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DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Developing a Spiritual Leadership Curriculum at West University Church of Christ

Daniel McGraw

Abstract: *In the fall of 2015, I worked with a small group of congregational members to develop a spiritual leadership curriculum for the West University Church of Christ. Many of the congregation's leaders were feeling a sense of burnout and weariness in ministry. They yearned to deepen their own connection with God to energize their ministry. This article relates the history of the congregation before the intervention, outlines the process of the intervention, from its theological underpinnings to the development of the curriculum, and finally, examines the efficacy of this intervention.*

Snapshot of WUCC

The West University Church of Christ¹ is a 77 year old congregation in Houston, Texas. The congregation was established in 1939, built its first building in 1951, and added to it over the years. Although the congregation reached close to 600 members in the late 1960s, its membership declined over the next few decades.

This decline was due to two main factors. First, the church followed the typical life-cycle of churches, with a slow decline taking place as the church grew older and more established.² Second, the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood began changing in the late 1980s as older, middle-class homes were demolished to make way for more lavish homes, driving up property taxes. Many long term members from the neighborhood sold their houses and moved to the suburbs, often changing membership to closer churches. The church transformed from a

¹ Hereinafter, WUCC.

² Robert Dale, *To Dream Again* (Nashville: Broadman, 1981), 14-18. Dale depicts a congregation's life-cycle as having five distinct phases: birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. While the lifespan of a congregation can differ from location to location, the typical lifespan of a congregation is approximately seventy years.

neighborhood congregation to a commuter church, with many remaining members traveling from the suburbs.

These changes impacted the congregation's leadership. Many potential leaders moved and placed membership elsewhere. Fewer individuals were willing to take on leadership roles. There was also rapid leadership turnover, with elders and deacons moving away or, more often, succumbing to burnout. Those who continued leading often felt stretched and weary from their work.

WUCC experienced another decline in 2002 after a significant disagreement between the minister, elders, and church members. This conflict was multifaceted, but stemmed from disputes over personality, vision, and ministry prerogatives of the various leadership groups. Factions arose, divisions deepened, and people began to leave the church as the conflict simmered under the surface. The church declined significantly over the next two years, with the minister and some of the leadership also departing during this time. The remaining leadership kept the church together, but those efforts stressed them emotionally and spiritually. They cultivated an atmosphere of love, perseverance, and cohesion that still undergirds the congregation. Yet those efforts also left a mark on congregational leadership. Leadership was more about immersing oneself in the various administrative and pastoral tasks of the congregation, not in fostering or modeling intentional spiritual growth.

I began my project thesis in the summer of 2015, when WUCC had approximately 150 members. The year before this intervention had been a time of transition for the WUCC leadership, as well. The leadership of the church had changed over the course of the past few years, with my transition into preaching, the hiring of a new associate minister, the retirement of two long-time elders, and the death of a deacon. The congregation had two elders, nine deacons, and a number of other unofficial ministry leaders who helped oversee various ministries within the church.³

³ There are a number of different areas of the leadership within the congregation. In most Churches of Christ, leadership refers to the elders, deacons, and ministers of the congregation. At WUCC these roles are restricted to men; this is based on the traditional Church of Christ polity of male leadership, which is discussed later. Hereinafter I refer to these three leadership positions as the "formal leadership." In our congregation there are a number of "informal leadership" positions as well. These would include ministry leaders and organizers, Bible class teachers, ministry volunteers, and others. These positions are not reserved for a specific gender.

As I discovered in the fall of 2015, however, the congregation's leaders felt stretched thin. Partly this stemmed from the need to raise up new leaders from within the congregation, a project that we are currently addressing. But there was a deeper, underlying cause: WUCC leaders need to develop a deeper spiritual life to sustain them as they serve the congregation. I arrived at this conclusion using various ethnographic approaches.

Over the course of eighteen months I conducted two separate ethnographic studies of WUCC: appreciative inquiry interviews and a series of informal conversations. I discovered a number of themes regarding leadership and spirituality. First, some of the leadership felt "stretched" by administration and pastoral care needs. They were experiencing weariness and burn out partially due to only having two elders. They felt a need to find strength and perseverance in the Lord. This theme was repeated in the later, informal interviews. Some felt as if their spiritual lives were atrophying or depleted. One deacon told me, "I don't think I have any spiritual conversations with people from church." This statement was both disheartening and enlightening and demonstrated a need to develop a deeper spirituality among the leaders of our congregation. Additionally, I discovered that many of the leaders also had a mistaken understanding of spiritual leadership. Many saw spiritual leadership through the lens of a business model, with productivity and action as the metrics of success. As a congregation, WUCC needed to change its understanding of leadership in order to be faithful to God's mission.

These interactions suggested a narrative of concern facing the congregation: we must develop spiritual leaders who are deepening their relationship with God. This, in turn, would allow them to better serve the congregation. Leaders cannot hope to lead others closer to God if they, themselves, are not in the process of spiritual formation. In order to facilitate this change, however, WUCC needed an intentional curriculum that integrates new patterns of leadership with spiritual formation exercises, allowing these existing leaders to develop a deeper, more intentionally spirituality that would shape their leadership practices.

