoring Relationships

While the group sessions provided vital discussion on both the theological and
practical aspects of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch, nominees inevitably needed
more intimate interactions to complement their time of discernment. By design, group
sessions focused primarily on foundational principles and practices related to
shepherding. Yet nominees’ considerations undoubtedly extended beyond the formalities
of leadership. The men needed opportunities to inquire about the impact of shepherding
on their families, their careers, and even their personal spiritual lives. The establishment
of intentional shepherd mentoring relationships provided a forum for this aspect of discernment as well.

As a part of this project the current shepherds were asked to personally mentor nominees through this process. Upon the conclusion of the nomination phase, the shepherds evenly distributed the nominees among themselves and committed to walk with each nominee through the discernment phase. I requested that the shepherds include their spouses in these mentoring relationships since shepherding clearly involves more than the leader himself; it requires a family commitment. Thus to honor this component of the discernment process, the project established opportunities for the nominee couple to interact with a shepherding couple for the purpose of exploring those aspects of leadership that may impact the family unit.

Accordingly, the current shepherds committed to specific interactions over the course of the discernment phase. Initially, the shepherding couple met with the nominee couple for prayer and encouragement as the nominee and his spouse embarked on this time of consideration. This meeting necessitated a rather intimate setting, such as an invitation to dinner or dessert, and it needed to occur within the first two weeks of the discernment phase. Then, over the course of the six-week period, the shepherding couple maintained regular contact to adequately address questions as they arose during the process. During the last week, the shepherding couple offered the nominee and his spouse the opportunity for another intimate meeting to provide any final advice or encouragement, as well as prayer, as the nominee prepared to make his decision.

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5 The shepherds attempted to match mentors and mentees based on the existence of previous personal relationships.

6 See appendix D.
Thus operating in conjunction with the group sessions, these shepherd mentoring relationships supplied a necessary breadth to the discernment phase by providing nominees with the opportunity to receive personal, pastoral care as they maneuvered the process of discernment. Additionally, it expanded the impact of this reflective time period beyond the nominee himself to include his wife and her questions as to how shepherding would impact their family unit. Ultimately, the goal of the project was to provide the nominees with multiple angles of care as they determined their willingness to serve as shepherds.

**Description of Curriculum**

While the discernment needs of nominees certainly varied among individuals, the group sessions focused on four specific categories for reflection. Three categories related to the theological considerations of leadership: the source of one’s call into leadership, the function of those who accept such a call, and the ultimate goal of that call. This curriculum explored each of these theological contemplations specifically through the use of Ephesians 4:11-16. The fourth, more practical, category of this curriculum addressed the basic logistics of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch. While rather rudimentary compared to the divine implications of Ephesians 4:11-16, such practical considerations also substantially factor into a nominee’s decision-making process.

**Session 1**

Because discernment served as the impetus of this project, I framed each session around a particular question for reflection. After an initial welcome and brief overview of the project, I opened the first session, “Gifted to Lead?” with the intentional introductions of both nominees and current shepherds in order to establish an environment of intimacy.

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7 For a more detailed discussion, see the subsection in ch. 2 entitled “Theoretical Foundations.”
and transparency. I asked each individual to describe his history at Cinco Ranch, specifically his length of time with the congregation and any ministries in which he had participated.

Following these introductions, I led the group in a prayer and then shifted our conversation to their present nomination as potential shepherds. I then acknowledged the probable mixture of emotions they were experiencing and introduced Charles Siburt’s list of possible hesitations with which nominees may wrestle in a process such as this. The general nature of the list allowed for more intimate discussion as nominees identified and shared with the group their own personal trepidations about their potential shepherding.

Next, I assured the nominees of the overall intent of the discernment phase, namely to aid them in making an informed decision about their nomination rather than to pressure them for a specific response. From there, I described the two components of the process: the group sessions and the shepherd mentoring relationships. I also emphasized the importance of complete participation to ensure the integrity of the process. I then informed them of the plan to video record the sessions and to make the video available for any nominees who might miss a meeting.

Concluding this introductory time, I asked nominees to sign an informed consent form that explained the overall purpose of this project. I also presented a participant

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8 In order to further cultivate this relaxed environment, I served coffee and refreshments each week.

9 See appendix E. Siburt’s document is intended to help congregations encourage nominees to serve as elders; however this discernment phase was designed simply to help nominees make an informed decision about their nomination. Therefore, I shared with the class only Siburt’s section on the possible reasons nominees may hesitate.

10 See appendix F.
commitment form for their consideration.\textsuperscript{11} While the informed consent form clearly indicated nominees could withdraw from the project at any time, I suggested that nominees contemplate committing themselves to full participation in the discernment process. Having been identified as potential shepherds, they could honor the congregation by proceeding through this phase in its entirety. With this second form, they would commit to attend all sessions and mentoring opportunities. Furthermore, if they missed a session, they would take the appropriate measures to secure the video recording. Finally, they would agree to maintain confidentiality throughout the process.

Having adequately laid a foundation for the group sessions, I introduced our primary text of Ephesians 4:11-16, along with our principle practice of \textit{lectio divina}. Rather than structuring the sessions around a lecture, I wanted to encourage participants to discover for themselves the significance of Ephesians 4:11-16 as it related to their task of discernment. Thus, prior to reading the passage together, I familiarized the group with the underlying premise of \textit{lectio divina}, namely to allow God’s word to speak among his people.\textsuperscript{12}

While I intended the communal practice of \textit{lectio divina} to initiate and guide our preliminary discussions, I imposed a sense of structure to this practice by emphasizing particular questions raised by the text. These questions moved participants through the theological categories previously described as the source of one’s calling, the functions of one’s calling, and the ultimate goal of that calling. During sessions 2 through 4, the group interacted with this text in conjunction with one categorical question per session; for the

\textsuperscript{11} See appendix G.

\textsuperscript{12} For a relevant description of this practice, see Eugene Peterson, \textit{Eat This Book} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 91. While I did not implement his full model, his approach served as a framework for comprehending the basic practice of \textit{lectio divina}. 
first session I simply encouraged participants to share their initial responses to a reading of the text. We concluded with a prayer in which each nominee and shepherd offered a one- or two-sentence request related to the process of discernment.

**Sessions 2, 3, and 4**

While the next three sessions explored different aspects of Ephesians 4:11-16, the curriculum itself followed the same general outline. I began each session with a time of prayer, asking God specifically to bless these men with clarity as they continued through the discernment process. After some introductory comments, I prepared the group for our practice of *lectio divina* by reminding them of its underlying premise, then divided the nominees and shepherds into smaller groups based on their shepherd mentoring relationships. This division created an even number of groups comprised of two nominees and one shepherd. These discussion groups remained consistent for the entirety of the sessions, so that each week the same groups read the text together and explored a specific question.

Session 2 aimed to establish the Christology of Ephesians 4:11-16, especially as it relates to discerning the source of one’s giftedness to lead. Thus in this session, entitled “Gifted by Whom?” the discussion groups considered the question “What do we learn about Christ from this passage?” Session 3, entitled “Gifted for What?” geared the nominees to explore the actual tasks in which these leaders engage—specifically, to equip, serve, build, and love Christ’s body. Each small group read the text and pursued the question “As Christ gifts his church with leaders, to what kinds of tasks do they devote themselves?” Finally, session 4, entitled “Gifted till When?” shifted participants to the final categorical question of discernment as they determined the ultimate goal of
one’s giftedness, namely the maturation of the body of Christ. The subgroups interacted with the question “As Christ gifts his church with leaders, what is their ultimate purpose?”

Once each subgroup engaged in these personal discussions, I reconvened the participants and asked them to share their discoveries. As I listened to their feedback, I adjusted it when necessary to emphasize the discernment angle for that particular session. For instance, when we discussed the Christology of the passage, I highlighted the ongoing activity of Christ on behalf of his church. This conversation naturally led us to consider Ephesians 1:19-23 as well, in order to more fully comprehend the author’s assertion of Christ’s power and authority.

When the group explored the ultimate goal of these gifts in “Gifted for What?” I guided the discussion to allow the participants to grapple with the specific tasks of leadership. I used our text to expose the group to the open-ended debate regarding the use of prepositions in Ephesians 4:12. While I did not pressure the group into a particular understanding, I certainly wished to convey that leadership involves more than simply telling others what to do and how to be. Service and ministry mark the heart of a shepherd. To further enhance our discussion, I gave participants particular readings to consider outside class.13

In the fourth session, “Gifted till When?” we considered how the theme of the maturation of the body of Christ surfaces throughout Ephesians, particularly in passages such as Ephesians 4:1-6 and 4:17-5:21. I encouraged participants to distinguish between

the maturation of the body and merely its management. At the urging of the shepherd selection team, I also distributed a form pertinent to the selection process.

Therefore, while sessions 2, 3, and 4 approached Ephesians 4:11-16 from different angles of discernment, they all followed the same general format. In each session I allowed the subgroups time to reflect on the text and share their feedback with the larger group, then utilized these comments to facilitate a discussion that emphasized the source, the function, or the goal of leadership. To conclude each session, I asked the group to consider specific ways in which these conversations could influence a nominee’s discernment. I intended to end each session in prayer, integrating both participatory and corporate prayer practices. However, time constraints often forced us to pray in the more traditional manner of one individual’s offering a prayer for the entire group. Typically, in these instances, I asked a shepherd to lead this prayer.

Sessions 5 and 6

In the fifth session, entitled “Gifted with You?” I shifted our conversation to the practical aspects of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch. This time we started the session by reading Ephesians 4:11-16 as a group. I asked for personal reflections on the passage, and then we prayed.

14 Because several of these men work in the business realm, I utilized Seth Godin’s Tribes to enhance this discussion by providing some contemporary cultural interplay between the ideas of maturation and management. See Seth Godin, Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us (New York: Penguin, 2008).

15 See appendix H. While the form would technically apply only to those who eventually accepted their nomination, the selection team needed these forms completed by Sunday, October 17, 2010. Unfortunately, the discernment phase did not conclude until Wednesday, October 13. Given the breadth of the introspective questions, candidates would require more than three days to complete this form. By placing this form in the hands of nominees ahead of time, I offered them substantial time to review it and possibly even begin completing it. The form may also have prompted some appropriate questions for the nominees to consider within their shepherd mentoring relationships. While it is possible that the introspection forms may have put undue pressure on nominees to consider the next phase before they finalized their discernment, I did address this by verbally explaining the time constraints and ensuring nominees of the absolute priority on their discernment before they concerned themselves with further phases in the process.
I had requested that each of the current shepherds prepare a two-minute description of his personal experience of shepherding at Cinco Ranch. Following these accounts and their accompanying discussion, the group reviewed two specific leadership documents used by Cinco Ranch shepherds and staff: a covenant of leadership and a shepherd leadership model.16 We considered how these documents could facilitate the leadership’s embodiment of the principles gleaned from Ephesians 4:11-16. I then facilitated a conversation regarding our current theological trajectory, conveying specifically the need for those who serve as shepherds to generally embrace this direction, rather than attempt to drastically alter it. Finally, I opened the floor for nominees to ask the shepherds questions regarding shepherding at Cinco Ranch. We concluded this session in a time of prayer.

In the final session, entitled “Gifted: Now What?” I led the group in a review of both the theological and practical considerations that we had discussed in previous sessions. We started again by reading Ephesians 4:11-16 as a group, identifying together principles that speak to the giftedness of leaders, namely the source, function, and goal of their gift. I answered any lingering questions of nominees and assured them again of our desire to simply facilitate their discernment process, to help them make an informed decision regarding their willingness to serve as a shepherd.

We then reviewed together the next phases of the selection process, ensuring the nominees understood the purpose of each stage and the procedure they would follow from that point in responding to the congregation’s nomination. I did not ask for any decisions during the final session. In fact, I encouraged nominees to spend some final

16 See appendix I and appendix J. Unfortunately, in the fifth session, we did not have time to cover the shepherd leadership model. Therefore, I asked that each participant review the document on his own, and we discussed it briefly at the start of our sixth session.
time in prayer with their spouses. I explained that the nominee’s personal shepherd (the one providing pastoral care throughout the process) would contact the nominee over the next two days, either in person or by phone. At that point, the nominee would indicate his discernment in regard to serving as a shepherd. The selection team would announce the candidacy of those accepting the nomination on the following Sunday, October 17, 2010. To close our time together, the shepherds shared final words of wisdom, and we concluded with a prayer.

**Method of Evaluation**

Because this project sought to establish a formal practice of discernment, the measure of its effectiveness extended beyond mere numbers. I did not aim by this project to convince every nominee to serve as a shepherd, but simply to help nominees maneuver through various considerations as they determined their response to the congregation’s nominations. Regardless of the number accepting and the number declining, the goal would be accomplished if nominees confirmed that this discernment phase aided them in their decision-making process. Therefore, this project called for a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to evaluation.

Qualitative evaluation offers a methodology appropriate to a project of this nature because, as expressed in its nomenclature, this type of approach evaluates the quality of a particular experience rather than any particular quantifiable outcome. In fact, qualitative research often emphasizes aspects beyond the scope of quantitative measurements. As Denzin and Lincoln indicate, such research emphasizes “the value-laden nature of inquiry.”17 Opting for a more ideographic approach to knowledge, qualitative research

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insists meaning can be discovered in the interactive processes between individuals and communities within the world around them.\textsuperscript{18} Timothy Sensing offers a good summation when he writes, “Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience.”\textsuperscript{19}

Participant Observation

In practice, qualitative research varies considerably in its implementation. Many disciplines use it and execute it using multiple methodological strategies.\textsuperscript{20} Ultimately, regardless of method, qualitative researchers seek not so much to explain reality as to describe it, convinced that accurate and insightful description transforms both understanding and future action.\textsuperscript{21} As Lincoln and Denzin point out, qualitative approaches analyze a variety of empirical materials, ranging from case study to personal experience, interviews to artifacts, historical documents to personal observations—all for the purpose of interpreting “phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”\textsuperscript{22} For this reason, Swinton and Mowat contend that the practical theologian best incorporates qualitative research methods by “developing an eclectic and multi-method approach,” one that utilizes effective practices without committing to any one particular model.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{18} John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research} (London: SCM Press, 2006), 29, 43.

\textsuperscript{19} Timothy Sensing, “Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects” (Unpublished manuscript, Abilene Christian University, May 13, 2010), 46.

\textsuperscript{20} Denzin and Lincoln, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” 6.

\textsuperscript{21} Swinton and Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research}, 44-46.

\textsuperscript{22} Denzin and Lincoln, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” 3.

\textsuperscript{23} Swinton and Mowat, \textit{Practical Theology and Qualitative Research}, 50.
A project of this nature, performed in a congregational setting, necessitated a methodology accounting for the interaction between the participants and me, the minister-researcher.\textsuperscript{24} Since I would be personally engaged in the process and facilitating group sessions, I needed as one angle of evaluation a qualitative technique offering an intimate assessment of the thought processes of the nominees as they discerned their willingness to serve as shepherds. Therefore, because it provided such a point of view, I employed participant observation as the primary means of evaluation.

Thomas Lee confirms participant observation best fits studies that involve interpersonal actions and interpretations. He highlights specific advantages of this approach, namely that it allows the researcher to gain firsthand knowledge about group processes and perspectives as they occur in “real-time” in a “real-world context.”\textsuperscript{25} Michael Patton corroborates, describing the intent of participant observation as allowing the evaluator to develop an “insider’s view” so that the “evaluator not only sees what is happening but feels what it is like to be part of the group.”\textsuperscript{26}

Participant observation ranges from minimal involvement with the group to the complete identification of the observer as a vital member.\textsuperscript{27} This project required intimate involvement on my part as the facilitator of group discussions. I actively engaged in guiding group conversations and undoubtedly affected the participants’ overall

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Thomas Lee, \textit{Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research} (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Michael Quinn Patton, \textit{How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation} (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 75.
\end{itemize}
experience. However, my assessments remain those of an outsider to the group itself. My role as a non-elder precluded any identification by the nominees as an insider to their specific situation. At best, I was perceived as one who walked with them through this process of discernment. Therefore, in order to best balance my dual role of participant and observer, I employed a perspective offered by Patton as “empathic neutrality.”

While I fully engaged in the process, I maintained an emotional position both distinct and unbiased as I sought to evaluate the group’s experience of discernment.

Angles of Evaluation

At times, qualitative research has been scrutinized for the subjective nature of its methodology. Because ideographic discoveries rather than nomothetic findings provide its basis, its conclusions could be perceived as suspect. In order to avoid such judgments, qualitative research employs the technique of triangulation, in which researchers utilize multiple angles to ensure an accurate assessment of a project’s outcome. Denzin and Lincoln highlight the dilemma of a descriptive approach to research, namely that an observer can never fully capture objective reality through a single lens of observation.

As Sensing indicates, multiple angles of evaluation allow a researcher to “cross-check” the data in order to add “breadth and depth” to the analysis as well as to increase the “trustworthiness” of the research itself. Therefore, following the model proposed by

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28 According to Lee, I operated as an “observer as participant”; see Lee, Using Qualitative Methods, 99. I engaged intimately in group sessions, even drawing on my relationships with individual group members. However, I also continued to remind the nominees of my outsider status to their specific situation.


