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# Facilitating a Pastoral Leadership Model for the Ulysses Church of Christ

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## ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the results of a project intended to train leaders in principles of character-based leadership. I applied five principles drawn from Proverbs to the current situation of the Ulysses Church of Christ. The principles included community development, integrity, listening, ministering to the marginalized, and shepherding. I intentionally focused this character-based leadership training more on theological principles found in Proverbs than on skill development or leadership theories from the social sciences. I paid some attention to skill development and incorporated some principles from the social sciences, particularly psychology, but I placed greater emphasis on learning what God desires for spiritual leadership based on Proverbs.

I used five training sessions to teach principles of leadership and two sessions for evaluation. The five teaching sessions consisted of classroom instruction in the principles from Proverbs mentioned above. I gave assignments each week to be completed before the next meeting. Three assignments involved going to visit members of the congregation who were not part of the participant group (assignments for sessions on community building, listening, and shepherding); two activities engaged members of the participant group in conversing about their experiences and perspectives (assignments for sessions on integrity and ministering to the marginalized). The participant group consisted of nine men and seven women, all but one serving as leaders in the church.

Several important themes emerged, including the need for more active engagement of leaders with members, the need for more visitation and listening, and the

need to prepare for and/or prevent discord in the body. The project elicited positive attitudes from the participants and prepared them for active ministry functions. The community building and reconciliation that occurred during the course of the project makes evident the significance of the intervention.

Facilitating a Pastoral Leadership Model for the Ulysses  
Church of Christ

A Thesis

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Doctor of Ministry

By

Warren Baldwin

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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

Date

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Title of the Project .....	2
	Ministry Context .....	2
	History of the Ulysses Church of Christ .....	2
	Current Leadership.....	4
	Nature of the Current Leadership Style .....	6
	Identifying the Problem .....	8
	The Purpose of the Project.....	11
	Basic Assumptions.....	12
	Definitions.....	12
	Delimitations.....	13
	Conclusion .....	13
II.	THEOLOGICAL LENS .....	15
	Five Important Principles for Character-Based Leadership in Proverbs .....	20
	Community Development.....	20
	Integrity of Leaders.....	25
	Listening .....	27
	Ministering to the Marginalized.....	30
	Shepherding .....	34



	Conclusion .....	38
III.	METHODOLOGY .....	39
	Format .....	39
	Group Participants .....	41
	Description of the Sessions .....	42
	Data Collection Strategies.....	44
	Data Analysis .....	46
IV.	RESULTS .....	49
	Evaluation of Findings.....	50
	Researcher.....	50
	Engagement and Community Building.....	50
	Overcoming Fear of Leading .....	54
	Character Formed in Community .....	55
	Ministering to the Marginalized.....	57
	Participant Observer.....	60
	Importance of Conversation.....	61
	Leadership Can Be Learned.....	62
	Ministering to the Marginalized.....	63
	Outside Expert .....	64
	Themes.....	64
	Leadership Development .....	64
	Ministering to the Marginalized.....	65
	Youth.....	66

	Recommendations.....	66
	Conclusion .....	67
V.	IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION .....	68
	Implications for Ministry .....	68
	Significance.....	68
	Trustworthiness.....	74
	Potential Improvement.....	76
	Conclusion .....	77
	WORKS CITED .....	79
	APPENDIX A: Letter to Participants .....	82
	APPENDIX B: Questions for Participants to Ask in “Visits with Members” and “Discussions in Class” Sessions .....	83
	APPENDIX C: Questions for Debriefing with Participants.....	85
	APPENDIX D: Weekly Group Meetings .....	88
	APPENDIX E: Note Taking Form .....	89
	APPENDIX F: Protocol for Note Taking.....	90
	APPENDIX G: Coding Protocols.....	91
	APPENDIX H: Notes for Classes Taught in the Intervention.....	92
	APPENDIX I: Outsider Report by Dr. Jeanene Reese .....	110
	APPENDIX J: Resources Quoted in the Five Intervention Classes .....	123

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Membership changes from 2000 to 2010.....3

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses a project conducted in Ulysses, Kansas, to provide training based on the theological principles of Proverbs for current and future leaders of the Ulysses Church of Christ. The training process was intended to help participants better understand biblical principles of leadership from Proverbs and how to apply them in the congregational context. Chapter 1 provides a historical perspective of Ulysses, with particular regard to the need for more trained leaders. The theological lens that guided the project, examined in chapter 2, analyzes five character-based leadership principles from the book of Proverbs. In chapter 3 I lay out the methodology for the project, provide the format and timetable for the intervention, and discuss the participants, sessions, and evaluation methods. Chapter 4 demonstrates the results of the project. Participants learned theological principles of leadership and applied them within the church during the course of the project. In the process, they functioned as shepherds in the body—visiting members, listening to their stories, and working for community building. Chapter 5 shows the significance of the project. Not only did reconciliation occur among participants and members of the church as a direct result of this project, but participants also extended themselves to members and visitors on the margins of the church life and fellowship.

### Title of the Project

The title of this project is “Facilitating a Pastoral Leadership Model for the Ulysses Church of Christ.” Both membership and leadership have declined at Ulysses. Two main factors have contributed to this decline: job transfers and tension. We need leaders in all areas of the congregation’s life, from classroom teachers, youth workers, and mentors to deacons and elders. I designed this project to provide training opportunities for men and women within the congregation who are interested in providing such leadership for Ulysses. The book of Proverbs primarily focuses on developing wisdom; however, in designing the training curriculum I also drew upon the book for leadership principles profitable for use in the church today.

### Ministry Context

#### History of the Ulysses Church of Christ

I preach for a congregation that is part of the religious heritage known as the Churches of Christ. The congregation first met in Ulysses in the late 1800s, with the first recorded baptism occurring in 1887. Drought drove many families away, and no one knows if the church continued to meet in the early years of the twentieth century. Records show that the church was meeting again by the late 1920s. Members met in homes, then in a school building, and later in a court house. The depression thinned out the group in the 1930s, leaving only three women and four small children.

In the 1940s the oil and gas industry and irrigation for farming attracted new families to the county, some of whom began associating with the congregation in Ulysses. The congregation purchased its first building to be used for worship. In 1952 the church moved to another building, then in 1967 constructed the facility we now occupy.

A daily five-minute radio program begun in 1965 has continued uninterrupted to the present time.

The church bears many marks of the conservative branch of the restoration heritage from which we have descended. Our organization and government (elders, deacons, ministers), style of worship, forms and rituals, and identity all reflect its Church of Christ roots.

Ulysses's membership declined during the decade from 2000 to 2010, reflected in table 1, has impacted both our current leadership and the pool of potential from which we will need to develop future leaders. In 2010 the Ulysses church averaged approximately sixty fewer people in attendance on Sunday morning than a decade earlier in 2000. About eighty-five people currently attend each Sunday morning.

Table 1. Membership changes from 2000 to 2010

Reason for Loss	Number Lost	Reason for Gain	Number Gained
Moved Away	67	Moved In	51
Dropped Out	23	Baptized*	20
Died	11	Baptism accepted	8
Graduated (HS)	60	Born	16
<b>Total Lost</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>Total Gained</b>	<b>95</b>

\*This number does not include children of members.

Of the 161 people no longer attending the Ulysses Church of Christ, only twenty-three departed due to unhappiness with the church, its leadership, or other members.

Almost eighty percent of the decline has resulted simply from people moving away from Ulysses. Counting high school graduates, 127 people moved away during the decade of the 2000s. Only two high school graduates from that time period have returned to the

church.<sup>1</sup> Those who have moved away include elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and committee members. We currently have no process in place to train members to move into vacated leadership positions.

### Current Leadership

The leadership structure at Ulysses includes both formal and informal leaders.<sup>2</sup> Six different groups or personalities function in the formal role: elders, minister, deacons, teachers, activity leaders, and committee leaders. The elders function primarily as managers. They meet weekly to discuss issues and make decisions related to the congregation. The five elders engage in personal interaction with members outside the corporate meeting times and pursue visionary leadership, including developing ideas for numerical and spiritual growth, worship practices, and relational activities.

The other formal leaders function under the oversight of the elders. As the congregation's pulpit minister, I perform the regular duties of a local minister within the tradition of the Churches of Christ. I assist the elders in the management of the congregation. Due to conflict issues that I explain below, I have provided only limited visionary leadership in the past few years.

Each deacon takes responsibility for a specific assignment related to the care and maintenance of the building. A few deacons also provide leadership in ministry and

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<sup>1</sup> The congregation maintains a membership directory and weekly attendance records from which the attendance and membership changes mentioned above are derived.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the terms *formal* and *informal leaders* comes from Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 29. The authors refer to formal leaders as the clergy and informal leaders as those coming from the membership. I use their terms but draw a slightly different distinction to fit the polity of the Churches of Christ. In my usage, formal leaders include the elders, ministers, and others whom the elders designate for specific functions, such as deacons, class teachers, and activity leaders. Informal leaders might not hold a recognized position of leadership but may still exert influence within the congregation.

worship activities, including organizing Leadership Training for Christ,<sup>3</sup> serving on the education committee, organizing young people for participatory roles in the Wednesday night devotional, and helping with youth activities. Teachers and committee leaders have specific functions as well. Committee leaders head the youth, education, and scholarship (raising scholarship money for students to attend Christian colleges) committees.

In addition to these formal leaders, several informal leaders exercise influence in the congregation because of their years of membership, their former leadership roles, and the trust they have developed among some members. While these men and women currently have no positional or formal leadership roles, their informal leadership makes a difference in congregational dynamics. Unfortunately, a few of these informal leaders fit Israel Galindo's description of a stage 3 personality.

Stage 3 individuals "catch" their values and convictions from their peer groups. They rarely think independently, question their views, or tolerate others who challenge their perspectives. Stage 3 personalities do not think well in the abstract and therefore do not grapple with the deeper nuances of such concepts as salvation, redemption, sin, justification, and love. They tend to view issues as black or white, making it difficult for them to balance apparently opposing concepts, such as loving someone with whom they disagree on a theological point. Because their identities are formed by and continue to be nourished by their peer groups, they maintain an "us" versus "them" mentality.<sup>4</sup> This mentality has the potential to affect or even to stir up conflict in the church.

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<sup>3</sup> Leadership Training for Christ (LTC) trains youth in the third through twelfth grades to be leaders in the church. It is conducted every year on Easter weekend, but preparations begin in October and November. Events include preaching, song leading, speeches, signing for the deaf, various types of art, drama, and choruses. It requires a tremendous investment of time and energy for the youth and the leaders.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Discerning Church Dynamics* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 101-2.



## Nature of the Current Leadership Style

Because much of our current leadership function focuses on management and task orientation, our events, activities, and routines tend to run well, with volunteers performing essential tasks (although declining numbers have resulted in fewer volunteers); congregational life is predictable and reliable. I meet every Wednesday evening with the elders, and one Sunday afternoon a month we meet with the deacons. Traditionally, decisions have been made in the elders' meetings and announced to the congregation. However, over the last two years the elders have been introducing more items for discussion in the deacons' meetings, seeking their opinions and input. Such items as speakers for meetings, topics for classes, and ideas for various activities and programs have been presented for discussion. By discussing such ideas with the deacons prior to implementation, the elders hope not only to get their thoughts and input but also their support. In addition, the elders are making more announcements to the congregation to seek input before decisions are made. This greater effort at public communication follows a period of conflict over changes in worship rituals (discussed below) that led most of the members with a more traditional understanding of theology within the Churches of Christ to become suspicious of the elders and their intentions. We hope that more public communication from the elders will help rebuild trust and confidence.

One particular experiment involving the observance of the Lord's Supper led to conflict and lessening of trust toward the leadership. In 2004 the leaders invited John Mark Hicks for a seminar on the Lord's Supper. On the concluding day of the seminar, Sunday, we partook of the Lord's Supper conversationally instead of silently (the

traditional method of taking it among the Churches of Christ). Members committed to the traditional practice in the church opposed those inclined to question entrenched methods and practices and experiment with something new. I believe the eruptions that ensued stemmed not from a single cause but from dual failures: one side refused to question their embedded theologies, and the other pushed their theological perceptions faster and farther than we had prepared the church as a whole to go. In short, the leadership team erred seriously by not exercising practical theology: we did not, prior to that Sunday morning experiment, engage the people sufficiently in an ongoing discussion comprising Scripture, our traditions, and our current context. Because we did not involve the entire congregation in the process, we did not realize just how unprepared some of them were for such change. Although we did exercise vision, an important component of effective leadership, we concerned ourselves more with liturgy than with mission. In trying to create an environment of dynamic worship, we alienated at least half of the congregation, people who were happy with the status quo. Consequently, we failed to create an environment conducive to being missionaries to the community. Had we led an ongoing conversation with the congregation in the area of missions and created a dynamic force in this area, the church might have been more open to analyzing our embedded theologies in the realm of liturgy. Furthermore, we might have been in a better position to process new issues together as a congregation a few years later when a similar eruption occurred over the issue of small groups (with those against them opposing those in favor of them). Instead, because of these two situations, in recent years the elders and I have functioned more as managers than as visionaries.

From a positive standpoint, during these periods of conflict, the leaders did maintain a calm, non-anxious presence and continued functioning in normal roles. However, we should have been more connected and engaged in the members' lives, listening to their concerns and challenging them to responsible behavior. Although we met with a number of distressed people as an eldership/minister team, we lost the personal, friendly contact we had previously enjoyed with many of them. Thus while the leadership did not fall into any of the anxiety-laden responses described by Edwin Friedman<sup>5</sup>—reacting, blaming, herding, or seeking a quick fix—we remained a bit withdrawn from some members. The nature of the training of future leaders will address being more relationally directed in our exercise of leadership.

#### Identifying the Problem

Three specific problems relate to leadership within the congregation: attrition, lack of adequate preparation, and systemic structure. Attrition has occurred as numerous key leaders have retired or received job transfers and left Ulysses. These key leaders have included deacons, Bible school teachers, Leadership Training for Christ leaders, youth leaders, song leaders, substitute preachers, Vacation Bible School organizers and teachers, technology workers, and an elder. (In addition to the roles they filled at the time they left, we also considered some of the men to be prospective deacons or elders.) Younger men and women in the congregation stand ready to fill many of the vacancies, but they need training in leadership.

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<sup>5</sup> Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve* (New York: Seabury Books, 1999), 54-55. Friedman has identified reacting, blaming, herding, and seeking a quick fix as responses by members of a system to the changes that cause disequilibrium and lead to conflict. A leader can get caught up in the anxiety of the system and become part of the chaos by giving in to unrealistic demands or by participating in any of the members' chaotic behaviors. Leaders who continue to function with the aim of helping to regulate the system provide a healthier response.

The current elders have worked to provide leadership for the church, to find men and women to fill vacancies caused by those who have moved, and to keep a positive spirit in the congregation. As they have encouraged capable men and women not only to continue to minister but to explore other areas of ministry they might like to work in as well, workers have indeed taken on challenges in new areas. However, this infusion into the labor force has produced neither trained leaders nor enough leaders. We already need more people to lead in various capacities in the church; without intervention, the problem will continue to plague us.

To combat the effects of attrition, we must deal with our second problem, a lack of adequate preparation. We have no systematic plan in place for training leaders. Historically, preparation for leadership has consisted of giving potential leaders assignments and basic instructions, then monitoring their actions. If, over time, they proved capable of performing their assigned tasks, they were given more assignments. Over time both men and women could become Bible class teachers or committee leaders, and men could become deacons or elders. While this method has been somewhat effective in the past, it overlooks the importance of specific training in character-based principles of biblical leadership. This model of leadership training allows a person to achieve significantly more important levels of leadership in the church through responsibility and dependability. While both characteristics reflect biblical principles, this model neglects other important principles that God values and Proverbs teaches—principles such as community building, leading with integrity, listening, ministering to the marginalized, and active, personal shepherding.

These neglected principles relate to the third leadership problem: a systemic structure that may be described as dominant, top-down, hierarchical, or bureaucratic. Bureaucratic systems concern themselves with organization, greater efficiency, a hierarchical chain of command, rules, and procedures. Bureaucracy leads to a top-down leadership style wherein top level authorities control the system with little or no regular input from its members. The authorities at the top simply announce their decisions and expect system members to comply with them.<sup>6</sup> While this description overstates conditions in Ulysses (as elders do share meaningful relationships with many of the members, and members are encouraged to share their thoughts), the many decisions made in closed meetings and announced to the congregation give evidence of bureaucratic tendencies. These tendencies led to the controversy over the Lord's Supper and small groups.

The use of bureaucratic systems has been declining in America since the 1960s,<sup>7</sup> but many churches still cling to a form of it, even though it is unhealthy and threatens to destroy the church.<sup>8</sup> A new system of management referred to as "partnership" is challenging the hierarchical system. A belief system known as "stewardship" or "servanthood" supports the partnership system of management. Partnership encourages greater availability of information to all members, eliminates symbols of hierarchy, and allows everyone to contribute to the system's vision or purpose. While some people do possess greater responsibility or authority within the system, these leaders concern themselves more with clarifying purposes and serving members than with exercising

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Managing the Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 165-68.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

control.<sup>9</sup> In a partnership system, leaders encourage and empower members to contribute their ideas and energy to the function of the system. I desire with this doctor of ministry project to move the leadership of the Ulysses Church of Christ toward a partnership style of leadership.

### The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to train leaders of the Ulysses Church of Christ. I chose Proverbs as the theological foundation for the project for two reasons. First, the book of Proverbs is concerned with developing wisdom and character in people. Proverbs 1:2-3 states the purpose of the book: “For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity.”<sup>10</sup> Second, Proverbs concerns itself with leadership. Numerous passages deal with the leadership of the king, both with his character and his function. Other passages show the leadership of parents in guiding their children to straight paths. Principles derived from these passages can be applied to other situations, such as church leadership. For example, the statement that “a ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor” (Prov 28:16) applies to ministers and other church leaders as surely as it does to kings. In either setting leaders can abuse power if they do not understand their people and the nature of leadership.

Since my project focused on character-based principles of leadership and Proverbs deals with character and leadership, I found it to be a suitable theological foundation. In my study of the book I discerned five principles of character-based leadership—community building, leading with integrity, listening, ministering to the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 183-91.

<sup>10</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

marginalized, and personal shepherding—and used them to form the core of my curriculum. I do not suggest that these five principles exhaust the list of principles that may be found in Proverbs, but time constraints necessitated limiting the list to these five.

### Basic Assumptions

Five underlying assumptions affected the direction of this project. First, the traditional polity of the Churches of Christ requires male elders and deacons. Elders are older men who oversee the affairs of the church, mediate disputes, and provide teaching.<sup>11</sup> Deacons serve in various capacities in a local church and often assist the elders in their work.<sup>12</sup> Therefore I assume in this project that future elders and deacons, like their current counterparts, will be male.

Second, congregations need to be sensitive and intentional in training future leaders, both in skill and in character. Some in the organization will aspire to this leadership. Third, some sociological models are useful, but theological models warrant greater emphasis in training church leaders. Fourth, the book of Proverbs contains principles of leadership for God's people. Finally, informal leaders exercise important leadership influence in Ulysses and need to be trained accordingly.

### Definitions

By leaders I mean men and women who provide leadership at Ulysses, whether formally or informally. Ammerman defines leadership as “an activity that can be exercised by various people in the congregation.” A list of such activities might include helping members understand their congregational setting, developing a vision of God's purpose for members within their individual contexts, and helping members embody (or

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<sup>11</sup> Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 321-22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 334-37.

live out) that vision.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this doctor of ministry project, I considered all who functioned in any of these three ways to be leaders, whether they serve as classroom teachers, youth workers, deacons, elders, or any other role.

### Delimitations

This project was delimited to the participant group, including the elders and their spouses. The participant group consisted of both men and women recruited by the elders. This project focused on Proverbs as a resource for leadership development because Proverbs is concerned with both character development and leadership. For this reason, even though many other biblical texts and even social science models devote themselves to leadership development, I delimited this project to Proverbs. I decided on this delimitation after studying the text of Proverbs and noticing the book's interest in character and leadership. A number of books also proved helpful in shaping my decision, particularly William Brown's *Character in Crisis*.<sup>14</sup> In this work Brown demonstrates the essential nature of character, wisdom, and skill in relationships for the healthy functioning of leadership and community relationships. Reading this work greatly influenced my view of Proverbs as a sufficient resource to address character-based leadership.