While there were many options on where to begin, I thought that the best course of action would be the creation of a spiritual leadership formation curriculum tailored to the specific needs of our congregation. This curriculum focused on Philippians, especially the Christ hymn (Phil 2:5-11), as its primary text for developing a model of spiritual leadership. Specifically, this curriculum focused on the development of a Christlike

phronesis through small group interaction, biblical reflection, and spiritual formation practices.⁴ Using Paul's theology of *phronesis* as a model of Christian leadership, this curriculum emphasized various aspects of the Christ hymn to show how the imitation of Christ transforms spiritual life and leadership, helping leaders be shaped into the image of Christ more fully and, in turn, allowing them to lead others to be spiritually formed. I will return to the development process later in this article.

Theology of *Phronesis* and Spiritual Leadership

I chose to base this spiritual leadership curriculum in the book of Philippians. Much of the language that Paul employs in the epistle is the language of spiritual formation. This is centered on the example of Christ found in Philippians 2:5-11, in which Jesus is shown as humbly giving up the form of God to take the form of a servant and become obedient to death. Jesus becomes the ultimate example of spiritual formation, as Paul then commands them: "Let your mindset be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). Philippians also integrates themes of spiritual leadership throughout the epistle. Paul addresses his letter specifically to the leaders of the Philippian congregations, urging them to set an example for the entire congregation. Paul also gives them four examples of leadership, both positive and negative, to demonstrate how Christ's example can shape life and leadership within a faith community. Thus, Philippians serves to unite spiritual formation and spiritual leadership under the heading of *phronesis*.

Paul's purpose in writing Philippians is to encourage these believers to be formed into the image of Christ and to allow that identity to influence every aspect of their lives. Paul writes, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27),⁵ calling them to a life shaped by the narrative of Christ. In Philippians 1:27, Paul summarizes the main point of his epistle with this statement: "Now, the important thing is this: as citizens of heaven live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ."⁶ James Thompson contends that 1:27 forms the *propositio*, "the thesis statement of the argument," for the book of Philippians.⁷ Paul reiterates this admonition

⁴ *Phronesis* is a transliteration from Greek that is often translated as "mindset" or "attitude."

⁵ Unless otherwise specified, all biblical quotations are from the ESV.

⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 144. The phrase "of heaven" is not present in the Greek text, but O'Brien interjects it here based on 3:20.

⁷ James W. Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," *Interpretation* 61 3 (July 2007): 303-5.

in 3:20, reminding the Philippians “our citizenship is in heaven.” Although the word implies “to be a citizen,” it can also be understood in terms of “to deal with, to conduct oneself, to live.”⁸ It seems that Paul chose the phrasing of citizenship intentionally because of civic values in Philippi. Philippi was designated as an *ius Italicum*, where Roman laws and customs ruled. Those who had been citizens of the city were granted Roman citizenship as well. There were sharp distinctions in Philippi between those who had Roman citizenship and those who did not; those with citizenship had greater societal worth. Those in Philippi prided themselves on their Roman citizenship,⁹ but Paul calls them to a citizenship that trumps all: citizenship in the kingdom of God. Their lives were meant to be a reflection of that which they believed. To Paul, the core concept of the spiritual life is to live in accordance with the gospel narrative and the example of Christ. In this epistle Paul teaches his recipients how to conform their lives to the pattern of Christ. “To live worthily as citizens of heaven” becomes synonymous with the spiritual life, a life lived in accordance with the pattern of Christ.

Throughout Philippians, Paul continues to build an argument for the development of a lifestyle based on the example of Christ. As Meeks contends, “this letter’s most comprehensive purpose is the shaping of a Christian *phronesis*, a practical moral reasoning that is ‘conformed to [Christ’s] death’ in hope of his resurrection.”¹⁰ This *phronesis* should influence every aspect of their lives: their civic actions; their relationships with those both inside and outside of the church; and their values, with the Christ-ethic challenging the cultural ethics and values of the society in which they lived. Every aspect of their lives was to be shaped by their faith.

Indeed, the idea of a Christian *phronesis* becomes the unifying idea throughout the Philippian epistle. Paul uses the verb *phronein* in its various

⁸ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 80. In Acts 23:1 also translates this idea as “fulfilled my duty” (NIV) or “lived my life” (ESV) before God, implying life lived in accordance to one’s obligations.

⁹ Joseph Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114-6, points out that numerous funerary inscriptions discovered in Philippi contain references to both city and Roman citizenship, “suggest[ing] that the distinction between citizen and non-citizen was an important one for inhabitants of the colony” (115).

¹⁰ Wayne A. Meeks, “The Man from Heaven in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 333.

forms ten times throughout the text.¹¹ Traditionally, translators render this verb with the ideas of having the same “attitude” or “mind,” but this loses sight of the semantic nuances conveyed by the Greek *phronesis*. Others translate it as “mindset,” “practical moral reasoning,” or “thinking.”¹² Fowl contends that this focus on the intellectual side of the word ignores its deeper understanding of *phronesis* as a way of being or acting; attitude also leads to action. Thus, he translates it as “pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting.”¹³ This *phronesis* serves as the foundation of the entire epistle.

