Elder Selection: Engaging the Monterey Church of Christ in a Collaborative Elder Selection Process

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Elder Selection: Engaging the Monterey Church of Christ in a Collaborative Elder Selection Process

A Thesis

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The Faculty of the Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Benjamin D. Pickett

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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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To my devoted wife, Kerry
ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the outcomes of a project intended to foster greater collaboration at the Monterey Church of Christ in its selection of elders. The intervention involved the engagement of the Monterey Church in a process that involved multiple steps. These steps involved engagement with teachers in the context of a teacher training seminar, with Bible classes in a series of Bible lessons, and with elders, elder nominees, and their spouses in order to discern the perceived degree to which Monterey members participate in the elder selection process. The Bible lessons presented an alternative model for theological reflection on the character traits of elders in hopes of generating thoughtful discussion for members as they submitted nominees.

The outcomes of the project presented several important insights: a) the engagement of additional constituent groups in the process was viewed as a positive contributor to feelings of collaboration within the church; b) the lesson materials, on the whole, presented an opportunity for Bible classes to reflect more intentionally on the character traits of elders contributing to the overall sense of involvement in the selection process; and c) the project provided opportunities for the Monterey leadership to reflect on the elder selection process, inviting thoughtful theological and practical consideration of the steps involved.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Churches need leaders. In Churches of Christ, elders are responsible for the oversight and direction of the local church, so naturally, the selection of elders is a critical event in the life of the local congregation. Churches often find it difficult to identify men who possess the character essential to the role and may be further challenged in their attempts to involve fully the congregation in the process of selecting elders. The project evaluated the perceived degree to which Monterey members participate in the elder selection process and this project addressed the need for a more collaborative elder selection process at the Monterey Church of Christ. Chapter 1 introduces the project by presenting a history and introduction to the ministry context at Monterey and clarifies the problem, purpose, assumptions, definitions, and delimitations of the project. Chapter 2 presents the theological rationale for the project. Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed by describing the format, the participant groups engaged in the project, the ministry intervention and evaluation methodology, as well as an outline and timetable for the project. Chapter 4 articulates the responses and the results of the project based on analysis of the data retrieved. Chapter 5 explores conclusions of the project for my own ministry, the challenges associated with replication of this project, and the ramifications of the results for future elder selection processes.

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1 Hereinafter labeled “Monterey.”
Title of Project

The title of this project is “Elder Selection: Engaging the Monterey Church of Christ in a Collaborative Elder Selection Process.” On various issues and areas of ministry, Monterey has a rich heritage of collaboration with constituent groups inside and outside the church. The elder selection process presents an opportunity for this same spirit of collaboration to express itself in meaningful ways through intentional steps to engage a larger segment of the Monterey church membership than it has in the past.

In my role as the associate minister for the Monterey church, I served as a resource person for the process team as they developed and implemented an elder selection process with the approval of the current Monterey eldership. I was grateful to serve in this way to the benefit of Monterey for this and future elder selection processes. This role also afforded an opportunity to demonstrate the same self-giving, others-centered postures found in cruciform faith, love, power, and hope as I shared in a collaborative effort with elders and other church members of the team.

Ministry Setting

A Brief History

Every Christian church has a beginning—a place or point in history when Christians, moved by their desire for God, choose to establish a tangible expression of the love and fidelity necessary for groups of believers to thrive. For Monterey, its beginning came about through the work of area Churches of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, in 1962 and 1963. Together these churches provided resources to purchase land, a large portable
building, and founding members to form a new church at the corner of 58th and Memphis in, what was at the time, southwest Lubbock.

Over the years, the church could be described as one within the main stream of Churches of Christ. The church experienced periods of rapid growth necessitating building expansion and transition to multiple Sunday services. In 1993, leadership adopted a set of vision and values statements that would prove important for the future of the church.¹ These statements laid the foundation for a significant philosophical and theological shift that would be expanded in the fall of 2004, one year prior to transition to a new building in southwest Lubbock. During those meetings, elders and staff adopted a mission statement reflective of the vision and values statements put in place eleven years earlier. The resulting mission statement has come to reflect the kind of theological posture the Monterey Church has sought to adopt as a group of believers. The mission statement is as follows:

Our mission at Monterey is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus who make a difference by being a visible presence in our community and our world.

While mission statements are common for churches, this one, since its inception, has provided an outlet for leadership and the church to intentionally shape its relationship to its heritage and the community at large by communicating a Christ-centered orientation as foundational to its identity rather than an identity focused exclusively on the tenets of its heritage.² The mission statement is decidedly Christo-centric, capturing important themes consistent with Christian spiritual formation modeled after a desire to elevate Christ as the central model for faith and practice. Furthermore, the mission

¹ See appendix A.
² It is not uncommon to hear the following phrase in leadership circles: “While we wish to honor our tradition, we do not feel bound by our tradition.”
statement informs ministry practice and engagement and serves as an ongoing gauge to evaluate ministry effectiveness. Taken together, the vision and values statements, in conjunction with the mission statement, accurately reflect the driving theological disposition of the Monterey Church.

Monterey currently has a Sunday morning attendance of roughly 1300-1400 and has doubled in size since 1998. The Monterey Church transitioned to a new facility in June 2005 in a growing area of southwest Lubbock, Texas, a city of 225,000 people located in the rugged agricultural south plains of West Texas. In August 2005, a study was released that ranked Lubbock the second most conservative city in the United States behind Provo, Utah.

Current Ministry Context

In order to gain a greater understanding of the ministry context for this project, I apply Israel Galindo’s model for church classification as a method to describe the Monterey Church. Galindo’s “components of congregational identity” of “spirituality,” “stance,” and “style” present an important lens for describing the Monterey Church. This model introduces another way of understanding the church as a system in which different forces that influence the system are identified in order to ascertain church health. In other words, what type of spirituality, stance, and style does Monterey reflect? The

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3 Monterey has been located at its original location on 58th and Memphis since its founding in 1963.
spirituality best reflected by Monterey is what Galindo calls “Affective Spirituality.”⁷ It is a posture that stresses the importance of “experiencing” faith. Contemporary music, focused primarily on celebration and togetherness, is enhanced by a sense of community and personal involvement. Assemblies are also characterized by an “upbeat optimism” about the world and God’s role in it. Yet the church is not exclusively affective. There is a strong element of cognitive spirituality as well with its focus on education and doctrine indicative of Monterey’s heritage in Churches of Christ.

The Monterey Church is also, per Galindo’s criteria, a “community-stance congregation.”⁸ It values belonging and diversity. Monterey has an ecumenical posture that embraces members of other faith traditions, thus, as Galindo describes, “downplaying denominational loyalty affiliation.” Monterey tries to be “a place for everybody,” offering a variety of classes and ministry opportunities that “cast a wide net” for entry points into the congregation.⁹

Lastly, there is the “style” of the Monterey church.¹⁰ This component is more difficult to identify because it is clear Monterey touches on several of these “continuums” that go from one extreme to another. There are two styles overlapping and complimenting one another in this particular context—Galindo calls them “between inward-focused and outward-focused” and “between conventional and pioneering.”¹¹ Without question the Monterey Church desires to be outwardly focused. It recognizes the pitfalls of insularity and has embraced a posture more outwardly focused than in previous years while endorsing key factors important to interior church life. Monterey also possesses a strong

⁸ Galindo, *Congregations*, 120.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid., 123.
¹¹ Ibid., 125, 127.
desire to be “pioneering.” This particular posture imagines and embraces new challenges and conditions as opportunities for growth and renewal without being shaken by possible risks. The Monterey Church was the first in the Lubbock area Churches of Christ to affirm women in the role of deacon, and to add an instrumental worship assembly; it is open to encouraging partnerships with other denominations and organizations in ministry. The decision to engage in such ministries unhindered by outside forces represents a strong pioneering spirit.

Leadership Context

The current Monterey eldership consists of ten elders—five with tenures of less than six years. Since 1996, the church has undergone three elder selection processes. Elders serve on two standing committees and ad hoc committees as needed. Elders at Monterey take pastoral care duties seriously. They make weekly hospital visits, pray for members and others at weekly meetings, and are available for ministry support. Some elders serve on ministry teams and routinely volunteer to serve in ministries supporting community outreach efforts. During assemblies, elders and spouses are available for prayer and offer an “elder’s blessing” reflection for the congregation as part of the order of worship.

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12 Monterey uses the term “ministry leader” for all persons serving in the role of deacon. This is the preferred term over “deacon” or “deaconess.”
13 The methodology for these processes has varied. However, the process implemented prior to 2007 also used a modified version of Siburt’s instrument for elder selection. See appendix B. Charles Siburt “Elder Selection Process Map” (handout, BIBM 706, Christian Leadership Development, Abilene Christian University, 2010).
14 These committees include the “Administrative Committee” made up entirely of elders, the “Building Committee,” which has one to two supporting elders, and other special committees as needed.
15 Prayer and pastoral care in a general sense are strengths of the current eldership. David Wray’s thoughts on shepherding and prayer reflect well the current disposition. David Wray, “Soul Care and the Heart of a Shepherd,” in Like a Shepherd Lead Us: Guidance for the Gentle Art of Pastoring (ed. by David Fleer and Charles Siburt; Abilene: Leafwood, 2006), 51-66.
Previous Elder Selection Process

The most recent elder selection process took place in 2007. The need for additional elders was precipitated by the retirement of the three most tenured elders, two of whom were founding members. The process was initiated by the elders as a whole with the chairperson presiding over process implementation. Using a modified version of Siburt’s “elder selection process map,”\(^\text{16}\) the elders announced a process that included several steps. Sermons were preached on leadership prior to a call for nominations from the church at large. The elders identified a primary group from the nominated pool of candidates based on the number of nominations received. These nominees were contacted by the elders, and their interest in participating in the process was determined. Those who agreed to the process received an invitation to participate in a series of meetings prior to their announcement to the church as nominees. During this period, nominees met privately with the elders, who introduced them to the dynamics of shepherding in the Monterey context.

Later in the discernment phase, nominees and their spouses attended a “count the cost” session. During this session, current elders and spouses interacted with nominees and their spouses and ministry staff to discuss issues of pastoral care and the responsibilities of leadership at Monterey. Following this session, those nominees who desired the role were placed before the congregation and a date for ordination was announced. Also, the congregation was given the opportunity to voice concerns, in

\(^{16}\) Charles Siburt “Elder Selection Process Map.”
writing, should they have objection to a nominee.\textsuperscript{17} Nominees received ordination to the role two weeks later during Sunday morning assemblies.

It is clear that care was taken to engage the congregation in a collaborative effort; however, the need to involve other constituent groups is evidenced by the lack of initiatives offered to encourage participation and receive subsequent feedback from other constituent groups outside the worship setting.\textsuperscript{18} This project sought to address this need.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem this project sought to address was a lack of a collaborative partnership among the multiple constituencies at Monterey in its selection of elders. Church participation in previous selection processes, while successful in selecting elderships that serve Monterey, lacked sufficient concrete collaborative efforts to include other constituent groups in the congregation. By incorporating intentional steps and procedures in the elder selection process, interaction among various constituencies would be enhanced. Doing so would engender greater levels of trust between the congregation and the existing eldership and nominees. More collaborative efforts would also grant greater confidence in future elder selection processes. Leadership recognizes that greater opportunities for congregational education and reflection would be beneficial as demonstrated by their willingness to use outside resources to shape these processes.

\textsuperscript{17} Care was taken to avoid the term “scriptural objections” as leadership thought this applied an unreasonable burden on nominees.

\textsuperscript{18} A concern that surfaced following the process was the lack of information about the nominees. Members voiced the need for more information in order to give their consent. This problem was acknowledged by the process team and intentional steps were taken to orient the congregation to each nominee and spouse introduced as candidates as part of the present selection process.
Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to engage other constituencies at Monterey in the elder selection process. A significant segment of the church population was intentionally engaged in the project. Teachers, adult Bible classes, elders, nominees, and their spouses were engaged in meaningful conversation and were actively involved in the project per the principles of participatory action research. Strategies reflective of participatory action research (group interview and questionnaire) provided data necessary to determine the perceived degree of participation in the process after the intervention concluded.

Basic Assumptions

This project is built on the following assumptions:

Leadership recognizes that the current number of elders is insufficient for supporting the ongoing pastoral and administrative responsibilities of elders at Monterey. These responsibilities include hospital visitation and support of standing subcommittees necessary for ongoing personnel oversight and administration. The decision to add more elders came from within and not through any dissatisfaction or criticism from the congregation.

Monterey’s ongoing commitment to the Restoration heritage is reflected in the role of elders as the decision-making authority for the direction of the church.\textsuperscript{19} As part of the free church tradition of Churches of Christ in North America, Monterey adheres to a church polity whereby elders provide spiritual and functional oversight to direct the

ongoing work of the church. This oversight includes the supervision of clergy and other church staff, spiritual support of deacons, and general administrative oversight.\textsuperscript{20} Other outcomes of this approach include an insistence that elders are selected and appointed by the congregation, that the church is committed to a plurality of elders, and that all elders are male.

In order to address specific church needs and in conjunction with the perceived gifts present in the eldership, committees are formed to address specific tasks. A standing committee (known as the administrative committee) composed of elders is responsible for technical issues of church polity including legal issues and personnel. The senior minister serves as both the pulpit minister and staff administrator and reports directly to the administrative committee and to the eldership as a whole. All other ministry staff positions report directly to the senior minister.

**Definitions**

**Elder Selection Process.** Elder selection process refers to the methodology employed to add new elders to the existing eldership of a congregation. As noted above, Monterey previously employed a modified version of Siburt’s “Elder Selection Process Map” as a means to guide elder selection. In Churches of Christ each individual, autonomous church possesses the authority to select elders based on its own individualized methodology.