### Conclusion

This model has potential to help Ulysses prepare men and women for character-based leadership in the body of Christ. It takes advantage of biblical principles and adapts them to the local context. It also places responsibility on potential leaders to show an

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<sup>13</sup> Ammerman, 17. Throughout this project I concerned myself more with the character traits of leaders than with specific activities. Although I do discuss some activities, and my participation group completed several activity-based assignments, I focus on the nature of the leaders' character as they engage and lead in those activities.

<sup>14</sup> William Brown, *Character in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1996).



active interest in their own leadership development and to prepare themselves accordingly. The curriculum provides specific exercises for use by leaders and potential leaders in practicing the principles of character-based leadership they learn.

## CHAPTER II

### THEOLOGICAL LENS

I used the Old Testament book of Proverbs to provide character-based training for the leaders in Ulysses. Studying how the individual proverbs developed into a collection demonstrates the suitability for such use of the book. Numerous influences in ancient Israel, all concerned with character development, combined to produce Proverbs in its current form. The purpose of Proverbs is to develop wisdom, discipline, and righteousness (Prov 1:2-6)—essential characteristics in men and women who rise to leadership. Although different authors contributed to the production of Proverbs,<sup>1</sup> in its final form the book demonstrates the concern of all the authors with developing character and leadership qualities in young people.

Three possible social settings produced Proverbs: the rural or farming community,<sup>2</sup> the family,<sup>3</sup> and the royal court.<sup>4</sup> The rural, family, and court settings all had

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<sup>1</sup> Some contemporary authors, such as Bruce Waltke, argue persuasively for Solomonic authorship of much of the book. See *The Book of Proverbs: 1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 37. Others, such as James Crenshaw, argue against Solomonic authorship. See *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 38-40. Dave Bland proposes that Solomon began the process of producing the book and others contributed to it until it eventually found its way into the canon of scripture. See *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Claus Westermann studied proverbial wisdom in African tribal communities and found similarities to biblical wisdom, leading him to lean toward a farming or rural context for the origin of Proverbs. See Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 140-47. Proverbs dealing with neighborliness, work ethics, and management principles demonstrate an interest in the rural or farming community.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Bland, "The Formation of Character in the Book of Proverbs," *Restoration Quarterly* 40 (1998): 226. The function of the family in Proverbs is to instruct youth and to work for the well-being of the family. The family-based nature of the proverb served Israel not only in the early days of its community-building, but during later periods of great threat to its very existence as a people. During the

vested interests in training people to function with the integrity and moral acumen to maintain the health of their respective communities. Those so trained would also be prepared to lead the home, community, and nation with the proper moral fiber and skill. This interest in character-based development influences both the content and form of wisdom literature and sets it apart from the rest of the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> Tremper Longman identifies several different features of the proverb as a literary form,<sup>6</sup> and each feature or form reflects the skill and imagination of its individual author. The artistry of the language and of the forms of expression invites the reader to participate in the vision of the authors, a vision of social reality shaped by the virtue and proper functioning of the members in the various communities.<sup>7</sup> Whether that social reality is the family, the tribal community, or the nation, the very nature of the different forms helps shape the kind of character needed to serve and lead in a manner healthy for the community.

Proverbs, by both nature and function, has much to offer the church today in shaping character and developing leaders. Leaders schooled in the principles of Proverbs can help Christian congregations begin to function as communities to which people can

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postexilic period wisdom provided hope and life, helping Israel maintain a sense of identity and enabling Jewish communities to instruct their members in the midst of a largely Gentile environment. The lack of covenantal language allowed leaders to root their moral instruction in something other than Jewish nationalism. During this period of extreme change, wisdom enabled the household to continue the traditions of Israel, maintain identity, provide instruction, and develop moral character (ibid., 223).

<sup>4</sup> Crenshaw, *Anchor*, 5.518, and Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 103. The monarchy employed a professional class of courtiers and sages who served as counselors, judges, and lawyers, who needed social and ethical training for such positions.

<sup>5</sup> Wisdom literature provides limited treatment of the great traditions of Israel (such as the exodus, the wilderness experiences), has a noted didactic tone, and contains a high concentration of words for wisdom. Wisdom can take various forms, including the sentence proverb, autobiography, poem, and lecture or discourse. Bland, *Proverbs*, 14-18.

<sup>6</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 31-33. The features include (1) brief, pointed statements, (2) observations about how things are (with advice on proper behavior), (3) truths that are circumstantial in nature, (4) time sensitivity, (5) universality and timelessness of some truths, and (6) the lack of a guarantee that everything will turn out pleasantly.

<sup>7</sup> Perdue, *Sword and Stylus*, 27.

turn for instruction in life's proper choices. Dave Bland and David Fler bemoan the current, popular attitude wherein people look to the church not for advice in making good choices, but for affirmation in choices already made. "Popular Christianity no longer offers guidance in making daily moral decisions about Christian conduct. Instead, it helps Christians to relieve anxieties and frustrations."<sup>8</sup> As a corrective to this tendency of popular Christianity, wisdom gained by leaders from the principles in Proverbs can then be used by those leaders to mature and train others. Thus the circular effect of wisdom instruction continues to bless the instructor, the student, and the entire community.

I discerned from my study of Proverbs five principles with important, direct bearing upon character-based leadership training in the contemporary church. In the process, I read Proverbs repeatedly, looking for recurring topics and grouping them thematically. I read the thematically grouped verses, mentally applying them to my ministry context and making notes, then consulted commentaries and other books on Proverbs, comparing their comments to my notes. Through this process I identified five principles with direct bearing on my ministry context, and therefore appropriate for use in this project: community building, leading with integrity, listening, ministering to the marginalized, and shepherding.

I drew from my experience in ministry and my study of Proverbs in identifying these five principles. During thirty-three years of ministry, I have committed and have observed others commit numerous mistakes in leadership. Often the mistakes were functionally based, such as neglecting a visit or failing to communicate with members or

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<sup>8</sup> Dave Bland and David Fler, "Wisdom's Journey of Transforming Character" in *Preaching Character* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2010), 17.

other leaders. I have also been in situations of conflict where the leaders (myself included) were uncertain about how to respond to the anger and engage the members. I have observed that in such anxiety-laden circumstances leaders often withdraw from the situation and let it play out, hoping the ensuing carnage is not too severe.

I began my study of Proverbs looking for themes that addressed issues of leadership that could be used to train both future and current leaders to function better in their roles. A conversation with Dr. Glenn Pemberton, professor at Abilene Christian University, early in my study influenced me to look not just for themes that addressed the function of leadership, but themes that addressed the heart of the leader. Pemberton said, “We want our leaders to visit members in the hospital. But even more importantly, we want to find in Proverbs insights into the heart of a man or woman who will make that visit. What is the attitude or spirit that will motivate leaders to get out of their chairs in the evening to go make a visit? That is what we want to find in Proverbs.” Pemberton made me realize that function is only one concern of leadership; the heart of the leader is another. My study of Proverbs progressed with the intent of finding themes in Proverbs that addressed the heart and character of a leader. I found verses that addressed the function of leaders as well, such as giving proper care to the people they lead. But the five principles I found in my study and developed for the intervention support the function and shape the heart of the leader.

Even though Proverbs was written to an ancient culture, it still has the power to influence and shape people today. David Kelsey says that as we study Proverbs and integrate its principles into our lives, it has the ability to “elicit wisdom” today. He calls

this the “performative force” of Proverbs.<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 27:5-6 provides a good example of the book’s performative force. This passage says “better is open rebuke than hidden love. Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” When we apply this passage to our lives and allow its message to become part of our thinking and moral fiber, it shapes our thinking about love, honesty, and openness with those we care about. Genuine friends will rebuke someone they love even if the honesty threatens the relationship. On the other hand, if we are the one rebuked, we would be wise to recognize the sincere concern of our friends and heed their words. When we allow Proverbs to have its performative effect on us, we allow it to shape our thinking, character and behavior. The result is that Proverbs has the potential to create an alternative narrative. A church narrative characterized by low functioning leaders or a hostile environment has the potential to see its narrative changed to a healthier functioning leadership and an environment that is more open and accepting.

The five character-based leadership principles I identified and developed do not exhaust the potential list topics or themes of character that Proverbs addresses. Also, Proverbs addresses far more topics and themes than just that of leadership. The list I have developed is the result of my experience in ministry and study of Proverbs for the purpose of developing an intervention project on character-based leadership for the Ulysses Church of Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: John Knox, 2009), vol.1, 222.

## Five Important Principles for Character-Based Leadership in Proverbs

### Community Development

Character formation is a communal project; its achievement requires active participation from all members. Not only does character formation help an individual achieve a stable and meaningful life, but it helps make the entire community a safe place for individuals and families to prosper. Proverbs addresses more than just economic and social opportunities for Israel; it calls the people to orient themselves toward God in worship and obedience. Proverbs functioned both externally and internally to form character within the Israelites. The external function relied upon the community involvement of parents and other leaders to use the message and intent of Proverbs to exert pressure upon the minds and behaviors of those in their care. Character formation began with parental training, even before the students could read. Proverbs “appeals to the power of the community . . . in encouraging self-control.”<sup>10</sup> Self-control began with “community control,” first through the parents, then through the larger social system surrounding the children, making wisdom development a relational undertaking involving the participation of parents, society, and God.<sup>11</sup> Communal involvement of individuals served the dual benefit of shaping the individuals and continuing to develop the community according to its biblical standards.

Proverbs addresses different communities, including the family, the rural/farming community, and the royal court. Leaders within each group likely contributed some of the proverbs, as each group had its own incentives for producing sayings to encourage the development of character and leadership within its context. The family wanted young

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin J. Youngblood, “Cosmic Boundaries and Self-Control in Proverbs,” *Restoration Quarterly* 51 (2009): 139.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

men or women to grow up ready to assume the roles of spouse and parent, and to pass on the values and traditions of the Israelite family. The rural and farming communities wanted their young people to become law-abiding citizens who raised their families well, contributed economically, and provided leadership to the next generation. The royal court needed sages (the wise men of Israel) trained in character, wisdom, and leadership to serve as counselors, judges, lawyers, and scribes, as well as to oversee business and civic activities and serve as advisors to kings.

The function of community in character formation allowed young people schooled by any of these groups to be shaped by their communities and to become leaders in their communities and then to instruct others. In short, the youth received skill-at-life training. The Hebrew word for wisdom (*hokmah*) means more than the accumulation of knowledge; it would be better translated as expertise.<sup>12</sup> Wisdom in Proverbs is skill or expertise at life.

In wisdom literature skill at life is about serving the community. The devastating effects of the absence of such training points insistently to the need for such training. Lack of training in biblical revelation or wisdom results in the casting off of restraint (Prov 29:18). Where people cast off restraint, lack of discipline results in chaos.<sup>13</sup>

Conversely, those trained in skill at life live in an orderly and purposeful manner, blessing both their own lives and the life of the community. In personal behavior, wise people guard their mouths (being careful in speech, 13:3; 10:19; 21:21); avoid evil (16:17); suffer patiently (18:14); employ skill in their vocations (22:29); serve faithfully (27:18); and show restraint (13:3; 10:18-19; 17:27; 20:3; 21:23; 26:17).

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<sup>12</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1:33.

<sup>13</sup> Bland, *Formation*, 235.



The good behavior of those skilled in life spills into the lives of others in the community, blessing them. Skilled people do good to others by showing generosity (11:25), lending to the poor (19:17), sharing food with the poor (22:9), exercising patience with the angry (19:11), and offering necessary rebuke (28:23). For Israel, failure to exercise compassion and generosity toward others was tantamount to despising the care God had shown his people. Wise living requires faithfulness to God and service to the community. Wise living builds community, and community building is a major concern of Proverbs.

A community, once built, must be maintained. Proverbs provides insights into how to preserve a community, even one being torn asunder by vices. Proverbs 27:14-19 collects several sayings designed to strengthen those tormented by chaotic characters and thereby preserve community. This passage presents three difficult personalities—a rude neighbor, a quarrelsome spouse, and a (presumably) demanding master. All three manifestations of chaotic behavior strain the relationships. Yet in the midst of these strained relationships, verse 17 says, “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.” People hone each other, sharpening one another’s perspectives, morals, and character. In the accounts of the rude neighbor and the quarrelsome spouse, Proverbs provides an important lesson on community maintenance: those who receive harshness and abuse from people they expect to show compassion and care do not have to respond with denial or retreat. They can deal with the problems and with the offending parties by praying, confronting, being patient, showing love, and forgiving. Pleasant and friendly relationships alone do not hone character; it must be sharpened in the friction and tough work of preserving difficult and wearying relationships.

In verse 18 the writer uses the imagery of tending a fig tree to encourage a servant to provide loyal service to a master. The fig tree serves as a metaphor for relationship: just as fig trees require years of painstaking labor, effort, and tending before they produce sweet fruit, so fruitful relationships require similar devotion and care over time. While the insincere neighbor and rude spouse fit the metaphor, it especially describes the life of a slave with a demanding master. A slave cannot simply opt out of the master/slave relationship. The slave has to serve daily even if the master is unfair and unappreciative. The slave can only hope that after years of devoted service—as with tending a fig tree—the master will sweeten and honor the faithful employee. Hopefully, equally enlightened rude neighbors and spouses will eventually appreciate their patient neighbors and spouses as well, and community will be preserved.

Perhaps in exercising enduring patience, victimized neighbors, spouses, or servants might discover they are not merely victims in the chaotic relationships, but contributors to the chaos as well. “Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another” (Prov 27:19). In other words, we learn most about ourselves not from our own reflections about ourselves, but from the reactions of others to our presence. If most people seem rude, quarrelsome, and unappreciative toward us, the problem may not be with that neighbor, wife, or master (employer); the problem may be with us. We learn about ourselves by the ripples we create in community; just as our own integrity may enable us to help others make necessary changes in their lives, it also provides us the humility to recognize our own shortcomings so we can confess and make changes in our own lives. Proverbs not only builds community, it also helps that community survive tough and trying circumstances.

Proverbs guides community survival and maintenance not only at the family and local level, but even at the national level. Historically, Proverbs may have been put in its final form during the period of social stress surrounding the collapse of Israel under the invading Babylonians. Possibly this time of intense social distress, when exploitation and violence rent the national community asunder, drove the sages to issue the final edition of Proverbs, providing the people of Israel with a tool for reshaping and reorienting their lives through community.<sup>14</sup>

Proverbs teaches that when society is falling apart, whether from political scandals, invading armies, or moral disintegration, godly people turn to community, the family, or a spiritual group, and seek to rebuild and strengthen it upon sound, biblical principles of wisdom and righteousness. Instead of an occasion to give up in despair, hard times provide an opportunity to vigorously rededicate ourselves to the most basic of all societies: the family. From there, health and hope can spread to the wider communities of church and society.

This valuable perspective on community building and maintenance can help leaders in the church today deal with community on at least two levels: the family and the church. The church community consists of families who bring both their healthy and their dysfunctional tendencies to church with them. Unresolved issues in personal lives (anger, resentment, greed, gossip) that are not processed at home often cause dissension and chaos in the spiritual community. Therefore character-based leaders must concern themselves not only with the public behavior of people in the church but also with their behavior in the home. Since the ability to function in the home largely determines

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<sup>14</sup> Brown, 45.

readiness to lead in the church, these two communities cannot be separated. Leaders, whether in the home, the church, or the society, are called upon to maintain their community when new members introduce conflicting ideas and behaviors and when conflict arises in the course of human interaction.

### Integrity of Leaders

Three terms introduce integrity in Proverbs 1:3: righteousness, justice, and equity. Righteousness is doing what is right and living faithfully in covenant relationship with God. Specifically in Proverbs it means doing the things that provide harmony in relationships. Righteous people think of the needs and feelings of others and works for their benefit. “The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.”<sup>15</sup> Justice involves the attempt to conform to and live out the demands of righteous principles.<sup>16</sup> Waltke defines righteousness as doing right and promoting healthy relationships, and justice as making the effort to repair relationships harmed and disrupted by unrighteousness. Justice requires continuous activity to undo the pain and harm of damaged relationships and to preserve peace in the community.<sup>17</sup> Equity signifies straightness or levelness; in relationships it takes on the meaning of fairness or honesty. Equity shows itself in speech and behavior that is honest, fair to, and considerate of others.<sup>18</sup> To summarize, righteousness—the proper ordering of attitudes and

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<sup>15</sup> Waltke, 97. The wicked disadvantage others through their gossiping, lying, cheating, and laziness, upsetting people and relationships.

<sup>16</sup> Fox, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Waltke, 97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Fox, 60.

behavior—allows people to live in harmony. When righteousness and relationship break down and disharmony, anger, or disruption steps in, the hard work of justice gets the relationship back on track toward the equity necessary to be in line with God.

People with integrity are whole and blameless—not perfect, but walking in the way of God, displaying consistent behavior and total commitment to the Lord. They live with complete dedication to God.<sup>19</sup>

Developing integrity requires deliberation and purpose. Jennifer Green notes that the process of becoming virtuous is not completely rational or conscious, that virtue can also be developed in the “emotional and aesthetic responses to the world and people in our lives.”<sup>20</sup>

One way such responses can be developed is through modeling.<sup>21</sup> Green describes a psychology experiment involving three groups and three videos. The first video featured a boy giving food and blankets to the homeless in Philadelphia, the second was a nature documentary, and the third showed a comedy routine. After watching the videos, each of the three groups was brought in contact with a needy person. People who viewed the video of the boy helping the poor proved more likely to help a poor person when in contact with one. Psychologists label this emotion of being moved to positive action “elevation.” Elevation differs from admiration, which is a desire to emulate someone

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<sup>19</sup> Waltke, 99. To be “crooked” implies walking in the opposite direction from the straight path of God on which the person of integrity walks. The perverse act of making something crooked endangers the community. Crooked “combines the moral perverseness of what they (the wicked) say and do . . . with the calamitous results of their lifestyle” (Waltke, 230).

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Green, “Rising Up after the Woman of Strength” in *Preaching Character: Reclaiming Wisdom’s Paradigmatic Imagination for Transformation*, ed. Dave Bland and David Fleer (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2010), 189.

<sup>21</sup> Other means of deliberative character development include listening to instruction (19:20), accepting rebuke (19:25), confessing character flaws (28:13), being patient, and choosing character as a way of life (1:8-18).

great, such as an athlete. Elevation inspires us to do something good and virtuous.

“Elevation brings a desire . . . to become the best version of ourselves we can be.”<sup>22</sup>

Leaders who model lives of integrity (e.g., helping others) inspire others to follow in their steps.

At least three of the six means of becoming virtuous mentioned here involve having someone else with integrity in our lives to teach and guide us in the virtuous life. Leaders with integrity are essential to leading others in integrity and to promoting the healthy functioning of a home, spiritual community, or nation. Integrity guides the steps of leaders and saves them from moral traps that can destroy them (Prov 11:3, 5; 7:24-27). The entire community depends on the positive impact of the leader’s godly character (Prov 11:10, 14).

### Listening

Leaders in Israel had two practical reasons to be good listeners. First, the leaders could not develop wisdom and maturity without listening. The word “listen,” as used in Proverbs, points to the biblical text, encouraging the readers or hearers to pay attention to the Torah or the sayings of wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Listening indicates a continual openness to the message of the biblical witness and a heart for continued growth and maturity. Failure to listen indicates a spirit of disobedience and incurs God’s displeasure when one prays (Prov 28:9). Listening also means paying attention to the sage counsel of wise people. Though wisdom can be a gift of God (as it was for Solomon, 1 Kgs 4:29), one generally attains it through listening. The first teaching section of Proverbs begins with a warning

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<sup>22</sup> Green, 192-93.

<sup>23</sup> Prov 28:9. Longman, *Proverbs*, 490, says the focus of the listening could be to either wisdom instruction or the commandments of the Torah.

to listen to parental instruction. Listening and obeying enable the wise to avoid trouble by positioning them on a path of discernment (1:8-18).