Philippians 2:5 serves as the fulcrum of the Philippian letter, for this is the Christian mindset that Paul wants to develop in his recipients: “Let this be your pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting, which was also displayed in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴ He then continues by stating the ways in which Christ’s *phronesis* stands in direct contrast with many of the values of their society:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11, ESV)

Paul uses the plural to demonstrate that this is a calling for all of the Christians, not just a select few. This is the attitude that should permeate the church as a whole.¹⁵

¹¹ Phil 1:7; 2:2 (2 times); 2:5; 3:15 (2 times); 3:19; 4:2; and 4:10 (2 times). Paul uses forms of this word another thirteen times throughout his letters; nine of those instances are in Romans, another epistle concerned with a Christian manner of thinking and acting.

¹² Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 209; Meeks, “The Man from Heaven,” 333. Meeks also uses “practical reasoning” and “practical wisdom.”

¹³ Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 43. Gorman states, “The emphasis in the text is on the reality that

The way Paul presents Jesus in the hymn is a direct contrast to many of the values of their society. While Philippian society valued honor and the acquisition of power and esteem, Jesus is presented as pursuing humility and practicing servility.¹⁶ Although Jesus was the “form of God,” in humility he determined not to use that status to his own advantage. Instead, he practiced humility through kenosis and willingly took on the “form of a servant.” Kenosis was not something that Jesus casually agreed to do but, instead, was something that Christ considered and about which he thought. Jesus chose to humble himself for the sake of others and became obedient to the will of the Father, even though that obedience led to his crucifixion. Jesus showed the ultimate humility by moving not just from the highest level (“equality with God”) to the lowest (“the form of a servant”), but also by willingly humiliating himself more by submitting to “the socially degrading experience of crucifixion,” the basest and vilest punishment in the Roman Empire.¹⁷

According to Paul, Jesus’s kenosis occurred in three stages: his self-consideration of his status; his incarnation, moving from the form of God to the form of a human being and a slave; and his obedient death on the cross, a voluntary humiliation for the sake of humanity.¹⁸ Jesus willingly set aside the privileges of his position to practice humility in order to demonstrate the character of God to us. He also serves as the exemplar of

life ‘within you (all)’ is life ‘within’ Christ. For this reason, there must be a correspondence between Christ and believers, between his story and theirs, between the hymnic narrative of Christ (presented in vv. 6-11) and the ‘attitude’ or way of thinking and life of the Philippian community.”

¹⁶ Jonathan Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Hellerman demonstrates how Romans emphasized the acquisition of honor through the *cursus honorum*, the “Honors Race,” a progression of governmental positions through which one progressed by good works, monetary donations, public works projects, patronage, and sponsorship of games. One gained power, fame, and position through the pursuit of honor. Honor was a “public commodity” that was based on how one was perceived by others in society, and all aspects of life were directed towards the gaining and keeping of honor. Jesus, however, becomes the antithesis of this power struggle. Jesus practices the *cursus pedorum*, the “worsening race,” pursuing humility, servility, and degradation even to the point of death.

¹⁷ Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor*, 130-31.

¹⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 122. Fee adds deeper understanding to this position, contending that it is through these two actions that Christ confronts Greco-Roman societal values: Christ, as God, “did the antithesis of ‘selfish ambition’ by pouring himself out and becoming a servant, and as a man the antithesis of ‘vain conceit’ by humbling himself to death on a cross.” See Fee, *Philippians*, 187.

the life we are to follow. Essentially Paul contends, “Let this be your pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting, which was also displayed in Christ Jesus.” This was a pattern that the Philippian Christians were to follow in every aspect of their lives. In 2:2, Paul calls the Philippians to have “the same mind” with one another. He calls them to love, fellowship in the Spirit, affection, sympathy, and humility. This exemplifies a mindset shaped by the example of Christ, which would inspire and transform their interactions with one another.

The epistle to the Philippians was not written simply to inform or encourage these Christians but, instead, to mold their behavior and thinking. As Gorman contends, “The purpose of Paul’s letters . . . is pastoral or spiritual before it is theological. Today we might speak of his goal as spiritual formation.”¹⁹ Those who are practicing spiritual formation are developing a Christlike *phronesis* in their lives.

This is especially true for the leadership of the Philippian churches. Although the letter is addressed to the entire Philippian church (“to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi”), it is the only letter in the entire Pauline corpus that is addressed specifically to the leaders of the church: “together with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1).²⁰ Paul is concerned with the spiritual formation of every member of the congregation, from the leaders to the newest believers. His appeal directly to the elders and deacons, however, serves as a specific instruction to the leaders of the congregations in the city in how they should conduct their own life, ministry, and leadership. Only by developing the *phronesis* of Christ in their own lives can they lead others in spiritual formation.