**Bible Hour.** Bible hour is the time between Sunday morning worship services when members meet in classes for study, prayer, and fellowship. At Monterey, the Bible

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
hour is the primary point of connection for the church. Bible classes meeting during the Bible hour will constitute roughly 70-75% of the congregation on any given Sunday.

**Scriptural Objections.** Scriptural objections is a phrase that describes a concern from a member of the congregation stipulating that an elder nominee does not qualify to serve because of perceived violation of the function and disposition of an elder as described in particular passages of Scripture. As mentioned earlier, when biblical texts customarily associated with elder selection are employed with a “checklist” quality, scriptural objections is the term used to describe a failure to meet these presupposed standards. In the previous elder selection process, the Monterey church leadership sought to avoid use of this term as they believed it held a negative connotation.

**Elder Nominees.** Elder nominees are candidates for the role of elder nominated by the church as part of the elder selection process. Elder nominees must first accept an invitation to consider the role prior to participating in the process. A nomination does not require people to accept the role, only to acknowledge that they have been asked and are considering the formal possibility of becoming an elder.

**Delimitations**

This project focused only on the evaluation of an agreed upon process for selecting elders at Monterey. This process was developed by the process team and endorsed by the Monterey elders prior to implementation. The project did not evaluate processes for elder selection in other church contexts. However, it is anticipated that other churches will benefit from the results of this project.
Conclusion

Because of Monterey’s history and disposition as a church that possesses a “pioneering” and “outward-focused” spirit, the church welcomed the inclusive nature of a collaborative elder selection process. The constituent groups engaged represented a significant core group of the congregation. Given the number of participants in these groups, I believe the results of the project can be trusted as consistent with the disposition of the congregation as a whole. Given the size of the congregation, it is often the case that members may not personally know the nominees submitted as elder candidates. Through intentional steps of communication and interaction in the worship and Bible class ministry contexts, however, a more collaborative effort will engender greater trust between leadership and the congregation.
CHAPTER II
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I provide a framework for reflection on the character traits of an elder in the context of an elder selection process. I will begin by describing the prevailing method of elder selection in Churches of Christ and the way churches in our heritage customarily reflect on the traits of an elder. I will then present the alternative method employed for this project, and its theological foundations, as the primary framework for the elder selection process at Monterey.

A point of entry into the conversation concerning elder selection is the recognition that members of Churches of Christ have traditionally approached the process of choosing elders—and the associated texts in Scripture cited for these processes—in a particular way. The traditional method employed in Churches of Christ for elder selection is for leadership to ask for nominations from the church body, determine if nominees match up with specific texts in Titus and Timothy, and if there are no “scriptural objections” (a term not found in Scripture), the nominees are affirmed as elders. Though somewhat effective for selecting elders, this approach stretches the Timothy and Titus texts beyond Paul’s intent and fails to inform the primary rationale most often employed by members when asked to consider someone for the role.

In correlation to the method of selection described above, there also exists a rationale members instinctively employ when asked to think about potential nominees.

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1 See fig. 1, p.15.
When members are asked to consider who could serve as an elder, they instantly think of a person before they go to the texts in Scripture traditionally considered essential for understanding the role—1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This raises two areas of concern. First, the texts in Timothy and Titus become a “nominee filter” and take on a “checklist” quality (see fig. 1 below).¹ When Paul asked Titus and Timothy to appoint elders in their churches, he did so with a keen understanding of their particular context. The character traits Paul describes for elders in Timothy and Titus were shaped by the contexts of the churches to which he wrote. Paul’s response to Titus and Timothy does not mean the lists are not useful today, but careful attention should be given to the cultural context that informed Paul’s correspondence.² The Titus and Timothy texts—and the lists of the qualities of elders they contain—constitute a reflection of Paul’s spirituality conditioned by the dynamics of the particular church setting to which he wrote. In other words, Paul was addressing a specific problem in Ephesus.³ The lists provided were given to Timothy in hopes of resolving the existential reality in Ephesus for which Timothy was responsible. To suggest that the character traits of elders provided by Paul in these texts were necessarily meant to inform all elder qualities in all circumstances ignores this important condition.

¹ 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are passages that inform the role of an elder. Towner, in his reflection on 1 Timothy, describes the role of elder in terms of the various qualities articulated in the text—a similar approach to that of a “checklist.” Philip H. Towner, 1-2 Timothy and Titus (NTCS; Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 81-90. Ngewa provides a similar approach. Samuel M. Ngewa, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (ABCS; Grand Rapids: HippoBooks, 2009), 59-70, 338-44.

² For more on the setting and occasion for the writing of Timothy and Titus, see Gordon D. Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984), 78-85, 171-76.

³ Ibid., 78-79. Fee rightly argues that the problem in Ephesus was the presence of elders who were promoting false teaching. Paul, therefore, provided a list of qualities (which Fee contends possess a Hellenistic emphasis) that reflected his concern that “the elders have Christian virtues (this is assumed) but that they reflect the highest ideals of the culture as well.”
Figure 1

Traditional Approach for Elder Nominee Identification

Second, the antecedent criteria for elder selection—that is, the reasons a person thought of someone as an elder in the first place—may be informed by criteria independent of those qualities consistent with spiritual maturity in Christ. When members lift up other members as potential candidates, they do so—either intentionally or unintentionally—based on certain behaviors they believe are consistent with qualities of faithfulness and leadership the role requires. Too often, the character traits sought in potential elder nominees reflect qualities consistent with leadership success in the surrounding culture. That is, if a candidate is successful in business or has a reputation as a leader in the community in some other professional arena, then the assumption is the candidate will necessarily make a good leader in the church. This assumption is a faulty notion and detrimental to leadership in the church because leadership success, and the substance of the qualities necessary to lead to that success in those contexts, is defined by a different standard. Character traits for leadership in the church are found in the resources of the church. It is these resources that should provide the criteria for leadership. I propose a rationale that invites members to pause and reflect on the qualities of spiritually mature people (and connect these qualities with the character traits of elders) before a person for the role is considered.
Cruciformity and Elder Character Traits

Michael Gorman offers an effective method for understanding Pauline spirituality. Using the term “cruciformity,” Gorman describes four narrative patterns of spirituality useful for understanding Paul’s commitments for faith and for our conversation on the character traits of elders. Specifically, the narrative patterns of cruciform faith, love, power, and hope invite us to ask “What character traits should church members look for when considering candidates for the role of elder in the church?” I will borrow extensively from Gorman’s work on Pauline spirituality and will explore how each of his narrative patterns provides fundamental principles important for members to consider as they think about character traits essential for elder nominees.

Cruciformity

Cruciformity, in a general sense, is defined as the orientation of a person’s walk of faith and the commitments that inform faith around the crucified Christ. In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the seminal event through which Christians properly understand the character of God. As such, Christ’s behavior, as representation of the character of God, exhibits certain qualities, often described as virtuous, that necessarily inform Christian faith. The value of Gorman’s thought for this discussion is found in the way he frames Paul’s life, teaching, and ministry as a narration “in life and words, the story of God’s self-revelation in Christ.” Because Christ’s death is paradigmatic to Christian faith, the cross then shapes Christian commitments and

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5 Cruciform faith, love, power, and hope are terms used by Gorman to describe each of the four narrative patterns and have been adopted for use in this project.
6 Gorman, Cruciformity, 7.
attitudes in all circumstances. This is to say the faith commitments actualized in daily choices should be informed by the obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ demonstrated at the cross.

The use of cruciformity brings us back to the importance of Paul’s spirituality for elder selection. When Gorman’s narrative patterns of cruciform faith, hope, power, and love are utilized as a means to inform the criteria for elder traits, exploration of these patterns naturally yield certain qualities. These qualities constitute their own set of virtues—cruciform virtues. Gorman hesitates to use the language of virtue in his thought on cruciformity; however, there is clearly a connection because, like the virtues, the habits of cruciformity necessarily seek what is good and proper in the interest of others. The appeal to a deeper, more authentic spirituality envisioned by Paul describes certain behaviors informed by an encounter with the crucified Christ. As a consequence, these behaviors, or habits, involve choices that guide Christians regardless of their circumstances. The narrative patterns and the qualities that emerge as a result represent a set of theological virtues central to faith formation and, in their expression, constitute a means for recognition of the presence of mature Christian faith essential to the role of an elder.7

I propose an alternative rationale for thinking about the selection of elders in Churches of Christ. In figure 2 below, I suggest an alternative approach in which antecedent criteria for elder selection are not informed by sources outside the church, but by the qualities, the virtues, of cruciformity. Approaching the selection of elders in this

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7 The limitations of this project do not permit a full exploration of the ethics of virtue in relation to cruciformity. However, central to an understanding of virtue is the notion of right, or proper, action and right, or proper, motive. Cruciformity speaks to both of these concerns. For more on theological virtues, see Robin W. Lovin, Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 63-79. Also, Adams explores the motivations for the pursuit of virtue from a non-theological perspective. Robert M. Adams, A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 1-31.
way invites members to consider virtues central to Christian faith as a means to inform elder nominee selection. I recognize there exists the possibility these criteria, as articulated earlier, may also serve as a “nominee filter” if not considered in the proper light. If this model is honored, however, then members are granted the opportunity to think theologically about the virtuous qualities of an elder in ways consistent with the cruciform character of Christ.

Figure 2

Alternative Approach for Elder Nominee Identification

Gorman’s narrative patterns, which I will address in detail below, open up new possibilities for understanding what it means to be authentic followers of Christ and provide an alternative way for members to think about the character traits essential for elder nominees. For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore each of Gorman’s narrative patterns—cruciform faith, love, power, and hope—and describe what each pattern entails and show how the qualities, the virtues that emerge, from each narrative pattern inform criteria for elder nomination. If members engage collaboratively in this thinking regarding elder selection, then candidates lifted up as nominees will likely reflect a different set of commitments from earlier, more traditional elder selection processes.
Cruiform Faith

The narrative pattern of cruiform faith is the first and the most foundational element necessary for understanding cruiformity and its usefulness for discerning the character traits of an elder. Cruiform faith is fidelity to God informed by the obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ. Concrete expression of cruiform faith is found in the hymn of Phil 2:6-11. Here Paul’s correspondence with the Philippian church provides an example of all the elements of cruiformity, including cruiform faith expressed in terms of obedience. Christ’s obedience is demonstrated by his willingness to become human. That is, the incarnation demonstrated perfect humility and obedience—he oriented his life to the will of God. Often expressions of faithfulness are defined by certain levels of piety, a particular view of providence, or individualized expressions of spiritual ascent. While these are good practices, they are the result of a faithful posture toward God. A person who demonstrates cruiform faith will express behaviors defined by the virtuous qualities of humility and obedience.

How does cruiform faith inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who demonstrate humility and obedience to God rather than sequester open expressions of faith in response to secular social norms exhibit the qualities of cruiform faith. It is a matter of courage. Elders will resist the impulse to compartmentalize or privatize their faith and courageously display authentic Christian qualities in all circumstances. The tendency in our culture to compartmentalize faith as a separate aspect of life individualizes and limits faith commitment. Elders will recognize the call of Christ is to

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8 Gorman, Cruciformity, 95.
9 See note above regarding the importance of this text to Paul’s spirituality.
“let [their] light shine before others” (Matt 5:16) reflecting cruciform faith in concrete ways. Consequently, an elder who has made a commitment to Christ will have shown choices (the way he spends time, energy, and resources) consistent with the obedient and self-emptying qualities of the crucified Messiah.

Another facet of cruciform faith is an ongoing daily expression of commitment to God through the “faith of” Jesus Christ. This distinction is important because it points to the actions of Christ at the cross as a source that informs the substance of faith.\(^{10}\) It is important to see Christ’s actions as demonstrative expressions of his own belief. Gorman is right when he says Christ’s death “is synonymous with Christ’s faith”\(^{11}\) because his description of Christ’s death invites Christians to see themselves as a participant in the faith of Christ. The obedience demonstrated at the cross is the substance of what it means to be faithful to God. Thus when Christians exhibit this same commitment to faithful obedience, they share in or possess the same faith as Christ.\(^{12}\)

The ramifications of this particular facet of cruciform faith are significant in that they change the Christian’s understanding of what it means to participate in genuine Christian faith. In the present culture there exist impulses in the Christian community that

\(^{10}\) See Gal 2:16; 2:20 and Rom 3:22, 26. Gorman is a proponent of the subjective genitive form of πίστις Χριστοῦ. Space does not permit a thorough examination of this and other related texts pertinent to the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. Downs provides an excellent summary of the current debate regarding πίστις Χριστοῦ in a recent paper concerning 2 Tim 3:15. He succinctly states the contending sides when he says “proponents of the objective genitive emphasize that for Paul human faith is placed in Christ, with Christ as the object of such faith. On the other side, advocates of the subjective genitive contend that the πίστις Χριστοῦ construction refers to the faithfulness of Christ himself.” David J. Downs, “Faithfulness in Christ Jesus in 2 Tim 3:15,” Journal of Biblical Literature 131 (2012): 143-60. For a perspective supporting the objective genitive view, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Romans (TAB; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 344-46. On a personal note, I believe in all likelihood Paul could have easily intended both objective and subjective genitive meanings of the text. In other words, to hold to both would provide a total commitment to Christ both as God and as a demonstration of faith in God.

\(^{11}\) Gorman, Cruciformity, 114.