Proverbs addresses those who neglect the path of listening and discernment by asking, “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?” (1:22). Waltke calls such mockers “hardened apostates.”<sup>24</sup> They refuse to listen to advice or correction and hate the one who offers it to them (Prov 9:7-8). The defining trait of mockers is their arrogant pride (Prov 21:24). Proverbs pictures the mocker as a proud man who thinks he has all the answers to life and so refuses to listen to anyone else, even someone with more experience and wisdom. The mocker meets offers of help not with gratitude or appreciation, but with abuse. Pride engenders this hard, obstinate nature.

Because failure to listen prevents people from maturing, it hinders their growth as leaders. In Israel even the king was not above the need to listen to the voices of wisdom and maturity. A proud, obstinate king who, like the mocker, refused to listen to sane voices could plunge his nation into turmoil and ruin (11:14; 28:28). Kings such as Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12) and Ahab (1 Kgs 22) show the tragic consequences when leaders of God’s people fail to continue to listen and heed the message of wise people.

In addition to developing their own wisdom and maturity, the leaders of Israel needed to listen to the people of their communities (the home, neighborhood, or nation) in order to gauge the people’s spiritual health. Wise shepherds pay attention to their flocks (Prov 27:23) to discern their needs. Israel’s leaders were held responsible for knowing about the needs among their flocks and not turning a deaf ear to the cries of the

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<sup>24</sup> Waltke, 114.

hungry (Prov 21:13). The only way to know was to listen and pay attention to their people. A leader builds a house—not a literal building, but a community, such as a family, a social system, or even a country—through wisdom, which includes listening (Prov 24:3-4). In the early days of Solomon’s administration, he listened faithfully to his flock and was therefore able to assess situations with discernment and make wise judgments (1 Kgs 3:16-28). A ruler in Israel, such as the king, functioned not just as a judge or lawmaker, but also as a shepherd, making himself aware of the needs of his flock so he could respond to them with wisdom and insight.

Proverbs was written for the simple and young, but it was also written for the wise. A man or woman who listens to wisdom early in life (whether the text of proverbs or the sage counsel of more experienced men and women) becomes wise. But wisdom is not static. To remain in the path of wisdom, one must continue to listen to the voices of wisdom. For leaders in Israel, whether a king on the throne or someone in the home or community, the path to personal growth in wisdom and understanding led through open ears. Continued listening requires a spirit of humility. Leaders who are proud of heart and obstinate in mind refuse to listen to their people. When these leaders then make rulings, without having listened, folly and shame reveal themselves.

Wise leaders listen humbly and heed necessary corrections or rebukes of their behavior. To a spiritual person, a word of correction is like “a gold ring or an ornament of gold” (Prov 25:12). A rebuke reinforces lessons that have been taught. People naturally resist a rebuke and retreat into a defensive posture, especially if the rebuke seems harsh, unfair, or wrong. But one can judge the soundness and deservedness of the reprimand only by humbly listening to the rebuke and weighing the accusation. Enduring correction



leads to the hope of finding life (Prov 6:23b; 10:17), but resisting a rebuke leads one astray and even to death (Prov 10:17; 15:10). When leaders of Israel made decisions and issued rulings, they were to guard against making decisions and rulings that failed to consider the needs of the people, were overly harsh, or destroyed lives. King David, for example, listened to the prophet Nathan's rebuke and humbly submitted to the correction rather than reacting defensively (2 Sam 12:1-13).

The spiritual guides of a community today, whether home or church, must continue to be open to Scripture and the insights of wise people. Therefore they must continue to listen. Their continued spiritual growth depends upon their willingness to listen and submit to the lessons they learn. Listening enables leaders to gauge the spiritual and material needs of their people; it gives church leaders insight into their members' theological orientation so that decisions about church polity or liturgy can avoid false doctrine and conflict; and it helps bridge the gap between the leaders and members by creating a bond of understanding. Leaders must listen.

#### Ministering to the Marginalized

Character-based leaders share God's concern that all people experience fairness and equity. In God's kingdom no one should suffer from hunger, alienation, or abuse. This ideal is expressed in the word justice.<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 24:19-21 addresses this concern with an injunction to Israelite farmers to leave some crops for the aliens, orphans, and widows to glean. Having food and basic dignity is a fair expectation for all people, reflecting Scripture's moral vision of people as having basic rights. The Old Testament prophets also address and develop this concern. For example, Micah accuses

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<sup>25</sup> Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker, eds., *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 179.

the nation's leaders of abusing those who lack money and power and robbing them of God's blessing (see Mic 2:8-9). Such abuses not only violate the rights of individuals, they also threaten the cohesion of the larger community. God's kingdom holds enough gifts of belonging and material blessing for all to share in the experience. Proverbs continues this theme of justice as the sages warn against abuses toward the poor and socially disadvantaged.

Numerous passages in Proverbs exhort the reader to work hard, avoid debt, and spend wisely, with the hope that over time one can achieve financial success as well as the added benefits of having friendships and social position (19:4). Wealth and social position can signify that one has lived wisely. However, Proverbs warns against the temptations that may accompany success: selfishness with one's blessings and the tendency to use wealth and position to abuse those on the lower levels of social ranking, such as the poor (22:7, 22).

Poverty in Proverbs connotes not only a lack of the basic necessities of life, such as food (22:9), but also a corresponding lack of social position and control over one's own destiny. Impoverishment in Proverbs meant living on the margins of Israelite society, denied even such basic dignities as respect and fair treatment. Specifically, the poor suffered a constant dread of ruin (10:15), of being shunned (14:20a; 19:7), and of being deserted by one's own friends (19:4b). They were hated (14:21), mocked (17:5), treated harshly (18:23), and denied help. A Jewish proverb says, "In order to chase away beggars one needs a rich person"<sup>26</sup>—perhaps because the constant entreaties of the poor to the rich hardened the rich people's hearts and made it easy for them to refuse requests

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<sup>26</sup> Waltke, 96.

for help. Because the poor lacked power, they were also exploited financially by those who did have power (14:31; 22:7). Proverbs describes this unfortunate state of the poor as wretchedness (15:15a).<sup>27</sup> The writers of Proverbs want to ensure the poor are not reduced to insignificance in their communities and therefore forced to live on the margins of Israelite society. The wisdom of Proverbs demands that they be received as full members of God's community.

Proverbs not only decries the mistreatment of the poor; it counters with advice on how the poor should be treated. Those with means should be kind to those less fortunate. "Whoever is kind lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full" (19:17). Since mistreatment of the poor and marginalized had apparently become a common practice, those who treated the poor with dignity would stand apart as those who served not only the poor, but the Lord.<sup>28</sup> Serving the needs of the impoverished so pleases God that he assumes the indebtedness of the poor toward their benefactors, and he pays the debt in full. "Recompense is certain, because God himself will repay the "debt." The repayment may be in the form of material benefits, but it may also consist of God's love, to match the charity the lender has shown."<sup>29</sup> Proverbs 22:9 promises blessings to the generous, and although the writer does not name the source of the blessings, it should be understood

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<sup>27</sup> Proverbs teaches poverty can be a person's own fault. People can become poor through laziness (20:13), spending beyond their incomes (23:21), and failing to exercise self-control in their pursuits of pleasure (21:17). Self-imposed poverty can result from a sinful lifestyle (13:25) such as drunkenness (23:21). On the other hand, people may become poor through no fault of their own, but by the injustice of another. "The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice" (13:23). Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 offers insight on one form of this injustice when it says officials at various levels of government relieve the farmer of his produce. Unjust financiers subject people to financial hardship and poverty by charging exorbitant interest (28:8), then using their positions to rule over their victims (22:7). Proverbs is less concerned with how people become poor than with how they are treated when they are poor.

<sup>28</sup> Waltke, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Fox, 656.

to be God. “Generous” literally means “good eye.” The good eye looks at others with compassion and behaves generously.<sup>30</sup> Proverbs’ treatment of the poor reveals God’s immense concern for them. God is the maker of both rich and poor (22:2), and he is the creator and defender of the unfortunate (19:17). He regards our treatment of them as being directed toward him. When we share with the poor, we show kindness to God; when we treat them unkindly, we show contempt for God (14:31).

The authors of Proverbs stress the necessity for those who serve as leaders among God’s people to not only be aware of the needs of the poor, the powerless, and the marginalized, but to treat them with dignity and assist them in their plight. Proverbs does not provide every scenario for how to help the poor. Sometimes a gift of money or food may be appropriate, but being generous does not always require giving possessions. A job offer, along with the opportunity to share in the profits generated, might be better (11:24-26). Appropriate help could include training in a skill, providing financial instruction, and mentoring. Aiding the poor and marginalized could be a long-term commitment extending for years, and aid givers must learn to guard against feelings of pride and superiority for being in the helping position. Both the one giving and the one receiving aid are broken people, and both need “to pursue processes that foster the reconciling work of Jesus Christ in the lives of both parties.”<sup>31</sup> In whatever way leaders who are trained in the character-based principles of wisdom decide to help, they need to make sure that their efforts bless people, not harm them. “The righteous know the rights of the poor; the wicked have no such understanding” (29:7). This significant passage, with its clear concern for justice for those living on the margins of society, appears in the

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<sup>30</sup> Bland, 200.

<sup>31</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 155.

royal section of Proverbs, a collection of verses with specific application for leaders in Israel.

### Shepherding

Many Old Testament writers use shepherd and sheep imagery as metaphors for the function of kings toward their people (see especially Ezek 34). The Israelite king's duties as a shepherd included handling political, economic, and religious affairs. He was responsible for providing spiritual leadership to his sheep. This shepherd and sheep imagery is picked up by the sages and developed in Proverbs 27:23-27. This poetic passage exhorts a shepherd to know the condition of his flocks and to tend to the land so he can be rewarded with increasing wealth and food. It can be read as a literal admonition to shepherds and farmers to care for their animals and property, but it can also be read as an exhortation to royalty to tend to the needs of their kingdoms, particularly the needs of their citizens.<sup>32</sup>

The poem begins by exhorting the shepherd to “know well the condition of your flocks” (v.23). It instructs the shepherd to “know well the faces” of the animals. This admonition implies that the shepherd should give them ample attention, monitor their nutritional needs, know their natures (beyond just having a cognitive awareness of them), and take care of them.<sup>33</sup> The intensive energy required of shepherds means that even if they have servants to help in the care of the flocks, they cannot leave full responsibility to the servants. They must care enough to personally oversee the animals and the estate.

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<sup>32</sup> Verse 24b refers to a crown. The poem is situated in the Hezekian collection (25:1), and the references to servants, wealth, and property acquisition indicate one in a higher social setting than a common peasant. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Proverbs,” *New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 233. The fact that the poem appears in the royal proverbs section indicates it probably had prior circulation in the royal court in oral form. Waltke, 391.

<sup>33</sup> Fox, 816; Waltke, 391.

The location of this poem—in the section on royal rule—means the author intended it to apply not only to shepherds tending literal sheep in a pasture, but to the concerns of a king and his reign. In essence the poem addresses the responsibilities of a monarch toward his people. Kings deal primarily with political and economic issues, but in Israel the king had one more important responsibility: providing spiritual leadership. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 commands the king to copy, learn, and remain faithful to the law. His responsibility did not end with providing healthy social and economic conditions for the people; he was responsible for providing personal spiritual leadership as well.

The assertion in Proverbs 27:24b that a crown is not secure for all generations assumes that a king who does not tend to the needs of his flock could lose his position on the throne. A king who failed to monitor the health and contentment of his people risked rebellion, assassination, or takeover from outside forces, and jeopardized both the loyalty of the people and his own position and authority. Thus Proverbs teaches that a king should show the same concern for the well-being of his people as a wise shepherd does for his beasts.

Bruce Malchow regards Proverbs 27:23-27 as the introduction to the carefully structured chapters 28-29, which he argues serve as a manual for future monarchs. The introduction warns the monarch that he must exercise care in his duties toward the people if he will keep his position secure; the following two chapters build on that theme.<sup>34</sup> Following Malchow's thesis, I will examine two verses from chapters 28 and 29 that demonstrate the shepherding/leadership theme and have important implications for leaders.

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<sup>34</sup> Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 243.

“When a land rebels it has many rulers; but with an intelligent ruler there is lasting order” (Prov 28:2). The sage does not say why rebellion leads to many leaders. People who are discontented with or distrustful of their current leaders may rebel against them and assert their own will. The people might sense indifference or weakness at the top and attempt to take over. In this case, perhaps the monarch violated the wisdom of Proverbs 27:23-27, pursuing his own agenda instead of investing in the people, thereby betraying them and losing their loyalty. Whatever the motivation, a rebellion has ensued and the jockeying for power leads to discord and fragmentation within the community.<sup>35</sup> The second part of the proverb affirms the wisdom of the introductory poem. The wise leader maintains order through understanding the systemic conditions and working within them. The wise leader expends the effort to “know the faces” of the people, to inquire about their lives, and to offer appropriate assistance. The interest shown by the good shepherd fosters and feeds the loyalty of the people, preventing rebellion and chaos.

“Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath” (Prov 29:8). Wise leaders have the ability to recognize those people prone to disturb the peace and to address them before they can cause an eruption of anger and even rebellion. Mockers are impudent, arrogant, and cynical people who stir up strife.<sup>36</sup> The fruit of their work is chaos in the system: “Social harmony . . . is the first casualty of deceit.”<sup>37</sup> This passage does not explain how the wise turn away anger, but other passages give some insight. By calling upon the community to repent of sin (28:13), the wise leader avoids the tendency to seek simplistic answers and mask internal discontent. Instead he addresses the issues of the heart where real change must be made. Wise men and women take especial care to

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<sup>35</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*, 487, and Fox, 819.

<sup>36</sup> Fox, 836.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

weigh their words in tense situations, speaking only what is appropriate and promotes healing (12:18 and 25:11). Their words might encourage, rebuke, or call someone to repentance—whatever is deemed necessary to deal with the discontent.

Wise leaders trust in the goodness of God to help them persevere when they face difficult decisions and situations (16:1-3). Like the shepherd of 27:23-27, such leaders care for and minister to even the most impoverished members of their flock (29:7). Wise leaders are kind and fair. They have generous spirits that do not begrudge profit or well-being for others, but actively promote it (11:24-26).<sup>38</sup> Through these measures wise leaders stall the hostile forces of the mockers, turn back their anger, and promote peace in their system.

The shepherding imagery of 27:23-27 fits within one of Proverbs' purposes, that of producing wise leaders. It flows naturally into the chapters on monarchy, and it provides vivid imagery for the nature and function of spiritual leadership. Leaders trained in the wisdom model care about the flock, attend to its needs, and engage with the "sheep." Through intimate involvement with the lives of their members, wise leaders are able to discern dissatisfaction and discontent before they reach disruptive and chaotic levels; and by the strength and spirituality of their characters, they are able to stem the tide of rebellion in its earliest stages. Finally, leaders schooled in wisdom can discern the appropriate word to speak—whether encouragement, rebuke, or a call to repentance—into any situation that arises.

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<sup>38</sup> Waltke, 437.



### Conclusion

Old Testament leaders used the material in Proverbs to develop people into character-based individuals, capable of functioning as healthy participants in their families, communities, and nation. Because they had themselves been trained in healthy functioning, these individuals were prepared to serve as leaders in each of these communities. Today these five character-based leadership principles from Proverbs—community building, leading with integrity, listening, ministering to the marginalized, and shepherding—have particular benefit for my context as well. Just as these principles benefitted the ancient communities of Israel, they can benefit communities today, particularly the church.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Notes of the five classes I taught are in appendix H.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to provide training for future leaders of the Ulysses Church of Christ based on the theological principles of Proverbs. I intended that the participants, after going through a training process, would better understand biblical and character-based principles of leadership from Proverbs and how to apply them in the congregational context. All of those present for training currently serve as leaders in some capacity (e.g., deacons, committee leaders, activity leaders, teachers), but I designed the project to enhance their perspectives on character-based leadership to further develop them for future leadership.

#### Format

This project relied on qualitative research. Qualitative research involves the collection of data through observation, life experience, interviews, storytelling, personal history, and other social means. The data collected tell the stories of human lives. Data include the information and insights gained by the researcher through observations, questionnaires, and interviews.<sup>1</sup> The researcher then translates these raw data into a coherent story that reflects the experiences of the participants. In the end the researcher attempts to discern what the data mean. Qualitative researchers rely upon a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980), 22.

interpretive practices to understand their subject matter. Using multiple interpretive methods allows researchers to understand their subject from different perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative research positions researchers within the context being studied. The context consists of the field of study and the lives of those with whom the researchers interact in the project. Researchers themselves actively participate in the project, working toward the same goals as other participants.<sup>3</sup> My project meets this criterion in that each participant in this project is an active member of the Ulysses church with an interest in its goals and objectives.

I formatted the class as a series of five one-hour sessions with two specific objectives: (1) to gain a theological foundation of leadership as envisioned in Proverbs, and (2) to apply these principles within the church in Ulysses. Classes included instruction and discussion, and I gave weekly assignments for the participants based upon the week's lesson. I based the number of lessons on the theological themes and principles that emerged from my exegetical study of Proverbs.

The curriculum explored five themes I identified that Israelite communities originally used for character-based training. Scripture served as the primary basis of the instruction, although I used leadership principles and insights from other authors and leaders when I felt those insights provided a practical application of the principles in Proverbs.<sup>4</sup> I focused my teaching in each session on key passages in Proverbs.

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<sup>2</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> I primarily used as resources for my study of Proverbs the commentaries, introductions, and articles listed in works cited. I used other books to aid in class presentations, such as the works by Israel Galindo and Benjamin Friedman, also listed in works cited. I found their suggestions for providing leadership (Galindo) and conflict management (Friedman) to be practical applications of the principles I discerned in Proverbs on these subjects.

Participants listened, then discussed their thoughts and insights. As a group the participants developed and practiced the key concerns of Proverbs for character-based leadership—community building, leading with integrity, listening, ministering to the marginalized, and shepherding—then applied the lessons by visiting with members of the congregation and listening to them, using appreciative inquiry questions. Through active participation in the sessions and during the week, the participants developed the character-based leadership functions of Proverbs.

The sessions took place in the fellowship hall of the Ulysses Church of Christ. This room has ample space, tables and chairs, a large coffee pot, a chilled bottled water dispenser, and dry-erase boards. My wife, Cheryl, and I provided snacks and drinks for each session, and in one session we ate pizza as part of the actual training. I arranged ahead of time to pay a teenager from the congregation to provide childcare for participants with young children, but this service was not needed.

#### Group Participants

I invited five elders and their spouses to participate in this project. These elders, as key informants, assisted me in selecting a number of additional participants, including deacons and their spouses, as well as other church members, both male and female. The group consisted of nine men and seven women. Five men were elders and three were deacons. All but two of their wives participated. A single man and woman rounded out the group so that active leaders as well as potential leaders participated in this study.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The people in this group were already a discernible group. The sampling method is key informant sampling. The elders functioned as key informants in discerning who the other members of the research project should be. See Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 83. See appendix A for a letter inviting potential participants to join the project.

### Description of the Sessions

I facilitated the training. Elders participated with the other group members in activities both within and outside of the training sessions. Specifically, the group engaged in discussions during the training sessions, conversations with fellow participants during the week, and visits with members of the congregation. Two elders assisted two other participants (a husband and wife) as they visited with two members who felt disconnected from the church and expressed extreme displeasure.

I based the number of sessions upon the number of character-based leadership traits I identified in Proverbs, and then added a debriefing session and a project evaluation session. I intended to spend the debriefing session conducting a semi-structured interview<sup>6</sup> that would allow free-flowing answers from the participants. However, an unplanned pastoral intervention prevented the debriefing session from occurring as scheduled. (More will be said about that below.) In the final session Dr. Jeanene Reese, an outside independent expert, evaluated the project. An outside expert is a consultant from outside the study group who generally has little or no personal knowledge of the participants in the study. The outsider's expertise or experience allows her to spot things in the process that the insiders may overlook.<sup>7</sup>

I began session 1 by welcoming everyone to the group and leading a prayer. I then passed out the informed consent forms, explained the need for them, and had members sign them and pass them back to me. I explained that there would be five weeks of teaching sessions followed by two weeks of evaluation interviews, one by me and one by

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<sup>6</sup> In a semi-structured interview the interviewer has "specified themes, issues and questions," but has the prerogative to "probe and explore for more depth" (Sensing, 107). The interview questions for the debriefing are listed in appendix C.