Paul holds up three examples of individuals who live in accordance with a Christian *phronesis*. First, Paul uses Timothy to illustrate this mindset in 2:19-24, saying that he has “no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for [their] welfare. For they seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (2:20-21). Timothy becomes the exemplar of Paul’s command to “count others more significant than [themselves]” (2:3) and to look after “the interests of others” (2:4). Timothy demonstrates the attitude of Christ in his life and ministry. Second, Paul reminds them of Epaphroditus in 2:25-30, a “brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier,” one of their own Christian community who was sent to Paul. Epaphroditus endured illness

¹⁹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 4.

²⁰ Paul does not specifically address these leaders again in the epistle. In 4:3, however, Paul does address other leaders in the congregation by name, specifically, Clement, Euodia and Syntyche, and other “co-laborers.” Thus Paul bookends much of the epistle with appeals directly to those in positions of leadership within the congregation.

and “risked his life” for “the work of Christ” (2:30). Epaphroditus is presented as one who puts the needs of the Gospel above his own health. Finally, Paul uses his own life as an example of the Christian mindset. In 3:2-14, Paul presents himself as an exemplar of kenosis by sharing the stories of his own life. Using the phrase “consider,” which he employs three times in the text (3:7, 8 twice), Paul compares his life with Jesus’s example in the Christ hymn. Paul’s own story becomes a tangible interpretation of this ethic, patterning Jesus’s kenosis. He had many advantages from his Jewish birth and heritage, but those things had brought pride and false zeal. Many would consider them beneficial, but he now considers them a loss, even rubbish, in comparison to Christ. He is willing to give up everything in order to follow Christ. Paul has had a sudden “re-evaluation of values.”²¹ In Philippians 3:12-15, Paul reminds us that this process is not finished in him, either. He is still developing this *phronesis* “because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Thus Paul “forget[s] what is behind and strain[s] forward to what lies ahead” (3:13), seeking to attain the godly goal in Christ Jesus. He then tells the Philippians, “let all of us who are mature think this way;” literally, be of “the same mind” (3:15). These three leaders exemplify a lifestyle patterned on the *phronesis* of Christ. Their example should spur the imagination of the Philippian believers, calling them to practice a similar ethic.

Paul also presents a negative example from two of his co-workers, Euodia and Syntyche.²² They are embroiled in the midst of a disagreement, and Paul implores them to have “the same mind in the Lord” (4:2, NIV). Their fellowship in Christ must transform their relationship with one another, challenging them to put humility and Christlikeness first.

Throughout Philippians Paul is building an argument that the Christian ethic and lifestyle is patterned on Jesus. Church leaders ought to set a Christlike example in the contexts and situations of their own lives. Leadership is about more than just the ability to influence others through

²¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 382-391; Fowl, *Philippians*, 152-53. This is especially poignant through Paul’s use of accounting language. His old advantages that were a gain are now losses in comparison to the gain he finds in Christ. Nothing is more important than “gaining Christ” (v. 8) and “shar[ing] in his sufferings” (v. 10). The things that he once considered an advantage are now nothing in terms of his relationship with Christ; he has gained far more through his recognition of Jesus as his Lord. For Paul, the ledgers are now far outweighed in Christ’s favor.

²² Paul calls them “co-laborers,” who have “labored side by side with [him] in the gospel” (4:3). Whether they were formal or informal leaders remains unknown, but Paul presents them as examples of those in leadership who do not practice a Christlike *phronesis* with one another.

words or actions; instead, it is about developing a Christlike *phronesis* in your own life and helping others do the same, leading to transformation.

Leadership vs. Spiritual Leadership

The core of this intervention is spiritual leadership. What does it mean to be a spiritual leader, and how does that stand in contrast to other forms of leadership practiced in politics, corporations, institutions, and even the church? It is through the *phronesis* of Christ that this distinction is best understood.

Leadership is, simply, “a relationship of influence in which one person seeks to influence the vision, the values, the attitudes, and the behaviors of another.”²³ Too often, congregational leadership has patterned itself on business leadership configurations. It often is about the person or people on top with others reporting to them. When approached solely as “a relationship of influence,” leadership becomes concerned leveraging one’s influence and position to gain greater power and prestige. It often is based on using one’s own charisma, persuasiveness, bearing, attractiveness, and influence to seek one’s own desires or outcomes. In many ways this type of leadership is a participation in a twenty-first-century version of the *cursus honorum*.

Spiritual leadership, in contrast, is patterned after the example of Christ and his humility. Spiritual leadership is less about power and more about spiritual influence, helping others live into the vision of God. Spiritual leaders are those who are developing *phronesis* in their own lives and, consequently, are helping others develop that same *phronesis* in their lives. Spiritual leadership development can only be accomplished through spiritual formation, the “continuing response to the reality of God’s grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world.”²⁴ It is an ongoing process in which we partner with God to draw closer to God and be transformed more and more into God’s likeness. This takes place primarily through participation in various experiences and practices that deepen our relationship with God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These practices help one be conformed to the *phronesis* of Christ.

²³ Walt Wright, “Introduction: Mentor to Mentor,” in *The Three Tasks of Leadership: Worldly Wisdom for Pastoral Leaders*, ed. Eric Jacobsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 3.

²⁴ Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, eds. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 24.