30 Denzin and Lincoln, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” 5.

31 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 54.
Sensing, I applied three evaluative methods to secure three distinct angles of assessment, triangulating evaluative data received from the researcher as well as from both insiders and outsiders to the process of discernment.\textsuperscript{32}

Functioning as a participant observer, I took copious field notes to document my findings as the researcher. The second angle involved interviewing the nominees at the conclusion of our group sessions, asking them to evaluate the efficacy of this process to their discernment. For a third angle I interviewed our current shepherds after the completion of the group sessions. Their participation through the process provided them a legitimate insider perspective, yet their role as current shepherds placed them outside the actual experience of discernment.

**Field Notes**

Reliability of the data in a qualitative study mandates extensive documentation on the part of the participant observer. Qualitative data describe for readers the nature of the project as well as the experiences and interactions of those involved.\textsuperscript{33} It provides an ongoing account of all that happens during the course of particular sessions, conveying specifics about the participants, the setting, and the conversations. Furthermore, comprehensive notes establish the legitimacy of a project’s findings and applying those findings to other settings.\textsuperscript{34} Thus field notes demand a researcher’s attention. In fact, as Merriam insists, researchers quickly discover observation to be “only half the work.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{33} Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 47.

\textsuperscript{34} Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 115-16.

\textsuperscript{35} Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 104-5.
Inevitably, though, field notes fail to completely record every aspect of the experience. At best, these written accounts merely represent the actual event. Participant observers must selectively choose among components essential to a proper understanding of the project and the less significant aspects.\(^{36}\) For this reason, qualitative researchers encourage the development of a particular strategy for documentation.\(^{37}\) For this project I established a clear protocol identifying noteworthy components for observation.\(^{38}\)

Because of my role as facilitator within the group sessions, I needed assistance from someone else to focus solely on the task of observation. Accordingly I enlisted Kyle Cornell, a highly respected member of the congregation, to take notes during the meetings.\(^{39}\) While a video camera recorded each session, in reviewing the video I would observe only those interactions captured within the camera’s scope. Another participant observer allowed a broader range of data collection.\(^{40}\)

I recruited Kyle for several reasons. First of all, Kyle works as a law enforcement officer; thus his training prepares him for astute observations. Also, because of his own


\(^{37}\) Merriam provides a list of six elements likely to receive an observer’s attention: the physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors, and the researcher’s own behavior; Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 97-98. Spradley classifies two types of observation, namely grand tour and mini-tour; Spradley, *Participant Observation*, 77-80. Furthermore, Patton explains the methodologist’s use of “sensitizing concepts,” which provide a basic framework to highlight the importance of specific events, activities, and behaviors; Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, 82.

\(^{38}\) See appendix L.

\(^{39}\) Because the group sessions were comprised entirely of males, I intentionally selected a male note-taker. Not only did this maintain a male dynamic to the group; it also prevented any insinuation of assigning seemingly prescribed gender roles.

\(^{40}\) Spradley would identify Kyle as a passive participant observer; see Spradley, *Participant Observation*, 59-60. While Kyle certainly played no part in the discussions, his presence in the meetings included him in the group’s overall experience as a kind of participant.
proven leadership within the young couples’ ministry and the level of respect accorded
him in the congregation, nominees would gladly accept his presence in the group
sessions. Since Kyle’s age precluded him from receiving the congregation’s nomination
to serve as a shepherd, his availability to participate as an observer rather than a nominee
was ensured. Finally, Kyle already regularly attended Wednesday night services, so I
trusted his dependability for these sessions. Even though Kyle had limited experience in
formal qualitative observation, Merriam indicates one can learn to be a “careful,
 systematic observer,” so I provided Kyle with training in the practice of skilled
observation to ensure he understood proper protocol.

In this training, I framed for Kyle the basic nature of qualitative methodology and
of participant observation. I emphasized three specific aspects of Kyle’s observatory
practice: completely passive observation, offering no input for group discussions;
disciplined note-taking skills, absorbing maximum amounts of information related to
both the atmosphere and the group interactions; and maintaining “emphatic neutrality,”
no matter what comments were made by whom.

With this basic understanding in place, I then described for Kyle the kinds of
observations to include in his notes. I explained the concepts of grand tour and mini-tour
observations and indicated the particular word usages I wanted Kyle to track. I

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41 Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 95.

42 See appendix K.

43 Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 50.

44 Spradley explains that grand tour observations offer general descriptions of the experience in its
entirety, whereas mini-tour observations deal with more specific aspects. He writes, “Every grand tour
observation is like a large room with numerous doors into smaller rooms, each door to be opened by a
mini-tour question-observation.” For his list of the categories of questions for each type of observation, see
Spradley, *Participant Observation*, 77-80.
reviewed with him the worksheet I intended him to use as his guide for taking field notes and expressed clear expectations for Kyle’s involvement in this project. He would need to arrive early to the meetings and leave late and would take notes about significant conversations occurring before and after the group sessions. Finally, he would review the notes, add final comments, and place them in my office. Naturally, I stressed the necessity of complete confidentiality as well.

Since the project’s legitimacy relied heavily on the accuracy of the observations, immediately following the group sessions, I typed Kyle’s notes into a Word document. As Sensing indicates, “details may fade quickly after a good night of sleep.” As I reviewed Kyle’s observations, I made notes as well, expounding on my own perceptions of the session’s events. I typed these notes in a three-column format, identifying actual observations, general impressions, and my own initial interpretations, then subjected them to a coding scheme that I developed and refined over the course of the project. Finally, I scanned Kyle’s actual field notes into a digitalized version, in order to ensure I had a copy readily available for future needs. I saved both Kyle’s notes and mine in triplicate to use later as a data set for evaluation.

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45 For a copy of this worksheet, see appendix L. It should be noted that portions of the guide that I provided Kyle proved ineffective for his note-taking. For instance, the tracking of certain word usages simply did not work given the nature of the group discussions, especially when the participants were in their small group clusters. Furthermore, Kyle preferred to record all of his observations in the two column format rather than using the worksheet in its entirety. However, the system worked for Kyle, and between his observations and my own (which I recorded in the form of compiled field notes), we were able to accurately document the sessions for evaluative purposes. For a sample of Kyle’s participant observer notes, see appendix M.


47 For a sample of my compiled field notes, see appendix N.

48 I further explain the coding scheme in the subsection of this chapter entitled “Data Coding.”

49 I saved them on my laptop, a flash drive, and a back-up drive on the Cinco Ranch network.
Group Interview of Nominees

For the second angle of evaluation, I conducted a group interview with the nominees on Wednesday, October 20, 2010, a week after the final group session. The current shepherds did not attend this session. As a tool for evaluation, the group interview allowed me the best opportunity to interact with the nominees as they provided valuable qualitative insights. Since the six group sessions had cultivated an environment of open dialogue, the nominees were already accustomed to such a format.

The group interview provided significant interactions for evaluation. As Berg indicates, the dynamics of a group interview often lead to “spontaneous responses from session participants,” allowing the researcher unique insight into both the individual’s reactions and the group’s assessment of a particular response.50 Since a researcher is free to pursue this spontaneity with probing questions, group interviews serve as a highly adaptable evaluative tool.51

In clarifying for the nominees the concept of a group interview, I set appropriate ground rules. First, I requested the nominees fully engage in the interview itself and highlighted its importance in determining the value of the discernment process. I also insisted on complete candor as the nominees responded to the questions. I explained to the group the tendency in projects such as this for participants to so desire the success of the researcher that they inadvertently fabricate positive feedback, a tendency known as


the Hawthorne effect. While biases can affect both sides of the evaluation process, whether from the researcher’s perspective or that of the participants, at least acknowledging this reality lessens the likelihood of blatantly skewed results.

In order to ensure feedback from all nominees, I started the interview by asking the men to privately respond to specific questions on an interview form. Berg refers to this practice as an “extended focus group” and suggests its use when a researcher wishes to draw out minority opinions as well as secure majority ones prior to the group’s discussion. Following the completion of these forms, I led the group in a conversational-style interview, guided primarily by the questions already processed individually, with the spontaneous addition of any necessary probing questions.

A group interview requires specific considerations and the implementation of a certain skill set. For example, I needed the ability to appropriately moderate such a discussion. Lee identifies this ability as the single most important aspect to ensuring the success of the interview evaluative technique. This skill in moderating includes managing the time, monitoring the interactions to ensure all nominees an equal opportunity to respond, and legitimately phrasing questions so that the responses accurately reflect the nominees’ experiences as well as provide feedback appropriate for

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53 Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 139.

54 See appendix O.

55 Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 111.

56 For a detailed discussion of conversational interviews, see Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods*, 81-86.

57 Ibid., 72.
For this project, the questions needed to specifically measure the impact of the project on the nominees’ practice of discernment.

I again enlisted Kyle to serve as a participant observer, recording conversations and interactions within the interview session in extensive field notes. Since he already understood the field-note protocol as well as the dynamics of this particular group, his involvement proved quite natural. While I recorded the group sessions, I did not utilize a camera for the interview lest it inhibit authentic feedback.

As in previous weeks, I typed Kyle’s field notes into a Word document immediately following the group interview session. I also used the same three-column approach to record my own observations, general impressions, and initial interpretations. I then subjected these notes, along with the completed interview forms, to a coding scheme similar to that used for the group sessions. To ensure the safety of this documentation, I scanned the interview forms into a digitized format and saved them, as well as the Word document, in triplicate.

**Group Interview of Current Shepherds**

For a third angle of evaluation, I conducted a group interview with the current shepherds. Meeting without the nominees, I led the shepherds through practically the same strategy I had used for the nominees’ interview. While I slightly modified the questions to better account for the shepherds’ perspective, I otherwise duplicated the approach, using individually completed forms and field notes, and documenting the

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58 For further instruction on developing questions and conducting the interview, see Merriam, *Qualitative Research Methods and Case Study Applications*, 75-81; Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, 122-34.

59 See appendix P.
responses. I performed this interview with the shepherds on Wednesday, October 27, 2010, two weeks after the final group session.

Data Coding

To complete the learning process, I had to move the project beyond data collection to data analysis. However, due to its reliance on words rather than numbers, analyzing qualitative research can get complicated.\(^{60}\) The data require a consistent, comprehensible method of coding to enable analysis; typically the researcher develops this method throughout the course of the particular project. Patton insists no real point exists at which collection ends and analysis begins; the two occur in tandem.\(^{61}\) For this reason, qualitative methodologists highly recommend coding data relatively soon after collection.\(^{62}\) In fact, Miles and Huberman insist late coding actually “enfeebles” the analytical process.\(^{63}\)

As Sensing asserts, coding essentially attempts to reduce the evaluative data to manageable components by grouping “words, phrases, and events that appear to be similar” into common categories determined specifically by the purpose of the project.\(^{64}\) As for the formation of these categories, Patton suggests developing a list of guiding questions during the design phase of the project and adding to this list during the


\(^{62}\) Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 128; Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 64.

\(^{63}\) Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 63.

\(^{64}\) Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 128; also see Creswell, *Research Design*, 154.
project’s implementation.Generally, this process of coding relies more on a researcher’s logic and creativity than on any standardized protocol. Due to the vital nature of consistency and proper documentation, Sensing recommends maintaining an ongoing index of any viable codes. These categories provide the framework for analyzing and eventually interpreting the data to determine the applicability and replicability of the project.

Therefore, prior to the project, I developed a protocol for coding the data. Following Patton’s suggestion, I identified guiding questions for the evaluation process, then began to develop a coding scheme. Each Thursday I reviewed the field notes from the previous night’s session, and I also considered those from prior weeks to ensure I maintained a consistent categorical scheme. I first read the notes in their entirety to gain an overall perspective, after which I read them a second and third time for the purpose of noting apparent topics or themes. As I discovered repetition in my initial notes, I shifted to analyzing these notes, arranging similar ideas into common groupings. I prioritized these groupings based on their level of significance and assigned them appropriate

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65 Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation*, 144. Miles and Huberman specifically describe the use of a “start list”; see Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 57.


67 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 128. Miles and Huberman recommend maintaining the index on a single sheet of paper for easy reference; see Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 64.

68 See appendix Q.


70 Creswell provides a helpful list developed by Renata Tesch that instructs a researcher in the process of creating codes, especially for field notes and interviews; see Creswell, *Research Design*, 155.
numerical designations for quick reference. These categorical groupings went into a second Word document for ongoing use and development throughout the project.

With this tentative list established, I then read the field notes in light of these initial categories, using the numerical designations to classify appropriate segments; the field-note documentation form contained a fourth column for such annotation. After this initial categorization, I reviewed the segments of data, seeking to further reduce the information into manageable amounts. In the process I refined my initial categories and designations for more accurate description and saved this information in triplicate along with my field notes. With the succession of weeks, I was better able to grasp the evaluative significance of emerging topics and themes.

Since the group interview sessions were documented as field notes, I utilized this same coding protocol for all three angles of evaluation. Even with the addition of written interview forms completed by each participant, this protocol provided a viable structure for their analysis. Therefore, I completed the six weeks of group sessions and the two weeks of group interviews with an organized set of data ready for interpretation and application.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to implement a discernment phase for those nominated in the shepherd selection process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ. To accomplish this purpose I led six sessions involving the nominees and our current

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71 Miles and Huberman offer good instruction on the development of helpful abbreviations; see Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 56-57.

72 For the final coding of the compiled field notes, see appendix R.

73 For the final coding of the nominees’ interview, see appendix S; and for the final coding of the shepherds’ interview, see appendix T.
shepherds in which we explored the theological foundations of serving as a shepherd and discussed the practical expressions of shepherding specifically at Cinco Ranch. Communal reflection on Ephesians 4:11-16 helped achieve the former, and the establishment of intentional mentoring relationships between the nominee and his spouse and a particular shepherding couple made possible the second. Ultimately, the primary goal of this project was not the addition of more shepherds to the leadership of Cinco Ranch but rather the assurance that each one nominated by the congregation received appropriate care and instruction during his time of discernment.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In past shepherd selections at Cinco Ranch, those nominated by the congregation were left on their own to maneuver through the process of discernment. Due to the nature of the selection schedule, little time was given these men for personal reflection. While the nominees undoubtedly engaged in a variety of practices to determine their willingness to serve, the congregation lacked a formal discernment phase to guarantee ample time for contemplation as well as allow for the consideration of pertinent information, such as the theological foundations of shepherding and its practical expression at Cinco Ranch. The implementation of this project provided such an opportunity for those nominated in the fall of 2010. Its design facilitated discernment through both communal conversations and personal mentoring relationships—yet without coercing the nominees to make a specific decision. This chapter presents the data gleaned from the field notes, the interview with the nominees, and the interview with the shepherds. A triangulated conversation among data sources helps identify the project’s consistencies as well as its incongruities.

Triangulation of Data

Qualitative research often utilizes triangulation to secure a more robust evaluation. Reliance on only one data stream leaves a researcher susceptible to oversights and biases; considering a project from multiple angles yields a more accurate assessment of an intervention’s effectiveness. This cross-checking of data increases the legitimacy of a project’s claims.
However, Denzin and Lincoln present triangulation not as “a tool or strategy of validation” but an “alternative to validation.”¹ In the same vein, Timothy Sensing cautions researchers not to use triangulation to “claim too much.” Triangulation as an evaluative practice may offer a thicker description, but it fails to “produce the whole picture.”² For this reason, Swinton and Mowat compare good qualitative research to a “detective story without a fixed ending.”³

Forgoing the need to solve the case, a researcher utilizes triangulation to establish a conversation among multiple data sources, identifying areas of overlap as well as divergence. Both identifications prove valuable to the evaluative process. Denzin and Lincoln attest that triangulation invites readers “to explore competing visions of the context” and so to avoid a myopic view of the available data.⁴ For this reason, Swinton and Mowat emphasize the researcher’s need for reflexivity.⁵ Avoiding naïve assertions or dogmatic claims, the researcher patiently considers all perspectives and listens to the voice of each data source. Only when all conversation partners have been heard does the researcher attempt to make evaluative claims regarding the project.

Themes

Naturally, triangulation highlights areas of agreement among the data sources. Such congruities, known as themes or patterns, offer a researcher much confidence in drawing conclusions from the project. Patton states that these consistencies “contribute

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¹ Denzin and Lincoln, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” 5; see also Uwe Flick, Introduction to Qualitative Research, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 227.
² Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 56.
³ Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, 30.
⁵ Swinton and Mowat, Practical Theology and Qualitative Research, 59.
significantly to the overall credibility” of the project’s evaluation.\(^6\) However, as Merriam reminds the researcher, while the triangulated conversation may reveal multiple consistencies, only those that “reflect the purpose of the research” should be noted.\(^7\)

**Nominees’ Need for Discernment**

One of the first clear consistencies among the data streams emerging from this project concerned the nominees’ legitimate need for a period of discernment. Since I based the project on the assumption that candidates required more than a mere week to make their decisions, this theme brought welcome confirmation. The nominees demonstrated from the start, through both their actions and their comments, a sincere desire to participate in this process.

As a consistent indicator of their eagerness, the men arrived faithfully on time to the group sessions. The sessions were scheduled to start at 6:45 p.m. each Wednesday night, and (amazingly) all nominees were present and ready by 6:50 p.m. every week. This proved noteworthy, as a typical Wednesday night at Cinco Ranch finds adult class members still streaming into their 7:00 classes at 7:15 or 7:20. Thus for this discernment class to start fifteen minutes earlier than normal and to have every participant present and on time provided a resounding affirmation of the nominees’ desire to engage in this process, especially considering the fact that most of these men were coming straight from work.\(^8\)

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\(^6\) Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods*, 162.

\(^7\) Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 183.