<sup>7</sup> Ammerman, 30.

an outside expert. I told the group that snacks and drinks would be provided by my wife and me each evening. I then presented the first character-based lesson, leaving time at the end for questions and discussion. Because I had a lot of material to present, I gave each member of the group a copy of the notes I was teaching from for every session. This proved to be beneficial because members could easily follow along with what I was teaching. Following the presentation, I gave the participants assignments to visit other members of the intervention group or members of the congregation outside of our group. I also provided them with specific questions to ask. The assignments and questions can be found in appendix B.

Sessions 2 through 5 began with a welcome to the session and a prayer by a member of the participant group. Most members got some of the snacks as they came in or went to the table to get them after the prayer. The format followed that of session 1. A few new members filled out the intervention form and I gave an extremely brief overview of the orientation from week one for those not present for the first meeting. This was not repeated after session 2. Also, beginning with week 2 there was a fifteen-minute discussion at the beginning of each class for members to report on their assigned visits. Members reported on important discussions they had had and on how they had been impacted by the visits. Sessions 6 and 7 were the two evaluation sessions.

Beginning December 7, classes met on consecutive Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m., with two exceptions. We missed December 28 because of the holidays, and we met on one Monday night, January 5, in order to complete the classes by January 18, the date set for Dr. Jeanene Reese to perform her evaluation interview.

### Data Collection Strategies

Qualitative methodology deals with interpreting the experiences of people in real life situations. It encourages people to share their feelings and thoughts about their experiences.<sup>8</sup> While I did use the training sessions to instruct the participants in principles of character-based leadership with a view toward applying those principles in real life situations (theory), I was more concerned about how the sessions might influence the participants to grow in their functions as character-based leaders (practice). I wanted the participants to learn new information, but even more I wanted them to experience and apply the kind of character-based leadership Proverbs encourages. Therefore, my data collection strategies and evaluation methodology focused on capturing the experiences and stories of the participants in class and in their visits and discussions with others outside the class situations.

I employed three means of data collection. First, insider participants formed two different groups. The elders and their spouses made up one group, and members invited by the elders and me to participate made up the other. I had originally planned to debrief all participants through a semi-structured interview in session 6. However, as noted above, session 6 did not proceed as planned. Though there was a lot of discussion, it did not center on the evaluation questions or interview, but on an opportunity to put into practice what we had learned. (See chapter 4 for further explanation.) Therefore I replaced the semi-structured interview with phone interviews, debriefing the participants in light of what we learned by the discussion in session 6.

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<sup>8</sup> Patton, 22.

The second means of data collection involved an outside expert, Dr. Jeanene Reese of Abilene Christian University. This expert, from her own experience and expertise, directed the conversation for the purpose of providing feedback on the effectiveness of the project. She provided this feedback in the form of an interview.<sup>9</sup>

In my role as researcher I used a participant observer (PO) to help collect data, thereby providing a third means of data collection.<sup>10</sup> My wife, Cheryl Baldwin, served as the PO. Cheryl has a degree in social work and worked for years in that field. Her involvement in a number of leadership activities in church contexts spans over thirty years and includes coordinating Vacation Bible School, teaching in the children's education program, teaching adult women, speaking at women's programs, training and mentoring teachers in the education program, and leading drama activities. She has served as a youth leader; a host for visiting groups, guest speakers, and travelers needing housing; and a small group co-host. Cheryl took field notes during the training sessions for me, and we followed a two-page field-note protocol.<sup>11</sup> Cheryl recorded field notes in the first column, and I recorded my reactions and thoughts in the second column. After each session I converted the notes of the PO and my observations into a digital file that served as the data set.

I trained Cheryl on the protocol for taking notes,<sup>12</sup> instructing her to be detailed and specific without making judgments or generalizations about individuals or their statements. Each session the PO noted (1) the date, time, and place of the sessions, (2)

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<sup>9</sup> See appendix I for this document.

<sup>10</sup> "Participant observation is the primary tool used in ethnography, the study of living human beings in their social and cultural contexts" (Sensing, 93). The participant observers gather data by taking notes of the intervention sessions. They do not ask questions or participate in the sessions in any manner.

<sup>11</sup> The two-page note taking form is provided in appendix E.

<sup>12</sup> The protocol for note taking is located in appendix F.



attendance and seating arrangement of the group, (3) the ways members of the group interacted with one another and with me, (4) the content of the discussion, giving attention to key words or phrases that were repeated and that related either to content matter or to feelings and experiences of the participants, (5) non-verbal cues that showed how the group members were feeling about the discussion or how they were interacting with one another, and (6) how the group members interacted in the first few moments before and after the group sessions.

Using a PO left me free to concentrate on the material I was teaching and to observe the responses of the participants. After each group meeting I evaluated the field notes for key ideas or themes and expanded them by adding my own thoughts and insights. I had originally intended to do this immediately after each session, but when the meetings were changed from a week night to Sunday afternoon, other responsibilities made it impossible for me to finish typing, evaluating, and expanding until later that night or, on a couple of occasions, days later. I typed the notes into a Microsoft Word document and used them as a data set to evaluate the effectiveness of the process on individuals as well as the group. These three means of data collection provided the information and insights I drew upon to evaluate the effectiveness and significance of the project.

### Data Analysis

In my analysis of these notes I identified the themes and categories that emerged from the notes throughout the sessions. Each week I followed a specific protocol: (1) Before reading through the PO's notes, I wrote down my own observations; (2) I read through the data recorded by the PO that evening or as soon afterward as possible; (3) I

archived reoccurring themes, words, or phrases used by group members; (4) I clustered these in their categories; (5) I assigned codes<sup>13</sup> to each theme, word, and phrase and inserted them into the data records; and (6) I categorized these for use in interpretation of the project's effectiveness. I used triangulation in the evaluation of the data.

Triangulation consists of collecting data from three different sources and analyzing it together to ensure a more complete and thorough evaluation of the results.<sup>14</sup>

I brought the insider, the outsider, and the expert witness into analysis through coding and triangulation.<sup>15</sup> In my context, coding, the first step of organizing the data so they can be interpreted, involved identifying and organizing repeated words, themes, and patterns<sup>16</sup> concerning character-based leadership in Proverbs that had emerged in the sessions and been discussed by participants. Triangulating helps alleviate the possibility of bias that might occur through the collection of data by only one party. The analysis of the data by all three angles of interpretation sought three possible occurrences: patterns, slippages, and silences. Patterns reveal dominant themes identified by participants. Slippages reveal disagreements or apparent contradictions in data. Silences reveal assumptions among members of the group. This triangulation and analysis of the data revealed a more thorough picture of the experience of the group.<sup>17</sup>

One purpose of Proverbs was to develop character and integrity in people to enable them to serve effectively as leaders of God's people. This project demonstrates the continued effectiveness of Proverbs in providing the basis for training character-based

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<sup>13</sup> Miles and Huberman recommend using general domains as a coding structure that can then be evaluated inductively. Matthew B. Miles and Michael A. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods* (Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage, 1984), 57.

<sup>14</sup> Sensing, 72.

<sup>15</sup> Patton, 560.

<sup>16</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, 517.

<sup>17</sup> Sensing, 197-202.

leaders. As chapters 4 and 5 will show, participants provided leadership by engaging each other and other members in conversations that led to bonding, reconciliation, and increased involvement of both participants and members in the life of the church.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The sessions described in the previous chapter produced four results. First, participants engaged each other and other members of the congregation with the intentional purpose of building community through their involvement and leadership. They engaged primarily through asking questions and listening, which promoted conversations among participants and with church members and led to reconciliation and community building during the project. Second, through discussion in the participant group and by performing leadership functions during the intervention project, participants overcame some of their fear about being leaders. Third, as members became more fully aware of how character is formed in community, participants found themselves wanting to reach out to other members, particularly young people, with mentoring, activities, and classes that will foster their character growth. Finally, members became more aware of the need to minister to the marginalized—defined for this project as anyone of a different economic, social, or racial make-up from the majority of the church (predominantly middle-class whites). This awareness led some members to become more accepting of visitors outside the predominant group and led one elder to more actively engage marginalized people who visit church functions. This chapter expands these four themes and gives evidence of the results.

### Evaluation of Findings

I used three different methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the project: (1) a researcher, (2) a participant observer, and (3) an outside expert. The perspective of three separate evaluators minimizes the possibility that the results will be slanted to favor the researcher. The three methods are presented below.

#### Researcher

I served as the researcher for the project. During the sessions I noted the comments and actions of the participants and my own feelings or reactions. I typed the notes after each session, dated them, and saved them in an electronic file. These notes formed the data that I used to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. The four themes identified above emerged from my study of and reflection upon the notes. I then compared these themes with the notes of the participant observer and outside expert.

#### *Engagement and Community Building*

I first saw from my study of the field notes a theme of increased engagement. The participants became more engaged with each other and with other members of the congregation through asking the appreciative inquiry questions I had provided.<sup>1</sup> Fruitful conversations grew from the exercises, and participants experienced deeper understanding of each other, of community building, and of reconciliation. While only one session specifically covered listening, all five teaching sessions included listening

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<sup>1</sup> Appreciative inquiry operates on the premise that “the language we use creates our reality. We create our social environment, our organizational reality, through words.” Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), 26. Conversation, including words, images, and feelings, builds a community. Our shared stories and experiences “contain threads of cohesion and meaning” (p.58). The participants asked positive questions, encouraging people to recall experiences and feelings that bonded them with others in the past and could do so again in the present and future, thus promoting continuity of the congregation (community). See appendix B for the questions the participants asked.

exercises based on the questions I had provided them to ask other people.<sup>2</sup> In three sessions I had provided participants with questions to ask members; in two sessions I gave them questions to ask another participant (or several participants). I emphasized listening over responding, particularly in visiting with church members. Several comments from members reveal how the emphasis on listening provided opportunities for positive engagement and community building.

“Trust develops between you when you listen, a bond of being able to communicate with each other,” one woman reported. A man said listening feeds community building because “if there is a need in the community, you won’t know it unless you hear it. You have to communicate with people.” A deacon reported that he had expected his visit to last thirty minutes, but he instead spent three hours. “I got more out of it than she did,” he said. “I left thinking, That was really neat.”

An elder noted that listening helps us better understand how other people have problems listening. During the intervention one of the participant couples, a deacon and his wife (referred to hereinafter as Deacon Couple), visited with a new couple (referred to hereinafter as New Couple) as part of their assignment to visit, ask questions, and listen. The Deacon Couple reported back to the participant group that New Couple did not feel included in the church. They felt discouraged, and the husband wanted to look for another church. He felt especially singled out by a church member’s comment about divorced people not being qualified to be leaders in the church. He was divorced and the comment

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<sup>2</sup> I developed the questions based on my study of appreciative inquiry for another class in my D. Min. project. I chose to design the questions rather than have the group help write them, in part because I wanted the participants to ask questions that would elicit a positive response from the people they were visiting. In addition, since each class session lasted only one hour, I was concerned a discussion of what questions to ask could take too much time.

offended him. Deacon Couple asked for help from the participant group in ministering to New Couple, and two elders committed to visit with them. The two elders listened to New Couple's grievances and assured them none of the leaders saw his divorce as an obstacle to his involvement or leadership. By listening the elders discerned that because New Couple felt shut out, they tended to process what they heard in a negative way toward the church. One elder added, "Hopefully we helped him straighten out his hearing. But it took a lot of listening. We all just about missed where [New Couple] were in their thinking and feeling." The second elder added that listening to New Couple, especially the husband, "drew them back in. They are participating and engaging with others now. Our class helped with that." As a direct result of the listening exercises and ensuing conversations, New Couple began assisting a Wednesday night Bible class teacher, and the wife began coaching a youth chorus.

Reconciliation through listening also occurred within the participant group. In session 6 Deacon Couple revealed to the group that they felt I had betrayed them ten years before by failing to follow up on a counseling session with them. They said I gave them three options at the time—to move, to go to a professional counselor, or to come back and see me—but I never checked back with them to see which option they had chosen.

I felt immensely awkward sitting in the front of the class as the Deacon Couple unloaded their anger from ten or more years ago. Other class members became nervous. My face flushed. Would a private conversation, or one with the elders, not have been more appropriate, I thought. Yet I could see that something significant was happening, and I did not interfere with it. Instead, I asked questions for further clarification. Poling

and Miller write about a moment in theology and ministry when “one stands in fear and awe of the depth and mystery of experience. Our rational thought cannot protect us from the moment. It is the existential moment when the community must risk all in order to be faithful to God.”<sup>3</sup> This was such a moment. Allowing the continued outpouring of ten-year-old anger was a risk. But becoming defensive and stemming the tide of anger was an even greater risk, both to my own integrity and to the healthy functioning of the group. I had stressed the importance of honesty in the lesson on integrity; I had to honor my own teaching by letting Deacon Couple have their say. Thus I decided to risk being vulnerable (a recurring theme in the group discussions) and allow the couple to say whatever they wanted, in whatever depth and detail they chose. I also considered the value of other participants seeing that ministers, servants, and shepherds can fail and still continue to serve. Even though Deacon Couple carried intense anger for ten years, my wife and I have a strong relationship with them. I needed to let them speak so I could learn how I had failed them. When they finished, I apologized for anything I had done to hurt them.

An awkward silence followed my apology, and then people began to speak. One man pointed out that the crisis for Deacon Couple had occurred during a time of crisis in the church when the leaders were often distracted and exhausted. Others mentioned that how the couple assessed my treatment of them could be a matter of perception. I thanked the couple for their openness and honesty, and an elder thanked them for being forgiving toward me. One woman said to them, “You must be relieved now.” An elder’s wife said, “We need a safety net for people who are struggling, people who could rally around

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<sup>3</sup> James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 88.



them.” In this session all participants showed attention and consideration toward others’ feelings, and the active engagement in conversation helped strengthen the community.

This discussion with Deacon Couple took place during the session scheduled for the semi-structured interview. The encounter above lasted one hour and forty minutes, leaving no time to do the interview. To compensate, I conducted phone interviews with at least one person from each family unit represented in the participation group, totaling over seven hours of interviews.

### *Overcoming Fear of Leading*

A second theme emerged as participants discussed their fear of leading and the changes taking place in their thinking about it. The project revealed that leaders fear being hurt by others, speaking in front of a group, and leading others in their spiritual lives. The lessons and exercises in this project pushed participants to step out of their comfort zones and begin leading through initiating spiritually based conversations, listening to members’ stories and concerns, and sharing what they had learned about leadership with other members of the participant group. As a result, participants were enabled to face their fears and function successfully as leaders. I stressed in the session on shepherding that being a leader is less about having charisma and personality and more about functioning in the body in a way that leads others closer to Christ.

Two participants expressed fear of speaking. A deacon shared his reluctance to ever speak in front of a group again after speaking in front of the assembly years before and then being sternly reprimanded by an elder. Although he did not speak in front of the entire church in this project, he did speak up in the participation group and found it

helpful. A woman expressed fear of being rejected, whether in speaking to an individual or a group, but concluded as a result of the exercises that it is worth taking the risk.

Some group members feared even conceiving of themselves as leaders. One woman said, “Using my name and ‘shepherd’ in the same sentence is not something I am comfortable with. On the flip side I will say there are a lot of things when we talked with [New Couple] that resonated with me. . . felt at that point like saying, ‘Ok, I am important enough to be heard, or I am in a position where I can be heard.’” Her husband added, “Shepherding is what we did. . . . We helped them out. I didn’t give them all the answers, but I was able to get them people [two elders] who did. I wouldn’t have picked that word, shepherd, but that is what we did. And it felt good to help someone out.”

#### *Character Formed in Community*

A third theme emerged from my analysis of the data: greater clarity for participants concerning how character is formed in community. This awareness grew through the session on integrity, in discussions with other participants, and in visits with members. I presented six steps in the development of character, gleaned from my study of Proverbs. The sixth step, modeling, proved the most important factor for character formation in the lives of the participants, and they want to see it replicated in the life of the church.

After the class on integrity, participants picked another member of the class to discuss how their integrity had developed according to the six principles I had presented. In most cases members credited parents and family members with teaching them about God, morality, and righteousness. They remembered most how these people had modeled integrity and righteousness for them. One elder who did not grow up in a Christian home

found integrity modeled in his wife's family. "I didn't come from a healthy family," he said. "But when I met my wife and connected with her family, my perspective changed quickly. Her family had a huge impact on my spiritual life."

In class discussion members emphasized the role others had played in their character development. Another elder said, "Character formation is more about the person than ideology. We are all reflecting on people, not about a theological or philosophical point. It is not the message we remember as much as the messenger."

While reflecting on the importance of leading with integrity in the church, one woman commented on how lack of integrity harms others. She expressed disappointment in two of our leaders who do not demonstrate integrity (neither of whom were in the intervention project) when they talk negatively about others. (Their comments were directed primarily toward a non-member who visits occasionally.)

Greater awareness of how community influences the formation of integrity led members to discuss ways we could be more intentional about using our influence to develop character in others, particularly our youth. A mother of three requested that I adapt all five of the intervention classes for the high school class and present the material to them. She encouraged me to have them do the assignments as well, in hopes that the lessons and exercises will capture the hearts and minds of the youth. She thinks church is too often about what we can get and not enough about what we have to give others. As a result of this project—the class on integrity in particular—this woman and her husband volunteered to work with the youth class.

*Ministering to the Marginalized*

The fourth theme to emerge from my study of the field notes centered on an increased desire to reach out to people who are outside the margins of our congregation's economic, social, and racial composition. Ulysses Church of Christ consists primarily of middle-class whites. Fourteen of the sixteen participants were white and two were Hispanic. Our congregation (eighty-five in regular attendance) includes sixteen Hispanics and eight whites who fit the marginalized designation and who regularly attend worship services, classes, and meals. The marginalized we serve include a Hispanic grandmother who is raising three grandchildren whose mother passed away and whose father is uninvolved in their lives. The grandmother receives only several hundred dollars a month in retirement and is trying to provide for four people. We have a white mother who is raising four children by herself. The father of the children provides inconsistent child support. She sometimes survives on only a few hundred dollars a month. Three sisters from another family attend without their parents. The oldest girl is fourteen years old, and she provides parental care for her younger sisters. These girls enjoy the Wednesday night meals so much that they walk from school to be here, even when it is raining or there is a heavy snowstorm. They know they will have at least one good meal that day. The marginalized in our congregation include those who are not white, are divorced, and are economically impoverished. Twenty-four economically impoverished people frequently bring to our Wednesday night meals visitors who take extra food out to their cars after the dinner. The church often helps them pay for Bible camps, youth trips, food, and heating. Four members have been openly critical of our support for these families, suggesting they

start “carrying their weight” around the church. One of these critical members participated in the intervention project.

When we covered ministering to the marginalized in session 4, I discussed Proverbs’ requirement that character-based leaders pay attention to the needs of the poor, socially disadvantaged, and marginalized in their community, then used a vivid demonstration to drive home the point. My wife, Cheryl, and I purchased pizzas, bread sticks, and soda for the class participants. Prior to the meeting I announced that we would have a meal during class, so it would be wise for the group not to eat big lunches. I set up three tables. Table Abundance, or table A, featured two large pizzas, bread sticks, two choices of soda, ice, and water. Table Enough, or table E, held one large pizza, bread sticks, one soda, ice, and water. Table Oh No, or ON (also called table Not Enough by the participants) had only two or three breadsticks cut into small squares and warm tap water. I sat at a separate table, with table A to my left and table E to my right, forming a U-shape. Table ON sat twenty feet behind me. As the participants arrived, I directed each person to pick a slip of paper from a bowl. The slips contained table assignments, and I directed the participants to sit at their designated tables. Everyone did so immediately except one elder’s wife. She sat with her husband at table A to visit at the opening of class. Despite feeling awkward, when class began I asked her to please go to her table, ON. With four people at table A, four at table E and only three at table ON, I did not allow the last man to arrive to pick a slip; I handed him one that said ON and sent him to that table.

Since table ON was positioned twenty feet behind me, I sat with my back to it. I spoke softly to the people at tables A and E so the people at table ON would have a

difficult time hearing me; they would have to strain to hear. This created the awkward situation I had hoped for. When I prayed for our food, they could not hear me. I intentionally spoke softly so the participants at table ON did not know we were praying. Their voices were louder than mine during the prayer. About halfway through, they realized we were praying and became quiet. They said later this frustrated them because they did not know what was going on. In the end, because they could not hear us well, they simply ignored the rest of the group and carried on their own conversation.