Spiritual leadership starts with the heart of the leader. Many churches choose leaders for their perceived expertise in business or life. Congregational leaders are often thought to understand spiritual formation and already be applying these practices in their lives. Many congregational leaders are lost on how to practice spiritual formation, however. Thus, I determined that WUCC needed to “strengthen the soul of our leadership,”²⁵ helping them be conformed to the *phronesis* of Christ.

Consequently, spiritual leaders must model a life of spiritual formation for the congregation. Gregory of Nyssa compares the difference in worldly leadership and biblical leadership with a metaphor: magnificent but dry aqueducts versus wooden pipes filled with water. Although one is impressive on the outside, it is ultimately useless. The church needs leaders who are connected to the source of living water²⁶ and are helping quench the spiritual thirst of the congregation. Only those who have connected with God intimately in their own lives can help others do the same.²⁷ Spiritual leaders must seek to connect with God through both personal and communal practices of spiritual disciplines.

Thus, I sought to create a curriculum centered on the Christ hymn from Philippians that would integrate biblical study, spiritual formation exercises, and reframing of spiritual leadership.

The Intervention

Rather than creating this curriculum myself, I wanted to involve others from the congregation in this process. First, I wanted to incorporate a plurality of viewpoints and positions in this curriculum in order to mirror the diversity of views within our congregation. Thus, I sought to create a team that represented the various ethnicities, backgrounds, and life stages in WUCC. Second, I wanted to involve others who had an expertise in education and leadership, utilizing their skills and abilities in this process. Third, I wanted to develop some individuals from within the congregation who could serve in leadership capacities in the future.

²⁵ This language is taken from Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 87-98. Barton equates the spiritual life to a journey and spiritual leaders to guides. She says that the best guide for a spiritual journey “is one who has made the journey him- or herself . . . and thus knows something about the terrain, the climate, the beauties, dangers and challenges present at each point along the way.” Only those who have spent time with God in the joys and pains of life have the ability to guide others through similar spiritual moments.

Thus, I sought to create a Curriculum Development Team (CDT) to help with this endeavor.²⁸ Specifically, I wanted the members of the CDT to fit into four main criteria: *diversity* of age, race, and background; demonstration of *spiritual maturity* in their lives; the exercise of *leadership*, but not in a formal position within the congregation;²⁹ and *expertise* in leadership or in curriculum development/implementation.

In the summer of 2015 I worked with the elders and ministers to create a list of approximately fifteen individuals who fit these criteria. I asked eight of those individuals if they would participate; six agreed to be a part of this intervention. Due to life situations and work conflicts, however, only four individuals were able to participate in the entire curriculum development process. These individuals ranged in age from thirty to sixty-five. Three of the CDT members were white and one was African-American.³⁰ Two of the participants had worked in the field of education as teachers, teaching-coaches, and curriculum specialists. Another member currently serves as the head of a local governmental organization, and he had served in positions of governmental and church leadership for more than thirty years.

The CDT agreed to participate in the curriculum development process. This process would consist of a weekend retreat and eight curriculum development sessions together. They covenanted to also participate fully in the project, completing the weekly readings, practicing the assigned spiritual formation exercise(s), and sharing their insights with one another.

Retreat

The project began with a retreat that took place over the course of a weekend in October, 2015. The goal of this retreat was to outline the theology of the project so that all of the members of the CDT would operate from the same theological framework. The retreat took place on Friday evening and Saturday morning, and consisted of five sessions spread out over those two days. For the retreat I provided a notebook of notes and readings to facilitate the discussion with the CDT. These notes ran concurrent with the lessons and provided a resource for them to use both

²⁸ Hereinafter, the CDT.

²⁹ I made the decision to not involve any elders or deacons because I wanted this curriculum to be created for the benefit of these existing leaders. I did not want to burden them with the task of creating this curriculum in addition to their other leadership tasks.

³⁰ Additionally, one of the participants who participated in half of the intervention was a Hispanic male who had become a Christian approximately ten years before.

during the retreat and during the curriculum development sessions. The retreat also interwove times of worship, prayer, reflection, and spiritual formation exercises.

The first retreat session focused on the difference between secular and spiritual leadership, especially in terms of characteristics, goals, and management processes. We looked at different models of spiritual leadership and discussed which was the most effective in congregational ministry. Specifically, we examined the missional leadership model and its emphasis on moving together toward God's goal. This model is demonstrated in Figure 1: Missional Leadership Model.

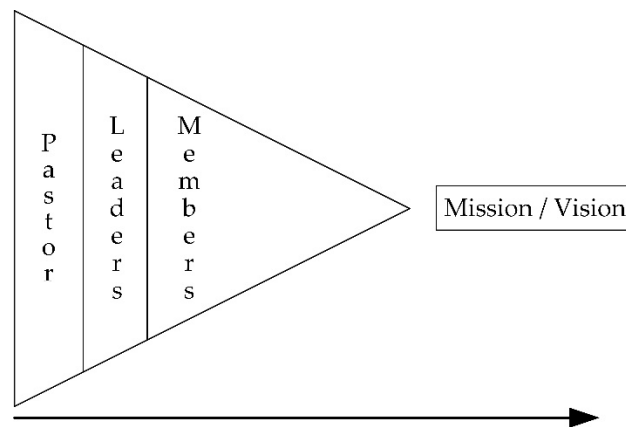


Figure 1- Missional Leadership Model

Originally, this was the model that the CDT used as it considered spiritual leadership. Our understanding of spiritual leadership changed over the course of this intervention, requiring us to create a new model.