\(^8\) Over the course of the six weeks, several men expressed appreciation for the snacks, specifically because they had been unable to eat supper prior to attending.
Interestingly, the legitimacy of this theme was most evident on the evening of the nominees’ group interview. On that particular Wednesday only three nominees arrived on time. It took another ten minutes for everyone to finally gather. Perhaps the men were simply running late, yet their demeanor that night seemed to indicate a more lackadaisical approach to the interview session. As per the selection schedule, the nominees had made their decisions final during the previous weekend, and the notes from the interview session evening reflect much more joking among the men, including several comments about the lack of “pressure.” In this more relaxed atmosphere I caught a glimpse of the seriousness with which these men had treated the previous six weeks of discernment. Sensing a legitimate need for serious reflection on their nomination, these men had given far more than a token participation.

Quite possibly the addition of a formalized discernment phase heightened this sense of pressure. The congregation’s expectation of these men to enter into six weeks of reflection may have magnified the weight of their decision. Regardless, their willingness to engage completely throughout the process indicates an awareness of their personal responsibility to give due consideration to the congregation’s nomination. The shepherds also confirmed this need for discernment. One shepherd specifically mentioned in his written evaluation that this process allowed nominees the time to “think through” their nomination.

Beyond the time factor, overt comments and conversations also demonstrated the nominees’ need for discernment, especially in the first session. After opening comments and individual introductions, I led the group through Siburt’s “Possible Hesitations of Nominees.” The field notes indicate clear signs of identification and agreement with the
various hesitations listed. In fact, I made the observation in the notes that use of this list seemed to release a considerable amount of tension. The nominees came into that first session not yet knowing what to expect. They found themselves in a group with other men in the same situation, all having received the congregation’s nomination; but until that evening, many of them did not even know the entire list of nominees, so the initial meeting held several unknowns. Siburt’s list of hesitations provided them with a non-threatening way to address common areas of concern. Instead of forcing the men to confess their own concerns to a newly formed group, the list raised common issues in a general manner. In essence, it offered the nominees a chance to discover the normalcy of their trepidation.

The conversation sparked by this list continued to confirm the relief engendered by the sharing of general hesitations among shepherd nominees. One nominee indicated his concern about finding balance and received multiple affirming non-verbal responses from the rest of the group. Another nominee expressed his fear of long meetings. Comments in later sessions echoed this sentiment as well; the time factor was clearly a significant issue, especially as it related to the family. One individual described his concern for placing too much pressure on his family in light of his own upbringing as the son of a preacher. Another man indicated later, in the nominees’ interview, that his biggest concern all along had to do with his family. Such comments confirmed the desire of these men to address specific concerns before agreeing to serve as shepherds.

Past experience also surfaced as a reason for concern. One individual who had endured a church split as the result of disagreement among a shepherding group conveyed his own fear of sharing such responsibility. One of the shepherds offered a
different perspective by sharing his perception regarding the impossibility of living up to past leaders. Again, this comment received an overwhelmingly positive non-verbal response from the group.

The nominees seemed genuinely surprised that the congregation had selected them as potential shepherds. One individual jokingly said his initial thought was, “Am I being punk’d?” Amazingly, each man could understand why everyone else in the room had been nominated. They could see the leadership qualities in others but were perplexed to find themselves in the same company. One nominee even used the word “uncomfortable” to describe his initial response to the nomination. Another man shared doubts about his biblical knowledge as well as his ability to lead. These comments confirmed that part of the self-assessment process involved an undue comparison with those perceived as “ideal” leaders, and they pointed conclusively to the need for a formalized time of discernment, one in which we could discuss realistic expectations of church leaders.

**Shared Experience**

Triangulating the data sources also highlighted the positive perception of the shared experience. Because these men all faced the same prospect of potentially serving as shepherds, they developed a genuine sense of camaraderie over the course of the discernment phase. The field notes reflect a consistent theme regarding the small group discussions. In three of the sessions, I utilized break-out groups for the nominees to interact with Ephesians 4:11-16 through the practice of *lectio divina*. Each of these field notes indicates the small group time was well received. In fact, my notes reflect multiple descriptions of the intensity of the discussions as well as the groups’ ability to stay on
topic. I almost expected the groups at some point to drift toward other conversations, especially given the interest many of these men have in sports. However, my notes consistently reflect the seriousness with which these men engaged in their discussions. At one point, I even made the observation that compared to the large group interactions this small group time seemed to have the best potential for honest input from the nominees.

Unfortunately, this time also proved the hardest to record. Kyle’s role as a participant observer worked well during the large group sessions because he had only one conversation to follow. However, when we broke into groups, he essentially needed to monitor six different discussion groups. Apart from his own difficulty of observing each cluster, his presence as an observer also created an interesting dynamic for the groups. Whereas Kyle could blend into the large group setting, these smaller groups accentuated his presence as a note taker. In fact, when Kyle walked by particular groups, participants jokingly told him to “be sure to get this in your notes.”

Despite these logistical difficulties, participant observation served this project well, as Kyle, too, observed at various times the ways in which camaraderie developed among these men. At one point, he wrote, “The group is starting to band together, working with each other, encouraging one another, and opening up freely.” Later he indicated he could see a “huge shift in the confidence of these men.” He referred to their “positive attitudes” and said he could “see it in their postures and hear it in their voices.”

The men clearly benefited from the shared experience, which they confirmed in their own interviews. Within their written questionnaires several emphasized their positive assessment of the group discussions, commenting on the value of meeting with “others like me” or the fact that they were “going to miss the sessions” once the
discernment phase had concluded. During the group interview, one nominee expressed how he was helped by simply knowing others were dealing with the same concerns regarding their decision. Another appreciated the encouragement he received from the rest of the group.

The current shepherds, too, noticed this dynamic at work among the nominees and confirmed it through their interviews. One shepherd mentioned the benefit of allowing the men to share with each other. Another recognized the encouragement gained by nominees in discovering they were not the only ones experiencing fears and concerns. Thus all three angles of evaluation indicate that the discernment phase clearly provided nominees with an opportunity to build camaraderie through a shared experience.

Slippages

By using three angles of perspective, the researcher intends to overcome the limitation of a single point of view. Triangulation reveals more than just consistencies; it broadens the evaluation and enables the researcher to identify not only themes but slippages. As Sensing indicates, “Slippage asks, ‘What is not congruent in the data? What is contradictory in nature?’”9

Because this methodology assesses the quality of a particular experience, such inconsistencies help rather than harm the evaluative process. Instead of undermining a project’s legitimacy, slippages offer a richer understanding of the project’s impact. Patton indicates the purpose of triangulation is not to demonstrate agreement but to “test for such consistency” and proposes that “inconsistencies ought not be viewed as weakening

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9 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 126.
the credibility of results, but rather as offering opportunities for deeper insight.”\textsuperscript{10} As he states in another work, “It is best not to expect everything to turn out the same. The point is to study and understand when and why there are differences.”\textsuperscript{11}

**Angles of Discernment**

The divergent assessments regarding our discussions on the theological foundations of shepherding provide a good example of insight gained from slippage. As outlined in chapter 2, the theological portion of this project stemmed strictly from Ephesians 4:11-16. Our large discussions as well as small group times reflected solely on this passage, specifically focusing on three angles of discernment—source, function, and goal.

Some participants viewed this focus positively. In the written portion of their evaluations, one nominee used the phrase “helped tremendously,” and another nominee explained that “focusing on the three angles helped me to see how God’s plan for the church included giving the church leaders to accomplish his plan.” Likewise, the shepherds echoed such sentiments as to their own impression of these theological foundations. One wrote that it helped him “think about more ways to be effective.” Another shared that the discussion helped him “see [that] the role of a shepherd really should be focused on helping the flock.”

Based on my field notes, I can confirm as well a positive perception of the theological discussions. As previously mentioned, I noticed each week a definite intensity to the participants’ approach to their time in small groups, a willingness to interact intimately with Ephesians 4 and seriously explore the implications of the passage for

\textsuperscript{10} Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 248.

\textsuperscript{11} Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods*, 161.
their own discernment process. At one point in my notes, I made the comment, “It is
good to anchor the class in one specific passage.” During the nominees’ interview, one
individual asked me directly, “How did you come up with the idea to use Ephesians 4?”
He indicated he had always thought of the passage as describing a hierarchy of leadership
and was impressed to discover the insight it offered into the source, function, and goal of
church leaders.

More than any other idea revealed in this passage, nominees and shepherds alike
continued to refer to the significance of source in Ephesians 4. The field notes describe a
substantial moment when the group discovered the concept that Jesus gives the gift of
leaders to his church. Nominees repeated this thought in subsequent weeks as a pivotal
discovery. In his written evaluation, one nominee wrote that this was “most impactful” to
him, even calling it “transformational.” In a similar fashion, one of the shepherds wrote
that the most profound change for his thinking occurred when he realized “leaders are
God’s gifts.” During the second group interview, another shepherd used the phrase
“blown away” to describe his personal reaction to the concept of leadership as revealed in
Ephesians 4.

I hesitate, however, to read too much into these observations. While all three
angles certainly confirm a level of effectiveness in regard to using Ephesians 4:11-16 to
establish theological foundations of shepherding, other comments temper this sense of
success. Interviews with both the nominees and the shepherds revealed concern that the
class had ignored “other leadership Scriptures.” One nominee thought “we stuck to one
series of Scriptures too long” and that we should have “more in-depth study of a variety
of Scriptures.” One shepherd indicated his surprise that we never discussed the more
traditional elder passages, such as 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9. He said he liked what we did, but he felt we “should not ignore them altogether.”

Furthermore, while some participants experienced a positive impact from the theological discussions, others indicated they experienced little shift in their thinking. In answering the evaluative question, “How has this process impacted your theological understanding of serving as a shepherd?” one nominee stated frankly, “Not much.” He did go on to offer the caveat that it at least “confirmed things [he] had been thinking for quite some time.”

Another nominee wrote, “It did not cause a huge ‘change’ in my thinking; it simply clarified it and improved my understanding.” Others echoed similar sentiments, stating that it “reinforced my thinking” or that they already “understood it fairly well.” One of the shepherds, as well, used only the terms “improved” and “reinforced” to describe his perception of the theological conversations. Finally, one nominee referred to the group discussions, stating that he “enjoyed the process from a standpoint of hearing the other men give their thoughts,” but he went on to say, “I do not think it impacted or changed my theological understanding.”

While such discrepancies could appear alarming, I think some reasonable explanations exist. In hindsight, I realize I asked a broad evaluative question that ultimately allowed for a wide range of responses. Rather than honing the question to target the impact of the angles of discernment or the singular use of Ephesians 4:11-16, I asked only about the impact of the process on the “theological understanding of serving as a shepherd.” The open-ended nature of the question allowed for a variety of interpretations concerning what I was asking them to personally measure. Thus when one
nominee responded with “transformational” and another with “not much,” I cannot be certain they were speaking to the same issue. A more targeted question might have produced more consistent responses, or at least ones that could allow for more accurate comparison.

Furthermore, in light of the project’s purpose, I should not be surprised by the nominees’ divergent feedback about the impact of the process on their theological understanding. My aim was not to impart profound biblical knowledge or convey new scriptural revelation about shepherding. Instead, I primarily designed this project to offer multiple angles of exposure so that nominees could make informed decisions regarding their willingness to serve. Theological foundations of shepherding comprised one such angle, but I also utilized discussions regarding the practical expression of shepherding at Cinco Ranch, as well as shepherd mentoring relationships. Nominees would naturally find connection with some components more than others. Not once in the feedback did nominees or shepherds disparage the use of Ephesians 4; they simply varied in their perceptions of how much it impacted their own discernment process.

Leadership Discussions

Triangulation revealed another slippage pertaining to the leadership discussions. In addition to providing a theological basis for shepherding, the project exposed nominees to the practical expression of leadership at Cinco Ranch through conversations with shepherds and through the presentation of guiding documents. In the written portion of their evaluation, several nominees referred to the documents in particular as helpful to their discernment process. One nominee wrote that it was beneficial to “see the documents that already exist that define the covenants and agreements under which the
shepherds operate.” Another nominee echoed this sentiment by describing this practical information as “critical to know upfront.”

During the group interview, when asked about the impact of the process on their practical understanding of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch, one nominee answered immediately by referring to the leadership documents. He said the leadership model “cleared up how they operate,” and the leadership covenant “showed an atmosphere of humility and openness.” Because of their value to his discernment, he later suggested making these documents available earlier in the process, possibly in a resource binder. Interestingly, neither my field notes nor the shepherds’ interview contain any mention of the significance of these leadership documents. However, as members of the leadership team, we were both already familiar with the documents and, therefore, probably overlooked their impact on the discernment process.

Besides the documents, group sessions also included intentional conversations with shepherds to convey the practical side of leadership at Cinco Ranch. In the fifth session, I facilitated an interview with the shepherds in which I asked them to share their own experiences as shepherds at Cinco Ranch. At one point in my field notes, I wrote, “It was helpful for nominees to hear that the shepherds had wrestled with some of the same concerns they themselves have.”

The shepherds’ assessment of the group sessions also focused on the positive nature of these practical discussions. One shepherd commented on the “relaxed, conducive atmosphere.” Another noted the lack of pressure placed on the nominees and the benefits of a “non-lecture format.” Echoing this sentiment, yet another shepherd stated, “We weren’t trying to make the ‘hard sell’ but were simply giving information,
offering direction.” Thus, from the standpoint of those in leadership, these practical conversations conveyed a non-threatening, informative description of leadership at Cinco Ranch.

However, some nominees offered a contrary perspective in their evaluation of these practical conversations. They sensed some ulterior motives in these interactions. For instance, one nominee used the term “cheer-leading” to convey his impression of the discussions, and another went even further, describing his interpretation of them as a “sales-pitch.” In my field notes for the fifth session, I even made the observation that one shepherd’s comments “shifted to more of an appeal.”

One individual wrote that he wished he could have heard about “some of the prior struggles” and “how they found the answer.” Another nominee stated that he had gained an “idea of the challenges but did not really know for certain.” To their credit, the shepherds acknowledged this gap as well in their interview; one man wondered if we “should have looked at tough discussions in class.” They, too, recognized the need for nominees to understand that shepherding involves making hard decisions.

However, given only a six-week discernment phase, such a slippage might be expected. Time constraints did not allow for an in-depth look at the intricacies of leadership at Cinco Ranch. At best, these discussions could only offer a general glimpse. One nominee captured this dilemma well when he wrote that the practical conversations were “beneficial” but he “still finds it hard to grasp all the practicalities until in the role.”

Shepherd Mentoring Relationships

While exploring theological foundations of shepherding and considering its practical expression at Cinco Ranch certainly played a role in the nominees’ discernment
process, the project involved more than the imparting of cognitive information. Due to
the personal nature of this decision, shepherd mentoring relationships provided nominees
with pastoral care by offering them the opportunity to converse privately with one
particular shepherd and ask questions that might not arise during the group sessions.
Since these relationships included their wives, the mentoring also allowed couples to
maneuver through the discernment process together.

Because these interactions occurred outside the group sessions, the field notes
offer no evaluative perspective. However, the interviews with the nominees and
shepherds exposed a substantial slippage in the assessments of these mentoring
relationships. One shepherd affirmed their value by calling them a “necessary part of the
process,” and another termed them the “most helpful part.” During the nominees’
interview, on the other hand, one of the respondents stated that his mentoring relationship
was “non-existent” and another wrote “It did not happen.” One of these men explained
that his shepherd-mentor had been out of town on business for much of the discernment
phase, and the shepherd in question confirmed this during the shepherd interview by
assessing his own mentoring with the description “didn’t do very well due to travel.”

Even among those shepherds who fulfilled their commitments of meeting with
their nominees, some expressed doubts about the effectiveness of their relationships. One
shepherd shared his surprise at being asked “less about relationships and more about time
commitments” by the two men he mentored. Two other shepherds verbalized personal
regret, stating they wished they had “met more often” or taken the chance for “more
interaction.” One of the nominees expressed similar regret, saying that he “should have
used [his] mentor more by calling and discussing [his] thoughts throughout.”
By the end of the shepherd’s interview, I was curious whether part of this issue stemmed from the fact that each shepherd had maintained multiple mentoring relationships during the course of this process. However, they assured me that this had not been a problem. While I was relieved that they had not felt overwhelmed, I commented in my interview notes that I was “somewhat surprised by their response given the fact that some of the nominees expressed a desire for more involvement.”

Therefore, as I consider this slippage, I recognize the need for clearer expectations. What are these relationships intended to accomplish? Such a conversation could help shepherds and nominees alike in knowing what to expect and how to take advantage of this intentional pastoral care. In fact, both nominees and shepherds independently expressed a desire for more structure to these mentoring meetings. They requested a “guide for discussion” or at least some “prompted questions,” rather than an open-ended dialogue.

I also wonder about the method used to pair nominees with their shepherd mentors. As explained in chapter 3, upon conclusion of the nomination phase, the shepherds evenly distributed the nominees among themselves. They attempted to match mentors and mentees by taking into account previous personal relationships. However, some nominees indicated a slippage in this process, too. One offered the suggestion “to allow nominees to choose their mentors.” Even as another nominee affirmed his respect for his mentor, he stated in the group interview that “it would have been nice to meet with other shepherd mentors,” a comment that received a positive non-verbal response from

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12 Due to the number of potential shepherds identified by the congregation, each shepherding couple mentored two nominee couples.
others as well. Therefore, I recognize the need to engage both shepherds and nominees in
the process of establishing shepherd mentoring relationships.