I started the class and told all participants they could eat, but that no one could move up a table. People then began to notice the disparity in the food arrangements. After twenty minutes a man from table ON came up behind me and put his arm around my neck as if to choke me. He was joking, but he was also frustrated that his table had so little food. Five minutes later I invited the participants at table ON to join us at tables A or E. Everyone from table ON went to table A. In addition to the leftovers from table A, I gave them a large supreme pizza I had reserved just for them. I had told the participants not to eat before class because I wanted to enhance their sense of anticipation and of disappointment.

Just as I wanted, everyone at the ON table felt left out and said so. One woman said she felt isolated; another said it was worse than that. The latter woman had felt isolation before in her life and never gotten over it; sitting at the ON table brought those emotions back to her. Two elders seated at table A felt guilty about their wives sitting at table ON. One elder said, "I saw the food at my table and assumed other people had the same set up. When I found out they didn't, I realized I was a role player. I wondered if I should get up and divvy up the pizza." The other elder expressed discomfort at having

plenty to eat while his wife was going hungry. He said, “I was not comfortable being at table A. I am not comfortable with that in real life, either.” A woman at table E said, “I was disappointed in myself [for not sharing food with people at Table ON]. I thought it was an experiment and I was supposed to play my role, and I did. I thought there were reasons to stay there [at my table], so I did.” Someone even said, “We were not allowed to share. We were told we couldn’t.” I clarified, “I said you could not move up a table, but I didn’t say you couldn’t go down, or you couldn’t share with someone at a lower table.” Based on my simple instruction, participants acted on what they thought they heard: “Stay at your table and do not help anyone.”

The group discussed this class more than any other. One deacon said the project, especially the ministering to the marginalized session, caused him to change his attitude and become more understanding of and gracious toward the marginalized. This participant is the same man who had openly voiced criticism of the money we spend helping people. This session so impacted one elder that he began to “make it more of a point on Wednesday night to say hello to everybody.” He continued, saying, “I’m less interested in what we have to eat than in the presence of everyone there. I don’t want anyone to think I am an elder that is unapproachable.” He now makes it a special point to visit with everyone regarded as marginalized. Everyone expressed the need to be more alert to those in need of help. Several said we need to get out of our comfort zones to serve others.

#### Participant Observer

As a second method of evaluation, I asked the participant observer (PO) to take notes of the sessions. As soon after the sessions as possible, I typed the notes and

analyzed them for any themes that emerged.<sup>4</sup> I identified three themes in the notes that provide another angle on the results of the project.

### *Importance of Conversation*

The first theme I noticed as I analyzed the PO's notes was the importance of communication for forming and maintaining community. Several conversations during class sessions and participant reflections and reports of their visits concerned this theme. One deacon said, "You need to have conversation to have community and relationships." Conversation draws people in so they feel connected to the group. It builds trust. As trust grows, members become more vulnerable with each other, developing what one woman called a "safety net" that keeps us from drifting away from faith and the community when difficult times assail our lives. She said this to another woman who confessed to often feeling alone and alienated from the church and remaining only because of her personal commitment, not because she felt connected.

Through asking questions, participants learned the importance of storytelling to conversation and community building. An elder's wife visited with a couple who had been led to Christ thirty years before by a man serving as an elder at the time. He baptized the couple and later one of their sons. The couple expressed how important this man was to their lives. Even now, thirty years later, when this couple walks into the building, they feel a peace because of the influence of that elder and the church in their lives. Class members shared numerous other stories like this one.

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<sup>4</sup> All written records of the participant observer were kept in a locked file until the project was completed. After completing the project, I destroyed the notes. The records I transferred to the computer are kept in a password protected electronic file. The protocols for coding are in appendix G.



As a result of the intervention, participants learned the importance of community building and even contributed to community building during the course of the project. This theme supports my conclusion as researcher that engagement leads to community building. This project demonstrates that leaders who want healthy communities must engage their members in regular conversation and provide opportunities for people to listen to each other, gain trust, and seek each other's spiritual well-being.

### *Leadership Can Be Learned*

Cheryl's notes showed a second theme: leadership is dynamic, not static. Leadership principles and functions can be learned, and we must continue to study them. An elder who has served the congregation for over thirty years as a deacon and elder remarked upon how different leadership is today than it was three decades ago because social views of authority have changed. In earlier years the elders could announce a new idea or plan and expect people to support it simply because the leaders authorized it. Today members challenge that authority, and elders must present ideas to members, explain the ideas thoroughly, and allow member input. This shift in social views of authority requires much more active engagement between the leaders and the members.

Leaders must be aware of differing perceptions among the members and even among the leaders. One example of differing perceptions lay in the exchange between Deacon Couple and me. We each expected the other to make the next move concerning whether our visits would continue. Other participants shared that they viewed the situation based on their memory of the situation ten years ago and what they were hearing in the current conversation. Cheryl commented, "This session (and discussion about differing viewpoints) was well received by all participants. They wanted to add to the

conversation and hear what others had to say. The main point of this class today could be the word perception. People need to be aware of how they and others perceive things. The participants were eager to find solutions to make the church be more attentive and caring to others' needs."

The PO's notes clearly reveal the need for leaders to be actively engaged with the members, listening to their stories and concerns carefully. These functions secure the interest and trust of the members and avoid the top-down model of leadership that once characterized this church and contributed to the congregational conflicts discussed in the section on the history of the Ulysses Church.

#### *Ministering to the Marginalized*

The third theme found in Cheryl's notes echoes my own observations as researcher: the importance of ministry to those outside the predominant, middle-class white group comprising the church. Her notes confirm that the meal experiment disoriented people. She recorded several revealing terms used by members to describe their reactions: uncomfortable, isolated, awkward, left out. One woman said she had felt socially isolated earlier in life, and this experiment brought back those painful emotions.

The negative emotions generated by the experiment created greater awareness of the needs of the marginalized and the church's responsibility to reach out to them. One man noted that where everyone is the same, one does not notice those who are different. That statement revealed a problem: those who are different exist, but we are not alert to them and we do not give them sufficient attention. We have not all noticed or reached out to the "different" people in our midst. Other participants mentioned how the experience

moved them from their comfort zones into a confrontation with our responsibility toward people we could be helping.

### Outside Expert

The third method of evaluation was an interview conducted by Dr. Jeanene Reese, an associate professor in the Department of Bible, Missions, and Ministry and Director of the Center for Women in Christian Service at ACU. Dr. Reese interviewed the participant group during the seventh session. Ten participants attended class that day, and Dr. Reese emailed copies of the questions to missing participants; two of them responded, bringing the total number of participants involved in the interview to twelve. Dr. Reese compiled the results of her interview into a thirteen-page document, which she emailed to me. I will discuss her results in two parts: themes and recommendations.<sup>5</sup>

### *Themes*

#### Leadership Development

Several participants expressed discomfort with being considered leaders or role models for the body. One elder said he did not feel like a shepherd. However, others commented on how the class helped them better understand their roles as leaders and how it helped provide insight and skill for performing their roles. The lessons and visitation assignments helped one participant learn how to engage people in spiritual conversations. He pledged to try harder in the future to reach out to others through spiritual discussions. One elder shared his need for the intervention to help him listen better and be more approachable. Everyone in the class agreed the intervention provided training that would help them function more effectively as leaders. One man credited the class on community

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Reese's complete report is in appendix I.

building, in which I assigned group members to visit a married couple in the congregation and listen to them, with helping him and his wife “reclaim [a] young family before they left the church.” He added that “these kinds of experiences would be repeated if all Christians saw themselves as shepherds.” Several participants suggested we continue and expand the training sessions. Those who had not been part of the participant group could cover the lessons I taught in the project while new and deeper material could be introduced for members of the participant group. Dr. Reese received a written response acknowledging the bond that developed among members of the participant group and expressing the desire for further training in this area to extend the bonding to the entire church, resulting in a “growing, thriving congregation.”

#### Ministering to the Marginalized

Dr. Reese wrote, “Although the energy in the room had stayed fairly constant up to this point, it rose significantly as participants responded to this prompt” (about their experience with the class on ministering to the marginalized). Participants made the connection between preference in the seating arrangement for the meal and preference we give others in real life. “We ignore others in real life,” one participant said. One man at the table with abundant food epitomized this confession by admitting that he missed the experiment as it was occurring because he just “fed his face.” Others noticed one table received much less food and wanted to help, but resisted the urge and did nothing. One man who was not even present for the class noted that it must have been very impactful based on what he heard others in the congregation saying about it. This one class changed attitudes toward the marginalized. For example, members of the participant group are

now more open to economically disadvantaged people who take food home with them after the Wednesday night meals.

### Youth

A mother of three described how one of her children does not feel fed at church, another does not like it, and the third thinks it is the greatest place on earth. She shared her desire for her children and other youth to take this leadership training class so that “in five to ten years there would be a vibrant children’s and youth ministry that empowered the young to stand up to their peers and bring them to church.” Concerns about an aging church led numerous participants to express a renewed interest in focusing on the spiritual health and involvement of youth and young families in the church. When both participants and the members they visited as part of their assignments shared favorite memories, the majority focused upon people or experiences of their own youth or those of their children when they were in the youth group. Participants want to use the lessons learned from this class to stimulate the youth in our group to evangelize their friends and to produce similar positive experiences for them.

### *Recommendations*

Dr. Reese concluded her report with four recommendations for our church to work on as a result of this intervention project. These recommendations are based on the feedback she received from the twelve participants in her interview.

1. The development of even more content that goes deeper into the role of the leader
2. Increased opportunities for conversations among congregants in both formal and informal settings

3. More effective outreach to the marginalized with efforts to make them more an integral part of the church
4. Concern for children and youth of the church in all areas with special attention given to their spiritual development

### Conclusion

The goal of this project was to provide a training process in which participants would better understand biblical principles of leadership from Proverbs and how to apply them in the congregational context. The researcher, participant observer, and outside expert identified themes that emerged, and the outside expert made four recommendations for further action. Conversation between participants and between participants and other church members led to greater understanding, reconciliation, and community building. Participants also became more aware of the presence of marginalized members and visitors to our church community, and some have already become active in reaching out to them. Most participants want the training program to continue, repeating the material for members who were not in the class the first time, and providing new material for those who have already covered it. The next chapter concludes this thesis by identifying lessons learned and discussing possibilities for improving the project.

## CHAPTER V

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this doctor of ministry project was to apply ministry principles I learned in the doctor of ministry program to my ministry setting in Ulysses. This project fulfilled that purpose by implementing a program of leadership training and activity based on theological principles of Proverbs that engaged leaders with each other and with members of the congregation in meaningful conversations, community building, and reconciliation. Engagement, rather than the top-down model practiced for generations in the congregation, prompted leaders to lead in this project. This final chapter discusses the project's implications for ministry and possibilities for improvement.

#### Implications for Ministry

##### Significance

Developing new leaders has posed a challenge for Ulysses. Leadership development has relied largely upon observation, with men and women observing others' leading and then functioning as they do. Other than some personal mentoring in teaching classes and visitation, no systematic attempt has been made to teach and train potential leaders. Also, because of the largely top-down leadership style traditional at Ulysses, elders have spent some time visiting and interacting with members, but they have actually functioned primarily through meeting and making decisions. I purposed by this project to move beyond the lack of training and top-down perspective to teach leadership principles and encourage active interaction with members of the congregation.

Building on a theological base, I incorporated into the training some sociological influences and models. I presented Israel Galindo's six functions of leaders and Rabbi Edwin Friedman's principles of anxious systems because their material demonstrated the practical function of the theological principles I was teaching. The class was more confessional, but we did experience some critical correlation between theological and secular principles.<sup>1</sup>

The project provided practical steps for leaders to function in their roles. We incorporated theological principles from Proverbs with principles from authors and leaders, such as Galindo and Friedman, who utilized both theological and sociological principles of leadership. For example, Galindo lists management as his fifth function. He discusses managing an organization through utilizing skills such as setting and following procedures, organizing, and using resources wisely, but he also considers management in terms of relational leadership or leading by personal connection with people. Significantly, several people noted how helpful this information would have been during earlier periods of chaos in the congregation when leadership was not as engaged as it could have been. Several members asked for more sessions on this topic later.

Experience, feedback, and reflection demonstrate that people changed as a result of the project. Several people mentioned gaining new insights and greater confidence in performing as a leader. One elder proclaimed himself a better listener as a result of the lessons and the opportunities to listen to participants and members, particularly in his involvement with the intervention with New Couple. Deacon Couple said they also

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<sup>1</sup> Poling and Miller discuss critical correlation as a method "which aims at collaborative dialogue between the Christian tradition and secular disciplines in which each can challenge the other and contribute both descriptive and normative statements . . ." (*Foundations*, 31).



learned a lot and want more classes. They had never thought of themselves as shepherds before, but realized through the training that helping people in the context of faith is a form of shepherding. New Couple has already become more involved in the life of the church, attending activities and even assisting me in a Bible class, and the wife is helping coach a youth chorus. One deacon credited the project, especially the ministering to the marginalized session, with causing a change in his attitude toward the marginalized, promoting greater understanding of and graciousness toward them. The ministering to the marginalized class also moved the heart of an elder to make more of an effort to greet everyone during the Wednesday night meal.

The significance of this project lies partially in its clear demonstration that leadership can be taught. Spiritual leadership is about function, not charisma. We expect leaders to know how to lead when we appoint them to a position or select them as elders or deacons. But often they do not know how. One new deacon in our congregation told an elder, “I don’t really know what to do as a deacon. I expect you will teach me.” Though this deacon chose not to be in the class (for reasons he did not provide), other participants in the class reported learning leadership principles and feeling more comfortable functioning as a leader.

The positive impact of this project can be seen in the benefits experienced in the congregation at two levels. The group itself experienced the first level of benefit. The participants became a support group for each other as they learned about leadership, did their assignments, and began to function more as leaders. Participants opened themselves to each other by expressing ideas and emotions, and they encouraged each other through positive feedback and personal conversations after the classes were over. When Deacon

Couple needed assistance in ministering to New Couple, they shared their need with the group and received help from two of the elders. The group developed a sense of bonding and togetherness. The members of the congregation visited by the participants received the second level of benefit. These members were given opportunities to express their positive thoughts, and some felt free to express their disappointments and frustrations as well. The changed attitude and fuller involvement of New Couple resulted directly from such an opportunity.

The project revealed a need for spiritual conversation among members. One deacon reported he converses often with members about a variety of topics, but spiritual issues are rarely raised. He plans to use the questions I provided in class to help him address spiritual issues with members in future discussions. He added that “even though the class is over, I don’t think we need to stop talking to others. What we’ve found out in class is we are not doing it.” Another deacon said he realizes he needs to visit with people more about spiritual things and said he keeps the appreciative inquiry questions we used in class in his Bible for future conversations. Class members recognized a similar need for more visitation. Participants see visitation as an opportunity not just to talk but also to express acceptance and create a spirit of closeness and community. An elder said, “One of the things we realize is we need to be walking through the flock a lot more. . . . More visiting will have us listening and will help people get the poison [anger] out, and let them look at the poison. And if they tell you what you have done wrong you can say, ‘I’m sorry.’”

Much significance lies in the fact that participants who did not think of themselves as leaders now envision themselves as shepherds. A woman who did not feel

comfortable being referred to as a shepherd went with her husband and actively shepherded another couple—and that couple now participates actively themselves in the life of the church. I gladly pointed out to them the role they played in spiritual shepherding by leading New Couple closer to the heart of God. I felt particularly gratified because the anger expressed toward me by this husband and wife two weeks prior had been processed, enabling us to work together positively and successfully as shepherds to another struggling couple. This project helped the participants not only become aware of the need for leadership, but to learn leadership principles and apply them successfully.

As a group we recognized the significance of inclusion and how easy it is for people to feel left out. New Couple felt left out because they were not invited to participate when they first moved here, and when someone later asked the husband to participate in worship, he declined on two occasions due to the anger he felt. A couple who often travels felt left out; although they are away more than they are in town, they still want to be called and checked on, to feel included. Although we discussed this problem of members feeling left out, we did not and could not fully resolve the problem. While some participants felt people need to be more proactive on their own and get involved, we all agreed that more visits to, conversations with, and listening to members will help build relationships, develop community, and provide safety nets for those who are struggling.

This project also revealed how confining roles can be. Sunday school teachers, deacons, committee leaders and drivers/chaperones for youth trips did not see themselves as shepherds with the ultimate purpose of bringing the people with whom they were working closer to the heart of God. During the project the fuller purpose of their roles

became more evident to them. The ministering to the marginalized class, with its pizza dinner, also helped us see how confining roles can be. People at the tables of Abundance and Enough wanted to distribute food to table Oh No or Not Enough, but did not think it their place. They felt uncomfortable having plenty to eat while some of their friends (and spouses) went hungry, but they felt even more uncomfortable stepping out of their roles to feed those people. In the end, each person chose the relative comfort of staying in his or her perceived role and doing nothing. This project challenged their limited vision of their roles and helped them reimagine the roles in fuller, more expansive ways. It helped them break out and actually do ministry.

In addition to the impact on the group, I myself gained professionally from this project. I learned to apply principles from Proverbs in a contemporary setting and helped the congregation develop leaders with a view toward building community and improving the health of the system. For a long time I had thought about how to develop a program that would help my congregation and other churches with leadership. I feel gratified to see others learn, grow, and develop as leaders as a result of this intervention and to watch people I have trained take the lead in working for community formation and reconciliation. I have grown through the process.

The project also held significance for me personally because it surfaced the feelings of some members toward me. While painful, the experience was also redemptive, and it taught me the power of forgiveness in an experiential way. It forced me to expand my own emotional capacity for criticism, especially in a group setting, with the good of the group and the church at stake. The possible good to come from the anger expressed in session 6 far outweighed whatever emotional issues I may have been

experiencing. This experience will make me more conscious of a number of ministry-related functions, including follow-up with people who seek help.

### Trustworthiness

In this section I address the issue of trustworthiness, specifically of the credibility and dependability of the project in addressing issues of leadership. My own observations, as well as the findings of the participant observer and the outside expert, demonstrate that members grew in their understanding of leadership and in their function as leaders.

My own involvement in the project posed a potential threat to its success since everyone involved in the project is a friend and therefore interested in seeing me succeed. I stressed on several occasions the greater importance of honesty than of saying things they thought would be only positive. I encouraged free expression of disagreement about issues related to the leadership principles I taught and the effectiveness of activities I assigned. I believe the group members interacted honestly with me and felt free to express themselves fully, as evidenced in the experience with the couple who openly expressed disappointment and anger toward my ministerial function years earlier. The participants quickly focused their interest on the inherent benefit of the leadership principles and activities and not on the perceived success of my role in the class. The notes of the participant observer and the conclusions of the outside expert confirm that participants grew in their roles and functions as leaders, further demonstrating the trustworthiness of the project.

Two unexpected events posed a challenge but did not seriously hinder the project. First, I had to break the Sunday rotation to get all of the sessions in before the final evaluation. I initially scheduled a Tuesday night, January 6 meeting, but a conflict would

have required several participants to decide between attending my class or another event. I presented the issue to the class, and they decided to meet on Monday night, January 5. I was concerned that participants would not be able to fulfill their assignments before the next meeting and explained to the group the importance of completing the assignment on Sunday following our meeting. Everyone agreed and did the assignment as soon as class ended. The second unexpected event was the lengthy discussion in session 6 that prevented me from doing the evaluation. I overcame this by resorting to phone interviews, spending about seven hours in the interviews and collecting considerably more data than I could have gained in the one-hour interview. Despite the absence of the group dynamic, I still collected valuable data.

Two particularly moving occurrences added to the experience. All class members felt deeply moved by the ministering to the marginalized class. Two husbands at the Abundance table expressed discomfort because their wives were at the ON table, the one without enough food. One woman at the ON table expressed envy that the other tables had ice and hers did not. She later felt guilty. Others expressed guilt over not feeling gracious enough toward people who visit or attend our church and sit at the ON table every day in real life. This session was one of the most discussed. The second moving occurrence came about in session 6 through the discussion with the angry couple. Despite the discomfort of having criticism directed so sharply and pointedly at me, the experience itself did not disappoint me (although I did feel concerned at the time about not completing the evaluation). I interviewed the husband and wife a week after the session and thanked them for their participation and honesty. They were very gracious. This

experience has dominated my own thinking since the project ended. It moved me to reflect on ministry function, failure, and integrity.