The next three sessions of the retreat worked through a theology of Philippians and the Christ hymn. We considered the themes of kenosis; *cursus honorum/pudorum* and humility; *phronesis*; and consideration. Each of these sessions also examined instances of spiritual formation and spiritual leadership in the epistle. Each retreat session ended with various spiritual disciplines to help the CDT practice spiritual formation. These disciplines included the breath prayer and the Jesus prayer,³¹ *lectio divina*, artistic representation, worship, and silence/meditation.

The fifth session was different from the preceding four. I invited WUCC's elders and deacons to participate in this session with the CDT. The

³¹ The Jesus prayer is a short prayer that states, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

goal was to brainstorm about these leaders wanted grow and mature in their spiritual leadership. I wanted these leaders to help determine the course of the intervention and curriculum. Both elders, seven deacons, and the associate minister attended the retreat.

The members of the CDT took turns presenting some of the information they had learned over the course of the retreat. This allowed me to ascertain how well they had internalized and processed the information they had been presented. All members of the CDT spoke, sharing the theology of Philippians and their understanding of spiritual leadership and spiritual formation with the group. At this point, I addressed the WUCC leaders, seeking to understand the ways in which they wanted to grow closer to God and be formed spiritually. Their responses were varied: some desired a deeper intimacy with God while others wanted to be serving in the community. These responses can be placed in three main categories: internal,³² relational,³³ and communal.³⁴ These categories are not exclusive, and many of their responses overlap from one category to the other. Their statements, however, showed that the leaders had specific needs for spiritual development in their own lives. We prayed together, and then adjourned from the retreat.

Curriculum Development Sessions

Over the course of the next four months the CDT met to develop the curriculum together. These sessions lasted approximately two hours and incorporated reflection on the week's spiritual practices, a discussion of the session's topic, the creation of questions related to that theme, and the introduction of the subsequent spiritual formation practice. Between these meetings I would also correspond with the CDT via email and phone calls, clarifying any questions they might have or checking on their individual progress.

Each session began with a prayer, followed by a reflection on the spiritual practice(s) assigned for the week. These practices were chosen to correspond with the theme for the upcoming session. For example, we would practice service and then reflect on that experience before discussing

³² Internal disciplines included humility, selflessness, patience, and balance.

³³ Here, I define relational practice as ways in which the respondents wanted to grow in their relationship with God. These practices included praying, listening to God, and practicing the presence of God.

³⁴ Communal practices are those done with one or more other individuals. These needs included confession, hospitality, fellowship, vulnerability/intimacy, service, evangelism, grace, celebration, and active listening to others.

how Jesus took on the form of a slave. The CDT members would share their experiences with the spiritual practice(s). Every member of the CDT facilitated these discussions. These reflections were spiritually and relationally formative; there were often moments of vulnerability and transparency as the members of the CDT shared their lives with one another.

After our discussion of the spiritual discipline, the CDT discussed the theme for the week. Almost every week was shaped around a portion of the Christ hymn, although other portions of Philippians were also incorporated. I would decide the theme beforehand to best meet the needs of WUCC's leadership (as ascertained in the retreat) while also remaining true to the flow of Philippians and the Christ hymn. At times, however, the CDT would suggest changing the theme or adding an additional lesson or reading. We would start each session by creating a purpose statement, which would reflect the goal that the curriculum was hoping to achieve in that lesson. We worked through the theme, reading the passages and creating questions for the curriculum. These questions were then narrowed to the focus of the purpose statement and arranged to best achieve its purpose.

At the end of each session I introduced the new spiritual exercises we would practice over the next week. These practices were chosen with the upcoming theme in mind (i.e., confession when discussing humility). We would practice this exercise together, if needed, and then close in prayer. Each week there was homework designed to help the participants prepare for the upcoming conversation, including one or two spiritual formation practices that directly related to the topic in question.

The members of the CDT helped craft this curriculum in significant ways. In the first session, our educators spent approximately forty minutes helping us understand the process of curriculum writing, from crafting purpose statements to writing open-ended questions to shaping a narrative from the flow of the questions and discussion. In each session one CDT member reminded us to focus on aspects of leadership, not just spiritual formation or biblical knowledge. Each individual brought their own unique perspectives and experiences to these discussions. Certain spiritual disciplines were added or removed based on the experiences of the CDT. They determined which exercises would be included. They helped create most of the questions, and they would reexamine each lesson to make sure it fit the purpose and spirit of the curriculum. Their insights also shaped the entire intervention. The curriculum was originally designed to last eight

sessions; due to the influence of the CDT, however, we created an additional two lessons.