On the other hand, nominees and shepherds alike agreed on the value of these
mentoring relationships for the nominees’ wives. Several nominees attested in their
written evaluations to the impact of these meetings on their spouses. One indicated he
could not have accepted his nomination without his wife’s support, then wrote, “Her
approval came after the time spent with our mentor two-on-two with his wife.” The
shepherds confirmed these assessments in their interview by stating that the “wives
seemed to get more from the mentoring relationships.” One shepherd shared his
perception that wives had two concerns: the expectations placed on shepherds and the
expectations placed on shepherd’s wives. Therefore, while the evaluation reveals some
slippage in regard to the shepherd mentoring, these relationships still provided significant
pastoral care for the nominee couples.

Silences

With silences, a researcher attempts to address the apparent gaps reflected by the
triangulated data. As Sensing indicates, the overarching question is, “What is left unsaid
that needs to be examined?” Like themes and slippages, silences offer significant
insight for a project’s assessment. Yet such gaps prove difficult to pinpoint because the
very techniques used to code and organize the data now create a limitation, making it
difficult for the researcher to see the data through any other framework.

The most apparent silence within this intervention involved the minimal reference
to nominees’ children. A surprising three-quarters of the participants had children—

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13 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 126.

14 Ibid., 127.
ranging in age from twelve to eighteen—still living at home, and in the opening session’s discussion of possible hesitations, nominees certainly made general references to family pressures; some even specified their need for spousal approval. However, in reviewing my field notes, the nominees’ interview, and the interview with the shepherds, I found no overt comments regarding the significance of children to this discernment process.

The closest the group came to discussing this issue was in the fifth session, when a nominee who has no children at home asked the shepherds about this issue. He indicated he simply asked on behalf of those with children because he assumed they would have concerns about how to balance this aspect of shepherding. It took his question to alert me, the researcher, to this silence that had existed throughout our discernment process. In designing the project, I had accounted for the spouse’s perspective, but I had not considered addressing the needs of the entire family. According to the field notes and interviews, I was not alone in this oversight. Had it not been for this comment by a nominee who did not even have children at home any more, the issue could have gone completely unnoticed and undiscussed. In fact, when he did ask this question, none of the nominees immediately responded; he finally singled out a particular nominee and asked him outright how he intended to handle the nomination in light of his children still living at home.

While the failure to mention issues related to children certainly qualifies as a silence within the project, it does not necessarily reflect poorly on the nominees and their concern for their children. Undoubtedly, each nominee with children still living at home wrestled with these questions personally as well as with their spouses. Subtle comments were made throughout the sessions concerning the pressures nominees felt to balance
family needs. Even without overt mention of children, such comments indicate each man’s heartfelt desire to take his entire family’s needs into consideration.

Furthermore, conversations of this nature may well have occurred in the context of the mentoring relationships. One shepherd who still has children living at home would have been a prime resource for nominees to approach in a more personal setting. Therefore I interpret this silence as simply a good indication of the multi-faceted nature of discernment rather than a cause for alarm about a lack of concern for the impact of shepherding on children. Nominees confront a wide variety of concerns as they discern their willingness to serve, including marriage, family, career, and spiritual development issues. A lack of reference to any one of these in particular may simply serve as a reminder that this decision permeates every aspect of a nominee’s life and as further confirmation of the dire need for those nominated in a shepherd selection process to receive appropriate time for proper reflection and discernment.

Project Alterations

Not all of the men identified by the congregation as potential shepherds proceeded through the entirety of the project. One man removed himself from the process before the discernment class started. After much prayer and reflection, as well as conversations with his wife, he determined regardless of what transpired during the discernment phase that he would not accept the congregation’s nomination. Although honored to have his name proposed and genuinely interested in the future of Cinco Ranch, he concluded he could better serve the congregation in a less formal capacity. In a letter declining the opportunity, he indicated that at “almost 74 years old” he felt his time “to serve as an elder had passed.” His willingness to continue through the process for the sake of the
other nominees further indicated the purity of heart with which he approached the decision. I assured him such participation would not be necessary and thanked him for the willingness to take his nomination so seriously.

Another nominee began the process but was unable to complete it. When I made the initial phone calls to nominees, this individual agreed to participate but indicated his job might require him to travel during the course of the project; he did, in fact, miss five of the six sessions due to job responsibilities. Even though I provided him with the audio and video of each session, in the end, he felt too disconnected from the group experience to fully relate. He contacted me before the nominee’s interview to indicate he would prefer to remove himself from the project’s evaluation.

His inability to attend all the sessions highlights another project alteration, namely the recording of all group sessions. As outlined in chapter 3, I used this means to account for the limitation posed by participants’ absences. Following each session, I converted the recorded data into both an audio and a video format and made it available for any absentee to review. ¹⁵ To ensure each nominee and shepherd stayed current with our group discussions, I made these disks available on the Sunday following each session, often handing the disks to the men myself at the Sunday morning worship service. During the nominees’ interview, I asked about the value of these recordings, specifically if they were indeed utilized. The group confirmed their usefulness, and one nominee in particular expressed his appreciation for having the option in case he missed a session.

¹⁵ I am indebted to the technical skills of Doug Robinson to make this data conversion possible each week.
Project Improvements

In the interviews with the nominees and shepherds, I asked the men to propose improvements to this process. While some suggestions were random, consistent themes surfaced from both groups. As mentioned above, some participants suggested providing a binder with materials pertinent to the sessions. They envisioned this binder being available from the beginning and containing not only leadership documents but also reflection questions for each session and any outside readings. I understood this request to be an indication of the nominees’ desire to fully engage in this discernment process.

The nominees offered valuable insight into their relationships with one another when they expressed a desire for more time together. One nominee wrote in his evaluation that he would like to see “a little more sharing time from the nominees.” Two others proposed holding a session without the shepherds to allow for a peer-based discussion about their discernment. At the time of the evaluation, the nominees had already finalized their decisions about shepherding, and one of the men who had accepted his candidacy indicated that “knowing what others were thinking and going to do proved to be an important factor in deciding.” He went on to say, “I didn’t want to be the only one who decided to proceed.” Comments such as these spoke to the camaraderie that formed among these men as they journeyed through this process together.

In their evaluation, the shepherds suggested more intentional opportunities for the spouses. One wrote frankly, “We need to involve the wives.” Another proposed offering a group session devoted to wives, allowing them “to meet and discuss their fears and concerns.” During the group interview with nominees, one participant expressed his concern that he “felt like [his] wife was on the outside looking in.” In response, someone
suggested we “offer a similar class for spouses, at least something more official than mentoring.” Such comments confirm that the decision to serve as a shepherd extends beyond the nominee’s personal considerations. Discernment happens as a couple. Therefore a formalized discernment phase should indeed include opportunities for both the husband and the wife to explore the implications of serving as a shepherd.

In considering the overall flow of the project, one other observation proves noteworthy. While not exactly an alteration, it certainly offers perspective to the evaluation. A scenario arose unique to Cinco Ranch’s prior shepherd selection experiences in which a nominee fully participated in the discernment phase and determined his willingness to serve, only to then face a congregational objection. Certainly the situation fell outside the scope of this project, and the shepherds, along with assistance from the selection team, provided the necessary leadership through the objection process. However, in light of the interview with both the nominees and the shepherds—specifically their comments regarding the study of other passages beyond Ephesians 4—I sensed the legitimacy of this slippage. While an intentional emphasis on passages in 1 Timothy and Titus would not have avoided this congregational objection, it could certainly have prepared both the shepherds and the nominee to deal with the questions raised by the objection. If Cinco Ranch opts to include this discernment phase in future selection processes, I will make the appropriate curriculum addition of exploring other shepherding passages.

Results of the Project

Triangulation offers the researcher valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a project. Avoiding a myopic perspective, this technique expands a
researcher’s assessment beyond biases and assumptions. Engaging data sources in a triangulated conversation provides an evaluation with “breadth and depth”\textsuperscript{16} as the interaction reveals themes, slippages, and silences. Accordingly, a researcher gains a richer, thicker understanding of a project’s results.

Contributions to the Discernment Process

The foregoing triangulated conversation highlights several components that proved beneficial to nominees throughout the discernment process. First, by creating an intentional period of time for reflection, this formalized phase avoided rushing nominees to a decision. One of the shepherds commented to me after the first session that “everyone seemed relaxed and at ease” and that “we were indeed able to create an environment without overt pressure.” Later in their evaluations, other shepherds echoed this perception of a “relaxed atmosphere” and an “open, honest, trusting environment.” One shepherd expressed his impression that the discernment phase helped nominees in that it “allowed for an informed decision.”

Nominees seemed to confirm this perception with their own comments. One wrote that he had “ample time to reflect.” During the group interview, someone asked, “How do you get to “yes” in a shorter amount of time?” In his written evaluation, this same nominee indicated that he “would’ve been an automatic ‘no’” but the class gave him “time to learn, share, pray, and ask for help.” In the end, he said with confidence, “I feel better about my decision.”

The project also contributed to nominees’ discernment by providing an opportunity for these men to identify with others facing the same decision. As they stated in various settings, they found it “good to hear the same struggles” or to know they had

\textsuperscript{16} Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 54.
the “same fears.” Even though each man ultimately made an individual decision regarding his own candidacy, the group demonstrated through their comments as well as their consistent commitment to the class a desire for this communal component.

Besides connecting with other nominees, this discernment phase also allowed the development of relationships with the shepherds. Through both group sessions and mentoring relationships, the nominees gained a glimpse of future service as a shepherd by interacting with those already serving in that capacity. In the discussions on the practical aspects of shepherding, I noticed an impressive dynamic when one nominee expressed his concern about balancing time and the shepherds gently reassured him as they spoke from their own experience. Later, one nominee shared his perception that shepherding “seems more manageable.” In another evaluation, one of the shepherds spoke directly to this dynamic when he wrote, “The interaction between the prospective shepherds and those currently serving was invaluable.” A nominee confirmed this impression when he acknowledged the value of the theological and practical components, yet emphasized, “Beyond that, I was able to see a deeper side of others involved in the process. I have a better understanding of how the ministers, current shepherds, and future shepherds comprehend the Bible, the church, and their relationship with God.”

Finally, the evaluations reveal the positive perception of the biblical perspective presented in this formalized phase. Even though opinions varied on the degree to which the angles of discernment impacted nominees’ theological understanding of shepherding, the attempt to ground the process in Ephesians 4:11-16 proved beneficial. As discussed in chapter 2, I intended through this project to help nominees frame their nominations
within the parameters of Scripture because only in this framework would nominees discover the necessary “interpretive tools for discerning” their nominations.\(^\text{17}\)

Therefore, the goal of the biblical discussions was not necessarily the imparting of new knowledge, as if one particular verse would magically lead to immediate discernment. Rather, these conversations served to remind participants that their nominations involved more than the human element, that the process was more than a congregational election. As the passage revealed, Jesus gives leaders to his church. Therefore, in their discernment, they needed to consider this divine component as well.

Such awareness led one nominee to acknowledge the benefits of this biblical perspective by writing “All I need to do is trust God as he will use us to build up the church.” Even those who indicated that these discussions only “confirmed” or “reinforced” their thinking recognized the benefit. One wrote, “It brought new items to the surface and helped me realize what I already knew.” Another nominee stated, “What I knew before was correct, but it was not nearly deep enough.” Therefore, the project also contributed to nominees’ discernment by emphasizing the intersection of their decision with specific teaching from Scripture.

Effectiveness of the Intervention

When asked what effect this intervention had on their process of discernment, nominees insisted it made a significant impact.\(^\text{18}\) Several men indicated that without this process, they would have immediately declined their nomination. One wrote, “I would have been an automatic ‘no,’” while another stated, “Without this project, I might have

\(^\text{17}\) Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 31.

\(^\text{18}\) In order to evaluate the legitimacy of such a response, I must account for the Hawthorne effect. I will take up this task in ch. 5.
taken ‘another pass’ without sitting back and taking into account my invitation [by] the
church to serve.” Others described the process as “greatly beneficial” and “very helpful.”
They indicated the process gave them “specific areas to focus on” and “helped them
understand God’s perspective in a new and better way.” Another nominee said, “This
made me think more deeply about my nomination and my responsibilities as a church
member.”

Several participants compared this experience with their nomination in the 2008
selection process. One nominee called the process “very valuable” and then wrote, “Last
time, the decision was less thorough. This [project] forced me to think about it, to take
time to consider a passage and how it related to my decision.” Another said, “Having
been nominated the previous time, I had to seek out counsel and input on my own. I like
this structured, non-pressure approach.”

The shepherds echoed such sentiments when answering how this project impacted
the nominees they mentored. One described the group sessions as a “powerful study.”
Another offered his assessment that the “material covered and the time to reflect helped
them make an informed decision.” Yet another insisted, “I believe it changed their lives.”
Furthermore, the shepherds affirmed the value of this phase for all the nominees, not only
for those who accepted their nominations. Two shepherds specifically stated that their
mentees who declined their candidacy still benefited from the project and expressed a
desire to serve in the future.

Not only do such comments affirm the impact of this project on nominees’
discernment; they also confirm the efficacy of inserting a discernment phase into Cinco
Ranch’s shepherd selection process. As mentioned above, some nominees spoke to the
effectiveness of this process based on their previous experience of having been nominated without a formalized discernment phase. The shepherds recognized this effectiveness as well as they reflected on their own past nominations. One man indicated he would “be a better shepherd today” if he had gone through such a process. Another stated, “It would have made my decision a much more informed one.” One shepherd even wrote, “I might have said ‘yes’ earlier.”

Therefore, the insertion of a discernment phase into the shepherd selection process proved a viable strategy. Nominees further confirmed this by alluding to a seriousness instilled by the formalized phase. Because they were expected to participate, they recognized the need not to take their nomination lightly. In the group interview, one nominee stated, “My nomination is not a fluke. Something bigger is going on.” Another nominee echoed this perception when he said, “I realized we are wanted. It is harder to take a pass on this process.” Thus more than assisting nominees in their discernment, this formalized phase communicated to nominees the need for serious reflection.

I concluded the evaluation by asking both nominees and shepherds whether this process should be repeated in future selection processes at Cinco Ranch, and every participant answered affirmatively. Nominees used phrases such as “absolute must,” “enthusiastically recommend,” “definitely keep,” and “absolutely vital.” Likewise, shepherds made comments stating it “should be a part of all shepherd selections going forward,” and “I support one hundred percent continuing this type of class.” Therefore, while I acknowledge the presence of slippages and the need for improvements, I am certain that this project positively impacted nominees as they discerned their willingness to serve as shepherds at Cinco Ranch.
Conclusion

Triangulation proved useful for a qualitative project of this nature. Rather than relying on the limited perspectives of both Kyle and me as participant observers, I solicited the evaluative input of both the nominees and the shepherds. I secured these data sources in the form of field notes and group interviews, then established a triangulated conversation among these perspectives. This interaction highlighted both consistencies and incongruities, enabling me to identify themes, slippages, and silences. Through reflection on both the overlaps and divergences, I gained a richer, thicker understanding of the impact of this formalized discernment phase on the participants’ decision-making process. Equipped with this knowledge, I now move to the task of exploring the implications of this project for Cinco Ranch as well as other potential contexts.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Because Cinco Ranch lacked a formalized discernment phase for those nominated in its shepherd selection process, this project involved an intentional strategy to help nominees determine their willingness to serve. Incorporating group discussions as well as shepherd mentoring relationships, the intervention provided a multi-faceted approach to discernment. The group discussions offered nominees an overview of church leadership by exploring the theological foundations of shepherding as well as its practical expression at Cinco Ranch. The mentoring relationships paired a nominee with a shepherd and allowed the nominee, along with his spouse, to interact with another couple already serving in a shepherding capacity. By design, then, the project’s primary goal was to ensure each nominee received ample time and appropriate care as he reflected on his opportunity to serve as a shepherd.

In the previous chapter, I presented the data compiled through the use of field notes and of group interviews with both the shepherds and the nominees. Utilizing a triangulated conversation among these data sources, I identified themes, slippages, and silences. Through reflection on these consistencies and incongruities, I drew conclusions as to the effectiveness of the intervention, namely that it did indeed assist nominees in their discernment process. The purpose of this chapter is to consider the implications of the intervention. If an accurate assessment of its effectiveness has been made, how then does the project impact the future of Cinco Ranch, both the congregation and its
leadership? Furthermore, does the project contain the potential to impact other contexts as well? Using a model adapted from Timothy Sensing’s work, I will explore the trustworthiness and the significance of the project as well as final considerations raised by the intervention.¹

**Trustworthiness**

Since I intended through the project to facilitate discernment for nominees rather than solicit a specific decision, I opted for a qualitative instead of a quantitative methodology. When a researcher evaluates using qualitative techniques, the researcher must be able to demonstrate that readers can “trust the findings.”² Even though it utilizes more subjective evaluative tools, qualitative research does not “water down the standards of rigor and precision.”³ Therefore, the researcher must filter any assessments through intentional reflection and scrutiny. Sensing proposes four categories of consideration, namely credibility, dependability, reflexivity, and applicability. In the end, Sensing acknowledges that while no “truth test” exists for qualitative methodology, a researcher can secure readers’ confidence through meticulous and transparent reflection.⁴

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¹ For a detailed explanation of this approach, see Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 133-45. In describing methods for determining the implications of a doctor of ministry project, Sensing develops the broad categories of trustworthiness and significance. To better define his understanding of these two categories, he utilizes various terms that differ slightly but are essentially synonymous. While cautious to avoid repetition, I have chosen to use his terms to draw out specific angles of consideration as I explore the implications of this project.