#### Potential Improvement

One way the project could be improved would be for the elders (or comparable leaders in other church settings) to personally visit the potential participants they have identified. In my situation, the elders and I wrote a letter inviting those we chose to participate in the class. Several responded right away, expressing their desire to join us. I personally contacted those who did not respond, informing them that it was not only a school project for me but was also an endeavor we hoped would benefit each participant personally as well as the congregation as a whole. Several people agreed to participate, and four couples declined. A farming couple said they would be busy working. Another couple declined because the husband had just had surgery and would be recuperating for several weeks. A third couple declined because, as the man explained, "I'll be away for a couple of sessions, and if I can't be at all of it, I don't want to be at any of it." (As an interesting contrast, another man came to me and said, "I can't be there for all of it, but may I be there for the classes I am able to attend?") The fourth couple did not give a reason for their noninvolvement. Since involvement in projects for the doctor of ministry program must be totally voluntary, the elders and I did not feel it appropriate to push these other couples to get involved. We hoped the class would go well, giving us the opportunity to offer it again, and that these other four couples would take it then. In another setting the elders may be more comfortable visiting with these couples, explaining in more detail the benefits of the class, and encouraging them to attend.

Another possible improvement would be to include more sessions. Since the participants requested more classes on engaging with members, particularly during periods of crisis, a class specifically on conflict would be beneficial. Numerous verses in Proverbs concern how to deal with conflict both personally and communally, making this subject an appropriate addition to the curriculum.

We encountered one final situation that could use some improvement through advance preparation. Several times participants discussed issues in the church that need to be addressed, but they suggested others address the issues. For example, at least two participants suggested the youth and ladies' classes write notes to absentees. Neither of the people making the suggestions was involved in these programs, leaving them equally uninvolved in the proposed solution. In one discussion outside of a class session, a participant noted that some of the suggestions for ministry addressed "what other people should do." It would be an improvement to be prepared for this and to have creative ideas ready for encouraging those who made such suggestions to get personally involved in organizing and leading the projects.

### Conclusion

This thesis describes my doctor of ministry project, focused on developing character-based leadership using five principles of leadership derived from Proverbs. The Ulysses Church of Christ provided a context for the project. Through this project I taught principles of biblical leadership and provided opportunities for the class participants to apply them in real-life situations. All but one of the participants said they learned principles of leadership in the class, were able to apply them in real life situations, and were positively impacted by their experiences. The one person who said none of the



material was new did say it was a good review and the experience was positive for him. The participants now realize their potential to provide leadership in the local body and contribute to healthy communal development. They envision themselves as shepherds among God's people, leading them closer to the heart of God.

The positive experiences of the participants indicate that even though the DMin project is over, the benefits of the project will continue to live on in their lives and ministry. Their new perceptions of themselves as shepherds and leaders will continue to shape their thinking, their character development, and their function in the local church. Also, because the project was positively received, there is an openness among the leaders to conduct the project for other members of the congregation and for developing new lessons and exercises for those who have already been through it. By continuing to conduct the project for other members and developing new lessons in character-based leadership, we hope that this work will continue to live and produce fruit in the Ulysses Church.

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## APPENDIX A

### Letter to Participants

Date:

Re: Character-based Leadership Training from Proverbs Project

The elders and I invite you to participate in a project that will help me complete a Doctorate of Ministry program and also benefit the Ulysses Church of Christ. The purpose of the project is to train participants in the principles of character-based leadership from the book of Proverbs. The project will include seven one-hour sessions. Sessions one through five will be teaching and discussion sessions, session six will be time for group discussion about our experiences with the project, and session seven will be an evaluation of the process and project. Participants will engage in activities and discussions between sessions as well. Activities between sessions can be as short as one hour, but participants are free to take longer.

Dates and times for the meetings (consecutive Sunday afternoons) follow:

- Session 1 – Sunday December 7, 2014
- Session 2 – Sunday December 14, 2014
- Session 3 – Sunday December 21, 2014
- Session 4 – Sunday January 4, 2015
- Session 5 – Monday January 5, 2015
- Session 6 – Sunday January 11, 2015
- Session 7 – Sunday January 18, 2015

All meetings will be held in the fellowship hall. Snacks and child care will be provided. Your participation in this project is optional. If you choose to participate, or if you have any questions, please let Warren know by calling him at 353-0372.

Warren Baldwin

## APPENDIX B

### Questions for Participants to Ask in

#### “Visits with Members” and “Discussions in Class” Sessions

##### Community Formation Questions for Participants to Ask Members They Visit

1. What is your favorite memory in this church?
2. What are your feelings about that? Why is that your favorite memory?
3. What do you like most about our church now?

##### Leading by Integrity Discussion Questions for Participants in the Class

1. What has been the principal influence in the development of your character?
2. Which of the six steps to character formation covered in class session #2 can most promote your continued growth as a character-based leader?
3. What is the biggest hindrance to your continued growth?

##### Listening Questions for Participants to Ask Members They Visit

1. What is your greatest strength? Why did you pick that strength over your other strengths?
2. How has the church used your strengths in the past?
3. How can we better utilize them in the future?

### Ministering to the Marginalized Questions for Participants during Class

1. What was your reaction to the division of rich and poor, socially included and socially excluded?
2. How did you feel about your position? If you were in the position of abundance or sufficiency, how do you perceive the “excluded” felt about their assigned position? If you were in the position of the poor and excluded, how do you perceive those in the abundance and sufficiency category felt toward you?
3. How well does our church integrate the marginalized into our fellowship and activities?

### Shepherding Questions for Participants to Ask Members They Visit

1. How are your spiritual needs being met in this church? What can we do to help promote your spiritual growth?
2. To whom do you talk about spiritual needs? How can we as your leaders help you be more comfortable talking to us about your spiritual needs?
3. How can we develop a greater environment for spiritual growth in this church?

## APPENDIX C

### Questions for Debriefing with Participants

#### On Community Formation

1. Tell me about your experience questioning the person you visited.
2. Did this person seem eager or reluctant to share a favorite memory of the church?
3. Was the favorite memory oriented toward an activity, or was it about someone in the church?
4. What does this person like most about our church now?
5. Did you detect a longing for how things used to be? Was this feeling actually expressed, or is that something you surmised?

#### On Leading by Integrity

1. Was it difficult to identify the principle influence for character development in your life?
2. Was the principle influence for character development in your life an experience? Was it a person? If so, were you close to this person?
3. Did you find it difficult to discuss your character development with someone else from the class? Explain.
4. Which of the six steps to character development that we discussed can most promote your continued growth as a character-based leader? What hindrances do you anticipate with that?
5. How can you continue your character development? List some ways.

#### On Listening

1. Tell me about your experience questioning the person you visited.



2. Did the person share details with you that were not included in the questions you were provided?
3. Did he or she share anything personal with you?
4. How did you feel about asking these questions? Were you comfortable? Why or why not?
5. Did the person you visited with feel comfortable or seem nervous?

#### On Ministering to the Marginalized

1. Tell me about your experience in class with the division of rich and poor, socially included and socially excluded.
2. If you were one of the poor and excluded (or marginalized), were you comfortable with that role? What negative reactions did you experience? Positive? Did you feel any anger toward those who were enjoying abundance?
3. If you were one of the rich and included, were you comfortable with that role? How did you feel about having the class divided, with some members being poor and excluded (marginalized)?
4. Do you think we give enough thought to the poor and marginalized in our church? Do we give enough thought to the poor and marginalized in our community?
5. How can we as a church become more aware of the poor and socially excluded? What can we do to provide a more inclusive environment with and for them?

#### On Shepherding

1. Tell me about your experience questioning the person you visited.
2. Does this person feel his or her spiritual needs are being met here? Did this person share with you some of those spiritual needs?
3. If this person feels unmet spiritual need, does he or she know why the needs are not being met? Does the reason involve a problem with the church?
4. If spiritual needs are being met for this person, is it primarily through worship, classes, small groups, visitation, or something else?

5. What would this person like to see this church do in the future to provide for their spiritual needs? How does he or she believe we could better provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth?

## APPENDIX D

### Weekly Group Meetings

Weekly group meetings will consist of

1. A five minute review of the previous week's lesson.
2. A ten minute discussion of the visit or activity the participants, spurred by the previous week's lesson, engaged in during the week.
3. A new lesson (forty minutes).
4. An assignment for the next week (five minutes)

Discussion (number 2 above) will be based on the following questions:

1. What was your experience like this week in trying to implement what you learned from the previous lesson (beginning with week 2)?
2. Tell us about your visit or discussion.
3. How did what you heard in your visit resonate with what we discussed in class?
4. What suggestions would you make for improvement?

Planned implementation

1. How might we put what we have learned so far into action?
2. Try to implement one of these ideas in the coming week, and then be prepared to tell us about your experience next week.

APPENDIX E

Note Taking Form

Date:

Time:

Field Notes

Initial Observations

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Miscellaneous notes:

## APPENDIX F

### Protocol for Note Taking

1. The PO will
  - a. Take descriptive, detailed—not vague—notes of the meeting.
  - b. The notes will describe the events in the class.
  - c. Judgments will not be expressed by the PO.
  - d. Neither verbal nor written generalizations will be expressed by the PO.
2. The PO will observe and notate
  - a. The seating arrangements of participants. (Participants will be free to sit where they wish, except for session four when participants will be divided).
  - b. Those who do and do not participate in the discussions.
  - c. The content of the discussions.
  - d. The demeanor of the participants (e.g., argumentative, passive, etc.).
  - e. Non-verbal behavior (e.g., disengaging, looking bored, facial expressions, posture).
  - f. Conversation for five minutes before and after the meeting.
  - g. Reoccurring themes or topics mentioned by the participants.
3. The PO will hand the data to me before leaving.

## APPENDIX G

### Coding Protocols

1. Type notes into a dated Microsoft Word document.
2. Record data in the structure listed below, allowing for new categories to emerge in the course of the intervention.

### Structure for Coding

1. Acts: What actions of individuals or the group were observed?
2. Words: What words were expressed?
3. Participation: How did individuals participate in the activities?
4. Relationships: How did individuals interact with one another?
5. Themes: What themes emerged from the discussion?

## APPENDIX H

### Notes for Classes Taught in the Intervention

#### Lesson 1: Community Development

- I. Understanding of community
  - A. “The church is a community of people on a journey to God. Wherever there is supernatural togetherness and Spirit-directed movement, there is the church—a spiritual community.” (Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, 21)
  - B. “The greatest need in modern civilization is the development of communities—true communities where the heart of God is home, where the humble and wise learn to shepherd those on the path behind them, where trusting strugglers lock arms with others as together they journey on.” (Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, xvii)
- II. Community—God has always gathered people into community of some kind
  - A. The family
    - 1. Gen 1:27, 28
    - 2. Gen 2:20b-25
  - B. Israel
    - 1. Was to be a light to the nations
    - 2. Gen 12:1-3
    - 3. Isa 2:1-5
    - 4. Ezek 39:27-28
    - 5. God would work through Israel to bless nations of world and call them to him
  - C. The Church
    - 1. Started with the calling of the 12 Apostles

2. Purpose for their call—Mark 3:13-15
  - a. Community involves being with Jesus, becoming like him
  - b. “To ‘be with’ Jesus means to center their lives in him, to watch him and come to know his way of life, to listen to him and be instructed about life in the kingdom. It means to learn of Jesus’ intimate communion with the Father and to model their own lives on his life empowered by the Spirit. (Note: character formation) They hear him proclaim the good news with his words and demonstrate it in his actions.” (Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 151)

### III. Community and character development

- A. Community provides place for people to belong and provides character training for people within community
- B. Biblical examples of community and character building
  1. Proverbs
    - a. 1:8-19—Father and mother training son to avoid rebellious and criminal behavior
    - b. 15:31-33—Three levels of character training: home, larger community, God (Youngblood)
  2. The Apostle Paul
    - a. Paul preached gospel and formed his converts into communities called the church; normal basis for forming community is family or economic interests, but Paul formed communities on basis of “a common loyalty to Christ” (James Thompson)
    - b. Paul’s relationship to his converts (and his community building)
      - i. Like a father to his converts—1 Cor 4:14-21
      - ii. Urged, encouraged, pleaded with them to lead worthy lives—1 Thess 2:12
      - iii. Lost sleep over welfare of the churches—2 Cor 2:12-13; 6:5
      - iv. Did not want to burden churches, so treated them like a mother and father—1 Thess 2:6b-9



v. Treated Christians in the churches gently, like mother caring for her children—1 Thess 2:7

vi. Shared not just the gospel with them, but his life—1 Thess 2:8

c. Source: James Thompson, “Paul, the Elders, and Spiritual Formation” in *Good Shepherds: More Guidance for the Gentle Art of Pastoring*, ed. David Fleer & Charles Siburt (Abilene, TX: Leafwood, 2007), 31-46.

### 3. Jesus Christ

a. To train disciples in ethics of God’s community, washed their feet—John 13

b. Purpose for his service: “His actions were designed to shape the character of the band that would soon become the leaders of the movement. Just in case they missed the lesson, Jesus revisited the point after supper. ‘Love each other as I have loved you’ (John 15:12), he said. He called this a new commandment. Its newness lay in its character of reflecting the love that Jesus had demonstrated. His kind of loving—sacrificial and servantlike—raised a new standard for the quality of the disciples’ love for one another, then and now. He went on to say that this kind of love would be the trademark of the true community of believers in Christ.” (Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 123).

C. Focus of Proverbs, Paul, and Jesus was to train members of their communities to be servants instead of serving themselves; place for their training and formation was community: first temple and then church

### D. Maintaining community

1. It is one thing to form community, but quite another to maintain it as healthy, character-forming entity; churches of Christ experiencing high dropout rate, as are churches of other denominations

2. This project designed to help develop character-based leaders; one concern is keeping their sheep in flock; lose some older members to death, but lose many young ones as well; why?

a. David Kinnaman: “The dropout problem is . . . a faith-development problem.” (*You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church And Rethinking Faith*, 21).

- b. Kinnaman: “Many young people feel that older adults don’t understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships; in fact a majority of the young adults we interviewed reported never having an adult friend other than their parents. Can the church rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of the saints?” (*Lost*, 29)
- c. May be losing youth and adults, in part, because have not built sense of community with them; they don’t feel connected, so easy for them to leave us when there is disagreement or argument
  - i. Building community means we reach out to people, invite them in; maintaining community means we keep connected to them with personal contact; conflict is inevitable; dissolving of community (church) is not
  - ii. “The deepest urge in every human heart is to be in relationship with someone who absolutely delights in us, someone with resources we lack who has no greater joy than giving to us, someone who respects us enough to require us to use everything we receive for the good of others, and because he has given it to us, knows we have something to give. The longing to connect defines our dignity as human beings and our destiny as image-bearers.” (Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, 45)

## Lesson 2: Integrity of Leaders

### I. Doing what is right

#### A. Integrity=whole and blameless

1. Prov 1:3a - right, just, and fair
2. Integrity and righteousness involve doing right, living faithfully in covenant relationship with God; specifically in Proverbs, doing things that provide for harmony in relationships; the righteous man thinks of needs and feelings of others and works for their benefit
3. “The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.” (Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1-15*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1:97.)
4. Wicked disadvantage others through gossiping, lying, cheating, and laziness, upsetting people and relationships

5. Righteousness is proper ordering of attitudes and behavior, allows people to live in harmony

## B. Integrity of the leader

1. “All leaders limp. Leaders become leaders, in part, because they are willing to wrestle with who they are, who they want to become, how they can overcome some deficit in their own lives. They often need to achieve, need to be admired, even loved, need to bring order to some chaos that is within them. And almost always, these vulnerabilities are established in the leader’s family of origin, the early community that begins to shape the leader’s heart before the young child can even speak.” (Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 117)
2. Integrity: Confidences kept, promises kept; “It reflects genuineness and results from a one-to-one correspondence between public and private life in terms of truth and the treatment of people.” (Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 128)

## II. Developing integrity (in community)

### A. Training— Six steps or processes in Proverbs that promote character development

1. Listening to instruction: “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise” (Prov 19:20).
2. Accepting rebuke: “Flog a mocker, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke a discerning man and he will gain knowledge” (Prov 19:25); fools resist correction, even despise and do physical harm to the one who points out their error (Prov 9:7-8)
3. Confession: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Prov 28:13); humility is underlying spirit for being willing to listen, accept rebuke, and confess weaknesses and sins
4. Delayed promises promote character growth: Bruce Waltke—time between obedience to promise and delivery of reward is “gapping”; in waiting for reward, virtue accrued (Prov 3:9-10)
5. Personal choice: (Prov 1:8-18)
6. Modeling

### B. Modeling

1. Jennifer Green—process of becoming virtuous not completely rational or conscious; virtue can also be developed in “emotional and aesthetic responses to the world and people in our lives” (Jennifer Green, “Rising Up After the Woman of Strength” in *Preaching Character*, Dave Bland & David Fleer, eds., (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2010), 189.)
2. Green experiment: Psychologists showed three videos to three different groups; one video of boy giving food and blankets to homeless in Philadelphia, second a nature documentary, third a comedy routine; after watching videos, groups brought in contact with needy person; people who watched video of person helping poor more likely to help poor person when in contact with one; called “elevation”
  - a. Admiration—a desire to emulate someone great, like an athlete
  - b. Elevation—the emotion inspired in us to do something good and virtuous; “Elevation brings a desire . . . to become the best version of ourselves we can be.” (Green, 192-3).
3. Leaders who model life of integrity (helping others, for example) inspire others to follow in their steps

### III. Importance of integrity

- A. Leaders with integrity essential to lead others in integrity and in promoting healthy functioning of home, spiritual community, church
  1. Integrity important for leaders because guides their steps, saves them from moral traps that can destroy them (Prov 11:3,5; 7:24-27)
  2. Leader with integrity also important for entire community because leader’s godly character has positive impact on entire community (Prov 11:10, 14)
- B. On August 27, 1996, three weeks before his death, Henri Nouwen wrote in his journal, “We who offer spiritual leadership often find ourselves not living what we are preaching or teaching. It is not easy to avoid hypocrisy completely because we find ourselves saying things larger than ourselves. I often call people to a life I am not fully able to live myself. I am learning that the best cure for hypocrisy is community. Hypocrisy is not so much the result of not living what I preach but much more of not confessing my inability to fully live up to my own words.” (Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*)
- C. Good character a positive influence in community

1. Humility: Some leaders too competitive; “The spirit of competition sometimes gets translated into sarcastic humor that subtly (and not so subtly) puts others down. Camaraderie is only a thinly veiled attempt at trying to top another’s last line or joke. Humility, on the other hand, allows a leader to accept being less talented than others in some areas. Healthy people can admit this. The capacity for humility begins with coming to peace with oneself. Feelings of insecurity and insignificance do not foster genuine humility. Humility is the opposite of self-centeredness.” (*Work of Heart*, 128)
2. Scriptural example—I Tim 4:12-16
  - a. Young preacher to be example in:
    - i. Speech
    - ii. Conduct (life)
    - iii. Love
    - iv. Faith
    - v. Purity
  - b. Power of example (integrity)
    - i. Silence critics (v.12)
    - ii. Save self (v.16)
    - iii. Save others (v.16)

### Lesson 3: Listening

#### I. Powerful connection

- A. “We have come to a time in our culture when therapists have been asked to take over the functions formerly handled by priests, a function that properly belongs to biblical elders who listen because they’ve had the courage to listen to their own hearts, to face what’s bad and discern the Spirit, who can speak powerfully into the lives of others because they hear Christ speak powerfully into their lives.” (Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, 97)
- B. “Ordinary people have the power to change other people’s lives . . . The power is found in connection, that profound meeting when the truest part of one soul meets

the emptiest recess in another and finds something there, when life passes from one to the other. When that happens, the giver is left more full than before and the receiver less terrified, eventually eager, to experience even deeper, more eventual connection.” (Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, 31)