It was this process of communal discernment and reflection that also led to a significant change in our understanding of spiritual formation. Originally, in the course of this intervention, we based our curriculum on the missional leadership model presented in figure 1. Over the course of the intervention, however, we began to see problems with this model of leadership for our definition of spiritual leadership. Through the course of the ongoing interactions with the CDT, we determined that this model simply did not meet the criteria of spiritual leadership that emerged. In our understanding, spiritual leaders are those who are developing the *phronesis* of Christ through spiritual formation and are helping others do the same. The missional leadership model fit part of this definition in that it worked with a vision or goal in mind, but it did not incorporate spiritual formation into the model. Thus, we created our own model of spiritual leadership for the purpose of this project, which is represented in Figure 2: Spiritual Leadership Model.

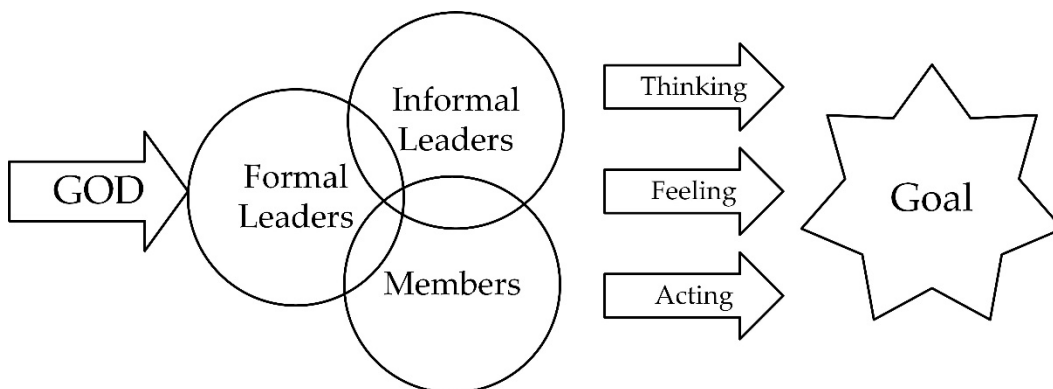


Figure 2 - Spiritual Leadership Model

This model takes into consideration the ongoing influence of God through spiritual formation and the need for leadership to help others be spiritually formed as well. This process leads towards a goal of Christian *phronesis* that is inherent in the lives of the congregants and moves the church towards God's goal for his people. This model of spiritual leadership takes seriously the development of a Christian *phronesis* in the lives of leaders. The goal of this model is to acknowledge that leaders have roles and responsibilities that are unique from others in the congregation, but also that everyone has a part to play. Leaders are being shaped into the image of Christ through spiritual formation, and they are then helping others to be spiritually

formed as well.³⁵ Spiritual leaders are those who are developing the *phronesis* of Christ in their own lives, imitating him in their thinking, obedience, kenosis, and humility.

Over the course of these eight sessions the CDT created a spiritual leadership curriculum that consisted of ten lessons. These lessons are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Spiritual Leadership Formation Curriculum Overview

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation Exercise</i>
1	Leadership: Secular vs. Spiritual	Four models of leadership	<i>Lectio divina</i> : five different passages
2	Citizens of the Gospel	Phil 1:27-30; 3:17-21	Ignatian <i>Examen</i>
3	The <i>Phronesis</i> of Christ	Phil 2:5 and other <i>phronesis passages</i>	Palms Up/Palms Down Prayer, Contemplation
4	Developing Christlike <i>phronesis</i> : Consideration	Phil 2:1-11; 3:4-11	<i>Lectio divina</i> , Journaling
5	Developing Christlike <i>phronesis</i> : Humility	Phil 2:5-8; <i>Cursus honorum / pudorum</i>	Confession
6	Developing Christlike <i>phronesis</i> : Service	Phil 2:1-30	Prayer, Meditation, Service
7	Developing Christlike <i>phronesis</i> : Obedience	Phil 2:5-11 and passages about submission	Facilitator's choice
8	Developing Christlike <i>phronesis</i> : Cruciformity	Phil 2:5-8 and passages about the cross	Prayer, Listening to others
9	The Goal of Leadership	Phil 1:9-11; 2:1-5; 4:4-7	Prayer, Discern / Imagine / Dream
10	A <i>Phronetic</i> Church	Phil 2:1-2, 12-16; 3:12-15	Implementation, Discipleship

³⁵ This model would also acknowledge the fact that God is at work in the hearts and lives of others in the congregation. Spiritual formation is not the sole right and responsibility of a congregation's formal leadership. Rather, God is at work in the lives of all people, and the ways in which we intersect with one another and share what God is doing help others develop a more Christlike *phronesis* and be spiritually formed.

Each of these lessons integrates biblical reflection, group discussion, and personal spiritual formation in order to bring about *phronetic*, spiritual leadership development in the participants.

Intervention Results

Overall, the curriculum and the group process are effective at helping existing spiritual leaders develop a deeper understanding of spiritual formation and spiritual leadership. I collected data from three different points of view: insider evaluation, outsider evaluation, and researcher evaluation. Utilizing data triangulation,³⁶ I compared these resources in order to gain a better perspective of the efficacy of this curriculum for the development of spiritual leadership. These three angles of evaluation came from the researcher, the insiders (CDT), and an outside expert. I will examine each of these in quick detail below.