² Ibid., 134.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.
Credibility

Credibility asks the question “Does the study measure what it was supposed to measure?”\(^5\) A qualitative project must remain true to its original intent. For instance, the purpose of this project extended beyond merely increasing the number of shepherds at Cinco Ranch. The goal was to allow each nominee the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding his willingness to serve as a shepherd. Thus the project’s purpose set the direction for the methodology and its evaluation. Measuring the effectiveness of this project based solely on the number who accepted their nominations would not only be irrelevant but disingenuous to the project’s aim. All nominees were given the opportunity to engage in a formalized process. Therefore, whether each man discerned a negative or an affirmative response to his nomination, the means of structuring and evaluating the project needed to align with its design.

For this reason, a discernment strategy involving the use of group discussions and mentoring relationships proved appropriate. Undoubtedly, the evaluation revealed slippages: some nominees described the theological discussions as “transformational,” while others attested to relatively no change in their thinking; some shepherds insisted the mentoring relationships were the “most helpful” part of the process, yet certain nominees described the relationships as “non-existent”; both nominees and shepherds indicated a need for spouses to have more engagement and interaction with the discernment process.

Nevertheless the methodology remains viable. Developing a formalized phase did not, in fact, require the establishment of a comprehensive process, one that would connect with every need of every individual. The very nature of discernment assumes it to be

\(^5\) Ibid., 136.
multifaceted. Each nominee entered the process with his own set of discernment needs; thus the need for refinements and improvements to the model was to be expected.

In addition to taking advantage of mentoring relationships and communal discussions on both the theological and practical aspects of shepherding, nominees undoubtedly engaged in discernment practices outside this formalized process, perhaps including personal prayer time or soliciting the advice of other respected voices. The discernment process proved larger than any single component. Thus even though it was not perfect, the project utilized a methodology well-suited for its intent to provide intentional pastoral care during a specific season of time in the nominees’ lives.

As for evaluation, triangulation provided appropriately diverse measurement concerning the effectiveness of the intervention. In fact, those who participated in this process created natural angles for evaluation. My observations, along with those of Kyle, recorded in the form of field notes, obviously provided the perspective of the researcher, and nominees assured an accurate insider’s view. The shepherds, though, offered the most complete angle due to their experience as shepherds coupled with their past identification as nominees. Not only could they evaluate the project as outsiders; they could also identify with the nominees as former insiders to the discernment experience. Furthermore, because they participated in the entirety of the project, from the group discussions to the mentoring relationships, they could accurately assess the value of each component. Thus triangulating all three of these angles allowed for a rich and thick description of the project’s impact on the nominees’ discernment.

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6 The field notes reflect comments in which nominees refer to “other mentors,” whether parents or former shepherds or simply respected individuals.
Finally, the issue of credibility demands a researcher consider the accuracy of the perspectives represented. Fortunately, Kyle’s observations, coupled with my own assessments, provided a precise narrative description of the group sessions in the form of field notes, and the video recordings offered me the chance to clarify any uncertainties. In terms of participant evaluations, the questionnaires coupled with the group interviews proved to be an effective method of gathering feedback; I gained insight into personal perspectives through the written forms and received communal evaluation through the group interaction, thus enhancing the credibility of the data collected.

Dependability

Whereas a researcher considers a project’s strategy to determine issues of credibility, the researcher assesses the project’s implementation to determine its dependability. Were the results of the project limited to a particular time, place, and group of people? In Sensing’s words, “Does it produce similar results under constant conditions on all occasions?” Human behavior is never static, but an external person must be able to audit the research and find a sound path of execution. The auditor may even arrive at different interpretations, but dependability asks, “Was the method properly implemented?”

Reflecting on the discernment phase through this lens, I am confident of the project’s implementation. Although multifaceted in that it addressed theological, practical, and personal needs through group discussions and mentoring relationships, the project embodied a straightforward process. Once I established the strategy for the project, I followed it meticulously, leaving little room for divergence.

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7 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 136.

8 Ibid.
As for the audit trail, I have adequately outlined my methodology, and my evaluations accurately represent the perceptions of those involved. In terms of how an external person might interpret the results, I acknowledge the subjective nature of the project’s goal. How does one precisely determine if discernment has taken place? Furthermore, how can one appropriately measure the quality of that discernment? Because the value of this project ultimately rested in each participant’s personal assessment of his own experience, can I trust their input to evaluate the effectiveness of the project? Is it enough for participants to say it was “helpful” to their discernment? Or would another researcher require more legitimized proof? In order to guard against this concern, I implemented triangulation, not for the sake of proving particular conclusions but rather to strengthen my interpretations by offering multiple perspectives.

Reflexivity

Another key factor for determining the trustworthiness of a project lies in considering issues of reflexivity. Because of a researcher’s primary role in assessing qualitative evaluation, the researcher must consider ways in which personal presence and emotions may have influenced any perceived outcomes. Swinton and Mowat attest to the vital nature of reflexivity when they write that it “is not simply a tool of qualitative research but an integral part of what it actually is.”

The field notes certainly reflect my awareness of this dynamic. In the first session, I recorded a general impression that I was “concerned about time” and that I was “second-guessing my decision to have introductions.” In my notes, I interpreted these comments by writing, “I assume I’m just nervous about the project, hoping it will indeed

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9 Ibid., 139.

10 Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59.
work as planned.” Thus from the beginning I wrestled with my own fears and concerns that the project would falter in certain areas.

In a later session, during the small group discussions, my notes reflect further anxiety over the questions I had written to guide the conversations through the various angles of discernment. At one point, I overheard a group struggling with the wording of a particular question, and another group indicated its confusion by saying, “I think he’s meaning….” In my field notes, I interpreted this lack of clarity by recording, “My struggle seems to be with the practice of guided discovery. I want the group to discover for themselves the relevance of this passage to their situation. However, I also may need to provide better and clearer direction.” In the large group discussion during that same session, I noted that “I got bogged down trying to ask leading questions to draw out” a particular point. In my field notes, I recognized that “I need to ensure my facilitation does not hinder the learning process.” Therefore, my field notes demonstrate my attempt to stay attuned to my personal presence and emotions throughout the project.

As I reflect on this anxiety, I recognize the pressure I placed on myself in trying to balance appropriate roles and interactions with the group. As a minister, I wanted to offer my own pastoral care to these nominees, yet I sensed the need to balance this with my role as a researcher for the project. I wanted to encourage the men in their discernment, affirming the congregation’s confidence in their abilities, but I also wanted to refrain from pressuring the nominees toward a particular decision. I recognized my place as a leader in this process, yet I was also an outsider to the participants’ experience, both the nominees’ and the shepherds’. Finally, I experienced internal conflict over the fact that while many of these participants are my friends, I felt a self-induced pressure to
maintain a certain professional role throughout this process. In the end, these reflexive observations do not necessarily undermine the project’s evaluation; rather, recognizing and acknowledging my personal influence on the process allows me to take this variable into consideration to provide more reliable interpretations.

Once I have taken into account the influence my own thoughts and emotions might have on the evaluation, I must also consider the influence my presence might have exerted on those who participated. Often, in projects of this nature, the congregation’s desire for the minister to succeed actually skews the evaluation. Participants subconsciously magnify the project’s impact in the hopes of securing the minister a better grade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the Hawthorne effect.\footnote{Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 60. For further reading, see Richard Gillespie’s \textit{Manufacturing Knowledge: A History of the Hawthorne Experiments}.} It is imperative, then, for a researcher to reflexively assess this potential influence.

The field notes reflect my awareness of this dynamic. In two separate instances, a shepherd made flattering comments about his perception of the value of the project for nominees. While I appreciated their sentiments and support, I recorded in the field notes, “My only concern is that it doesn’t adversely impact the evaluation, especially in light of the Hawthorne effect.” I went on in my notes to pledge, “When we come to that point, I will be clear in stressing complete candor.” Interestingly, when that conversation did arise during the group interviews, I wondered if I had so emphasized candor that it might have “backfired, as if I were soliciting not just honest feedback but negative.” In the end I concluded that the evaluation questions had been written in such a way that they would “solicit appropriate feedback” despite any verbal or tonal inconsistencies.
Other indicators suggested the presence of the Hawthorne effect. For one thing, I noticed that the participants felt a slight pressure due to the presence of the video camera. Nominees made subtle comments throughout the project about the camera, but I became most aware of this influence on the evening of the nominees’ evaluation when no camera was present. One participant made a joke about how the “pressure’s off,” and two others specifically referred to the lack of a camera and how it eased the pressure they felt.

As previously noted, Kyle’s presence as an observer also heightened the participants’ constant sense that they were being evaluated, especially during the small group discussion times. Because we had as many as six clusters of shepherds and nominees, Kyle had to walk among the groups with clipboard in hand to record the conversations, his presence obvious to the participants. Since I had explained his role in the beginning as a participant observer, the men understood his purpose was to gather evaluative data. The joking comments he received to “be sure to get this in your notes” made the presence of the Hawthorne effect apparent, but such a factor is to be expected in a project of this nature. In fact, reflexivity allows the researcher to acknowledge such influences and to use that knowledge to appropriately temper interpretations.

Applicability

Finally, in determining the trustworthiness of a project, a researcher must consider its applicability. As Sensing defines, this is “the degree to which findings derived from one context may be assumed to apply in other settings.”  

Differing somewhat from significance, in which a researcher will explore actual implications of the project, applicability allows the researcher to assess those aspects of the project unique to a particular setting and those that could be transferred to other contexts.

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12 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 134.
In the case of this project, certain unique components indeed existed. For instance, the specifics of a shepherd selection process vary among congregations. Some groups opt for a nomination phase, while others allow their leaders to identify and appoint new shepherds. Secondly, the frequency with which shepherd selections occur differs from congregation to congregation. Due to rapid growth, Cinco Ranch has developed a pattern of initiating a selection process every two years, which could be more frequent than other settings. In addition, a congregation comprised predominantly of families, such as Cinco Ranch, may have several potential shepherds identified who still have children living at home (as indicated in chapter 4, seventy-five percent of the nominees were in this situation, with some having children as young as sixth grade), while other congregational contexts may have a higher percentage of older nominees. Finally, this project focused solely on potential male shepherds, as distinct from other groups in the broader Christian community that allow for the service of both men and women as shepherds.

Yet despite these unique aspects, the basic components of the project could indeed be transferred to other contexts. Regardless of a congregation’s selection practices, those asked to serve will possess the need to explore similar areas for discernment. Whether nominated by the congregation or selected by the leaders, nominees will wish to explore the theological foundations of church leadership as they contemplate their opportunity. No matter how frequently the congregation appoints new leaders, potential shepherds will want to understand the practical aspects of leadership in their local context, and issues of age and gender will not alter the nominees’ needs to interact with others through mentoring relationships. Thus in spite of certain factors
unique to Cinco Ranch, the project presents a framework with the potential for use in a variety of congregational settings.

**Significance**

Once a researcher deems a project trustworthy, the task shifts to determining its significance. As Sensing indicates, an effective ministry intervention naturally contains “both personal and public” applications.\(^{13}\) These applications may take one of two forms: recommendations or implications. Whereas a minister-leader making recommendations gives bold statements about the project’s significance, implications are “more tentative” and “suit the stance of a researcher.”\(^{14}\) For this reason I have chosen to consider the significance of the discernment phase by proposing specific implications, utilizing as my organizational structure Sensing’s four categories of significance: future significance, personal significance, ecclesial significance, and theological significance.\(^{15}\)

**Future Significance**

One aspect of significance involves determining this project’s implications for future shepherd selections. In Sensing’s words, “What follow-up activities or action plans are needed to sustain the changes?”\(^{16}\) Based on the overwhelming recommendation for its continued use, I must consider what steps to take in order to ensure its future duplication. Initially, I will need the approval of the shepherding group to include this phase in the next selection, but because the nominees and shepherds initiated this recommendation, I can assume that component to be in place. Next, I will need to secure the support of the

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 140.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 140-43. In order to maintain a parallel structure for the sub-headings, I have chosen to refer to Sensing’s category of “sustainability” as “future significance.”

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 141.
shepherd selection team. Again, based on anecdotal comments throughout the
discernment phase, I am confident the team will agree to its inclusion in future selection
processes.

Therefore, I primarily need to develop a strategy for the transference of the
project’s methodology to the selection team. Because selections occur only on a periodic
basis, I must ensure the next team has easy access to details of how the discernment
phase was carried out in this case. Essentially I can do this in the form of a notebook.
Since the team already utilizes a binder for storing pertinent information about the
selection process, a similar folder containing the various components of this project
seems a logical addition. The contents of the folder should include the chapter on
theological foundations and angles of discernment, the discussion questions utilized in
the group sessions, copies of leadership documents, and outside readings. For the
mentoring component, I would include the protocol for mentoring relationships along
with suggestions for improvement. I would also provide all information in the form of a
data disc, giving the next selection team easy access in two different media to the
theological rationale for the discernment phase as well as its practical implementation.

Personal Significance

Whereas reflexivity describes the researcher’s influence on the project, personal
significance considers the reverse. How has the project impacted the researcher? Or, as
Sensing asks, “How has your experience of conducting the research made an impact on
your relationships with the persons in the study? What did you learn about yourself?”

Initially, I recognize that my desire to support nominees through their discernment
impacted my relationship with the existing shepherds, building in me a sense of

17 Ibid.
partnership with them. Several entries in my field notes indicate my perception of their eager participation. At one point I wrote, “The shepherds appear to be engaged. They seem to consciously help promote discussion.” In another session, I interpreted similar behavior on their part as a “sign that the shepherds want to make this class work.” I benefited personally from sharing with them the goal of providing intentional pastoral care to the nominees.

In addition, the project offered me an opportunity to provide support and encouragement to the nominees at a significant point in their lives. By journeying with them for six weeks as they determined their willingness to serve, I was more than their preacher; I became their pastor, one who had a personal interest in their discernment process.\(^{18}\) For those nominees who accepted their candidacy, the project also helped to lay a foundation for our future relationship together as fellow members of the leadership team.

From a personal standpoint, during the course of this project, I gained insight into the significance of intentional leadership. Too often, my role as a minister gets lost in the day-to-day preparation of another sermon, another Bible class, or another meeting. The project confirmed for me the immense value in identifying a clear need, dedicating ample time to study and reflection, and then implementing an intentional ministry intervention. Even more, Ephesians 4:11-16 reminded me of my own identity as a “minister of the Word”\(^{19}\) and, therefore, my responsibility to ensure the maturation of the body.

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\(^{18}\) Traditionally, those within the Churches of Christ have refrained from using the term “pastor” to refer to their ministerial leaders. However, I intentionally use this term here to convey the underlying idea of demonstrating sincere concern for those within one’s care.

\(^{19}\) Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, 436.
Ecclesial Significance

Whereas personal significance considers the project’s effect on the minister, ecclesial significance explores the ways in which the study impacted the local church. Since exploring this topic could yield a multitude of implications, Sensing insists, “The choices you make should correlate directly with your problem and purpose statement.”

In one regard, the project was designed solely for nominees, involving only them and the shepherds. Accordingly, the congregation experienced little exposure to it. Members were aware that the nominees would enter a six-week formalized discernment process at the close of the nomination phase; however, neither the names nor the number of those identified as nominees were ever publicly shared for fear that such an announcement would place further pressure on these men during their time of discernment. In the end, only the names of those who accepted their candidacy were announced publicly to the congregation.

However, even though the congregation may have had limited exposure to the project, Cinco Ranch certainly benefited from having its shepherds engage in the process of discernment. First of all, the project ensured that potential leaders were granted time to consider their opportunity to serve in leadership. The congregation developed its particular selection process on the premise that the church can recognize its shepherds by the way these men live and love. To fail to offer ample time for consideration risked pressing potential leaders to make rash decisions. Quite possibly, the congregation could lose the very shepherds it needed simply by rushing the nominees’ response.

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20 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 141.

21 The men were certainly free to share their identification as nominees on their own. However, with the support of the shepherds and the selection team, I wanted to publicly protect the nominees’ need for a more personal period of discernment should they so desire.
Accordingly, this formalized discernment phase offered a pause in the selection process, one in which nominees could appropriately reflect on their nomination and, in the end, make an informed decision regarding their candidacy.

The project also demonstrated ecclesial significance by naturally promoting a unity among the congregation’s shepherds. In the weeks leading up to the discernment phase, those already serving as shepherds found their working relationships enhanced as they rallied together to pastorally care for the nominees. Then, by working intimately with the nominees, the shepherds laid a foundation for their future service together with the nominees as fellow leaders, especially among those who accepted their candidacy. Accordingly, when Cinco Ranch finally installed its twelve shepherds, the congregation benefited from leaders already in the midst of developing a shepherding partnership.

Furthermore, the project enhanced both the shepherds’ and the nominees’ understanding of leadership. Whether participants described their perceptions of the theological foundations as “transformational” or simply said that it “confirmed” their previous thinking, the project promoted a view of leadership rooted in Christology. Participants continued to refer throughout the sessions to their realization that Jesus gives the gift of leaders to his church. The ecclesial significance of this discovery was astounding, preventing any perception of the shepherd selection as a sort of congregational election and instead revealing a divine presence in the midst of this process. Cinco Ranch will benefit tremendously from having shepherds humbly aware of their role as servants of Christ who dedicate themselves to building his body.