## II. Why listening is important

### A. For personal development of leader in wisdom and maturity

#### 1. Listen to scripture

- a. Word “listen” used in Proverbs in reference to biblical text, as in paying attention to Torah or sayings of wisdom ( Prov 28:9; Longman, *Proverbs*, 490)
- b. Listening meant one was continually open to message of biblical witness, had heart for continued growth and maturity; failure to listen indicated spirit of disobedience, incurred displeasure of God when one prayed (Prov 28:9)
- c. Listening to scripture does not mean using Bible to prove point or make case; rather, two very powerful reasons for us to listen to scripture as a community:
  - i. So it can shape our spiritual life and outlook; in spiritual formation class here we used method of Scripture reading called *Lectio Divina* (holy reading); went off individually to read and mediate over text, came back as group and discussed our thoughts; process enlightening, brought us together in positive way over text of scripture; all equal participants with no one in charge
  - ii. Process can be used to achieve spirit of reconciliation in a church; John Grant used *Lectio Divina* with group of church leaders at impasse in selecting new elders; because of conflict, men not willing to serve as elders in church of one thousand people; older men criticized younger men for refusing to serve, younger men distrusted health of church too much to put themselves in leadership. Grant brought the people together to look at “God’s cosmic plan for the church” in Ephesians 4:1-16; group used *Lectio Divina*, reading text several times, meditating, then individually offering brief comments; did not discuss precise meanings of words or phrases but looked for big themes, God’s dreams for church; members located themselves in big themes “to protect the unity God created and to work together to build up one another and the congregation” (Grant, “Listening to God and One Another” in *The Effective Practice of Ministry*, 89-90)

## 2. Listen to wise people

- a. Listening also meant paying attention to sage counsel of wise people; though wisdom could be gift of God (as for Solomon, 1 Kgs 4:29), was generally attained through listening; first teaching section of Proverbs begins with warning to listen to parental instruction; listening/obeying enables wise to avoid trouble by positioning him or her on path of discernment (1:8-18)
- b. Woman Wisdom upbraids those who spurn invitation to listen to her words of wisdom (Prov 1:20-33): “How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?”
  - i. Mockers “hardened apostates” (Waltke, *Proverbs*, 1:114 )
  - ii. Mockers refuse to listen to advice/correction and hate one who offers it to them (Prov 9:7-8)
  - iii. Defining trait of mocker is overweening pride (Prov 21:24); picture of mocker in Proverbs that of proud man who thinks he has all answers to life so refuses to listen to anyone else, even someone with more experience and wisdom; instead of receiving gratitude or appreciation, anyone who attempts to aid mocker will receive abuse; pride is source of his hard, obstinate nature
- c. Essential that Israel’s leader, the king, be man with heart to listen to voices of wisdom, maturity. If king obstinate and proud, like mocker, refused to listen to sane voices, could plunge nation into turmoil and ruin (Prov 11:14; 28:28). Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12) and Ahab (1 Kgs 22) serve as examples of tragic consequences of leaders of God’s people who failed to continue to listen to and heed message of wise people

## B. To gauge the spiritual health of people

1. Leaders of Israel needed to listen to people of their communities (home, neighborhood, or nation) to gauge their spiritual health; wise shepherd:
  - a. Pays attention to his flock (Prov 27:23) to discern their needs
  - b. Knows needs among the flock, does not turn deaf ear to cries of the hungry (Prov 21:13)
  - c. Builds a house (Prov 24:3-4); like Solomon in 1 Kings 3:16-28; *House* in this context not literal building, but community—a family, social system, or country

- d. Functions as leader in Israel, not just to make judgments or issue new laws, but to be aware of needs of his people so will know how to respond
- e. King David demonstrated extent a ruler was to listen when he accepted rebuke of Nathan (2 Sam 12:1-13)

### C. Community built through connecting

1. To connect
  - a. Start with one, two people
  - b. Keep in mind solving people's problems really secondary battle, may not be able to help; every problem an opportunity to know God better.
  - c. Let people know you're struggling for them, that you've entered battle for their souls to more fully experience Christ
  - d. Listen with eager interest...hear what is shared without retreating; entering battle to find God, not solve the problems in their lives
  - e. Enter with only thought of companionship, not heroic or expert rescue (Larry Crabb, *Connecting*, 152-54)
2. Connecting (is)...the battle we enter into together—not to solve problems but to find God. (*Connecting*, 154)
3. Failure to connect has negative consequences. "A friend of mine once had a serious struggle with cancer. I asked her one day if her pastor brought help to her when he came to visit her in the hospital. 'I'd rather he not come,' she said, 'because when he visits, he tells me how I ought to feel rather than ask how I actually do feel.' (Gordon MacDonald, *Renewing Your Spiritual Passion*, p.8)
4. One of Reggie McNeals six qualities for sustaining friendships is listening. "Leaders are used to being heard. Great leaders know how to listen. Listening gives a great gift to a friend. People know when others are listening or whether they are merely taking time to formulate their next thoughts or opinions. Friendship requires listening, and this requires time. It takes time to really hear what is being revealed about someone's heart, not just what is being said with someone's lips." (Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart* 128-9) (The other ingredients are . . .)

### D. To avoid/handle conflict



1. Leaders need to listen when frustration is present. In Grant's project, "Bringing together the two sides was powerful. Once they understood one another's position, they had a much greater chance of developing a satisfying solution." (Grant's project addressed the problem of older members frustrated with young members not serving/leading.) (Grant, *The Effective Practice of Ministry*, 89)
2. "Listening is not an abandonment of leadership responsibilities but rather a way to discern with greater confidence the leading of the Spirit, as well as a way to build trust and enhance mutual investment in a shared future . . . all of these benefits are invaluable in establishing a renewed culture of faith, hope, and love." (Ron Crandall, *Turnaround and Beyond*, 144)

#### Lesson 4: Ministering to the Marginalized

##### I. How it feels to live on the margins of society because of poverty (or other causes)

###### A. In Moldova

1. "For a poor person everything is terrible—illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of." (Corbett & Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...And Yourself*, p.50)
2. Moldova has very high rate of trafficked girls, girls hoping to escape extreme poverty

###### B. God's concern for all people—basic needs met

1. Deut 24:19-21—Israelite farmers were to leave some crops for aliens, orphans, widows to glean; having food, basic dignity fair expectation for all people, reflecting moral vision of scripture that people have basic rights
2. This concern further developed by Old Testament prophets; Micah accused nation's leaders of abusing those lacking money and power, robbing them of God's blessing (see Mic 2:8-9); such abuses not only violated rights of individuals but threatened cohesion of larger community; God's kingdom a place for all to experience his gifts of material blessing and belonging

##### II. What it means to be poor or marginalized

###### A. In Proverbs

1. Lacking basic necessities of life, such as food (22:9)
2. Lacking social position, control over one's own destiny
3. Living on margins of Israelite society; lacking such basic dignity as being shown respect and fair treatment
4. Specific hardships and abuse the poor suffered
  - a. Constant dread of ruin (10:15)
  - b. Being shunned (14:20a; 19:7) and deserted by one's own friends (19:4b)
  - c. Subject to being hated (14:21), mocked (17:5), treated harshly (18:23) and denied help
    - i. Jewish proverb: "In order to chase away beggars one needs a rich person." (Waltke, 2:96)
    - ii. Heart of the rich hardened, made it easy for him to refuse requests for help
  - d. Exploited financially by those in power (14:31; 22:7)
  - e. Wretchedness (15:15a)

#### B. How it feels to be poor

1. In Latvia—"During the past two years we have not celebrated any holidays with others. We cannot afford to invite anyone to our house and we feel uncomfortable visiting others without bringing a present. The lack of contact leaves one depressed, creates a constant feeling of unhappiness, and a sense of low self-esteem." (Corbett & Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, p.50)
2. In the United States—A poor person in our congregation, speaking to me
  - a. Constant dread of ruin—"I used to worry about that, but I made sure we had at least a box car or a tent. When the house burned down, I didn't have anything. We went to a shelter."
  - b. Being shunned—"We get shunned all of the time; we are used to that one. We don't let it bother us anymore. We have a saying, 'Dear God, they know not what they do.' They shun us because they think we are bad, or we are poor by choice because we chose to not get a job or [we] drink and do drugs. It is not a choice."

- i. Proverbs teaches: people can become poor because of circumstances beyond their control (injustice, 13:23)
- ii. Proverbs teaches: people can become poor through own poor choices and behavior

C. God’s concern—That poor not be reduced to insignificance in their communities but be received as full members of God’s community

### III. How poor should be treated

- A. Be kind—“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Prov 19:17). God so pleased with those who serve the needs of the impoverished, he assumes indebtedness of poor toward benefactors, pays debt in full; blessings to generous promised again in Proverbs 22:9
- B. God is maker of both the rich and poor (Prov 22:2), creator and defender of unfortunate (Prov 19:17); he regards our treatment of poor as being directed toward him; share with them, share with God; treat them unkindly, show contempt for God (Prov 14:31)
- C. “Simply giving . . . (some people) . . . money is treating the symptoms rather than the underlying disease and will enable him to continue with his lack of self-discipline. In this case, the gift of money does more harm than good, and it would be better not to do anything at all than to give this handout.” (Corbett & Fikkert, 53).

Table 1. Causes and treatment of poverty

If we believe primary cause of poverty is	Then we will primarily try to
Lack of knowledge	Educate the poor
Oppression by powerful people	Work for social justice
The personal sins of the poor	Evangelize and disciple the poor
A lack of material resources	Give material resources to the poor

From Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 52.

- D. Message of table 1: Working with marginalized will require long-term commitment, different actions toward them (helping, educating, training, etc.)

### IV. Responsibility of spiritual leaders toward poor

A. Be aware, concerned

1. “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern” (Prov 29:7).
2. Royal Proverbs—31:8-9

B. Provide help (Prov 19:17)

1. Bible doesn’t provide all scenarios for how to help poor—possibilities:
  - a. Give them gift of money or food
  - b. Help them get job, share in profits they helped generate (Prov 11:24-26)
  - c. Train them in skill, provide financial instruction, mentor them
2. Aiding poor and marginalized could be long-term commitment extending for years; those who help need to guard against feelings of pride, superiority for being in helping position; both one helping and one receiving aid broken people, need “to pursue processes that foster the reconciling work of Jesus Christ in the lives of both parties.” (Corbett & Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, 155).
3. “Jesus directed his ministry from the beginning to the socially and economically deprived persons in society. Then, too, we can say it was a movement begun among the poor and dispossessed, to whom Jesus promised the good news of the kingdom and a coming time of social reversal. This, at least, is the way Luke understood Jesus’ ministry, according to the beatitudes.” (Walter Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor*, 76)

V. Implications of effective ministry to marginalized

- A. Fulfilling God’s concerns (Matt 25:31-46)
- B. Acts 4:34—No needy persons (repeating Deut. 15:4?); showing fulfillment of God’s will for Israel; means Israel has been restored, doing what supposed to be doing
- C. Rev 21:1-4—A kingdom with no poverty

VI. Our concern—The poor among us

- A. Taking food: Craig Saterlee story of children stealing cookies on Sunday morning; reprimanded; “Who steals food? Hungry people.”

B. If we give it to them, is it stealing?

## Lesson 5: Shepherding

### I. Shepherding imagery in the Bible

- A. Deut 17:16-20—King (shepherd of Israel) not to accumulate horses (military power; must trust God) or wives (heart might be led astray) or silver/gold (materialism); must make hand copy of scriptures, read them daily, revere the Lord, obey the law, not consider himself better than subjects; even apparent political position had important spiritual responsibilities
- B. Ezek 34—Shepherds of Israel (King? Prophets? Priests?) care for themselves, leave sheep to wander; “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd.” (v. 4-5); God will hold shepherds responsible
- C. John 10:1-18—Sheep know shepherd, and shepherd knows sheep; shepherd can call sheep by name; many imposters want to be shepherds (leaders), but lead for own gain; Jesus is good shepherd who lays down life; good shepherd gives of himself, even dies, for his sheep
- D. Prov 27:23-27—Shepherds in Israel (metaphor for king/leader), know condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; metaphor— leaders, care for your people
1. “Know the condition of your flocks is literally, ‘Know well the faces’ of the animals.” (Fox, 2:816) Know nutritional needs, know natures
  2. “A crown is not secure for all generations” (v.24a); inattentive king could lose position on throne
    - a. Leaders should show same attention to their people as attentive farmer shows his animals
    - b. Lack of attention could mean shepherds lose flocks
- E. Implications
1. Shepherds (spiritual leaders) to give attention and care to condition of their flock (family, Bible class, small group, church)

2. Shepherding requires time, effort, personal sacrifice on part of shepherds (Jesus laid down life for sheep)
3. Failure to shepherd could result in members of flock wandering off
4. Failure to shepherd could result in leadership of shepherds not being recognized by sheep (members)
5. Shepherds held accountable by God
6. Shepherding an important function!

## II. Six shepherding functions

### A. Providing vision

1. Sense of purpose for your class, group, congregation
2. Knowing who you are and what you are about
3. Mission of every church to minister in Jesus' name; vision of each church to decide, based upon its identity, nature, and abilities, how to best fulfill that mission

### B. Managing crisis

1. Crisis created by change that lacks purpose or focus and thus "introduces disequilibrium, uncertainty, and makes day-to-day life chaotic and unpredictable" (Galindo, 150); members left feeling out of control
2. Changes can be in areas of leadership, perceived direction of church, functions (such as worship); people sometimes threatened by change
3. Disequilibrium lessened if members can discern purpose for it; if disequilibrium continues, anxiety can ensue

### C. Staying connected

1. Always important, but especially so during periods of conflict, upheaval; best response of leadership is to remain differentiated from (calm, above the chaos of) members while at same time staying connected to (visiting with and listening closely to) them (Galindo, 152)
2. Calmness of leaders allows members to know leadership still in place; remaining emotionally engaged, connected with them helps regulate anxiety

3. Staying connected important principle in Prov 27:23-27 (know well the faces)

#### D. A strong orientation to scripture

1. Shepherds/leaders are “resident theologians”—men and women who study Bible, make decisions on basis of being informed by Bible; otherwise, might act out of pragmatism (what works) or emotion (need to do something!)
2. Good question to ask each other: “How does theology (a biblical understanding) inform our decision?” (Galindo).

#### E. Management

1. Spiritual leadership (shepherding) relational (connecting to and leading people)
2. Spiritual leadership involves managing organization (procedures, organization, use of resources).

#### F. Influence

1. May be most important leadership function, more important than skill or ability; also a principle from Proverbs 27 and John 10
2. Influence means people trust us, will follow us as we lead them into spiritual thoughts, behavior; comes after we have spent time with our members (the sheep) so they have learned we genuinely care for their welfare, trust us; long-term spiritual influence not based on charisma, but on character, relationship-building; aim and direction of shepherd’s leadership to influence people to live out God’s claim on their lives—submitting to his will, obeying, engaging in mission to lost and needy souls (Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*, 140–160)

### III. Goals of shepherding

- A. Develop community
- B. Develop spiritual life in people (spiritual formation)
- C. Develop future leaders to carry on life of community
- D. Develop/maintain healthy environment
- E. Note: Proverbs may have been developed in final form during or after exile when Israel a shattered nation, normal means of passing on faith and traditions (family,

temple, priesthood) in shambles; biblical wisdom may have been seen as hope to re-establish community, health, spiritual formation in crisis situation

- IV. When disequilibrium occurs—Six possible responses when anxiety (a sense of being out of control due to change or other causes) strikes community (family, church, business)
- A. Reaction: Members may be scared, frustrated, angry, nervous—all indicative of chaos
  - B. Blame-casting: No one immediately assumes responsibility for confusion, so each person looks to others to blame; leaders become primary targets; if they initiated changes, may be legitimate targets
  - C. Herding: People of like mind group together, find equilibrium and comfort in solidarity; grouping together creates “us versus them” mentality, should signal to leaders real problem in congregational unity
  - D. Demand for a quick fix: Inner turmoil caused by chaos can become unbearable, sufferers demand immediate remedy—maybe going back to old practice, firing staff member, or insisting on resignation of elder or other congregational leader
  - E. Failure of nerve: Failure of nerve when leaders get caught up in anxiety of system, become part of chaos by giving in to unrealistic demands, participating in chaotic behaviors (reacting, blaming, herding, or seeking a quick fix)
  - F. Remaining a ‘non-anxious presence’ in the body: Not getting caught up in fear, panic, anger of others, but ; staying calmly engaged, continuing to function with aim of helping regulate system, lead it back to calmness and health (Benjamin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 54-55).



## APPENDIX I

### Outsider Report by Dr. Jeanene Reese

#### Outside Evaluation of Warren Baldwin's DMin Project Thesis

In September 2014 Warren Baldwin sent the prospectus of his DMin project thesis, *Facilitating a Pastoral Leadership Model for the Ulysses Church of Christ*, to Dr. Jeanene Reese, Associate Professor and Associate Chair of the Department of Bible, Missions, and Ministry at Abilene Christian University. Baldwin asked Reese to serve as an outside expert to evaluate his project. After reading the prospectus, Reese agreed to serve as an evaluator and developed potential questions to be used in the evaluation. Once IRB approval was obtained, a date was set for Reese to travel to Ulysses and conduct the evaluation.

On January 21, 2015, Dr. Reese worshipped with the Ulysses Church of Christ, ate a communal meal, and then met with ten of the 16 leaders who had participated in Baldwin's leadership training. Several others, who also participated in the training program, were unable to attend the meeting, so e-mails with the evaluation questions were sent to them, and two of those individuals responded. Those responses are included in this report.

The session began with participants introducing themselves and describing their leadership roles within the congregation. Leadership roles among those gathered ranged from volunteers with children's or youth ministry to deacons in the church. At least two people at the meeting served as elders of the church. The responses of the twelve (the ten attending the evaluation session and the two who submitted written responses) are reported here. However, not all respondents gave a rating or made comments on every question.

The evaluation questions were designed to begin broadly and move to more narrow and specific responses. Therefore, responses on the first seven bulleted items under question 1 are summarized, while responses to questions 2-9 are reported as given in the evaluation meeting or through e-mail.

#### **1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 is low, 10 is high), rate the following:**

- Your initial response to Baldwin's suppositions about the leadership style of this church and the need for this project.

Ratings given in response to this statement ranged from 7 to 10. One person originally gave the project a 5, but after some thought changed the rating to a 7. The lowest rating given was a 6 or 7, with that person expressing uncertainty that the project was really needed. One other individual responded with a rating of 7 but made no comment. Four participants gave a rating of 8, and two indicated that they felt a real need for the training while the third and fourth made no comment. Four people rated the project at a 9. Two of these felt the training was needed for the growth and development of new leaders while another connected it to his role as a new deacon. The last person giving a 9 acknowledged that it was something she personally needed. A rating of 9.5 was given by one of the elders in the church who noted that such training allowed congregants to better understand the role of leaders, and that allowed them [the elders] to function more as shepherds than administrators. Another person, who gave a rating of 9.5, said that as a leader he often finds that things are going on in the church that people do not understand. Consequently the functions of the leaders are easily misunderstood, and shepherds end up being more administrators than shepherds. The highest rating given was a 10. That individual admitted to not thinking the project was necessary after first reading Baldwin's paper, but changing his mind once he attended the first training session.

- Your early expectation of the effectiveness of this intervention.

Participants' ratings in this area were considerably lower. The lowest score was a 2-3 with the person admitting that he might naturally be more skeptical than others. Someone else, with a rating of 4, shared that he did not think the project would change anything among the church leaders. Five people gave a rating of 5, with two of these acknowledging that buy in is often difficult to attain. Others, giving this same score, expressed a "wait and see" stance, hoping change would come, but were not certain that it would. One individual gave a rating of 5-6 saying that she was disappointed that more material was not presented. Two people gave a score of 6, one saying she is an eternal optimist while the other said he thought getting people to attend a 6-8 week series might be difficult. Two people did not give a rating but one of them expressed appreciation for Baldwin working hard to stick to the time frame. The other said that he heard the last session was the most meaningful and was sorry that he missed it.

- Your experience in the community formation exercise.

Responses to this exercise were extremely positive except for two leaders who said that those they tried to interview refused. Others rated the exercise at an 8 or 9 and the energy in the room rose significantly as they talked about their experiences. Several comments were made, but often participants forgot to give a rating in their eagerness to report what happened. One man said that he would like to know what the congregation

thought about the exercise and suggested that a survey be given to measure it. Two people thought that the three questions asked were excellent and reported that they could hardly get those interviewed to stop talking.