The first angle of evaluation, researcher evaluation, came from the field notes I created at each CDT session. During these sessions I listened to the CDT members, recording their comments and my observations. Afterwards, I added my own analysis and interpretations of these events in the second column. I would then code these notes based on four key areas developed from the intervention's theology: kenosis, spiritual leadership, *phronesis*, and spiritual formation. This permitted me to determine how well the spiritual practices functioned in developing the spirituality of the CDT. I also evaluated how the CDT's understanding of leadership had changed over the course of the intervention.

The second angle of evaluation was insider evaluation, based on the overall perception of the CDT. During the final session I handed out an evaluation question for the CDT to consider.³⁷ This evaluation allowed the CDT to judge the curriculum from their own experiences with the curriculum in the process of development. We then discussed their views within the group, which allowed the exchange of ideas and permitted new

³⁶ Data triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the situation that is being researched. Through triangulation, the researcher adds breadth and depth to the research, while also adding trustworthiness to the researcher's final product. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 70-76.

³⁷ The evaluation document they were to consider was as follows: *Imagine that a small group of individuals from the congregation work through this curriculum together over the course of ten weeks. How would their understanding of spiritual formation and spiritual leadership change through this study? What changes would we observe in their spiritual lives and in their leadership within the congregation?*

possibilities to emerge through corporate imagination. I compiled their statements and looked for common themes and words specifically based on the formal coding system.

The third angle of evaluation came from an outside expert. I asked Dr. Houston Heflin, associate professor of ministry at Abilene Christian University, to evaluate the curriculum and leader guide to judge their efficacy for spiritual leadership development. He examined the curriculum and wrote a summary of his analysis, providing a report about its strengths and weaknesses.

When all of these results were compiled, the curriculum was judged to be efficacious for developing a deeper understanding of spiritual leadership. It is especially effective at helping existing leaders develop a deeper understanding of spiritual leadership while enhancing their own spiritual practices. Once this curriculum is implemented at WUCC, we should expect that leaders would develop a more Christlike *phronesis* in their own lives while viewing spiritual leadership differently. It would be up to the leaders, however, as to whether or not they integrate these spiritual practices and new perspectives on leadership into their lives. I am looking to create an ongoing process of coaching, guiding these leaders as they lead others to develop a Christlike *phronesis*. Discipleship is the second goal of spiritual leadership. As the group completes the curriculum, they are encouraged to gather a small group to participate in the curriculum together, with the leader now serving as group facilitator. The original facilitator could transition into a coaching role, walking alongside these leaders as they disciple others while also encouraging these leaders to continue their own spiritual development. Ideally, these leaders would meet once a month to check in and encourage one another in ongoing spiritual transformation while also supporting one another in their continuing discipleship. I am still developing these coaching plans.

Potential Application for Other Congregations

The process of curriculum development would be a wonderful exercise for congregational practitioners. As I interacted with the CDT, I learned a lot about my own leadership style. I was also influenced by the various personalities and perspectives within the congregation. These diverse individuals came with their own points of view and backgrounds that greatly enhanced the curriculum, creating a vastly different outcome than would have been possible on my own. Congregations that are looking to tailor a curriculum to their own needs could utilize this same process to great effect. By allowing others to take ownership in the development

process, the outcomes will have a greater efficacy when it comes to the diversity within the congregation itself. Thus, this process could be used to help create new curriculum, work through a theological issue, or plan for upcoming sermon series to meet the needs of the congregation; it would not just be limited to curriculum development or issues of spiritual leadership.

While the process of curriculum development was an integral part of the intervention, I believe that the curriculum itself could serve to help leaders deepen their own understanding of spiritual development and spiritual leadership. Churches could take this existing curriculum and nuance it to their own polity and leadership needs. It would introduce a variety of spiritual disciplines for *phronetic* development while also expanding their understanding of spiritual leadership.

Congregational Impact and Future Plans

This curriculum has already impacted the life and ministry of WUCC. The members of the CDT still comment on how their spiritual lives were impacted by this intervention. Three of the CDT members are also involved in new areas of ministry, as both participants and leaders, after having participated in this process.

During the summer of 2016, this curriculum was adapted by our associate minister for use with the small group leaders of WUCC. Both the existing and new leaders used parts of this curriculum to develop a new understanding of spiritual leadership within their small group. This curriculum proved to be too cumbersome for this group, however, due to its length and scope. As a result, I am also in the process of editing this curriculum, creating individual homework portions to be completed during the week as well as a group discussion portion. My hope is that this edited curriculum could be implemented in a variety of different settings.

WUCC is currently in the process of ordaining new elders. In January 2017, we will use this curriculum within the staff and elders to help reorient the spiritual leadership of WUCC while also seeking to cast a vision for *phronetic* development for the congregation.

While the overall impact of this curriculum is not yet known, we believe that God will use these insights and interventions to deepen the spiritual life of our congregation and develop a new generation of spiritual leaders at WUCC.

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