In this regard, the project also demonstrated the significance of utilizing a formalized method of maneuvering substantial life decisions. From the outset, the project
sought simply to help nominees make an informed decision about their nominations by exploring theological foundations and practical expressions of shepherding at Cinco Ranch through group discussions and personal mentoring relationships. For nominees to state they “feel better about [their] decision” whether they accepted or declined their nomination indicates the importance of this formalized process. Thus the project begs the question, how else might this approach be utilized in the life of the congregation?

Certainly it should impact further decision-making processes by the leadership. Having experienced a formalized approach that utilized intentional aspects of reflection, I hope the shepherding group will refrain in the future from entertaining rash leadership decisions. Whether exploring new theological understandings or determining possible congregational objectives, the project has offered the shepherds a viable method of discernment, one they have already experienced firsthand.

Yet what other substantial decisions are faced by the broader community of faith as well as its individual members? Discerning a shepherd nomination serves as only one example among a wide variety of opportunities that arise within the life of believers. People of faith seek to root their identity in God and, as Johnson asserts, desire the discovery of appropriate “interpretive tools.” 22 How then might an approach dedicated to the establishment of theological foundations and the cultivation of communal conversations inform such decisions? While specific to a particular group of individuals, this project introduced a methodology of discernment with significant implications for the future of Cinco Ranch.

22 Johnson, Scripture and Discernment, 31.
Theological Significance

A researcher must also consider the implications of the theology presented within the project (a concept closely related but not identical to ecclesial significance). For instance, as stated in the previous section, the basic ecclesiology undergirding this project is rooted in Christology. If Christ gives the gift of leaders to his church, then Christ is clearly serving as head; he is intimately connected to the life of his body. Thus the project’s theology maintains an understanding of the church as an extension of Christ himself, not as merely a religious expression of Christ’s teachings and desires. His church, as his body, serves his purposes.

For a congregation situated in a rapidly growing suburb, such a theological perspective proves vital. The establishment of new congregations continues to occur all over the Katy area; those rooted in a wide variety of denominational heritages. Recently, one newly formed church mailed postcards to the community with the simple statement, “We hated church, so we decided to start a new one.” Such an advertisement inherently sacrifices ecclesiology for the sake of personal preference. If not careful in Katy, a congregation and its leaders could easily succumb to the dangers of a consumerist view of church.

Certainly a growing suburb benefits from a multitude of congregations. However, such marketing techniques could potentially subvert a community of faith and its leadership with the temptation to overlook its christologically oriented task of maturing the body simply for the sake of attracting more attendees. While these goals are not always mutually exclusive, the theological foundations of this project remind leaders and

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23 Sensing, “Qualitative Research,” 142.
congregations alike that church maturation is much more complicated than merely increasing membership.

Accordingly, as church leaders grasp this theology, they discover a natural orientation toward maturing the body. One of the shepherds described how this theology helped him recover a view of shepherds as those who help “the flock grow in their walk.” He further insisted that “shepherds should not focus too much on non-spiritual matters.” While commendable, such an awareness proves to be only an initial step in a more theologically sound direction. What does it mean to mature the body? What are the markers of this maturation? How will leaders know when the congregation and its members are growing “in their walk” of faith? While the answers may lie beyond the scope of this thesis, the theology informing this project places leaders on a trajectory to ask such questions. Ultimately, the Christology revealed in Ephesians 4:11-16 hones a leadership’s emphasis and creates a healthier shepherding group as it dedicates itself to matters of building and maturing his body.

Final Considerations

Because Sensing uses the title “So What?”24 to describe the last chapter of a project thesis, he might refer to this section on final considerations as “Now What?” He reminds the researcher that the project was intended for more than degree completion, that it contains insights and experiences that can benefit the future health of the congregation as well as shape the personal growth of the minister-researcher. Accordingly, he advises, “Do not put your work in a shoebox after graduation”25 and

24 Ibid., 133.
25 Ibid., 144.
goes on to advocate that, prior to concluding the project, the researcher should contemplate appropriate future actions suggested by the intervention.

One of the first such considerations involves the addition of six new leaders to the shepherding group. How can Cinco Ranch facilitate the transition of new shepherds to its leadership team? Even though relationships between nominees and shepherds were established during the course of the project, their service together as fellow shepherds will present a new set of issues and adjustments. One of the nominees identified this aspect himself when he noted during a session that the upcoming transition would “probably prove harder for the current shepherds than it will for the new ones coming in.” Therefore, one future action resulting from the project will be for Cinco Ranch to develop an intentional strategy to facilitate the transition of its leadership team.26

Another consideration addresses the practice of discernment among our shepherds. How can the continued use of a formalized process of discernment such as the one they have experienced together be encouraged? They participated in a model that blended theological, practical, and communal conversations. They utilized the contemplative practice of lectio divina. They even witnessed firsthand the possibilities of mentoring relationships. How can these activities extend beyond the discernment of nominees to influence the daily discernment of Cinco Ranch’s leaders?

A final question posed for the future by this project in regard to the shepherds addresses the goal of leadership. The shepherd who wrote “It helped me to see the role of a shepherd should really be focused on helping the flock grow in their walk” and went on

26 One way in which the shepherds approached the transition for the 2010 selection was by coordinating an orientation retreat in which shepherds and spouses met together at a retreat center to inform the new shepherds of ongoing leadership discussions as well as to develop a plan for organizing themselves as a leadership team.
to state that shepherds “should not focus too much on non-spiritual matters” reflected a general sense of recognition among the participants that the ultimate task of a shepherd is to facilitate the maturation of the church. How then can shepherds be encouraged to maintain their focus on maturation? Certainly this challenges Cinco Ranch to make its ministry team leadership more efficient and effective. Fortunately, a recent consultation with Charles Siburt helped put our shepherding team on this track. However, the project emphasizes the need for more critical thinking in order to ensure our shepherds remain free of distractions.

Such a focus raises another question for future consideration: how can Cinco Ranch develop criteria by which to measure the maturation of the body? While I am encouraged to hear our shepherds’ desire, I wonder how they will know when it is being accomplished in the life of the congregation. Certainly, Ephesians 4:11-16 provides some guidance with its emphasis on love and unity, but how does a leadership turn such abstract concepts into visible realities? One strategy for developing these criteria could involve the continued practice of *lectio divina* and communal discernment among the shepherds. Dedicated, uninterrupted time given to such reflection might help them identify some clear markers of maturation.

Moving beyond the shepherding group, the project raises questions for others as well. For instance, since the project confirmed nominees’ need for discernment in relation to their opportunity to serve as shepherds, how can Cinco Ranch prepare future nominees to approach this process of discernment? The intentional period of time for reflection clearly benefited the nominees. Yet how might Cinco Ranch cause men to consider their
future willingness to serve as shepherds even prior to the start of a shepherd selection process?

In their evaluations, both nominees and shepherds suggested Cinco Ranch offer a leadership class designed to explore the implications of Ephesians 4:11-16. Some evaluators further recommended this class include both men and women, especially in light of the comments about wives being “on the outside looking in.” Another possibility may be to utilize shepherd mentoring relationships on an extended basis. Since they contain natural opportunities for pastoral care, these intentional relationships could allow shepherds not only to engage in the maturation of the flock but also enable them to mentor the next generation of leaders.

An obvious group with which to start would be the nominees who declined their candidacy during the 2010 selection process. The shepherds indicated in their evaluations that several of these men, as a result of the discernment phase, had explicitly stated a desire one day to serve as shepherds. Creating ongoing mentoring relationships may encourage this desire and allow Cinco Ranch to proactively prepare its leaders even before they are nominated to serve.

A final question raised by the project involves extending the practice of discernment to the broader community of the Cinco Ranch congregation. Since shepherds and nominees alike attested to the value of a formalized phase for the discernment process, how can Cinco Ranch educate its members in this practice? The opportunity to serve as a shepherd is not the only decision that requires believers to seriously contemplate an appropriate response. The project’s model involves reflection on both theological and practical aspects of the situation presented as well as the incorporation of
communal discussions and mentoring relationships. How can Cinco Ranch encourage its members to use similar practices as they face various decisions of their own?

A periodic teaching plan already utilized by Cinco Ranch may provide one strategy. From time to time the congregation coordinates its entire teaching plan for a period of four to six weeks to emphasize a particular focus, such as the practice of prayer or the habit of giving. During these seasons, the preaching, the Sunday morning Bible classes, and the Sunday evening small groups revolve around the chosen topic. Cinco Ranch could opt to provide such intentional teaching on the practice of discernment. The various forums could emphasize the need for communal reflection on both theological and practical aspects of substantial life decisions as well as propose the use of mentoring relationships. Further reflection will be needed, but the project certainly prompts Cinco Ranch to consider how this practice of discernment can be incorporated into the broader community of faith.

Conclusion

In its past shepherd selection processes, Cinco Ranch lacked a formalized discernment phase for those nominated by the congregation to serve as shepherds. Accordingly, nominees were left to discern on their own their willingness to serve—typically within a week of their notification. Therefore, this project involved the insertion of a six-week, formalized discernment phase into Cinco Ranch’s shepherd selection process. Nominees engaged in communal discussions regarding the theological foundations of shepherding as well as its practical expression at Cinco Ranch and participated in shepherd mentoring relationships designed to provide intentional pastoral care as nominees determined their willingness to serve.
Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the project’s evaluation involved analyzing compiled field notes as well as group interviews with both the nominees and the shepherds. Through a triangulated conversation among these data sources, the evaluation revealed themes, slippages, and silences. While exposing necessary improvements, the triangulation confirmed the positive impact of the project on the nominees’ discernment experience. Subsequent reflections on the trustworthiness and significance of the project affirmed the project’s value not only for these nominees but also for the researcher, the shepherding team, the Cinco Ranch community, and other congregational contexts as well. In the end, the project reveals both the need for discernment among believers facing significant life decisions and the desire among believers for formalized practices designed to meet such challenges communally and scripturally.


# APPENDIX A

## 2008 SHEPHERD SELECTION TIMELINE

### CRCOC SHEPHERD SELECTION PROCESS

#### AUGUST 2008

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<td>Lessons 1 from Aaron</td>
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<td>Church-wide email so those absent can request form</td>
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<td>Affirmation forms handed out</td>
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## 2010 SHEPHERD SELECTION TIMELINE

**July**
- June-July: Begin “planting seeds”
- August 1: Announce selection process
  - [starts Nomination phase]
- August 15: Start sermon series
- August 29: Nominations due

**August**
- September 8: Class begins
  - [starts Discernment phase]
- October 13: Class ends & Nominees decide
- October 17: Introduce nominees
  - [starts Introduction phase]
- October 31: Objections due
  - [starts Resolution phase]
- November 7: Distribute affirmation forms
  - [starts Affirmation phase]
- November 21: Affirmation forms due

**September**
- December 3: Shepherd retreat
  - (or possibly December 10)
- December 5: Installation Sunday

**Key Dates:**
- August 23—School starts
- September 6—Labor Day
- November 25—Thanksgiving
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INVITATION TO NOMINEES

Cinco Ranch Church of Christ

August 30, 2010

Dear _____,

By now, I am assuming you have been informed of your selection by the Cinco Ranch congregation as a potential shepherd. Let me be the first to commend you for your nomination. The way you live and the way you love have obviously caught the attention of those around you.

Several thoughts may be going through your mind right now. Quite possibly, you have been looking forward to this day when you could serve as a shepherd among God’s people. On the other hand, you may be rather nervous as you consider the prospect of stepping into a formal leadership position within Cinco Ranch. Either way, I would ask that you refrain from making any immediate decision.

Instead, I would like to encourage you to participate in an intentional time of discernment. Honestly, your nomination should not be taken lightly. Quite often, God himself speaks through his people to call leaders into specific service. Therefore, I invite you, along with the other nominees, to join me and our current shepherds for a six-week class in which we will explore both the biblical basis of shepherding and its practical expressions at Cinco Ranch.

This class will take place from 6:45-8:15 p.m. on Wednesday nights, starting next week on September 8th. We will be meeting in Room 107, and we’re even going to serve coffee and refreshments.😊 I assure you that our intention is not to pressure you into serving as a shepherd. Rather, we simply want to ensure that you have all of the answers you need in order to make an informed decision about your potential role as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch.

I will be calling you within the next couple of days to talk more with you personally and to answer any questions you may have about this invitation. In the meantime, I hope you know many prayers are being offered on your behalf as you contemplate your willingness to serve as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch.

Blessings,

Aaron Walling

6655 S Mason Rd, Katy TX 77450
Phone: 281-579-3100; Fax: 281-579-3163; www.crcoc.org
APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR SHEPHERD MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

1. Once the number of nominees participating in the discernment phase has been determined, the shepherds will evenly divide the nominees among themselves.

2. At the first group session, during the introductory comments, I will explain the nature and purpose of the shepherd mentoring relationships—namely to provide the nominee and his spouse with the opportunity to interact with a shepherding couple on a personal basis and ask any pertinent questions of discernment that may not be adequately covered in the group sessions.

3. Within the first two weeks of the discernment phase, the shepherding couple will meet with the nominee and his spouse in an intentional setting, possibly for dinner, dessert, or coffee. During this initial meeting the shepherding couple will convey to the nominee and his spouse:
   - congratulations on receiving the congregation’s nomination
   - encouragement for the nominee’s participation in the discernment process
   - a description of the shepherd’s own discernment experience
   - an invitation to utilize the shepherding couple for any advice or insight
   - a commitment from the shepherding couple to pray daily for the nominee and his spouse

   The shepherding couple will then end this initial meeting in a time of prayer.

4. If the number of total nominees is such that a shepherding couple has more than one nominee to mentor, the shepherding couple will meet with each nominee couple individually, not as a group, in order to provide the most appropriate pastoral care needed by each nominee couple.

5. Over the course of the discernment process, the shepherding couple will maintain contact with the nominee and his spouse through phone calls, e-mail, and typical congregational interactions.

6. During the last week of the discernment process, the shepherding couple will offer to meet again with the nominee and his spouse in an intentional setting to address any final questions that may have arisen over the course of the process. This meeting should occur before the final session on Wednesday, October 13, 2010. Furthermore, the shepherding couple will refrain from soliciting a final answer from the nominee at this time.

7. At the final session, I will inform nominees of the process by which they express to us their decision. Specifically, each will be contacted by his mentoring shepherd within two days, at which point he will share his discerned decision.

8. Each shepherd will contact his nominee(s) by Saturday, October 16, 2010.
APPENDIX E

POSSIBLE HESITATIONS OF NOMINEES

Helping Those Nominated As Elders to Say Yes Instead of No
Charles Siburt

Numerous churches have experienced this pattern during the process of selecting elders:
1. The church is asked to nominate men to be considered as possible elders.
2. The church then nominates several men whom they would consider as possible elders.
3. The men nominated by the church go through a time of self-examination and discernment.
4. Ultimately, the majority of the men nominated decide to say no to serving as an elder.

Why does this happen? Why do the men who are most respected by the church decide not to accept the church’s vote of confidence and decline to serve as elders?

Some possible reasons for nominees saying no instead of yes may be that they…

1. Have idealistic expectations about how perfect elders must be.
2. Consider themselves ineligible because of sins committed in their younger years.
3. Feel they cannot possibly balance work, family, and elder responsibilities.
4. Fear that they will be expected to attend numerous, long, and unpleasant meetings.
5. Doubt their own ability to be effective shepherds.
6. Want to avoid subjecting their family to the pressures of scrutiny and criticism.
7. Do not trust the church to treat them with grace, mercy, or compassion.
8. Be poorly informed about what elders do and how the group of elders functions.
9. Have wives who do not want them to serve right now.
10. Do not want to serve while they still have children at home.

How can we encourage those nominated to say yes instead of no? We can…

1. Take pastoral initiative to go to these men during their self-examination, not after.
2. View this time of discernment as a time of personal crisis.
3. Extend pastoral care to these men in their time of crisis.
4. Assist these men in using healthy self-examination practices.
5. Offer healthy coping strategies for managing their personal crisis.
6. Ensure that the church receives biblical teaching about biblical qualities of elders.
7. Prepare the church for their discernment of elder candidates.
8. Change the “scriptural objections” time to a time of “candidate affirmation.”
9. Orient the nominees and their families about how the elders function as a group.
10. Remind them that the church’s call to serve as elders should be a priority call.

When men do decide to serve as elders, we can…

1. Provide basic leadership survival skills to those who agree to serve as elders.
2. Establish behavioral covenants (“holy manners”) for all elders and members.
3. Link them to those who serve as elders in other congregations in the region.
4. Insist that all practice reconciliation and peacemaking according to Matthew 18.
5. Equip elders to support, encourage, and shepherd each other as partners.
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Implementing a Discernment Phase for Those Nominated in the Shepherd Selection Process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ

Principle Investigator: Aaron Walling
Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors: Charles Siburt
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University
Ken Cukrowski
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

Introduction: I understand that as a nominee in the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch, I have been asked to participate in a formalized discernment phase.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to implement a formalized discernment phase within the shepherd selection process at Cinco Ranch in order to assist nominees as they determine their willingness to serve as shepherds. The goal is not to pressure nominees into a particular outcome but rather to provide nominees the opportunity to make a fully informed decision. Accordingly, this project will primarily incorporate biblical foundations, theological reflections, logistical explanations, group discussions, and mentoring relationships.

Procedures: All those nominated in the shepherd selection process will be invited to participate in a six-week formalized discernment phase. Participants will attend six group sessions occurring on Wednesday nights from 6:45-8:15 p.m. at the Cinco Ranch building. These sessions will begin on Wednesday, September 8, 2010, and they will end on Wednesday, October 13, 2010. Furthermore, to provide opportunities for more intimate conversations, each participant and his spouse will engage in a personal mentoring relationship with one current shepherd and his spouse. These relationships will extend over the course of the six-week discernment phase. Participants will be asked to attend one final session on Wednesday, October 20, 2010, for the purpose of evaluating this project through a group interview. The current shepherds will be asked to attend a similar session for evaluation on Wednesday, October 27, 2010.