\(^{12}\) Gorman, Cruciformity, 120. See Gal 2:19. This text demonstrates this conviction well.
equate economic or social success and influence as evidence of God’s favor.\(^\text{13}\) To the contrary, Paul’s own experience and his spirituality make it clear that participation in the faith of Christ, to participate in a cruciform faith, necessarily comes at a cost: adherence to faith in Christ demands a person’s time, resources, and even social acceptance for the sake of Christ and his work in the world. For Paul, the cost was experienced through violence and persecution from his religious opponents and from the political forces surrounding him. It meant intentional choices in his profession and its administration that sought to identify with the poorest in his community.\(^\text{14}\) If conformity to Christ is a conformity to his death (Gal 2:20), then costly faith, as expressed by suffering in its various forms, is an indicator of a cruciform existence. Faith that comes at a cost includes personal choices, informed by faith, that run counter to social norms. As Gorman notes, “the life of obedient faith, of identifying with the One who died such a death, is a costly one, as Jesus, Paul, and some, if not all, of Paul’s communities knew well.”\(^\text{15}\) In the present culture open adherence to Christian faith in the work place or in some segments of the country could be met with economic persecution or social exclusion.

How would a commitment to the “faith of” Christ inform character traits for elder selection? Because elders share in the faith of Christ, they will possess a daily walk of faith that incorporates the virtuous and self-giving qualities of the crucified Christ. Their lives will be oriented by their faith: their careers, accomplishments, social status, and reputation are all gifts in service to God. With this orientation in mind, church members, in their identification of elder candidates, should resist the urge to select nominees based

\(^{13}\) I do not wish to deny this as a possibility, only to note that social and economic dispositions presupposed by Paul and the Christian church of the first century elevated suffering and economic difficulty as consistent with authentic faith and, therefore, consistent with the favor and grace of God.

\(^{14}\) Paul’s profession as a tentmaker is representative of this posture.

\(^{15}\) Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 146.
solely on career successes or achievements. Career advancement does not necessarily suggest cruciform faith.

Cruciform faith begins with the choice to take on the life of Christ as a personal act of commitment before God. It is a choice that invites a life of obedient self-giving and humility toward God and others—just as Christ did. It is a faith that comes at a cost, yet there is grace and joy knowing that such suffering is demonstrative of authentic faith. As churches consider nominees for the role of elder, questions such as “How does this nominee publicly demonstrate cruciform faith?” or “How does this nominee talk about or view the importance of his career, social status, or achievements?” would be worthy of reflection and consideration.

**Cruciform Love**¹⁶

Cruciform love is a commitment to others reflective of the same posture of self-sacrifice and others-centeredness as demonstrated by Christ at the cross. Cruciform love consists of choices and behaviors that represent concrete evidence of the presence of the Spirit and a commitment to Christ. I like the way Gorman describes the paradoxical nature of cruciform love when he says that “cruciform love does not seek its own advantage or edification; . . . it seeks the good, the advantage, the edification of others.”¹⁷

In other words, love that is informed by the crucified Christ takes an active and engaging posture directed toward the well-being (both spiritual and physical) of others while consistently renouncing any attempts to bring honor or attention to itself. People who

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¹⁶ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 155.
¹⁷ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 160.
exhibit cruciform love will be consistently self-giving, sacrificial, and status-renouncing\textsuperscript{18} in their orientation toward others; they will offer love to others for the sake of the other.

The apostle Paul exhibited cruciform love in the context of his ministry by embracing the same self-giving and status-renouncing disposition as Christ. This commitment to a status-renouncing disposition was evidenced by his profession. I agree with Gorman when he makes the case that Paul’s profession as a tentmaker was not one of practicality, but a deliberate act of love consistent with his cruciform character. Paul, out of love for Christ and for believers, intentionally worked as a tentmaker in order to demonstrate the authenticity of his commitment to a cruciform existence.\textsuperscript{19} Cruciform love, then, invites the use of behaviors and choices that place the importance of others—as both an expression of love for God and for other people—above all other things.

How would cruciform love inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who exhibit cruciform love are living testimonies to an others-centered existence. They are people whose choices and commitments consistently reflect the nature of cruciform love by seeking the best possible outcome for others for their sake—even if doing so comes at a cost—as an authentic expression of Christian faith. In other words, like the people who spend their time in service to the homeless at the cost of greater income or status, or those who use their resources to bless others, elders who exhibit cruciform love will be people who recognize that love for God and love for others necessarily rejects notions of self-aggrandizement or status as desired dispositions consistent with the role.

\textsuperscript{18} Status-renunciation is an intentional act of self-abasement, motivated by concern for other believers. It is most pronounced when people possess the capacity, either by birth or natural talents and abilities, to advance socio-economically within their own context but refuse to do so.

\textsuperscript{19} Gorman, \textit{Cruciformity}, 183. Such action would have significant implications for the role of ministers and their attitudes concerning compensation and church governance. What would happen if ministers recognized that all facets of their service in the kingdom were shaped in a similar way?
The outlets for expression of cruciform love are not limited to these examples. A narrative spirituality informed by cruciform love means the opportunity to take action for the good of others is limited only by the resources of the individual. Cruciform love continues the story of the cross in different times and places as they occur. It is imaginative in the sense that it is proactive and self-initiating. Cruciform love is not limited to certain times of the week or for certain groups. Cruciform love, applied appropriately, seeks the good of all and can manifest itself in any circumstance.

The pattern of cruciform love also emerges in the theme of reconciliation. At the cross, Christ reconciled humanity to God (2 Cor 5:18-21). Reconciliation is a consistent and needed facet of cruciform love because reconciliation is consistent with God’s desire for relationship with his creation. This same desire for reconciliation is found in Paul’s interaction with the Corinthian church. He extends the love, grace, and forgiveness of God by asking the Corinthians to reconcile themselves to the gospel he preached. Forgiveness was demonstrated by Paul in the way he thought the Corinthian church should treat the person among them who had previously caused offense. The desire for reconciliation, then, involves a spirit of forgiveness in hopes of attaining restoration and wholeness among God’s people.

How would this idea of reconciliation inform character traits for elder selection? In this instance, elders who exhibit cruciform love in terms of reconciliation would show qualities of empathy toward the other that stretched beyond the limits of established 

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20 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 266-67. Gorman uses the term “polyvalent” to describe the imaginative nature of cruciform love. Though not specifically expounded upon by the author, the term ‘polyvalent’ seems to be used in the sense found in art appreciation and interpretation. In other words, ‘polyvalency’ describes how “different artists interpret the same [thing] differently.” See Doug Adams, “Changing Patterns and Interpretations of Parables in Art” in *Arts, Theology, and the Church* (ed. by K. Vrudny and Wilson Yates; Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 126.

21 See 2 Cor 6:11-13; 7:2.
social or cultural norms. Elders demonstrate compassion even when there exists an opportunity for judgment. Elders should not be complacent toward the need for justice. Instead, cruciform love shapes the way an elder thinks about others in terms of compassion and mercy, while being mindful of the need for godly dispositions regarding judgment and accountability.

Reconciliation also informs another facet of cruciform love as demonstrated in the lives of elders who are inclusive. Elders who readily embrace others (beyond social, racial, and gender boundaries) reflect a heart for others created in the image of God as worthy recipients of the love of Christ. They manifest a sacrificial posture that seeks to respond with love even when it is unwarranted or undeserved. It is here we find the connection between cruciform love and collaboration. To include others necessarily invites their participation into a person’s own circle of concern and influence. Including others means, elders open themselves to the attitudes and commitments of those to whom they are called to serve. Including others means they invite mutual participation in tasks and other endeavors that affect the life of the church. In other words, elders who exhibit cruciform love as collaboration open themselves to the active participation of others in matters of central concern to the body of believers. They resist the urge to be closed to the possibility of disagreement and encourage honest and open feedback from the church.

As churches consider the dynamics of cruciform love in their selection of nominees for the role of elder, questions such as “In what ways does this nominee demonstrate a desire for the advantage and edification of others?” and “Is this person someone who readily includes others?” would be helpful for congregations as they consider nominees.
Cruciform Power

Cruciform power is the capacity to exercise influence over others informed by the crucified Christ. Unlike common cultural understandings of power defined by the use of force or positional status to exercise control and authority over others, cruciform power is understood in terms of weakness. It is paradoxical in character—to be weak is to be strong—because in weakness the true power of Christ is displayed fully in terms of vulnerability, suffering, and love (2 Cor 12). Power understood in this way seeks to influence others through invitation and appeal rather than by the use of force in various forms.

The paradoxical quality of cruciform power is reflected in Paul’s ministry by his own experiences of suffering and ongoing challenges of life defined by an others-centered existence. Paradigmatic to understanding power in this way is to recognize that Paul understood that “weakness makes Christ’s power present” (2 Cor 12:8; 4:7-12) and may include “concrete physical pains suffered for the sake of the gospel.”

How would an understanding of cruciform power inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who display cruciform power use invitation and appeal to influence others for the sake of others. They recognize that power is measured by the qualities and standards of a crucified Christ, not those of the current cultural climate. I recognize elders possess authority to make leadership decisions; however, the way this authority is

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22 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 268.
23 Gorman identifies five different expressions of cruciform power in Paul’s apostolic ministry: a) his personal presence and lack of rhetorical skill, b) his constant suffering, c) his “thorn in the flesh” experience (1 Cor 12), d) his refusal for financial support and performance of manual labor, and e) his attitude of humility and meekness.
exercised must be consistent with the paradoxical nature of power as demonstrated by the crucified Christ (2 Cor 12).  

Paul’s stance on power shaped the way he interacted with the community of faith. He consistently appealed to his own weakness and commitment to Christ as an invitation for believers to listen to him. When given the opportunity to exercise authority, he refrained (Rom 14, 15; 1 Cor 8), appealing to their understanding of cruciform faith and love in their treatment of one another. Paul’s refusal to control the community reflected his belief that the church, as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12), should be defined by the same qualities of self-giving love, humility, and vulnerability as Paul portrayed in his own life informed by the cross. Therefore, the exercise of power in the church must reflect these same qualities. Doing so does not negate the authority for leaders to act, but redefines the reasons they possess the authority to lead in the first place.  

Another way of understanding this point is found in Gorman’s explanation of “status transcendence and reversal,” a way of describing God’s selection of “what is weak in the world” and “what is low and despised in the world” (1 Cor 1:26-29) as a representation and demonstration of the substance of the power of God. Authentic power subverts cultural definitions of power based on the use of force through positional and social rank and replaces these tenets with cruciform postures of vulnerability, 

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25 This includes current theory on the various books, classes, and seminars on contemporary leadership in the present culture. Christian leadership should reflect the qualities of the cross if they are to be consistent with tenets of the gospel of Christ.

26 See Hall for discussion on the nature and exercise of ecclesial power in the larger North American context. He argues convincingly that the church is in a post-Christendom era and suffers from the same understanding of power and control as those who have led the Christian church since the time of Augustine. Douglas Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

27 Power as status transcendence and reversal, moral transformation, boasting and victory in suffering, and cruciform care for others are four categories Gorman uses to explain Christ’s “downwardly mobile” action at the cross. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 298-303.
lowliness, and weakness. Power understood in this way “transcends” cultural conventions by courageously refusing to accept and exercise power in that way. This reversal is important to our concern for elder selection because power understood in terms of status transcendence and reversal invites a reconsideration of what the definition and exercise of power mean for church governance. In other words, Gorman is correct when he asks readers to define power as something that “transcends and reverses social status” because the “cross reveals the way God works, not just the way he achieved salvation” for humanity.

Cruciform power is the ongoing exhibition of the same self-emptying, status-renouncing postures consistent with those demonstrated by Christ at the cross, where God’s divine power is demonstrated. Therefore, believers who seek other forms of power and control outside this dynamic misunderstand what it means to be cruciform and misunderstand the nature and use of power in the church context.

How would cruciform power in terms of status transcendence inform the character traits for elder selection? Cruciform power means elders possess humility, love, and vulnerability informed by the crucified Christ as they interact with others in the church. Elders will be people who exemplify this quality in the way they make requests of others in the church, of the way they encourage and offer guidance to ministers and deacons, and in the way they exercise leadership on critical matters important to the future of the congregation. In other words, on matters of direction critical to the life of the congregation, elders who exercise cruciform power open themselves to the voice of the congregation. All impulses to hierarchy or status as defined by cultural norms outside the

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28 The ability of church leaders to competently use their spiritual gifts and abilities in service to the church is not diminished by the demands of cruciform power. To the contrary, the trust granted to leadership by the church is enhanced when leaders exercise their authority through invitation and other cruciform postures.

29 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 300.
church are suspect because elders recognize authentic power is defined by traits and resources within the church. They listen to the church because they understand as elders they are in service to the church. They are vulnerable to the concerns and commitments of the congregation and resist the urge to move in directions without serious consideration of the views of the congregation in mind. Listening invites the church to grant leadership a great gift—the gift of trust.

The exercise of cruciform power engenders trust between elders and the congregation because, in listening to the church, elders demonstrate their commitment to the crucified Christ in terms of vulnerability; they validate their self-emptying, obedient disposition of love for God and for others. On the surface, their vulnerability may seem counter-intuitive because our culture is accustomed to defining leadership as making hard decisions that go against the grain or that challenge the status quo through the exercise of positional power similar to that of a corporate board of directors. Yet by courageously embracing these cruciform postures, elders engender the trust of the church by appealing to each member’s own understanding of Christ and the same self-emptying, obedient dispositions that come with it.\(^\text{30}\)

Cruciform power is an essential component for authentic expressions of collaboration. When elders exercise cruciform power in the context of collaborative efforts, they necessarily value the attitudes and feelings of others above their own. Choices or decisions, important to the life of the congregation that must be made by leadership when engaged with the virtuous qualities of cruciform power in mind, will

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\(^{30}\) For more on the essential and foundational nature of trust in a group setting, see Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2002), 188-190.
necessarily be informed by others. Such a posture constitutes the essence of collaboration—the essence of working together.