One leader said that in his exercise the conversation moved quickly to some things that weren't going well, but he was grateful that the individuals at least felt heard. Another thought that if nothing else happened other than the conversation he had with other members, it was well worth it. Another acknowledged that people want to tell about their experiences and found the exercise an excellent way to connect. One woman and her husband shared that they have already seen results from this exercise. They reported encountering a young family who were about "to vote with their feet" but after the interview began to feel included and were excited to be asked to do some things with the church. In the past month this family has become more fully integrated into the congregation.

- Your response to the leading by integrity conversation.

One respondent was unable to give a rating for this question since she was absent from the session. The lowest score given in response to this question was a 5, and the woman reporting said it was because she didn't have much in common with those she had a conversation with, including her partner in the training. She looked across the table at her partner and asked if the statement offended her. The other woman said that she was not offended. Later, after others gave their rating, however, the score of 5 was changed to an 8, with the respondent saying that she got more from the experience than she realized after she heard her own comments. The next lowest score was a 7-8, with the participant saying that he did not have difficulty talking to people with differences. He thought it was good for him to talk to a couple of elders.

Four individuals gave a score of 8. A couple of these relayed that they felt very comfortable with the people they talked with, yet indicated they felt uncomfortable in thinking of themselves as role models outside their own families. One person acknowledged that both family and church served as strong influences in her life. Another participant giving this score reported that in his conversation with a church member neither of them felt that their families served as role models. Two individuals gave a score of 9. The first said he intended to spend about 30 minutes in the conversation, but that it lasted 3 hours. He also reported that he followed up a few weeks later and found the questions very useful in directing the conversation. The other person scoring a 9 reported that she and another leader met with some older women and appreciated the conversation since she admired them. She also relayed that she had more difficulty in a conversation with a male church member she shared a conversation with because they have very little in common.

- The effectiveness of the congregational visit on your skills as a listener.

Responses to this question proved interesting with few of the participants actually giving a score. It also raised some insightful gender issues. One respondent did not give a score, admitting that he is not a good listener and struggled not to talk too much. After saying that he thought they did well as listeners, another individual turned to his partner and asked if he agreed. His partner reported that the woman they were having a conversation with was a talker and that both interviewees kept talking at the same time. A female leader then asked him: “You heard them, but did you understand?” The second male then admitted that his wife is always asking him, “Did you hear me?” implying that he is not necessarily a good listener and perhaps needed the exercise. At this point another female participant referenced an article she had read and found quite effective. In it the question, “Do you hear what I’m not saying?” made her reflect on her interaction with her children who were now grown.

Two individuals gave a rating of 8. The first of these felt that both his initial and follow up conversations were effective and honed his listening skills. The second person rating an 8 admitted that he struggled not to talk and had to control his tendency to “jump to conclusions” when listening. He said that his wife is a really good listener and he tries to be like her. The highest scorer of this experience gave a 9 and shared many of the previously reported struggles to listen and not talk. He also added that when asked what their greatest strength was, his interviewees had no idea what to say.

- Your experience in the ministering to the marginalized exercise.

Although the energy in the room had stayed fairly constant up to this point, it rose significantly as participants responded to this prompt. They bantered with one another, teasing and laughing as they shared their reactions. One rather big man (with whom several leaders would joke through the initial discussion) said the experience “sucked” because he and another leader were seated at the low end of the table. One woman, also seated at that table, said they had enough to eat until the larger man showed up (the group laughed together). He had come late, but they tried to save him some food. She said they had warm tap water to drink and, throughout the meal, she wished she had some ice. She gave the exercise an 8. One man simply said that he was allowed to only eat the food at his table, which excluded giving assistance to anyone else. Another participant, who also gave a score of 8, said he sympathizes with people who don’t have much. He addressed the larger gentlemen saying he felt sorry for him in the exercise, and the latter responded, “I wish I could have a picture of your empathetic face!” The room erupted in laughter again.

Other participants had different responses. One said it opened his eyes to those who have less. Another acknowledged that “we ignore others in real life.” Still another participant admitted to being very uncomfortable. He said he tends to ignore those who

are less fortunate and has very little contact with them. He also thought the exercise uncovered an area of growth for him. Two people, who gave a score of 9, had different points of view. The first said that he was at the table of plenty and obviously missed the whole experiment and just fed his face. He felt the exercise was a good one. The other person with a rating of 9 said that the experiment opened her eyes to something. During the meal at the table with enough, she thought about sharing her food but, since it was an experiment, she ignored the impulse. She said that instead of doing what was right, she did what was expected and was disappointed in herself for so easily dismissing her instincts. The last score given was a 10 by a person unable to attend the meal. He said the exercise had generated lots of discussion across the congregation about how they view themselves and others.

- Your understanding of your role as a shepherd.

Several participants felt that the leadership training identifying them as shepherds was quite effective. Four gave a score of 10. One female respondent said that she especially valued the emphasis on remaining a non-anxious presence when disequilibrium occurs since there are so many other possible reactions that are not as positive. She would like to have more study in this area. Another woman acknowledged that church members often depend on elders, deacons, and pastors to say and do the right things rather than recognizing that these leaders too need prayers and encouragement. She said that everyone could be a shepherd who chooses to be and, therefore, be a light in the dark world. Still another individual giving a rating of 10 said that although the class didn't present new ideas, it reminded him of things that he doesn't always practice very well. He expressed appreciation for the class and the beneficial interaction it provided. The final person who gave a rating of 10 said that he was unable to attend this class, but that his conversation with a couple in the church (an earlier assignment in the leadership course) allowed him and his wife to function as shepherds and reclaim this young family before they left the church. He thinks these kinds of experiences would be repeated if all Christians saw themselves as shepherds.

Two participants gave a rating of 8 on their role as shepherds. One said that he learned a lot as far as blame casting, etc. He admitted to not feeling like a shepherd, even if he was considered one, and hoped to do better and grow into the role in the future. Another person, who serves as an elder in the church, said he definitely needed the class in order to become a better listener and be more approachable. But, he acknowledged, these qualities need to go both ways. He learned this truth from the last couple that he and his partner visited. "It was an eye-opening experience," he said. The class was instrumental in his growth and development. A final respondent said that he has never thought of himself as a leader and has avoided leadership roles in many instances.

**2. Now that the project is completed, how would you rate its overall effectiveness? How is this the same or different from your initial response? Why do you think this change occurred, if it did, or why do you think yours stayed the same?**

- The first person gave the class a 10 in her initial response and at this later point in the discussion. She said that she came in thinking the training needed to be done, but that nothing would change. But she added, “Even if everybody walks out and never talks about class again, I still would give it a 10 for what it did for me and the couple that we talked to.” She is not expecting the whole church to change overnight but suggested that given a year or two, perhaps more, change will occur. In other words, she reversed her initial response.
- One woman gave a rating of 8 at the outset of the discussion, but a 10 in this response saying she is ready to have more classes starting next week. She acknowledged that she could only change herself, but that she needs to change. She wants to talk to more people about spiritual things, as was done through the experiments provided.
- Another person giving a score of 10 said, “What was done is great, but [I] want to do even more. He said the class caused him to start “thinking outside the box” and that it changed him. His original rating was a 9.
- Still another individual rating the project at a 10 spoke of how busy everyone is, juggling so much. “Sometimes,” she said, “we drop a ball, pick some up, leave others. However, visiting people is something that we all know we need to do, but we’re busy.” This experience helped her see the need to get more involved with the congregation. Her first rating was an 8.
- One person said, “We just keep house and don’t pay much attention to what’s going on.” He felt the project helped him want to do better. This individual’s first rating was 9.5, but none was given at this point. The assumption is that his score stayed the same.
- A different participant noted that the class was different than what he expected. He said that it generated some conversations that were difficult to hear but that caused him to grow, and [ones] that he wouldn’t have heard otherwise. He closed by saying he was very impressed with the overall involvement of the group that participated. His score for the project moved from a 9 to 10.
- The final respondent, whose first rating was an 8, said that because of the project he would try harder to reach out to others and engage them in spiritual conversations. The classes opened his eyes to several weaknesses and some strengths. He did not give a second rating.

**3. In terms of community formation, what was the most valuable thing that you learned about this church as you shared memories with each other? How do you think this learning will influence your leadership now and in the future? Explain your response.**

The first several responses seemed to focus most on the elders and governance of the church:

- The first respondent reported that those he talked with remembered positive things from the past and seemed to forget the negative. He found the experience of sharing memories both helpful and informative. He also said that members thought the elders in the past were distant and unapproachable. [The implication is that this has changed.]
- The next participant noted that the church now was so “flexible, we’re fluid.” He said that the whole dynamic has changed. He further indicated that 40-50 years ago the elders made policies and the members followed. Now, he said, they have to defend every decision for at least 6 months.
- Another person felt that the church had now reached a happy medium. In the past he said people followed rules, now he says church members have to be convinced of why they should do something. He wondered why congregants couldn’t just trust the elders enough to govern the church, and if they didn’t why didn’t they go and talk to them?
- The last person to follow this thread of conversation asked, “Organization or organism? Do we make policies or do we grow together? The point is that everything that comes along must be dealt with together and people know what your thinking is, and you bring them along.”

The discussion then took a significant turn as more participants spoke about the youth and children of the church.

- The first of these respondents shared that a lot of the memories he heard about had to do with the youth. He asked, “If that is most impact[ful] and [provides the] greatest memories, what does that mean for today? What do we do about that?”
- The next person agreed, stating that the youth are really important. She added that if the church could get hold of them as little kids, then hang out with them as teenagers, it would make a bigger impact on whether they turned out to be future leaders or not.

- Still another participant thought that getting them when they are younger and asking them things like what they want to be when they grow up would yield great results.
- Continuing in the same vein of thought, a different respondent noted that events and activities that are planned often encourage interactions with different people. He mentioned several of these: an old Visitation program, Leadership Training for Christ, Vacation Bible School, Youth Rallies, Mission trips, and even this class as the kinds of things that need to be promoted at church.
- The last person to comment in this area agreed heartily with the others. He said, “The young are the most important group we have. We have to figure out how to reach out and help them make a decision to be committed to God and his ways.”
- One participant made an observation from his memory-sharing activity that could easily fit within either of the conversations. He said that when memories were shared with his assigned individuals, they focused on specific people in the church who had a strong influence on them and others.

**4. What insights did you gain about your character in the leading by integrity session? What did you gain from hearing about the character of your fellow congregants? How has this learning impacted your spiritual formation? Your role as a leader?**

There was mixed response to this question, with few people actually making comments. The first person said, “What a question,” and the second added, “It’s kind of complex.” The three who did speak didn’t thoroughly address the questions asked.

- One woman thought the experience was a humbling one. She said that even with titles, Christians are equal. She noted that “those with titles let us down, only Christ won’t. All others—elders, deacons, pastors, teachers, etc.—will let us down.” She further confessed that she often thinks that certain people have it “all together” even when they don’t and that it humbles her to know that they are more like her. She acknowledged that we don’t dress alike, don’t smell alike, but that we all love the Lord and need each other.
- Another participant recognized that no one is perfect but that with leadership comes responsibility and a higher expectation. He said, “From a spiritual standpoint, I am even more thankful for God’s grace and mercy!”
- The last respondent pointed out that we are all different due to our traditions or upbringing, but that we can all get along. He concluded, “We need each other and can’t survive on our own.”



**5. Prior to this project did you consider yourself a good listener or one that needed improvement? Why? How did this experience challenge you? What did you learn about yourself and those you interviewed in the process?**

The response to these questions was also quite limited, but some of that could be attributed to how much participants discussed their roles as listeners in response to question 1.

- The first person said that he always thought he was a good listener so he didn't learn so much from the experience, but it made him think about what to do after he has listened to another person.
- Another respondent said, "I usually say, 'Yes, ma'am.'" (He got a laugh from the group but did not reflect further.)
- Still another individual said he does not consider himself a good listener and had to learn to be better. He stated that he is a "get to the point kind of guy." One other participant agreed with this man saying that they are a lot alike.
- The last person said that he tried to be a good listener, but knows that he isn't one. He said, "I learned again what I already know: that people want to tell you about themselves and their opinions. You have to listen." He added that he needs to take notes when he listens to be more attentive.

**6. What was most difficult in the ministering to the marginalized experience? Why do you think it was difficult? What was the most valuable learning you took from this exercise for yourself? For the church?**

- The individual who opened this conversation admitted that he always thought the hardest part of conversing with the marginalized would be getting the conversation started. He said asking, "How are you?" is not necessarily the way to begin and that the question, "What do you need?" could be equally problematic. He recognized that Christians must think of different ways to approach others who are different because they have struggles that we are not familiar with. "It is challenging," he concluded. "I always thought the hardest part is how do you start the conversation. 'How are you?' is not necessarily the way to begin the conversation. Have to think of different ways to approach. They have struggles that we are not familiar with. Question of 'What do you need?' etc. It is challenging."
- Another person said that he sees the difficulty of interacting with the marginalized every Wednesday [when the church feeds people from the town] and that it allows for a lot of conversations. He said the church has seen a lot of different characters and the feedback received is disheartening at times. He

added, “The experience has opened our eyes, a lot of eyes. If we plant the seed for Jesus, he will take it from there.”

- A different person, also speaking about the Wednesday night meals, said it is easy to see people come, eat, and leave. He added that church members can get hardened about it, but rather hoped they would be able to think about the ripple effects and see what comes from it.
- Still another respondent admitted that it is easy to see the marginalized as a class of people rather than as individuals.
- One woman suggested that the community folks be allowed to take the leftovers home with them. She shared her own experience as a 15-year-old who didn’t have water at home and who was happy to take leftovers from such meals. She didn’t think about what others thought of her. She knows what it is like to not have enough. She smiled and added, winking at the women in the group, “You ladies can cook.”
- Another participant recognized that most people are comfortable with others who are like them and will generally avoid contact with those who are different.
- The final respondent confessed that he has a problem seeing things from the perspective of the marginalized and that he needs to really look at his line of thinking about them.

**7. As you reflect on your role as a shepherd, what is the most significant thing that you have learned about yourself through this project? About the church? How do you see the whole experience affecting your leadership now and in the future? Are there other areas that you would like to explore in a similar manner? If so, what are these?**

- “The thing I learned [in my role as a shepherd],” said one participant, “is to stay calm and talk to Jesus.” Another individual agreed with this sentiment.
- Still another admitted to not having a specific answer to this difficult question. He struggled to reflect on his role as a shepherd and felt he needed some help with forming areas to reflect upon.
- One participant said that he learned to be a better listener, more approachable through this training.
- A different individual shared that he and other elders always caution new elders not to play the game of “divide and conquer.” He said they recommend

avoiding hallway conversations, but rather suggest that every matter be taken under advice until it can be brought to all of the elders. He added that through the years he has discovered that there is always a lot more to a story than first appears and that being united as an eldership can really make a difference in how the group operates.

- Another respondent would like to hear what other areas could be explored in their roles as shepherds.
- One woman said that she could see the whole experience of leadership getting big. She added, “I think we should do more of the mixing and mingling, change small groups, [mix] older/younger, etc. I think we need to mix it up. I’ve always said that. Once we get that going, and we are all around different people in community, maybe we will attract more different people.”
- Still another person thought the group needs to keep a positive mindset, to learn from their mistakes, and to try to do better going forward.
- The last respondent shared that the church is about to roll out some new small groups, and he thinks others will find it exciting. He added that many who participated in this project would be able to take on a leadership role in it using many of the skills they learned through this project.

**8. Overall, how well do you think this project accomplished the goal of developing more character-based leadership from the book of Proverbs within the church? What do you hope to see as a result when you look five years down the road? Ten years? Twenty?**

- The first respondent hesitated to respond to this visionary question saying that he could “only answer for myself.”
- Another shared that he struggled with looking forward in years. He acknowledged that this group met because they wanted to; they agreed to participate. He inserted that the experience was more important than watching football [something he seemed to struggle with]. He expressed concern about what kind of response these leaders would get when they go out to spread what they have learned. He concluded, “If we hit some negative stuff at first, I think it will go stagnant. If we hit some positives, I think it will help a lot. Prayer is needed.” He later asked if some people were asked to participate in the project who did not choose to.
- One woman thought the class would be good for everyone in the church and suggested that it ought to meet regularly since everyone has the potential to be a leader. She felt that she still needs more classes and wondered if the young

people might especially benefit from the classes since they often don't recognize themselves as leaders.

- Another woman concluded much the same, saying she thought the classes would be good for everyone to take to see if they might be a leader and to learn what is involved in being one.
- Still another participant said, "I would like to see numerical growth with lots of families and young children like it was when [my family] first came."
- A different person added that the church was experiencing the "perils of an aging congregation."
- Another individual acknowledged that the youth "are the future of the church." He hoped that the congregation could hang on to them.
- Still another respondent gave herself a score of 10, saying that she felt she accomplished her goal through the project. She explained that she didn't think she had learned all there was to know and wanted more. But she said her brain was opened up to the various needs of people in the church. She added that one of her children is frustrated at not being fed at church, while another simply doesn't care, and the third thinks it's the greatest place on earth. She felt that having her children involved in leadership training would help them grow and that in 5-10 years there would be a vibrant children's and youth ministry that empowered the young to stand up to their peers and bring them to church.
- In response to her comments one man said that they had that kind of congregation when they had a youth minister. Another added that she knew someone who would do the job for free.
- Another woman said that her two sons often attend different churches and are currently considering their options for further education. She added that when they are young, children watch to see what we are doing. "Our walk," she said, "is more of an example than we think." She asked the group if they were spending time, including having conversations, with the young people in the church.
- To continue this train of thought, another participant said the future depends on how effective the church is with the youth. He remembered about 6 years back when the church had 70 young people on a Wednesday night. Now he said there are only about 15-20, a pretty bleak picture from his point of view. He wants the church to figure out how to attract more young people.

- One of the written respondents thought that if the church got the ball rolling in intentional leadership development it would help not only in individual development, but also the bonding of the church. He shared that the group who went through the classes bonded with one another and were better for it. He hoped that follow up from here could result in “a growing, thriving congregation that helps everyone get to heaven.”

### **9. Are there final comments that you would like to make about this project?**

Of the eight responses to this question, the majority thought that the project was well worth their time and energy. One said that she would like to do it again even more deeply. Another added that it was definitely worthwhile, and still another that it was very good. A different participant said it got everyone thinking outside of themselves and got them doing things with others. One participant expressed gratitude about being involved in the project while another found it eye-opening and good. The only recommendation made was that the project not be conducted during football season.

### **Conclusion**

To say that Warren Baldwin’s project thesis was a success is a gross understatement. It is obvious that he is both loved and respected as a pastor and leader at the Ulysses Church of Christ. As evidenced throughout the participants’ responses, they highly valued the content of the classes, the experiences they had, and the lessons they learned. Many suggested that the training continue and be extended to even more within the congregation. One notable recommendation given was to survey the church at large to measure their view on the effectiveness of the project. Other areas that deserve further attention based on the feedback given here are:

- The development of even more content that goes deeper into the role of the leader.
- Increased opportunities for conversations among congregants in both formal and informal settings.
- More effective outreach to the marginalized with efforts made to make them more of an integral part of the church.
- Concern for the children and youth of the church in all areas with special attention given to their spiritual development.

It is the strong recommendation of this outside evaluator that Warren Baldwin receive full credit for this project and attain his Doctor of Ministry degree

## APPENDIX J

### Resources Quoted in the Five Intervention Classes

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## BRIEF VITA

Warren Baldwin was born in New York on August 1, 1959, and grew up in Sutton, Vermont. He attended Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, graduating with a bachelor of arts in Bible in 1980. He received the Master of Arts and Religion in church history from Harding Graduate School of Religion, now Harding School of Theology, in 1987. Warren served as the minister for the Caverns Road Church of Christ in Marianna, Florida from 1982—1990. From 1990—1999 he preached for the Church of Christ in Cody, Wyoming, then moved to Ulysses, Kansas to serve as the minister there. He and his wife still live and work in Ulysses. Warren married Cheryl in 1982 and they have three children—Wesley, Jenny, and Kristin.