Potential Risks: There are no identifiable risks to participants in this research study. Any published participant quotations will remain anonymous.

Potential Benefits: Your participation may benefit you by (1) helping you determine your willingness to serve as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch; (2) providing you and your spouse with the opportunity to explore the impact of shepherding on your family; (3) establishing authentic relationships with your current shepherds; and (4) clarifying both
the theological and the practical foundations for your service as a shepherd, whether at this point in your life or at a later date.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

**Rights of Research Participants:** I have read the above. Mr. Walling has explained the nature of the group and has answered my questions. He has informed me of the potential risks and benefits of participating in this research project.

I understand that I do not have to participate in this research project, and I can withdraw from it at any time.

I understand that all the information I provide will remain confidential.

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Walling by telephone at (281) 216-6588 or by email to aaron@crcoc.org.

Signature of Participant______________________________ Date __________

Signature of Principle Investigator ________________________ Date __________
APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT COMMITMENT FORM

I understand that I am not required to sign this commitment form in order to participate in this project. However, in order to ensure the integrity of this discernment process and to give honor to the nomination I have received from the Cinco Ranch congregation, I willingly commit myself to the following actions and attitudes.

*I will attend all sessions, or if absent, I will review the recorded session(s)—whether audio or video—in a timely manner. I will personally take the initiative to obtain the necessary recordings.*

*I will maintain complete confidentiality of the group’s conversations and interactions as well as the comments and actions of particular individuals.*

*I will conduct myself in a manner consistent with the life of one who follows Jesus.*

Signature __________________________________________ Date ____________
APPENDIX H

INTROSPECTIVE INFORMATION FORM

Cinco Ranch Church of Christ
Shepherd Selection Process
August 15 – December 5, 2010

Name ____________________________________________________________
Address _________________________________________________________
City ___________________________ State ____________ ZIP ____________
Date Baptized __________________ Current Shepherd? ☐YES ☐NO
Occupation ______________________ Employer _________________________

FAMILY INFORMATION

Name of Wife __________________ Date Baptized __________________ Her Occupation___________________________
Is this your first marriage? ☐YES ☐NO Is this your wife’s first marriage? ☐YES ☐NO
If “No” for either, please provide details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Children</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Yr. Baptized</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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CONGREGATIONAL INFORMATION

Please list the names of the last five congregations, beginning with Cinco Ranch, where you have been a member, the dates of your membership in each, and any service as a shepherd, deacon or other position of church responsibility.

1. Dates __________________________ City/State __________________________
   Names of Congregations __________________________
   Roles __________________________

2. Dates __________________________ City/State __________________________
   Names of Congregations __________________________
   Roles __________________________

3. Dates __________________________ City/State __________________________
   Names of Congregations __________________________
   Roles __________________________
MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

List any community organizations, service clubs, professional organizations or military experience:

-----------------------------------------------

MY PERSONAL VIEWS . . .

1. Why do you want to become – or continue to be – a shepherd at CRCOC?

2. What will be your reaction if . . .
   a. You are selected as a shepherd?
   b. You are not selected as a shepherd?

3. What qualities do you feel are needed to succeed as a shepherd, and in what way do you feel that those qualities are exhibited in your life?

4. How has teaching God’s Word and sharing Jesus Christ been demonstrated in your life?

5. What in your life gives you confidence that you are living by the Spirit of God (Gal.5)?

6. What are spiritual areas in which you hope to grow and/or improve your Christian influence?
7. How have you been most effective in including Bible study, prayer and meditation in your daily life?

8. If criticism of some aspect of your personal life should arise, how would you characterize your expected response?

9. Discuss your understanding of the Biblical concept of shepherding in the Lord's church.

10. Discuss your understanding of the authority of church elders/shepherds in light of the Scriptures. You may wish to give examples of how such authority may best be administered in the church.

11. Explain how you feel the shepherds should respond to a situation in which a member continually acts in a manner that is corrupt and openly sinful? (Ref. 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Deut. 17:7; 19:19; 24:7) How would you lead the congregation to “reaffirm your love for him?” (2 Cor. 2:8)

12. Cinco Ranch was started as a church that is sensitive to those seeking Jesus Christ as reflected in the purpose statement. How do you feel about the direction this church has pursued and the type of church it has become?

13. What are some specific areas in which Cinco Ranch as a church should change or adapt in order to grow?
14. The demands of your job and your family can make it hard to meet the responsibilities of being a shepherd. How would you balance your time to handle these responsibilities?

15. In what ways will your wife be actively supportive of your work as a shepherd?

16. How should individual elders handle differences of conviction among themselves (some issue over which wise, spiritual persons do not find agreement)?

17. To what degree should church shepherds be involved in settling disputes (personal conviction or opinion) between members of the congregation?

18. Describe your view of a wholesome working relationship between elders and ministers.

19. Discuss your views on involvement and cooperation between Cinco Ranch and other churches of Christ. To what extent should Cinco Ranch be involved with churches or organizations outside our fellowship?

20. Discuss ways in which Cinco Ranch shepherds may improve communication with the congregation. Mention specific examples of successful methods used, or areas of need.

21. Give your understanding of the role of shepherds related to how specific Ministry groups and leaders are to function. For example, to what extent do you believe shepherds should be involved in the Finance Ministry, the Children’s Education Ministry, Benevolence Ministry, Worship Ministry, etc.
MY PERSONAL PROMISE . . .

I promise that, if selected by the congregation to serve as a shepherd, I will place myself under the spiritual oversight of my fellow shepherds. If, at any time in the future, I am requested to resign by a majority of the other shepherds, I will do so quickly and quietly.

Printed Name                           Signature                           Date
APPENDIX I

CINCO RANCH COVENANT OF LEADERSHIP

As a member of the Cinco Ranch leadership team, I embrace the following covenants…

**Covenant of Submission**—I will submit to the authority of God and to the authority of Scripture as we work together to lead Cinco Ranch.

**Covenant of Integrity**—I will use my influence in leadership to promote the vision and goals of Cinco Ranch. I will not use my position to advance any personal interests.

**Covenant of Affirmation**—I will affirm the other shepherds and staff as fellow leaders, promising to work together with them to build up the body of Christ at Cinco Ranch. Furthermore, I will submit to the authority of the shepherds, trusting them to care for me and my development as a disciple. If at any point, the consensus of the shepherds is for me to step down from leadership, I will do so without causing any dissension.

**Covenant of Prayer**—I will pray with the leadership on a consistent basis asking for God’s guidance as we serve together to lead this church. I will also pray for my fellow leaders personally that God will continue to grant them both the wisdom and the compassion for leadership.

**Covenant of Availability**—I will meet with the leadership team on a regular basis, and I will be fully present, ready to actively participate in the discussions. I will also support the ministries of Cinco Ranch by attending various events.

**Covenant of Honesty**—I will help cultivate an atmosphere of honest communication. I will encourage others to speak freely, even if it may lead to an initial disagreement. I will refuse to operate on any hidden agendas. I recognize that open, honest dialogue is essential for promoting unity among the leadership.

**Covenant of Disclosure**—I will freely share pertinent information that proves relevant to our leadership discussions. While at times it may require discernment on my part, I ultimately want to ensure I do not “keep secrets” from my fellow leaders.

**Covenant of Humility**—I will commit to communicating my own thoughts and perspectives with a spirit of gentleness and humility. If we discover disagreement, I commit to patiently working towards understanding those perspectives different from my own.

**Covenant of Feedback**—I will welcome relevant and constructive feedback, and I will refrain from responding impulsively or defensively. I realize any critique is only intended to help improve the future health and growth of Cinco Ranch as a whole or of me as an individual.

**Covenant of Agreement**—I will support the decisions of this leadership. At all times, I will present a “united front” and speak positively to others about my fellow leaders.

**Covenant of Confidentiality**—I will promise not to share with others what is discussed within the leadership, unless we have decided it is permissible. I will use discretion in determining what to share with my spouse.

In full acceptance of these covenants, I sign my name to this document in recognition of my commitment to God, my commitment to this leadership team, and my commitment to the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ.

Signed ___________________________________________ Date ___________________

(This signature is for your own commitment; you will retain this document.)
APPENDIX J

CINCO RANCH SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP MODEL

General Statements
- The Cinco Ranch shepherds agree that a leadership model centered on the goal of shepherding, mentoring and equipping will fit our role as leaders of the congregation. We further agree that this leadership style will meet the role of the church leader as described in the New Testament.
- We recognize it is an honor and a privilege to serve as leaders of Cinco Ranch. We serve and shepherd Cinco Ranch with sincere humility and dedication.
- We are committed to demonstrating bold, courageous, steady and responsible leadership coupled with visionary thinking in fulfilling God’s purposes.
- We consider every shepherd to be of equal status as a shepherd of this church.
- We acknowledge that each shepherd is under the oversight of the other shepherds, and the collective wisdom of the entire group is worthy of our trust and respect.
- We are committed to embracing a dependence on God’s word and to prayer, allowing the Spirit to work in our midst. Furthermore, we willingly embody an attitude of mutual submissiveness to one another.
- Ultimately, our prayer comes from Ezekiel 34. May God work through the shepherds at Cinco Ranch to…
  > take care of the flock
  > strengthen the weak
  > heal the sick
  > bind up the injured
  > bring back the strays
  > search for the lost
  > serve his people with gentleness, humility and love.

Administrative Practices
- All shepherd meetings are important, and all shepherds are expected to attend.
- Rotating on a monthly basis, one shepherd will be designated the meeting chairman. Responsibilities include developing the agenda and ensuring all those present have an opportunity to provide any pertinent input.
- Any shepherd, staff, ministry leader or member wanting to be placed on the meeting agenda must contact the monthly chairman to set up the best time.
- Generally speaking, the staff is expected to be present for regular meetings, unless otherwise specified as a “shepherd only” meeting. It is understood that ministry takes precedence over meetings.
- In order to concentrate on shepherding, routine administration and tasks will be delegated to staff, ministry leaders, ministry teams and/or members. Accordingly, the shepherds will seek to cultivate an atmosphere of trust, empowerment, and responsibility.
- When ministry teams are tasked by the shepherds, team leaders will be informed of specific goals and responsibilities, as well as assigned a shepherd who will be able to function as both a contact and a mentor. Furthermore, resources appropriate to the task will be allocated for the team’s usage.
- All decisions of policy pertaining to the life of Cinco Ranch will be made by the entire shepherding team. However, to promote efficiency, special assignments can
be delegated to an individual shepherd, staff, or ministry leader to evaluate and
develop an appropriate proposal.

- All major personnel decisions relating to the church ministerial staff will be made
  by the entire shepherding team. This will include terms of employment, annual
  reviews, and terminations.
- Any decision that affects the major course of Cinco Ranch, such as vision
  statements and major time or money commitments, will require the participation of
  all the shepherds.
- The shepherds as a whole will approve the annual budget.

**Voting Procedures**

- Aside from the exceptions noted above, a majority vote of those shepherds present
  is considered to approve or disapprove a motion. One more than half of the
  shepherds currently serving are required to be present in order to have a quorum for
  making decisions for the group (e.g. 4 of 6). Anyone not present at a meeting and not
  having his position previously made known is considered to have voted with the
  majority on any motion.
- It is understood that from time to time, a shepherd may miss a meeting. However,
  the decisions made at all meetings shall be deemed to have been made by all the
  shepherds with the aid and direction of the Holy Spirit. Any decision made shall not
  be revisited unless a voting quorum at a subsequent meeting requests such action.
- Whether present or not, all shepherds agree to support the decision of the group
  as if the vote had been unanimous.
- Shepherds will not talk to anyone outside of the meeting about how they
  personally voted or how other shepherds voted on a particular issue.
- When a decision is made which a shepherd cannot support in good conscience, he
  shall:
    > State that the issue is a matter of conscience and ask that the matter be
      reconsidered, giving him time to prayerfully consider the issue and present his
      concerns.
    > Abstain from voting on the issue. (However, he will support and cooperate
      with the other shepherds on the final decision, refusing to create disharmony
      among the shepherds and/or within the congregation.)
    > If the shepherd cannot support the decision and neither of the above options
      provide a remedy, the shepherd shall resign. He is still expected, though, to
      adhere to the principles above regarding support of the decision, as well as
      confidentiality of voting patterns.

**Outside Communication**

- Both individually and collectively, we desire to be men who are above reproach. In
  this regard, we recognize the need for clear and effective communication with each
  other and with the congregation. Our goal is to communicate openly and honestly
  with the church family about decisions that have been reached as we set the course
  for the spiritual direction for this church family.
- In our communication with others, we will refrain from presenting our own
  personal opinions as though they were the opinions of the shepherding team.
- At all times in our communication, confidentiality must be honored, unless otherwise waived by all of the shepherds.

**Core Values of Cinco Ranch**

- We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of everything that has been made.

- We believe in the true deity and full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of God. We acknowledge his virgin birth, his sinless life, and his miracles. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross and rising from the dead after three days to demonstrate his power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven at the right hand of the Father, and he will return to earth in power and glory.

- We believe in the full deity of the Holy Spirit. He is present in the world to make people aware of their need for Jesus Christ. We believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation and that he provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of a spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He has gifted every believer with a spiritual gift for the purpose of building God’s kingdom.

- We believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- We believe that people are made in the spiritual image of God and are the supreme object of God’s creation. Though humanity has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience and rebellion toward God called sin. Sin separates people from God and causes many problems in life.

- We believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone and that faith without works is dead. Salvation is God’s free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God’s offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin’s penalty. We believe that God has ordained baptism by immersion as a part of becoming a Christian, symbolizing the salvation we receive through Jesus Christ.

- We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is hell. To be eternally in union with him is eternal life. Heaven and hell are real places of eternal existence.

**Philosophical Values of Cinco Ranch**

- Based on Jesus’ own summation of the Law in Matthew 22:37-40 to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls, and minds and to love our neighbor as ourselves, as well as his instructions in Matthew 28:18-20 to go into all the world and make disciples of the nations, we are committed to a simple model of helping every person at Cinco Ranch to love God, love others and reach the world.

I agree to abide by the Shepherd Leadership Model as described above.

Signature ____________________  Date ___________
APPENDIX K

PROTOCOL FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

1. Explain the nature of qualitative methodology
   - meaningful knowledge exists outside the realm of quantifiable outcomes
   - grounded in the social world, it attempts to make sense of lived experience
   - aims not so much to explain reality as to describe it in ways that make sense

2. Discuss the practice of participant observation
   - group processes and interactions are best discovered within the group
   - intentional observation is needed to catch both verbal and nonverbal cues
   - requires disciplined note-taking, discerning the difference between detail and trivia
   - “empathic neutrality” is essential for an unbiased perspective
   - for this note-taker, participant observation will be entirely passive

3. Indicate the categories of description
   - grand tour observations describe the larger picture in broad strokes
     > setting—what aspects of the room impact the group’s experience?
     > participants—who is present? how do they arrange themselves?
     > interactions—what kinds of group dynamics seem to surface?
     > conversations—what are people saying? how are they saying it?
     > nonverbal—what is not being said? what does body language convey?
     > facilitator’s behavior—how am I impacting the group’s experience?
   - mini-tour observations attempt to describe particular observations in more detail

4. Identify key words/phrases to note during sessions
   - words/phrases—God, Jesus, shepherd, leader, gifted, discern, mature, body
   - record the initials of individuals using these words upon each use

5. Review “Worksheet for Taking Field Notes”

6. Establish expectations for observation
   - avoid sharing any intimate information about the process with outsiders
   - as a passive observer, refrain from contributing to the group discussions
   - arrive fifteen minutes early and stay fifteen minutes late
   - begin taking notes five minutes before the start of the session
   - continue taking notes for up to ten minutes following the session
   - review notes, adding any final thoughts or comments
   - when finished, place notes either on my desk or under my office door
APPENDIX L

WORKSHEET FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

Describe any significant conversations or comments prior to the start of the session.

Describe any particularities of the setting.

Record the attendance by diagramming the seating arrangement. (use initials)

During small group times, diagram the arrangement of participants. (use initials)
Identify key words and phrases (use initials for *each* occurrence)

God __________________________________________

Jesus _________________________________________

Shepherd ______________________________________

Leader _________________________________________

Gifted _________________________________________

Mature _________________________________________

Discern _________________________________________

Body __________________________________________

Indicate any other frequently occurring words.

Describe any significant nonverbal indicators observed during the course of the session.