When elders empower others to take responsibility for ministry and bless others, when they listen with a cruciform posture that portrays a willingness to work in genuine collaboration with others, they open themselves to receive the trust of the congregation. This trust empowers elders to move forward confidently when difficult decisions must be made because they have invested the church with a genuine voice in the conversation. It is an act of love for elders to hear and to be shaped by the congregation.

As churches consider the dynamics and qualities of cruciform power for the role of elder, questions such as “How does the nominee understand and exhibit cruciform power?” and “In what ways is this nominee vulnerable to others?” and “How does the nominee understand the relationship between the church and its elders?” might prove helpful.

**Cruciform Hope**

Cruciform hope embraces a view of the world that anticipates Christ’s return and the glorious reconciliation of all things.\(^{31}\) It is positive and uplifting, while recognizing suffering is both consistent with, and evidence of, a life conformed to Christ. Philippians 2:6-11 is important for understanding cruciform hope because the hymn found in this text concludes with God’s resurrecting and exalting the crucified Christ. Cruciform hope looks to the future confident of God’s presence and of the certainty of his promises. It

\(^{31}\) Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 304.
represents the completion, that is, the telos of “conformity to the narrative pattern of the Messiah.”

Wrapped into this understanding of cruciform hope is an implicit eschatological consideration. When Christians look at the cross, they do so with the knowledge that the resurrected Christ will return and reconcile all things. This eschatological perspective informs theological commitments pertaining to issues of God’s providence and sovereignty particularly during instances of suffering. As Paul reminds believers in 1 Cor 15, Christ’s resurrection is the foundation for the assurance that his followers will be raised as well. To understand properly cruciform hope, people must possess both faith in the resurrected Christ and faith in the promise of God to do the same for believers. The substance of cruciform hope is found in Christ’s humiliation and subsequent exaltation. This narrative posture, oriented toward the future, provides courage and strength for a life shaped by the cross.

Cruciform hope also provides meaning in suffering. I agree with Gorman when he contends that Christian suffering is a basis for a “continuation of the narrative of divine love” and a cause for encouragement knowing “the power of the resurrection operates in the present as the power of cruciformity to the death of Christ, which in turn guarantees a place in the future resurrection.” Meaning is found in suffering in the sense that the person who must endure suffering can be confident of the presence of God to provide compassion and peace in the midst of the trial. Suffering in the Christian community, though unpleasant and painful, in Gorman’s view, may have a positive component in that Christians will heed Paul’s exhortation to identify with Christ and “the whole creation of

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32 Gorman, Cruciformity, 306.
33 Phil. 3:10-11 is central to Gorman’s thought on cruciform hope. To participate in Christ’s death ensures participation in his resurrection. Therefore, the “future of cruciformity is glory.” Ibid., 330-31.
people in pain.” I disagree with Gorman to the extent that he believes suffering may be viewed in a positive light. Suffering is painful. Suffering, however, does not diminish the possibility of Christians, inspired by the encouraging and redemptive presence of God, from “redeeming” the experience and turning it into a means to encourage others. Cruciform hope makes sense of suffering in that it equips the Christian with concrete evidence of both the presence of genuine faith and assurance of resurrection and exaltation in the future. When suffering becomes part of Christian existence, cruciform hope “means the very thing (suffering) that suggests that glory is distant, is in fact, the proof of its proximity.”

How would cruciform hope inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who exhibit cruciform hope possess a spirit of joy regardless of the circumstances. They are quick to suffer with others and invest themselves in the lives of others who are in need of compassion and mercy. They display an attitude inspired by faith in the reality of a resurrected Christ and the promises of the God who raised him. Cruciform hope empowers elders to be courageous under the threat of persecution and will encourage them to be exemplars of faithfulness and compassion when those challenges arise.

Cruciform hope for daily living also involves a “rejection of imperial eschatology.” In this simple but critical distinction, believers are reminded that it is God, not the state, who is the source of salvation. It is the recognition that believers possess “an alternative hope through loyalty to God” rather than empire. There exists a temptation and expectation in some Christian circles that an appropriate use of Christian

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34 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 345. Pain is never pleasant and the notion that harm, purposefully imposed, to shape Christian behavior is a difficult topic beyond the scope of this project.
35 Ibid., 346.
36 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 346. This point challenges nationalism in all its forms.
influence should be exercised through the power of the state. Christ rejected this notion (Mark 10:35-37) and so should his followers. The use of the state as a means to advance the gospel is an appeal to theocracy reminiscent of the bygone days of Christendom. To place hope for advancement of the kingdom in the coercive influence of government is to misunderstand what it means to have faith in the crucified Christ because it appeals to the forces of power and coercion as an acceptable method for both addressing important social concerns and the means by which responses to these concerns are implemented.

How would rejection of reliance on the power of the state inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who display cruciform hope are encouragers who remind others of the certainty of Christ’s ultimate victory. They do not dismiss the challenges and difficult circumstances of this world, yet they are quick to frame them in the larger redemptive story of God’s love. They express confidence of God’s presence and place the substance of their hope and trust in God’s ability to redeem any condition or circumstance and above any notions of imperialism. Possible questions to consider while discussing cruciform hope and elders would be “In what way does the nominee talk about God and the future?” and “how would this person interpret Christian suffering?” and “How does this person talk about the relationship between God and government?”

**Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, criteria for leadership in the church should emerge from sources within the church. In this chapter, I have explored Gorman’s four narrative patterns of cruciformity as a source to inform the character traits of elders. These criteria provide a viable alternative useful for members as they consider nominees for this critical
role of leadership in the church and, in doing so, encourage collaboration between members and leadership.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The project focused on specific elements in the larger elder selection process produced by the process team and endorsed by the Monterey elders. It is clear that a collaborative effort, informed by Gorman’s cruciformity, enhanced the elder selection process at Monterey by its introduction in the Bible class setting. By introducing intentional steps to engage a larger portion of the membership, leadership benefitted from the experience and the project proved useful for future elder selection processes. Furthermore, the eldership fostered greater trust from the congregation as a result of intentional member involvement in the process. The introduction of cruciformity as a criterion for elder nominee selection in the Bible class context solicited and equipped the church for more robust participation as it reflects on criteria for elder nomination.

Strategy

The strategy for the project was informed by the principles of participatory action research. This methodology includes key principles whereby “the inquiry process involves participants in learning inquiry logic and skills” and participants “work together as a group” while the researcher/evaluator “acts as a facilitator, collaborator, and learning resource.”

Action research “aims at solving specific problems within a program, organization, or community” by “engaging the people in the program.”¹ In this type of research, the standard for evaluating the outcomes of the intervention is characterized by the “feelings about the process among research participants” and the “feasibility of the solution generated.”² In other words, participatory action research was employed to discover attitudes and dispositions held by church members following their participation in the elder selection process.

As I proceeded with my evaluation, I was mindful of the definition and underlying principles of evaluation as articulated by Patton. A definition for evaluation, as outlined by Patton, “focuses on gathering data that are meant to be used for program improvement and decision making.”³

**Participant Groups**

The project involved the following constituent groups at Monterey. The populations of these groups were formed prior to the beginning of the project and worked in collaboration as part of the elder selection process.

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³ Michael Q. Patton, *Creative Evaluation* (2nd ed.; Newbury Park: Sage, 1987), 15. Patton defines evaluation as “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and affecting.” The program for this project is the elder selection process.
Process Team

This team was formed by the elders to formulate the process and support its implementation. The team consisted of three current elders, one former elder, two ministry staff members, and one female member at Monterey. This team developed a format for the elder selection process prior to the beginning of the project.\(^4\)

Current Elders, Elder Nominees, and Their Spouses

This group participated at various stages of the process. In addition to their participation in Bible classes, this group attended a special “Count the Cost” session at the end of the discernment phase of the selection process. Elder nominees and their spouses participated together in mentoring relationships with existing elder couples and interacted with members of the process team. Spouses were asked to participate with elder nominees in the mentoring relationships phase and the “Count the Cost” session recognizing their importance in the decision-making process for the elder nominees.

Teachers

Teachers in the adult education ministry at Monterey presented the curriculum to the adult Bible classes. Most teachers have extensive experience in the ministry and all are established members at Monterey. As part of the adult education ministry, teachers are invited to annual training seminars and attend orientation meetings prior to each teaching series. Teachers have approximately thirty-five minutes of time during the Bible hour to present the scheduled lesson.

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\(^4\) See appendix D.
Bible Classes and Bible Class Leaders

The Bible class leaders are selected by Bible classes to serve as the spiritual and administrative leaders of the Bible classes. Class leaders attend an annual meeting and, in addition to other responsibilities, select the teacher(s) for each lesson series. There are twelve adult Bible classes at Monterey that meet on Sunday mornings during the Bible hour. These classes vary in age range, life stage, and overall size.⁵

Description of Ministry Intervention

The goal of the project was to engage the Monterey church in a collaborative elder selection process. To facilitate collaboration, three primary points of engagement were introduced involving four constituent groups as part of the larger elder selection process. The outcomes of these engagements were evaluated for the presence or absence of particular attitudes and feelings.

Teacher Training Workshop

The project began with a workshop for Monterey teachers assigned to teach Monterey adult Bible classes for the fall quarter. The group met for a one-hour session in which lesson materials were distributed and the significance of teachers as participants in the process was highlighted. The meeting took place in the Fireside Room—a large conference area that serves as a fellowship hall for Monterey. Refreshments were served.

⁵ The largest class will average about 85 in attendance weekly, while the smallest will have about 20 each week.
Adult Bible Classes

Teachers presented five lessons to Monterey adult Bible classes during the Sunday morning Bible hour. The curriculum engaged Gorman’s thought on narrative patterns of cruciformity and their use as a means to shape elder nominee selection. Bible class teachers, Bible class leaders, and attending members were encouraged to embrace a new theological approach to elder selection so that they would be better equipped to make an informed decision about whom to select as elder nominees. The lesson series was entitled “Elders and the Cruciform Life” and included five lessons. As part of this thesis, lesson plans for teachers and supportive outlines for the materials are included as appendices. The lesson series was presented as follows:

Week 1: “A Cruciform Life”
Week 2: “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith”
Week 3: “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love”
Week 4: “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power”
Week 5: “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope”

Elder/Nominee “Count the Cost” Session

Elders, nominees, and their spouses attended a pastoral discernment session on a Sunday afternoon following the presentation of the Bible class lesson series. Included in the material for the seventy five minute session was a brief presentation on “Cross-Centered Leadership,” an overview of Gorman’s thought on cruciformity as it relates to the role and function of elders. This session included time for elders and nominees and
their spouses to interact and hear from elders and their spouses on the challenges and joys of serving as an elder. This session was held in room 251 and refreshments were served.\(^6\)

**Evaluation Methodology**

In this project, I used data triangulation to provide a multifaceted perspective of the intervention by gathering data from constituent groups. Data triangulation is an approach that “uses a variety of data sources”\(^7\) in order to develop a broader analysis that “increases the trustworthiness of [the] research.”\(^8\) The intent of triangulation, as Patton notes, is “to test for consistency.” It is not for the purpose of ensuring the data sources “yield the same result.”\(^9\) For the purposes of this project, I employed field notes and open-ended questionnaires to acquire data from three different angles of interpretation, being mindful of themes, convergences, divergences, and silences. Using Sensing’s descriptions,\(^10\) the “insider” angle was represented by the members of the process team. The “outsider” angle was represented by Bible class attendees, teachers, elders, elder nominees, and their spouses. I served as the “researcher”—representing the third angle of triangulation.

\(^6\) It is important to note that two important events took place following the Bible class lessons and prior to the “Count the Cost” session. First, Walling’s discernment phase protocol for nominee orientation, called “Shepherd Mentoring Relationships,” was implemented with each nominee couple partnered with an existing elder couple for conversation and interaction. See appendix C, “Guidelines for Shepherd Mentoring Relationships” handout from Aaron Walling, “Implementing a Discernment Phase for those Nominated in the Shepherd Selection Process at the Cinco Ranch Church of Christ” (D.Min. thesis, Abilene Christian University, 2011). Second, elder nominees met with the process team for a session to orient nominees to some of the practical aspects associated with the role of an elder at Monterey. Each of these steps is significant in that they support elder nominees and spouses as they wrestle with the decision to become an elder.


\(^8\) Ibid.


\(^10\) Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 75.
Field Notes

As the researcher, I took field notes throughout the course of the project. Field notes are “descriptive” and provide concrete and particular information important for the reader to understand fully the activity described. Field notes not only include what other people say, but also detail the observer’s “own feelings, reactions . . . and reflections about the experience.”11 The field notes also contained my own personal observations, “interpretations, and beginning analyses,”12 based on the data observed. I employed a coding system to evaluate data from the process team interview, teacher training workshop, and elder/nominee “Count the Cost” session. For consistency I kept the following question in mind as I collected field notes: How would you say the elder selection process involved you?13

As a protocol for field note data collection, I focused on Sensing’s thought on “observations.”14 Important for my collection of field notes was the date and setting of the action observed. Elements particular to the larger setting (such as the room conditions in the “Count the Cost” session) were noted. The context or “event” was also significant because the process involved different stages and interaction between different groups (in such places as a meeting or during Bible hour). In each of these instances, the verbal, non-verbal, and written content were carefully examined. Key words were noted as they reflect ongoing themes sought as outcomes of the collaborative process. The worksheet

11 Patton, Qualitative Research, 3rd ed., 303.
12 Ibid., 303.
13 See appendix F. Field Notes Worksheet.
14 Sensing, Qualitative Research, 93-102. Sensing uses Thumma’s six options as categories for possible articulation.
also contained a page for general observations and comments pertinent to the process, providing space for initial reactions and elements of meaning.

**Open-ended Questionnaires**

Following the Bible lesson series, class leaders were asked to read a questionnaire to their classes during the first fifteen minutes of the Bible hour on the succeeding Sunday. The form contained an introductory statement, the question for response, space for the class leader to record responses, and space for the class leader to record personal impressions. Given that the teachers assigned to each class continued to teach for the remainder of the quarter, I assumed the teachers had opportunity to respond as other class members. The question read to the class soliciting their response was how would you say the elder selection process involved you?16

Following the elder/nominee “Count the Cost” session, participants received a questionnaire via email in order to ask for their anonymous responses.17 The purpose for anonymity was in anticipation of the need to collect data from nominees who chose to withdraw from the process following the session.18 The question posed was how would you say the elder selection process involved you? Emailed responses were compiled anonymously through the use of an online forms tool.19

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15 See appendix G.
16 This questionnaire was presented after the deadline for elder nomination forms has passed.
17 See appendix G. The questionnaire was similar in form with the one used in Bible Classes.
18 The process team correctly anticipated nominees would submit their acceptance or refusal of the role following this session.
19 For this step, Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) provided a format whereby responses to the online questionnaire were compiled in a useful form. Responses (including email addresses) to the online form were anonymous.
**Group Interview**

At the close of the project, the process team—the insider group—and I engaged in both a group interview and questionnaire to explore process team perspectives on the process. A questionnaire\(^\text{20}\) was introduced and the following questions were posed to the group: How would you say the elder selection process involved you? Given your role on the process team, how would you assess the effectiveness of the process to engage other groups? Field notes were taken during this session.

**Data Collection**

Completed questionnaires from the Bible class leaders were collected from class leaders following Bible hour and the data compiled in document form. Responses from the elders, elder nominees, and their spouses to the online questionnaire were printed and data also compiled in document form. Field notes from the process team group interview and their responses to the questionnaire were also compiled. All data was coded using a uniform coding scheme specific to each context.

**Data Interpretation**

Coding is “a way to get a handle on the raw data so that it is more accessible for interpretation.” Coding “assigns meaning” to the data without “oversimplifying” it.\(^\text{21}\) Coding, or indexing, the data means that each piece of data will be assigned with a particular code. Each piece of data has meaning and is useful for identifying and affirming patterns in the data.

\(^{20}\) See appendix H.
\(^{21}\) Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 203.
For this project, I looked for important themes to emerge that reflected the goals of the project. As the data were examined, it was important to look for common themes from the three areas of triangulation. Common themes discovered in the data are known as “convergences,” data that “fits together” leading to classification. It was also important to see if patterns of Gorman’s cruciformity emerged in the data. In other words, in what ways were dispositions of cruciform faith, love, power, and hope expressed? Also of keen interest was the emergence of language and feelings indicative of a sense of community and togetherness. What characteristics of collaboration emerged in the data? Evidences of community and collaboration are often expressed in the language people use to describe their involvement. For example, the use of pronouns such as “we” and “us” in the context of conversations regarding the elder selection process would be positive indicators of feelings of collaboration in the data.

Just as there are convergences in the data indicative of emerging themes, there are instances of divergence, or contradiction, in themes. Sensing refers to these instances as “slippage.” Slippage asks “What is not congruent in the data?” Slippages indicate different themes in the data that run counter to a primary theme(s). Slippages are not necessarily bad. In fact, the existence of slippage affirms and “helps clarify the limits and meaning of the primary patterns.” For this project, slippage can be expected due to the large numbers of individuals being engaged in the process. With the “outside” group

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22 Ibid., 197.
23 Beyond the nomenclature of the narrative patterns themselves, I hoped to see behaviors and attitudes consistent with concrete expressions of each of these patterns as highlighted in chapter 2. I was curious to note, for example, the emergence of patterns reflective of the negative and positive features of cruciform love and how these conversations related to elder selection.
24 Sensing, Research, 200.
25 Ibid.
engaging as many as five hundred congregants, alternative themes were expressed as anticipated.

Silences were also anticipated and noticed in the data. Silences are often “self-evident but are left unsaid.” They represent blank spots in the data set where there was anticipation of activity. These “gaps in the story” can be difficult to spot, but are meaningful for interpretation. Silences may also be indicative of tacit rules, social norms, or power plays employed to intimidate or suppress opposing views. Because this project involves the selection of leaders in a volunteer environment, where the dynamics of relationship are very important, the search for silences was important for data interpretation and analysis.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to engage other constituencies at Monterey in the elder selection process. In order to accomplish this goal, I attempted to take on a self-giving posture in order to engage others in the elder selection process. I engaged teachers in a training workshop to prepare them for the lesson series. I produced five lessons presented for the Bible class ministry that encouraged members to participate in thoughtful reflection and conversation on cruciformity as a means to inform the characteristics of elder nominees. I engaged elders, nominees, and their spouses in a time of reflection on key elements of cruciformity, and as a member of the process team I encouraged the implementation of discernment phase tools and other steps designed to foster greater congregational involvement in the process. The qualitative evaluation

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26 Ibid., 201.
methods I employed provided insight and illumination concerning the attitudes and dispositions of the congregation regarding their perceived involvement in the process of selecting elders.
CHAPTER IV
RESPONSES AND RESULTS

The elder selection process implemented for this project included a series of five Bible class lessons, discernment phase tools, and other steps intended to foster greater levels of participation among members of the Monterey Church. The project sought to gather field data and specific responses from Bible classes, elders, elder nominees and their spouses, and the elder selection process team in order to discover the perceived level of collaboration taking place during the course of the elder selection process. In the previous chapter, I described a qualitative research approach that focused on interaction and participation among key constituent groups to seek prevalent attitudes about the selection process.

Prior to the beginning of the project, I collaborated with the process team and suggested the inclusion of the Bible class lesson series and the mentoring relationships portion of the discernment phase as helpful tools to seek greater participation in the process. The process team agreed and included these elements in their final submission of the process timeline to the elders. The addition of the Bible class series heightened the importance of Monterey teachers in the process, and the mentoring relationships represented a new method of engagement for elders, elder nominees, and their spouses in the discernment phase of the process.
In order to develop a thick description of the results of the project, I employed three different angles of interpretation: a) field notes, which represented my view as a participant researcher, b) an open-ended questionnaire, which sought responses from the Bible classes, elders, elder nominees and their spouses, and c) a group interview session with the process team in order to capture a perspective from inside the process. This chapter describes the responses and results following an analysis of the data and then brings each angle of interpretation into conversation with each other in order to determine the perceived level of collaboration fostered by the project.

Description of Results

“How would you say the elder selection process involved you?” This question stood at the heart of my data collection protocol and served as an effective way to frame the data for this project. This query served as a common element and key point of reflection for each of the evaluative components—the questionnaire to Bible classes, the online questionnaire, and as part of the group interview with the process team—employed during the course of the project. As I explored the field note data for the teacher training event and the process as a whole, this question served as an important filter for the data received.

Twyla Tharp defines collaboration as “people working together—sometimes by choice, sometimes not.”¹ With this idea in mind, my efforts to determine the level of collaboration at Monterey focused in large part on the responses to the question above. Also, I considered other questions: How do members describe their involvement in the

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¹ Twyla Tharp, *The Collaborative Habit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 4. In a church context, it is assumed collaboration takes place by choice.
process? In what sense do they believe they are “working together” with leadership, or as a group, toward the selection of elders? What behaviors consistent with a spirit of collaboration were expressed in the data? In what ways did the Bible lessons shape the way members understood the character traits of an elder? As I recorded and coded the questionnaire data and field notes according to the prescribed protocols for the project, these questions helped guide my thinking.

Bible Class Questionnaire Data and Themes

A questionnaire was introduced to Bible classes the Sunday following the final lesson in the cruciformity series. Three weeks prior to the scheduled date of the questionnaire, class leaders and their classes were asked to participate. A reminder was sent to class leaders via email the Thursday prior to the scheduled Sunday morning interaction. Instructions were included on the form and in emails, offering a suggested protocol for administering the questionnaire. Class leaders were asked to read it verbatim to the class, record responses from class members, and offer their own impressions on the form.² Eleven of the twelve participating Bible classes responded. Following Bible hour, I went to each class, collected the questionnaires, organized and coded the data received, and studied the findings. One class designated a person to record the responses given, and these were delivered to me the next day. Class leaders in two of the eleven classes, of their own initiative, took additional steps to solicit feedback from their class members by offering an alternative method of response to the questionnaire. Class leaders asked members to write down their responses to the questionnaire on a separate piece of paper or note card rather than vocalize their response to the class leader. This shift from the

² See appendix G.
suggested protocol constitutes an important dynamic within the data set for which, in hindsight, I am grateful.

A cursory overview of the data reveals the responses in classes that employed the alternative method received more responses than those that followed the suggested protocol. More than half of the total responses received were given in this format. Furthermore, the anonymous feedback received contained markedly greater detail and diversity. By comparison, the classes that followed the requested protocol returned fewer and less detailed responses. The initiative on the part of the class leaders to solicit individual comments was a positive development because it represented a genuine collaborative attempt by the leaders to capture as much feedback from class members as possible.

Another feature of the data received involves the nature of the responses given. In the nine classes where comments were vocalized and recorded on the questionnaire by the class leader, the responses were brief and involved one, sometimes two, themes or perceived points of connection or involvement. In those classes that adopted the alternative method of data collection, the responses routinely showed two or more themes or perceived points of connection. This statistic suggests that class members were more comfortable providing feedback in an anonymous format. For example, one class member responded to the question “How would you say the elder selection process involved you?” by saying “we got to directly nominate people.” The alternative method produced a comment that read: “We were informed fully regarding the process and admonished to participate in the nominations. All in all, a thorough and satisfactory

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3 Forty-three responses were received from nine classes following protocol. Forty-eight responses were received from two classes who sought anonymous feedback from individual members.
process.” These differences in data do not invalidate any of the responses; however, it is clear the format of data collection in the classroom shaped the quality of data received.

The most prevalent theme that emerged from the questionnaire data was a positive sense of participation in the process as a whole. Generic comments about the process describing it as “good,” or “was well done,” or “I liked the process” flowed throughout the data set, pointing to a positive attitude about the process and the participants’ involvement in it. In some instances, the positive comment was followed by a reason, or reasons, why the class members felt as they did. Comments such as, “We like the process; it was different from previous selections” and “Unique approach—the process went above and beyond a checklist approach” were frequent—particularly within the classes where individual responses were requested.

As expected, nomination submittal was often noted as a means of personal and communal involvement. It is important to note the submission of nomination forms was the only tangible element whereby the congregation provided intentional, concrete input in the process. The data reflect an appreciation by participants for not only the ability to submit names but also the opportunity to record reasons that the specific person was mentioned. There were also instances of member responses showing their appreciation for multiple methods to submit nomination forms.\(^4\) Availability of nomination forms and deliberate methods of data retrieval (alternative ways of submitting nomination forms) were considered a positive act of involvement on the part of church members. Language in the data such as “Appreciated the letter; qualities made you think why you were nominating them” and “I submitted nominations online and thank you for my ability for

\(^4\) Nomination forms were sent by mail, available at the Welcome Center, and an email providing a link to an online form was also sent to each email address in the member directory.
input” are responses that suggest the additional avenues for feedback were helpful and provided in a manner convenient for church members. This method reinforced collaborative attitudes because the means to participate—in this case, the ability to submit forms—was amended to encourage participation.

The introduction and exploration through the Bible class lessons emerged as another important theme in the data. For Bible classes, the five lessons delivered over the course of five consecutive Sunday morning class sessions were considered an additional point of engagement in the process. Instances where specific lesson content was mentioned (i.e., key words such as “cruciformity” or texts paradigmatic to the series such as Phil 2:6-11) were rare, yet the lessons as a whole were considered beneficial. One class member captured the essence of these comments when he wrote “With the lessons, I feel I was very much involved; I appreciated them.” Some responses pointed to the efficacy of the lesson material for personal reflection. “The material made me reflect on me and my faith” was a comment written on a note card. I had hoped to see comments that pointed to primary themes in the lessons, but these were largely missing. Two responses used the word “checklist,” an important topic of discussion in lesson 1. Some of the language connected with the comments on lessons could reflect slippage, but this was difficult to determine.

Prayer was another theme that emerged in portions of the data set. Prior to the beginning of the project, the elders had announced to the congregation a selection process would be implemented. As part of the announcement to the congregation, the elders asked the church to pray both for the process and for the men who would be selected to

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5 The underlining drew me to this response.
6 See appendix K.
lead the congregation. Clearly, based on the collected data, many in the church responded to this request and considered prayer as a means of participation in the process of elder selection.

One other theme that emerged from the data in response to the Bible class questionnaire was the repeated use of personal pronouns such as “we” and “us” employed to describe involvement in the process. This language was common—more so in classes where responses were vocalized—and, as noted in the previous chapter, is reflective of a sense of community, or involvement, in a particular process or context. Given Bible classes represent a primary point of connection at Monterey, this expected development is worth noting because it was unclear in some instances whether the “we” referred to the Bible class or to Monterey as a whole.

Online Questionnaire Data and Themes

Following the “Count the Cost” session, an email containing a link to the online questionnaire was sent to seventeen elders, elder nominees, and their spouses as participants in the session. The “Count the Cost” session was the final step in the discernment phase of the process, so it represented a turning point for nominees and their spouses. It also served as the final event concluding the mentoring relationships phase. The session began at 6:00 p.m. on a Sunday evening, and all current elders, elder nominees and their spouses were in attendance. The protocol for the event was adjusted slightly by the process team due to time considerations and reflected similar content to the event held during the previous elder selection process.7

7 See appendix M.
Following the “Count the Cost” session, nominees understood their responsibility was to communicate to the elders if they would be willing to have their names made public. The data received from the online questionnaire were acquired at an important juncture in the process. Similar to the questionnaire posed to Bible classes, the online questionnaire asked the same question in order to discover feelings and attitudes prevalent in this constituent group. The online format was not as well-received as hoped with only nine participants responding to the questionnaire, but the anonymity it afforded respondents yielded data similar in style and content from classes that solicited individual responses as noted above. The similarity of the responses represents an important point of convergence, affirming the value of anonymous responses for data retrieval in this context.