Describe any significant comments or conversations following the end of the session.
Describe significant conversations and interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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APPENDIX M

SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVER’S FIELD NOTES

FIELD NOTES (Kyle’s)
Session #2
Date: 9/15/10

Record the attendance by diagramming the seating arrangement. (use initials)

(LN) MB DR RL LW BW (GB) DR
[KC] (RH) (SB) CP LR BS (KE) CK

[AW]

Absent—(JS), RH, MS

[]—participant observer ( )—current shepherd

During small group times, diagram the arrangement of participants. (use initials)

(LN), BS, CK MB, RL, (KE) BW, LW, (SB)
(RH), DR, LR CP, (GB), DR

Describe significant conversations and interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Participant</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>laughed</td>
<td>BS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shock</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surprised</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncomfortable</td>
<td>CP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amazed by the company in which I was nominated</td>
<td>CK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Called by God
- job opportunity BS
- relocated to another country RL
- called to Christ...baptized...at new church was offered an open Bible CP

Practices used to determine God’s will
- pray and move on RL
- sledge hammer effect CK
- pro-active ?
- seek council LR
Observation

Scripture that speaks to you
- *Ruth talks to Naomi*
- *Ephesians 4:11-16*
- *glorify Christ*
- *Acts 5*

Overview of Ephesians

1:3-6
- *praise, blessed, chosen, adopted, holy, blessing through Christ, in Him, predestined*

1:9-10
- *purpose is Christ, mystery, Christ is the solution, time is right under Christ*

1:19-23
- *resurrection, all power to Jesus, forever, Christ is the Head*

2:4-7
- *made us alive, his love for us, saved through grace, in heaven with Christ*

4:7-8
- *grace has been given, Christ isnin control*

Psa. 68:15-18
- *jealousy of other mountains, slavery, gifts to king*

Small group comments (overheard)
- *concerned about finding what purpose or talent or gift for shepherdship*
- *purpose is to support church and build relationships*
- *worried about lived experience*
- *Christ’s position in my life (He is the Head; we are to build up the body)*
- *we all depend on him*
- *insight into Scripture*
- *even though we all have different gifts, we still serve the same purpose*
- *accepting grace can be hard*

Large group comments (shared)
- *Christ is the standard*  
  BW
- *he gives us everything we need to build him up*  
  DR
- *gifts to ordinary people to do extraordinary things*  
  DR
- *delegating authority to us*
- *gifts for unity*
- *witnesses to give message*
- *emphasis is giving to the church*  
  DR
- *gifts given to help mature*
Observation

More large group comments (shared)
- wants us involved, not sitting on the sidelines
- finding our role
- confidence toward maturity
- working together to build up the body of Christ
- pressure taken off because God gave me the gift

Ending prayer

*I praise you, Lord, because these verses remind me...*
- all powerful
- humbled leadership
- in control
- gift us with talents
- role for these men in your body
### Compiled Field Notes

**Session #2**  
**Date:** 9/15/10  
**Coding revised:** 10/14/10  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Observations</th>
<th>General Impressions</th>
<th>Initial Interpretation</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At 6:40, we only had a couple of people in the room (CP, CK, and KC). By 6:50, though, all of the nominees were there (except for RH and MS who weren’t able to attend). As for shepherds, JS was out of town. Even at 6:50, we still had two shepherds who were not yet present (RH and GB). I started my introductory comments and even asked the first question to the group. GB, though, started talking to the nominee he is mentoring. Tonight was the start of AWANA, and we could hear kids in the halls and the adjacent classroom.</td>
<td>I think this simply reflects the fact that most are coming straight from work and a busy schedule. The nominees are meeting expectations for attendance. Accordingly, it’s important for me to start and end on time. It was hard to start without our leaders present, especially knowing they would walk in late. Due to the size of the room, his voice carried and served as a distraction (at least to me).</td>
<td>The nominees seem to confirm by their presence their willingness to participate in this process. Having just come from the leadership meeting myself, they may have been finalizing conversations. My guess is that he was not thinking about the distraction factor. In fact, I think he was confirming his mentoring meeting.</td>
<td>2.1 &amp; 1.3.3 2.1.1 1.3.3 1.3.1 1.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Observations</td>
<td>General Impressions</td>
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<td>Coding</td>
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<tr>
<td>My opening question asked for the nominees to share their initial reactions to their nominations. BS—laughed...am I being punk’d? DR—shock BW—surprised that DR made list CP—uncomfortable</td>
<td>Comic relief (lots of laughter). More comic relief A very serious &amp; reflective comment.</td>
<td>The laughter seemed to indicate that many of the nominees could easily identify. Even in the midst of laughter, there is a daunting element to this task. The nominees seem to question themselves and their own abilities.</td>
<td>6.1 (&amp; 4.1.1) 4.1.1 4.1.2 4.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CK—amazed at the company in which I was nominated</td>
<td>This seemed more about group dynamics than an unwillingness to participate, especially given that we had just started along with the distractions mentioned above.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While I offered plenty of time for response, we reached a point where it was clear no one else was going to share his initial reaction.</td>
<td>Having only three responses, I was not really sure if the question connected or if the group simply was not very talkative yet.</td>
<td>I’m not going to read anything into the lack of responses. Ultimately, these questions were geared more as ice-breakers.</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Actual Observations
I shared Kinast’s idea of experience → tradition → implication. Based on head nods, it seemed to connect.

To clarify “Christian traditions,” I asked what practices nominees have used before to determine God’s will.
RL—pray and move on essentially said he just has to pick a path and see what doors open to determine if it is indeed the right path
CK—sledge hammer effect… in fact, he said he finds that God will take away all of his excuses
BW & CP—proactive
LR—seek council

I moved our discussion to the idea of using Scripture to aid in discernment. The group seemed to agree with this identification.

General Impressions
The group seemed to be following my line of thinking.

I wonder how much this comment relates to his current discernment of his nomination.

While I appreciated the other comments, this was the first one that seemed in line with the kinds of responses I was expecting.

I was surprised that Scripture had not been mentioned yet.

Initial Interpretation
CK really seems to be connecting our conversations with his own discernment.

Both of these observations make me wonder if I lacked clarity in my facilitation and, specifically, in the questions that I asked.

Coding
3.1.1
5.2
3.1.2
Actual Observations
I asked if anyone had ever experienced a Scripture that spoke directly to his situation. Several heads nodded, but again, only a few responded.
CP—Ruth talks to Naomi
CK—Eph. 4:11-16...specifically, he referenced how it addressed his concern last week about having, in essence to "do it all"; the verses reminded him he is simply to play his part
(SB)—gloriﬁ Christ
CP—Acts 5

I then moved the conversation to an overview of Ephesians. We read speciﬁc passages, and then I simply asked for initial observations. (Unfortunately, KC was unable to get the initials of those making the comments)
Eph. 1:3-6—praise, blessed, chosen, adopted, holy, blessing through Christ, in Him, predestined
Eph. 1:9-10—purpose is Christ, mystery (CP), Christ is the solution, time is right under Christ

General Impressions
CP & CK are frequent responders.

Initial Interpretation
Again, CK keeps giving glimpses into his own discernment process.

Coding

6.2
5.2
5.0
5.1
5.3.1
**Actual Observation:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eph. 1:19-23—resurrection, all power to Jesus, Christ is the Head</th>
<th>Eph. 2:4-7—made us alive, his love for us, saved through grace, in heaven with Christ</th>
<th>Eph. 4:7-8—grace has been given, Christ is in control</th>
<th>Psa. 68:15-18—jealousy of other mountains (me?), slavery, gifts to the king (LN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

We then moved into our small group time. We were missing one shepherd and two nominees. We still had 5 groups of 3, even though it was not divided according to shepherd mentoring relationships.

The small group format did present a problem for note-taking. KC had to walk around and “listen-in” on group discussions.

Small group comments overheard...
- concern about finding what purpose or talent or gift for shepherdship

**General Impressions**

- I felt like we were fairly rushed by this point.
- Fortunately, LN clearly identified the idea of a conquering king, which set up small groups well.
- I thought the room would make it difficult to break into small groups, but it worked out rather well.
- This actually seemed to create an odd dynamic in that groups were aware when KC was taking notes. (LR even made a joke about “be sure to get this in your notes.”)

**Initial Interpretation**

- Even if passive, KC is definitely a participant observer. His presence cannot be hidden nor can his influence be denied. The best I can do for evaluative purposes is to continue to acknowledge it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.3</td>
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<td>5.3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4 ( &amp; 1.3.1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actual Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- purpose is to support church and build relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>- worried about lived experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Christ’s position in my life (He is the Head...we are to build up the body)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- we all depend on him</td>
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<tr>
<td>- insight into Scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td>- even though we all have different gifts, we still serve the same purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>- accepting grace can be hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>One group seemed to really struggle with the wording of the second question. They couldn’t figure out what was meant by “nature.” I finally wrote a new question on the board using the word “kind.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>I heard another group make the statement “I think he’s meaning” in reference to one of the questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The groups talked for 15 minutes. Most were finished with all five questions. One group, however, continued to talk a little more even as we shifted the chairs. (MB, RL, KE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Observations</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large group comments shared...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Christ is the standard (BW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- He gives us everything we need to build him up</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Gifts to ordinary people to do extraordinary things (DR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Delegating authority to us</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Gifts for unity</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Witnesses to give message</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Emphasis is giving to the church (DR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Gifts given to help mature</td>
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<td>- Wants us involved, not sitting on the sidelines</td>
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<td>- Finding their role</td>
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<td>- Confidence toward maturity</td>
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<td>- Working together to build up the body of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pressure taken off because God gave me the gift (LR)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Again, in our group discussion, I got bogged down trying to ask leading questions to draw out the significance of “particular servants” versus “impersonal services.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Impressions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was surprised at how well we stayed on the topic of source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wow! Is there any hint of his nomination in this statement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wow! This was when the idea of servants over services seemed to click for the group (see note below).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sets the stage for goal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wow! Is this a general statement or one related to the nomination?</td>
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<tr>
<td>At some point, I need to stop trying to force guided discovery and just share the thought directly. In fact, when I finally shared this distinction, there was an overwhelming “Aha!” moment for the group. DR best articulated this with his statement recorded above.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Interpretation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>So far, these angles of reading seem to be working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christology seems to be sinking in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The passage seems to be prompting personal reflection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>More personal reflection.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
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<td>5.3.1</td>
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<td>5.3.4.3</td>
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<td>5.3.3</td>
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<td>5.3.3 &amp; 5.3.4.8</td>
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<td>5.3.4</td>
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<td>5.3.2 &amp; 3.2.2</td>
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<td>5.3.4.4.2 &amp; 5.3.4.6</td>
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<td>3.1.2</td>
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<td>3.2.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actual Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>DR made an interesting comment about having previously looked at this list from an egotistical viewpoint, whereas now he sees it as a recognition of “leaders among us.” In fact, he implied it was more about others than about himself saying “I may not even be one of these.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple of other comments were made in a similar vein, with nominees essentially stating they may not have these particular gifts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Again, I felt like we were fairly rushed at the end. By this point, it was about 8:10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the rush, I felt like I forced specific conclusions on the last reflection question, which was primarily designed to draw out nominees' perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Observations</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my concluding remarks, I commented on the fact that this passage enhances our view of those who lead, specifically pointing to our current shepherds. Several nodded in agreement, and BW said it is a message CR should hear, too. I was planning to end with a large group participatory prayer, but due to time, I asked them to pray in their small groups. They prayed this simple prayer—<em>I praise you, Lord, because these verses remind me...</em> Overheard prayers... all powerful humbled leadership in control gift us with talents role for these men in your body servant gifted us to attain full measure of Christ Upon dismissal, I got tied up talking to RL about our upcoming mission report on Sunday. I was unable to shake the participants’ hands as they left the classroom.</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX O

GROUP INTERVIEW FOR NOMINEES

Thank you for participating in this project. The following questions will help me evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this discernment phase and determine what might be repeated or improved for future shepherd selections. Please respond with complete candor and be as specific as possible.

What are your general impressions of our group sessions?

What are your general impressions of your shepherd mentoring relationship?

How would you describe the impact of this project on your own process of discernment?

How has this process impacted your theological understanding of serving as a shepherd?

How has this process impacted your practical understanding of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch?

What improvements would you suggest?

What do you recommend regarding the continued use of a discernment phase in future shepherd selections? Please explain.
APPENDIX P

GROUP INTERVIEW FOR SHEPHERDS

Thank you for participating in this project. The following questions will help me evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this discernment phase and determine what might be repeated or improved for future shepherd selections. Please respond with complete candor and be as specific as possible.

What are your general impressions of our group sessions?

What are your general impressions of your shepherd mentoring relationship?

How has this process impacted your theological understanding of serving as a shepherd?

How would you describe the impact of this project on the nominee(s) you mentored?

How would this process have impacted your own discernment concerning serving as a shepherd?

What improvements would you suggest?

What do you recommend regarding the continued use of a discernment phase in future shepherd selections? Please explain.
APPENDIX Q

PROTOCOL FOR CODING FIELD NOTES

Protocol for Coding Field Notes
1) On Wednesday nights, following each group session, type the field notes into a Word document, using a three column format, identifying actual observations, general impressions, and initial interpretations.
2) On Thursday, review notes for all completed sessions, identifying prevalent topics and themes. Record these in a separate Word document.
3) Analyze these initial observations, arranging similar ideas into common groupings.
4) Prioritize groupings according to their level of significance.
5) Develop a tentative coding scheme by assigning appropriate numerical values to these groupings for quick reference.
6) Read all field notes again, classifying appropriate segments according to the tentative coding scheme.
7) In light of initial analysis, review tentative coding scheme for the purpose of further reducing classifications into manageable segments.
8) Refine tentative coding scheme into more descriptive categories.
9) Read, review, and refine weekly to ensure a complete and thorough coding scheme.
10) Produce a final iteration of the coding scheme.

Questions to Help Guide the Coding Scheme
1) How do nominees discern their willingness to serve as shepherds?
2) How do nominees interpret the congregation’s nomination?
3) What questions or concerns do nominees raise about their willingness to serve?
4) How has communal reflection on Ephesians 4:11-16 impacted the nominees’ process of discernment?
5) How has exposure to the practical aspects of serving as a shepherd at Cinco Ranch impacted the nominees’ process of discernment?
6) How have the shepherd mentoring relationships impacted the nominees’ process of discernment?
APPENDIX R

FINAL CODING FOR THE COMPILED FIELD NOTES

1.0—Logistics
  1.1—Spatial
  1.2—Technological
  1.3—Distractions
    1.3.1—internal
    1.3.2—external
    1.3.3—busy schedule
  1.4—Participant observation
  1.5—Refreshments
  1.6—Time

2.0—Participation
  2.1—Nominees
    2.1.1—eagerness
    2.1.2—disengaged
    2.1.3—personal reflection
  2.2—Shepherds
    2.2.1—personal reflection
    2.2.2—pastoral care
  2.3—Discussion
    2.3.1—Leadership
    2.3.2—Procedure
    2.3.3—Doctrine
  2.4—Lectio Divina
  2.5—Kyle’s assessment

3.0—Facilitator
  3.1—Self-perceptions
    3.1.1—connecting with the group
    3.1.2—self-doubt
    3.1.3—time concerns
  3.2—Lack of clarity
    3.2.1—self-perceived
    3.2.2—confirmed by the group
  3.3—Strategy for class confirmed

4.0—Nominees’ hesitations
  4.1—Individual
    4.1.1—self-doubt
    4.1.2—personal concern
  4.2—Group

5.0—Biblical observations
  5.1—General
  5.2—Personal connection
  5.3—Specific
    5.3.1—Christ
    5.3.2—body
    5.3.3—gifts
    5.3.4—purpose
    5.3.4.1—service
    5.3.4.2—love, concern
    5.3.4.3—building the body
    5.3.4.4—leadership, direction
    5.3.4.4.1—for the church
    5.3.4.4.2—for individuals
    5.3.4.5—example, embodiment
    5.3.4.6—maturity
    5.3.4.6.1—what it is
    5.3.4.6.2—what it isn’t
    5.3.4.7—relationships
    5.3.4.8—unity

6.0—Group Dynamics
  6.1—Laughter
  6.2—Lack of response
  6.3—Confusion
  6.4—Discussion
  6.5—Mutual support

7.0—Shepherd Selection Process
APPENDIX S

FINAL CODING FOR THE NOMINEES’ EVALUATION

1.0—General
   1.1—Session format
   1.2—Resources
   1.3—Connections
       1.3.1—with other nominees
       1.3.2—with other shepherds
2.0—Personal
   2.1—Nominees’ need for discernment
   2.2—Wives’ need for discernment
3.0—Theological
   3.1—Reference to Ephesians 4
   3.2—Need for more Scripture
   3.3—Confirmed previous understanding
4.0—Practical
   4.1—Shepherd mentoring
       4.1.1—positive comment
       4.1.2—negative comment
   4.2—Understanding Cinco Ranch
       4.2.1—procedures
       4.2.2—documents
5.0—Hawthorne effect
APPENDIX T

FINAL CODING FOR THE SHEPHERDS’ EVALUATION

1.0—General
   1.1—Session format
   1.2—Problem solving
   1.3—Making connections

2.0—Personal
   2.1—Nominees’ need for discernment
   2.2—Wives’ need for discernment

3.0—Theological
   3.1—Reference to Ephesians 4
   3.2—Need for more Scripture
   3.3—Confirmed previous understanding
   3.4—Unrelated to the intent of the sessions

4.0—Practical
   4.1—Shepherd mentoring
      4.1.1—Positive comment
      4.1.2—Negative comment
      4.1.3—Personal regret
   4.2—Understanding Cinco Ranch

5.0—Hawthorne effect
BRIEF VITA

Aaron Walling was born in San Antonio, Texas on September 4, 1973. He attended public school in both Texas and Iowa, and he graduated from West High School in Iowa City, Iowa in 1992. He attended York College in York, Nebraska for two years and then completed his undergraduate studies at Lubbock Christian University in Lubbock, Texas. He received the Bachelor of Arts in Bible in July 1996. He began his graduate studies in January 1997 at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri and in April 2003 received the Masters of Divinity. He is currently employed as the preaching minister at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ in Katy, Texas.