The nature of the responses was more personalized with two or more points of connection to the process cited by each respondent. Feedback ranged from answers such as “as both a member submitting names for consideration and as a prospective elder” to those more detailed and reflective, such as:

“I felt very involved from beginning to end. I was given the opportunity to pray for the process, we had class that focused on the cruciform life which I found spiritually rewarding and was given the opportunity to nominate potential elders. Both men I nominated were chosen. Overall, it was an experience that made me feel very involved, beginning to end.”

“The “Cruciform Life” Sunday Bible class lessons led me to consider the possibility of saying “yes” when asked to serve as an elder.”

Nomination submission was a theme prevalent in the data. This prevalence was somewhat surprising, given that the group consisted of elders and elder nominees, but is a positive indicator of collaboration. The elders shared in the same work of nomination as those in Bible classes. Methods of communication used to describe this theme varied
from a simple acknowledgement of the “opportunity” to “submit names,” to responses connected with aspects of the “Count the Cost” session. One person felt the capacity to “see” other nominees was important.

The lesson materials emerged as a theme in new ways within this data set. References to “cruciform life” and other comments, such as the ones listed above, expressed the efficacy of the content for personal spiritual reflection both as a nominee and as a participant in the process. While description of the lessons was somewhat less generic, the data did not point to specific content within the lessons themselves. It should be noted the “Count the Cost” session included a segment on cruciformity, which may have shaped responses.

Given the make-up of the constituent group asked to respond to the questionnaire, I expected to see data reflective of involvement in specific steps of the process for nominees and their spouses. These data were noticeably absent. There were no references to the process team/elder nominee interviews or data regarding the mentoring relationships phase. There was mention of participation in the “Count the Cost” session as a presenter but not as a regular participant in attendance.

Process Team Group Interview Data and Themes

The process team interview represented the final step in my evaluation and data retrieval efforts for this project. Five of the seven members of the process team agreed to meet on the Sunday afternoon following ordination of four new elders in the Monterey Church earlier in the day. The meeting began promptly at 2:00 p.m., and the chair turned over the meeting to me as the interviewer/researcher for this conversation. The process
team group interview questionnaire consisted of two queries. Because this group represented the “inside” angle of interpretation, I was excited about this conversation and interested to hear their perspective.

“How would you say the elder selection process involved you?” was the first question posed and the group entered into considerable discussion. The members offered comments from a standpoint in relation to their role in the church or with the process team. For example, the chair understood his involvement in the process primarily from his leadership role on the process team but also noted administrative aspects of the role as relevant. Another member of the team—a minister—believed he was more involved in this process than any other. Members of the committee expressed positive feedback concerning their involvement in the process as a whole. Their positive feedback regarding the process is to be expected, given the good work the team invested in its formulation.

The lesson material was cited as an important theme and significant to their perceived sense of involvement; however, the group not only mentioned the lessons in a general sense, but also identified significant themes and principles in the material important to the selection of elders. One member reflected this perspective by asking of elders: “What do these people need to be like?” In a similar way, another commented that process was a “good experience.” Another believed the “preaching and teaching respectively [were good] and [method for explaining] what do we mean and where do we start talking about the role of an elder.” Another said the materials “Moved away from

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8 See appendix H.
9 This is significant given the minister has served in churches for thirty years.
checklist to personhood.” These comments pointed to important principles wrapped into the material of lesson 1 and the series in general.

The conversation began to turn toward feedback about the process itself rather than the perceptions of collaboration and involvement from the team members within it. This feedback was important, but mirrored earlier responses in the interview. At this point it was clearly time to move to the next question: “Given your role on the process team, how would you assess the effectiveness of the process to engage other groups?” There was considerable silence following the reading of the question. I let the question rest for a few seconds more. One member asked if the question related specifically to elders. Unwilling to lead them, I asked the question again. This time the team understood the substance of the query and began to respond with observations pertaining to engagement of the process with the Bible classes and the lesson materials. One member thought that the lessons invited “more dialogue” and “Bible class conversations resulted in small group conversations.” This comment noted the significance of conversation in other contexts as an important outcome consistent with a collaborative spirit. The sentiment was affirmed when the committee chair said “personal and family level engagement meant increased conversations at the dinner table; talking about qualities helps make the decision easier.” This observation may be a reflection on the mentoring relationships portion of the process involving elders, elder nominees, and their spouses, though it is difficult to discern.

Mentoring relationships were referred to only twice during the group interview. Both instances described positive feedback regarding its effectiveness. No other conversation on this portion of the process took place. The absence of additional data
regarding mentoring relationships is not surprising because only one process team member present at the time of the interview participated in the mentoring relationship phase.

Bible teachers were mentioned for the first time as the group considered how other constituent groups were involved in the process. Specifically, it was noted that “some back-up teachers were ill-equipped to pick up the slack” when primary teachers needed a substitute. As the group began to comment on that facet of the process, it was clear the group thought the teacher training seminar was not as effective as it could have been. This sentiment was reinforced when another in the group said some teachers who attended the training struggled to capture fully the new theological direction of the material and its connection to elder selection. Because I was the person who conducted the seminar, I found my own feelings of inadequacy and anxiety start to build as the comment was affirmed by another member of the team.

The conversation thread continued and specific reasons for concern over the teacher seminar emerged. I noted an observation from one committee member who believed lesson terminology was an issue because the “language and terms represented a challenge for some teachers.” At this point, I was reminded of a request I had received following the teacher training event from a member of the adult education ministry. He had asked if I would provide a simple teaching outline for teachers as a supplement for each lesson in the series. I had agreed and provided a weekly submittal containing

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10 This comment points to the teacher training seminar held prior to the beginning of the Bible lesson series.
11 For my part, I recognized what was happening and quickly moved to refocus my attention to what was being said.
commentary and a suggested outline to follow. I asked the team if they believed these additional materials were helpful. Group response was mixed. Specific data on the effectiveness of the outlines was not available.

The conversation moved to lesson content once again—specifically the new approach for thinking about elder selection described in the lessons. There was disagreement in the group concerning its efficacy as one person thought the way the lessons were framed “was effective, though [I am] not sure as many captured the material as could have,” to which another member quickly responded, “Many did! And it caused them to rethink elder nominations.” Dialogue was lively, and the group interacted and responded in a positive and mutually respectful manner.

Concern was raised regarding the way the process engaged the youth in the congregation. The group agreed there were “challenges with ways to engage and connect children and youth” in the process. When two others in the group affirmed this concern, there was a brief period of conversation similar to a brain-storming session on how future elder selection processes could engage youth and children. The segment concluded with a commitment to discuss this issue prior to the next selection process. The group interview ended, and I expressed my deep appreciation to the process team for their time and thoughtful feedback.

Field Notes Data and Themes

Personal field notes were recorded throughout the course of the project. For consistency, I kept in mind my primary question, “How would you say the elder selection process involved you?” in order to test for feelings and attitudes of collaboration among

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12 See appendix L.
constituent groups. In my attempts to gather meaningful field data, I used the field note worksheet described in chapter 3 when it was clear I was entering into a conversation or meeting specific to the elder selection process. On those occasions when I did not have a worksheet available, I discovered that a handheld electronic device (such as an iPad) proved useful because I was able to record my observations or conversations immediately on the device and then transfer that information to a file at a later time. Furthermore, I was careful to note the purpose of the meeting, or event, in order to qualify the data as significant to project objectives. After careful reflection on the field note data compiled at the end of the process, I saw three significant blocks of information emerge: a) data related to the teacher training seminar, b) data from an elders meeting where nomination results were discerned, and c) miscellaneous notes retrieved throughout the process reflective of collaboration and involvement among constituent groups.

The teacher training seminar was held August 19, 2012, at 1:30 p.m. in the Fireside Room. Teachers registered when they arrived and received a three-ring binder containing the lesson materials for the “Elders and the Cruciform Life” study. They also received other resources pertaining to the study that bracketed the five-week special series. Refreshments were served. Teachers sat at round tables and were accompanied by members of the process team. All but two of the twenty teachers and co-teachers selected by class leaders in the twelve adult Bible classes attended. This level of participation was high and represented an early indicator of interest and commitment from the teachers.

The seminar opened with prayer and words of appreciation. I took special care to communicate to teachers the importance of their ministry for the elder selection process and expressed my appreciation for their participation. I began my presentation by briefly
introducing the lesson series on “The Lord’s Prayer” that bracketed the special lesson series on cruciformity. I then began my presentation of the lesson series entitled “Elders and the Cruciform Life.” A brief explanation of the rationale for the series and an overview of each unit were offered. Following the conclusion of my presentation, I opened the floor for questions. No questions were posed. At the time, I did not consider the absence of questions unusual as it was consistent with previous teacher training sessions. I was, however, concerned by the lack of interaction given the content of the presentation. The trajectory of the series challenged established traditional theological norms for elder selection. Surely, I thought, the lesson content would raise questions within the teacher pool. Field note data related to teachers and the material following the close of the teacher training event showed the absence of questions represented a significant silence.

Over the next two weeks, instances of teacher interaction with classes and with process team members revealed strong feelings about the material. Mostly positive, teachers responded favorably, embracing the material and communicating it effectively to their classes. On one occasion, a teacher responded to the first lesson of the cruciformity series by providing small crosses for class members as a way of illustrating the central theme of the lesson. Another teacher told me he was “skeptical about the direction of the series” because he did not know how the class would respond but “was impressed by the material and the approach and the way it invites conversation in the class.”

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13 Monterey’s adult education ministry operates within a quarter system where topics of study are limited to 11-12 weeks four times a year. In this instance, the timing of the elder selection process, and the placement of the cruciformity series within it, meant Lesson 1 of the series on the Lord’s Prayer would begin the quarter and then the five lessons on cruciformity would immediately follow. Once these lessons concluded, teachers would take up the Lord’s Prayer series again for the remainder of the teaching quarter. The timing was not ideal, but workable.
There were instances of resistance as well. The following week I learned a teacher had voiced concern about the trajectory of the lesson material and the handling of the Titus and 1 Timothy texts. This teacher later approached me about the material in a spirit of love and appreciation. We discussed how the texts in question related to the lesson series. The additional thoughts and perspective I was able to provide satisfied the teacher’s concerns. Another teacher stated he believed the curriculum “was too difficult for class members to grasp” and, prior to the second lesson in the series, chose to step away from the teaching role in the class for the remainder of the quarter. These episodes reinforced my earlier observation that the teacher training event moved too quickly and lacked sufficient interaction to address possible issues.

The elders meeting held October 10, 2012, included conversation critical to the elder selection process and proved informative for the purposes of this project. At this meeting, the nomination forms submitted by the congregation had been tallied and processed by the designated elder selection process subcommittee. The agenda for this meeting, following the customary time of prayer for congregational needs, was to discuss the results of the nominations and identify names as potential elder nominees.

The chair of the elders turned over leadership of the meeting to the process team chair. A handout was distributed to the group (consisting of all nine elders and three full-time ministry staff) listing the names of the men nominated by the congregation. One hundred ninety-six nomination forms were received—a significant increase—and seventy-nine names were nominated. Of these, fifteen names received more nominations than the others and some of the character traits listed on the nomination

14 I stepped in to teach the remainder of the classes on cruciformity.
15 Nominations received were 52% higher than the previous process; records showed sixty-nine names were nominated in 2006.
forms were provided next to each name. In a significant sign of collaboration, the process team chair announced each name and opened the floor for discussion about each nominee. The group was encouraged to give information about why they believed the potential nominee should or should not be considered for the role. The resulting conversation was interesting as comments pertinent to each nominee were made and noted by the process team chair. Ministers and elders alike exchanged comments and perspectives on each candidate and his capacity to serve as an elder. When the conversation came to an end, the elders went into executive session and identified eight names.\footnote{The stated objective of the conversation was to seek eight nominees to engage in the remainder of the process. Rationale given for this particular number was the belief that the addition of too many new elders might produce an unwanted shift in leadership style or direction.}

Throughout the project, I listened carefully for comments or signs of collaboration pertaining to the elder selection process. During the lesson series there were few indicators of how the lessons were being received. Teachers provided information when I interacted with them; I listened for feelings and attitudes about their experiences. On one occasion, a teacher—who is also an elder—expressed his difficulty preparing for lesson 4 in the series because of his concern for the way the class would potentially evaluate his service as an elder. On another occasion, one of the elder nominees approached me and said he “appreciated the interaction with the elder couple”—a comment referring to the mentoring relationships phase. Later that week, the spouse of this elder approached me and communicated the same sentiment. The process team chair communicated concern about the number of nominations received as of October 2. At the time, roughly fifty nominations had been submitted. Given the final outcome, it seemed participants were
waiting for the lesson and sermon series to conclude before submitting forms, a positive indicator of involvement and commitment to the requested format. On another occasion, changes in the process itself took place that moved in the direction of greater involvement than was first planned. These changes were seen in the initial elder nominee interviews. Originally, these were to be conducted by the elders on the process team. Instead, the entire process team participated. At the October 10 elders meeting, where nominees were determined, ministry staff was invited to attend and provide feedback. Overall, the miscellaneous field notes were helpful and provided additional data points supporting established themes.

Themes of Collaboration

By bringing the three angles of interpretation into conversation with each other, points of convergence emerged. The most consistent theme throughout the process was the overarching perception of involvement in the process as a whole. With minimal exception in the Bible class questionnaire data, it was clear that participants in all facets of the process felt involved in some way. These feelings of collaboration expressed themselves in diverse ways, but each pointed to a spirit of engagement and participation in the action of selecting new elders for the congregation. Data showed the constituent groups were comfortable and appreciative of their involvement and comfortable with the process as it was outlined by leadership. The absence of negative data would be a concern were it not for the retrieval of anonymous data from the outsider group on two occasions. As evidenced by the content of data from the insider group, it is logical to assume negative concerns would have been voiced in that context.
With minimal exceptions the data suggest the lesson series precipitated a sense of involvement, encouraged discussion, and contributed to the process as a whole. Lesson content seemed a secondary concern, but was a critical factor in the initiation of dialogue regarding elder character traits. All three angles reinforced this disposition. Data from teachers, class participants, and the process team revealed significant conversation related to the content and the efficacy of the lesson material for the process.

Prayer constituted another point of convergence. Though absent from field data, the other angles produced data that pointed to the importance of prayer as a means of involvement and support of the elder selection process. The importance of prayer was somewhat surprising given it was not a stated element of the process; however, it serves as testament to the spiritual disposition of the church and its desire for God to work and move in the process of elder selection.

Silences were present during the course of the project. In other words, there were moments when themes were expected but did not emerge. Some were clearly identified, as discussed above in connection to the teacher training seminar. Others remained. The absence of mentoring relationship data in the online questionnaire stands as significant. How did elder nominees and their spouses, on the whole, feel about this portion of the process? How did the established elders who served as mentors feel about it? These questions are largely unanswered.

Another silence involves the final phase of the elder selection process. Nominees were placed before the congregation and the church was asked to pray and fast. If any member had concerns about one of the nominees presented as a potential elder, those were to be communicated to the elders by a designated date and time. The following
Sunday, all four names were affirmed in a special ceremony conducted at both morning services. As part of the affirmation, the church was asked to respond with an “amen” to a statement affirming the new elders to the role. The “amen” was given; however, because data retrieval from the outsider group took place prior to the conclusion of the process, there are no data to discern how the final steps of the process were received. Process team data were silent on this issue, as expected.

The triangulation of the data suggests some significant convergences in the process. The process succeeded in its objective to bring other constituent groups into the elder selection process at Monterey, as evidenced by the attitudes and feelings expressed and the significantly higher number of nomination forms received. There remain, however, more opportunities for greater involvement in future processes. Even though some of the components of the process did not function as planned, it seems clear the church benefitted from the experience. The final chapter offers some concluding thoughts and reflection on the project and its implications for future elder selection processes.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

In this project thesis, I sought to address the lack of collaboration among the various constituent groups at Monterey in its selection of elders. I recognized that earlier processes had successfully added elders, yet there existed considerable opportunity for the Monterey church leadership to engage larger segments of the church in the process. The focus of this project addressed this need by engaging Bible classes, teachers, elders, elder nominees, and their spouses in an elder selection process that included new elements of pastoral care and theological reflection. This final chapter provides further consideration of the results of the project by discussing issues related to personal and ministerial learning, the generalizability of the project, issues related to sustainability, and implications for future elder selection processes.

Areas of Personal and Ministerial Learning

This project presented opportunities for my own personal development and growth as a minister in a church context. From the beginning of the project, I witnessed instances of collaboration and openness to greater participation in the process. The extent to which I was accepted as a member of the process team was demonstrated by the elders’ encouraging comments and questions about my research and involvement prior to the beginning of the project. Furthermore, the suggested elements I offered for process
implementation were also well received and incorporated into the process timeline in cooperation with the team.

Observations reflective of the dynamics of the Monterey Church as a system, particularly between church leadership and members, marked a significant point of learning for me. The active participation of the church in the various processes revealed an appreciation of and sense of engagement in the selection of elders. Of those constituent groups responding to the questionnaire, there was clearly a connection between participation and a sense of collaboration. I had assumed collaboration necessarily meant involvement in the final decision to select elders—meaning a vote or affirmation step of some kind whereby the outcome determined who would serve in the role. I believed only tangible input and its acceptance and recognition as valid and valued would constitute collaboration. What I discovered was that church members considered themselves in collaboration with leadership for the selection of elders because of leadership’s open request for prayer, engagement in Bible study, and request for nominees with comments supporting those nominations. In other words, the project succeeded above previous efforts in large part because of the multiple ways church members could actively invest themselves in various aspects of the selection process, not necessarily because of the nature, or means, of involvement. Multiple points of interaction in the process encouraged greater participation and enhanced feelings of collaboration. This dynamic caused me to rethink my own understanding and definition of collaboration.

While there is evidence of trust between church members and leadership, it is also apparent to me that Monterey is more inclined to provide genuine feedback when offered
the opportunity to do so anonymously. The significance of this dynamic was demonstrated by the character of the data received. While the reasons such hesitancy on the part of membership to provide feedback publicly is unclear, this condition provides an important perspective for my own methods of ministry evaluation. The collection of high quality data for reflection on the ministries or perspectives from the ecclesial community at Monterey is enhanced when opportunities for anonymous feedback are provided.

I learned the importance of my own involvement and significance for the life of the church as a minister in an associate role. Sometimes ministers in the “second chair” role of an associate minister can succumb to feelings of insignificance or discouragement because their role in the life of the church often takes place less publicly than other roles in professional ministry. This dynamic can foster feelings of burnout on one extreme or issues of lethargy on the other because of feelings of ineffectiveness in the church context. The Bible lessons emerged, however, as an important point of conversation and interaction in the process. Though the specific principles may not have resonated with the church as thoroughly as hoped, the lessons did accomplish an important goal: they invited members to consider carefully the elder candidates and the characteristics of those elder candidates in fresh ways. This positive development is tempered by the challenges connected with the teacher training seminar, in which my performance and savvy to discern the reaction of teachers to the new material was not as sharp as it should have been.

**Issues of Reliability**

In order to discern the generalizability of the project for other contexts, it is important to first note that the Monterey Church, during the previous elder selection
process, had employed a modified version of Siburt’s elder selection “process map” as a model for elder selection.¹ This history is significant because it was Siburt’s model that provided the foundation for the inclusion of other elements—and subsequent constituent group participation—in the elder selection process which subsequently contributed to the success of the project. If the processes described in this project had been attempted without this condition, the radical shift in both process and lesson content might have proved to be too dramatic for participants to accept. For churches that adhere to traditional methods of elder selection in our heritage of Churches of Christ, introduction of Siburt’s process map or some other similar, more expansive model for elder selection will need to be implemented.

This condition points to a second and equally important factor: the disposition of the Monterey Church as a “pioneering” and “outwardly-focused” community.² Monterey was predisposed to the attempt to invite new thinking on existing theological positions concerning the selection of elders and open to new ways of engaging in a process that addressed various aspects of church life. This condition exists because of its history of receptivity to new ministry endeavors and alternative theological views. Furthermore, the Monterey Church, while firmly believing itself to be part of the Churches of Christ, is open to new ways of engaging in ministry that may run counter to established traditional norms.

It should be noted that the chosen elements to encourage collaboration were tailored to Monterey’s specific ecclesial structure. As mentioned earlier, Bible classes represent a primary point of connection for fellowship, teaching, and ministry. This

¹ See appendix B.
² See previous discussion, pp. 4-6.
condition afforded the opportunity for engagement with a large and highly connected constituent group of members at Monterey. Other churches may see similar types of connecting points in small group ministry or some other area of ministry praxis, in which case the lesson materials would require adjustment to those specific contexts.

Specific to the process format itself, there are some things that must be considered if a replication of this process is undertaken. First, there is the issue of when to present the questionnaire to the Bible classes and other constituent groups. This project presented questionnaires to the outsider group at two distinct points in the process. The data received were substantial and significant for the process. In hindsight, I wonder how the responses would have been different had the questionnaire been submitted for feedback following the conclusion of the elder selection process? Doing so would certainly have provided respondents the opportunity to reflect on the process in its entirety rather than at certain junctures. Second, given the high quality of the data from the anonymous responses to the questionnaire, future processes would benefit by employing greater opportunities for the church to respond in such fashion.

As I look back on the project, the need for a more robust engagement with teachers is evident. The nature of the lesson content, the alternative approach for elder traits, and the importance of the role of the teacher to communicate these new themes to the classes necessitated greater engagement with this group. While lessons and lesson outlines communicated the content effectively, and understanding that the classes responded positively to the material, the considerable absence of concrete evidence in the data specific to lesson themes suggests teachers would have benefitted from additional interaction.
The implementation of Walling’s “Shepherd Mentoring Relationships”\textsuperscript{3} in the selection process, though marginally mentioned in the data, was well-received by the elders and the process team prior to the beginning of the project. I believe the additional step—modified as it was for the selection process—proved helpful for all involved. It engaged existing elder couples more intentionally in the process, and it provided a forum for elder nominees and spouses to talk privately and honestly about issues important to them regarding the role. Ten days were allotted for this phase from the time current elders were assigned nominee couples to the conclusion of the phase at the “Count the Cost” session. This time frame proved to be too brief. Scheduling difficulties meant roughly half of the pairings had little time for reflection following the initial meeting before the phase ended. I would recommend a minimum of two weeks be scheduled for this portion of the project, affording pairings time to hold initial conversations and then have sufficient time for reflection and possible follow-up. Still, even with these challenges, the conversations during those interactions proved important and meaningful for candidates with one couple, who, as a result of their conversation with an existing elder and spouse during this phase, chose to decline further consideration as an elder nominee. By contrast, another reported his acceptance of the role was largely a result of conversations during this phase.

The methodology for discerning and tallying results of nomination forms represents another point in the selection process that needs attention. After the time period for nomination submissions had closed, nomination forms were tallied by two members of the process team, and the results were presented to the elders as a group for

\textsuperscript{3} See appendix C.
conversation and nominee selection. While the result of their work was successful, and even though this portion of the phase was discussed in a process team meeting, a concrete methodology for disseminating the results of the nominations received was not informed by a pre-established protocol, nor was there interaction with the process team on the final results tallied. In other words, the data received were not engaged by the process team prior to presentation to the elders. This approach exposed the marginal role the process team held once the selection process format was established.

Another instance occurred during the course of the project when resistance to a fully collaborative effort was evident. This took place during the elders meeting when elder nominees were discerned. Following the open discussion on the nominee pool and discussion of the top fifteen nominees, the elders went into executive session, in which the final eight candidates were chosen. This step on the part of leadership represented a move away from collaboration and challenged the themes of cruciform love and power. Furthermore, the conversations and subsequent input from those asked to leave prior to entering into executive session was invalidated. Of what significance for collaboration is it to involve others in this phase of the process if they are not participants in its outcome? While I believe the intent on the part of leadership to include others was honorable, the move to executive session undermined the collaborative effort because participants asked to leave were necessarily excluded from the outcome of the meeting. A more collaborative approach would have been to include the process team and ministry staff in the conversations to their natural conclusions.

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4 This step is in line with Siburt’s map step 5. See appendix B.
5 See discussion, pp. 61-62.
These two instances raise the importance of the connection between cruciformity and collaboration. Cruciformity inspires and informs collaboration by providing the theological motivation critical to genuine engagement with others. The principles of cruciformity remain ethereal if not put into practice in the life of the church. In other words, Christians are motivated toward postures of greater collaboration out of desire to reflect the same qualities as evidenced by Christ at the cross and to engage those postures as evidence of Christian conviction. As discussed in chapter 2, cruciform love (as an example) and the reconciliation intrinsic to this narrative pattern are necessarily inclusive and encourage openness and acceptance across all kinds of boundaries, including barriers of status. Cruciform power invites leaders to consider the benefits of collaboration for different but equally important reasons. When leaders entrust themselves to the congregation by exhibiting qualities of openness and inclusivity, they engender the trust of the congregation. Through these kinds of interactions, relationships are formed and nurtured that bless all involved. Collaboration, then, may properly be understood as an outcome of Christian behavior informed by the tenets of cruciformity. These behaviors, as noted earlier, constitute virtues—cruciform virtues.

Exploration of cruciformity in terms of cruciform virtues opens tremendous possibilities for cruciformity to shape other ministry contexts. Cruciform virtues may shape interaction between ministries in the local church in various ways. Rather than working in competition over limited resources (such as funding or volunteer support) cruciform virtues invite leaders to explore ways of mutual support and collaboration for the sake of the church.
Cruciform virtues are evidenced when believers share in ministry to the community. Too often churches feel an obligation to develop their own ministries to the poor or disenfranchised in the city, often without the expertise or resources to establish efforts that are effective and sustainable. Implementation of cruciform virtues invites churches to consider partnering with other churches or para-church organizations with the expertise to be effective in the community. The normal denominational barriers that often raise insecurities and unwarranted fears are overcome when cruciform virtues of inclusivity and others-centeredness are exercised. These are just two examples; the possibilities are numerous.

**Reflexivity**

The theological significance of cruciformity for collaboration has shaped my view of church life and ministerial leadership by opening my eyes to the barriers that prevent collaboration and greater relationships between the church and its leadership. The study on cruciformity caused me to reconsider how Churches of Christ not only engage in elder selection processes, but also the way leaders plan for these processes. I learned that working with groups for these kinds of efforts, when the normative approach is challenged, can be met with resistance from various elements of the constituent groups involved. I wonder what would have happened had I spent more time raising questions to the process team regarding areas of the process timeline that were unclear or unspoken in process team meetings. The absence of these conversations meant some questions were left unanswered or were handled outside the process team meeting context.
I also felt I needed to spend more time engaging with the process team chair. He clearly cared deeply for the process and its outcomes, yet there were parts of the process that seemed either only marginally discussed or it was unclear (at least to me) how things would proceed. I recognize that part of this challenge may be my own anxieties, insecurities, and desires for a successful process.

Development, implementation, and teaching the lesson materials were richly rewarding. In hindsight, it was clear the teacher training seminar was not as effective as I had hoped, but the results of the seminar did not discourage my view of the value of the materials. The study on cruciformity shaped my view of the values that inform genuine Christian faith. In other words, through exploration of a new way to think about the character traits of an elder, the study invited personal reflection on what it means to be authentically Christian and raised a keen awareness when behaviors counter to those traits were on display within many of us.

From the beginning of this project, I sought to take the role of a servant, providing resources and insight helpful to the process team and given for their consideration in the formation and implementation of an elder selection process for Monterey. My challenge as a member of the team was to discern how best to interact with the team without seeming anxious or overbearing. In retrospect, I may have been too cautious and overly concerned about appearing anxious rather than offering direction and feedback that would have encouraged a more prominent and helpful role for the team.

**Future Questions**

The conclusion of the process and the subsequent outcomes allowed several questions to emerge for future consideration. I wonder how effective the content of the
material was for shaping the considerations of the church in its selection of elder nominees. Based on the data, it was clear that Monterey members spent more time in their reflection on possible nominees, but did members make the connection between the tenets of cruciformity and the qualities of nominees?

The interaction between the process team and the elders as a whole became an interesting point of reflection. In hindsight, the process team would have benefitted from more meetings as a team and greater engagement with the elders at points during the process. I do not believe the lack of additional interaction hindered the process from reaching its desired outcomes, but I do believe the sense of collaboration, and the areas mentioned earlier with regard to protocol, would have been granted the opportunity for further consideration.

The process team would have been enhanced with the addition of more lay members. While it is commendable that a female member of the congregation and one of two members outside the leadership structure were actively participating on the team, I wonder how the group would have been enhanced if additional members, perhaps some from the education ministry or Bible class ministry, had been involved on the process team. I do not deny the challenges that exist when more members are added to teams for the exploration and implementation of processes in a church setting; however, the benefits of greater participation and collaboration would be well worth the additional time and energy inherent to the task.

**Sustainability**

Given the responses from constituent groups in the process, I am confident the long term prospects for this project for Monterey are positive. The lesson material and the
various elements employed in the elder selection process were accepted by the elders as valid and helpful elements important for the process. Responses from members showed their sense of involvement and their participation in the process were meaningful to them. Furthermore, the success of the process to add four additional elders nominated by the congregation and the positive responses received from nominees reinforce the value of collaboration and mutual engagement in the process as an appropriate and beneficial means for future elder selection processes at Monterey.

Conclusion

The project sought to encourage greater collaboration among constituent groups at Monterey in their selection of elders. Elders, elder nominees and their spouses, teachers, and Bible classes were engaged in an intentional process in which elements were introduced to facilitate discussion, interaction, and reflection. Based on the feelings and attitudes expressed in the data, the project succeeded in its objective to foster greater collaboration among the members of the Monterey Church. Feelings of collaboration were clearly found among leadership and lay members alike. Given the dynamics of the project and my own estimation of possible outcomes to the project, I discovered new ways of understanding the substance of collaboration in my own church context and was encouraged by the effectiveness of the church to work together toward a common outcome.
WORKS CITED


As Christians, the foundation for all our hopes and the source of power for all our actions is the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14). Based on this belief in the centrality of Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, the Monterey congregation has developed a list of values that motivate us as we serve Christ and a Vision Statement that describes what we want to be as we glorify God.

Our Vision Statement

**Projecting Christ** through

**Enthusiastic Worship** in an

**Atmosphere of Love** by

**Caring For Others** and

**Equipping Saints** To Serve God

PROJECTING CHRIST THROUGH...

- We believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth; Jesus Christ, His Son, the Living Word; and the Holy Spirit, our guide and comforter.
- We believe Scripture to be the living, written word of God, useful for teaching, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- We believe the church is the visible presence of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the world, called to project to the world the message of reconciliation through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

ENTHUSIASTIC WORSHIP IN AN ...

- We are committed to lives of Spirit-filled worship that submit to God in both joy and sorrow (John 4:23-24).
- We are committed to corporate worship where all people may participate and be edified (Eph. 5:19; Rom. 12:6-7).
- We are committed to worship that integrates Christ into every aspect of our lives (Rom. 12:1-2).

ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE BY ...

- We are committed to love, accept, and nurture people through all the experiences of their lives (Gal. 5:13-15).
- We are committed to an atmosphere of freedom that embraces all Christian believers, and that welcomes all who seek Christ (Phil. 2:1-2; John 17:20; 1 John 4:1-2).
- We are committed to a loving environment that fosters genuine repentance, confession and forgiveness (James 5:16).

CARING FOR OTHERS AND...

- We are committed to being a church family that takes care of one another (Galatians 6:1-10; James 1:27).
- We are committed to being a visible presence of Christ who serve the needs of all people (Matt. 25:31-46).
- We are committed to serving our community through cooperative efforts that glorify God (Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12; Titus 2:14).

EQUIPPING SAINTS TO SERVE GOD ...

- We are committed to helping all members identify, develop, and use their gifts to the glory of God and for the growth of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16; Rom. 12:3-8).
- We are committed to an atmosphere where members are free to create and develop new ministries (Gal. 5:6).
- We are committed to strengthening members in their daily walk with God by training them in the spiritual disciplines (Eph. 6:18).
## APPENDIX B

### ELDER SELECTION PROCESS MAP

By Charles Siburt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Step</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Who Acts</th>
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| 1. **Decide to Select**—(and Reaffirm?) | - Use an opinion leaders meeting to discern: Select now or not?  
   - Inquire every 3-4 years  
   - If not now, next year?   | Elders—in dialogue with church                                      |
| 2. **Structure the Process**      | - Design process steps  
   - Design process timeline  
   - Show process to church  | Elders and Ministers                                            |
| 3. **Select the Process**         | - Choose 7-12 opinion leaders  
   - Choose mixture of ages, genders, generations, tenures, cultures, etc.  
   - Elders choose or pro-pose names to church  
   - Orient team to behavioral covenant, rules of confidentiality, decision-making, process, etc.   | Elders, Ministers, and Church                         |
| **Administration Team**           |                                                                      |                                               |
| 4. **Teach the Church**           | - Use sermons and classes  
   - Establish behavioral covenant for whole church  
   - Also use small groups or web site resources  
   - Perhaps use guest speakers & teachers  
   - Explain the list of qualities in 1 Timothy and Titus  
   - Teach about Matthew 18 process  | Elders, Ministers, Teachers, Guest Teachers/Preachers |
| 5. **Nominations**                | - Receive nominations from church  
   - Identify upper tier of nominees  
   - Inform elders of upper tier names  
   - Elders discern feasibility of each nominee | Church, Elders, Ministers, Committee |
| 6. **Nominee Self-Examination**   | - Ask upper tier to discern if they are willing to stay in the process  
   - Elders and Ministers provide pastoral care to nominee couples | Nominees and their families  
   - Elders  
   - Ministers  
   - Selection PAT |


| 7. Nominee Orientation | ▪ Elders and wives invite nominees and wives to an orientation meeting  
▪ Inform nominees of elder group covenant (behavioral and process norms and ground rules)  
▪ Negotiate and confirm % of positive responses needed to be selected by the church  
▪ Share concerns and problem-solve together | ▪ Current elders and their wives  
▪ Nominees and their wives |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 8. Nominee Cost Counting | ▪ Prayerfully consider the cost to family and church  
▪ Decide on willingness to continue in process  
▪ Current elders decide whether to continue to serve another term | ▪ Nominees and their families  
▪ Elders  
▪ Ministers  
▪ Selection PAT |
| 9. Candidate Announcement | ▪ Announce all current elders willing to serve another term  
▪ Announce all new candidates willing to serve | ▪ Selection PAT |
| 10. Candidate Information | ▪ Candidates complete information questionnaires  
▪ Make questionnaires available to church  
▪ Candidates group interviewed in congregational meeting  
▪ Arrange interviews with individual candidates if desired | ▪ Selection PAT  
▪ Candidates  
▪ Elders  
▪ Ministers |
| 11. Candidate Examination | ▪ Focus on affirmation, not criticism  
▪ Examine strengths, not attack weaknesses  
▪ Receive any concerns in writing and signed  
▪ Exercise Matthew 18 between concerned parties and specific candidates  
▪ Implement pastoral care from elders for either party when needed  
▪ Ensure good communication between PAT and Elders in problem-solving | ▪ Selection PAT  
▪ Church  
▪ Current Elders  
▪ Ministers |
| 12. Candidate Affirmation (Vote) | ▪ Allow two Sundays to receive response forms from church  
▪ Finalize results  
▪ Inform all candidates of results  
▪ Inform church of results | ▪ Selection PAT  
▪ Church |
| 13. Elder Ordination | ▪ Plan Sunday a.m. worship and ordination service  
▪ Include all previous and new elders  
▪ Administer covenant for both elders and church | ▪ Selection PAT  
▪ Elders  
▪ Ministers  
▪ Church |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use a workshop to do teambuilding</td>
<td>• Training in basic theological perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commit all elders to Elder Covenant</td>
<td>• Training in leadership concepts and skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assimilate new elders into elder</td>
<td>• Training in caring skills</td>
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<td>structure and assignments</td>
<td>• Training in peacemaking and reconciliation skills</td>
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<td>• Training in mentoring and coaching skills</td>
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<td>• Ministers</td>
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<td>• Outside Resource Persons</td>
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APPENDIX C

GUIDELINES FOR SHEPHERD MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

By Aaron Walling

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. During the last week of the discernment process, the shepherding couple will offer to meet again with the nominee and his spouse in an intentional setting should the nominee or his spouse have any final questions that may have arisen over the course of the process. Furthermore, the shepherding couple will refrain from soliciting any final answer from the nominee at this time.
7. At the final session, I will inform nominees of the process by which they express to us their decision. Specifically, each will be contacted by his mentoring shepherd within two days, at which point he will share his discerned decision.

8. Each shepherd will contact his nominee(s) by a designated date.
APPENDIX D

ELDER SELECTION PROCESS TIMELINE

Sunday, August 19th, 2012
- Teacher Training Seminar conducted 1:30pm, Fireside Rm.

Sunday, August 26th, 2012

Sunday, September 9th, 2012
- Elder Selection Process Begins
  - Sermon on Leadership
  - Bible Class Lesson #1 – “A Cruciform Life”

Sunday, September 16th, 2012
- Sermon on Leadership
  - Bible Class Lesson #2 – “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith”

Thursday, September 20th, 2012
- Letter sent to congregation with Nomination Form

Sunday, September 23rd, 2012
- Nomination Forms made available at Welcome Center
  - Bible Class Lesson #3 – “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love”

Sunday, September 30th, 2012
- Bible Class Lesson #4 – “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power”

Sunday, October 7th, 2012
- Bible Class Lesson #5 - “Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope”
  - Nomination Forms Due; Tallied by Process Team chair and member.

Wednesday, October 10th, 2012, Discernment Phase Begins.
- Nominees determined by the Elders and contacted by Process Team elders (Elder Team) prior to October 14th to notify them of nomination.

Sunday, October 14th, 2012
- Bible Classes respond to questionnaire.
- Process Team interviews with nominees take place.
- October 17th – Elder Team discusses interview results with Elders. Decisions made about finalists. Mentoring Elder Couple assignments to final nominees determined.
- Mentoring Relationships begin.
- October 24th – Elders continue discussions, reports from mentors, respond to nominee questions/concerns as needed.

Sunday, October 28th, 2012 “Count the Cost” Session, 6:00pm, Rm. 251.
- Following “Count the Cost” session, nominees notify their Mentoring Elder Couple of their choice to accept or decline affirmation no later than Wednesday, October 31st.
- Online Questionnaire sent via email link to Elders, Elder nominees, and their spouses.

Sunday, November 4th, 2012
- Elder Nominees presented to the congregation
- Email sent to congregation Tuesday, November 6th, with biographical information of elder nominees and their families.
- Week of Fasting and Prayer begins
- Concerns from the congregation regarding nominees must be submitted in writing no later than Wednesday, November 7th.

Sunday, November 11th, 2012
- Elder Nominees affirmed
- Process Team Group Interview conducted 2pm, Rm. 278.
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Elder Selection: Engaging the Monterey Church of Christ in a Collaborative Elder Selection Process

Principle Investigator: Benjamin D. Pickett
Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors: Tim Sensing
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University
Fred Aquino
Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

Introduction: I understand that as a member of the Process Team for elder selection at Monterey, I have been asked to participate in a collaborative elder selection process.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to engage other constituencies at Monterey in the elder selection process. The Process Team, formed prior to the beginning of the project, is tasked with the development and implementation of the elder selection process. By incorporating other constituent groups through the use of biblical instruction, special sessions, and group discussions, the process of nomination, orientation, and affirmation of elder nominees will be enhanced.

Procedures: The Process Team will submit a formalized process for elder selection at Monterey. For this project, specific action steps in the elder selection process will be evaluated. Teachers will participate in a Teacher Training Workshop August 19th, 2012 where curriculum specific to elder selection will be introduced and their participation as presenters of this material will be emphasized. Bible Class lessons on specific to elder selection will begin September 9th, 2012 and end October 7th, 2012. Following this series, Bible classes, teachers, and Bible class leaders, will be asked to participate in an open-ended questionnaire. Following nomination of elders, potential nominees will be asked to participate in a “Count the Cost” session on October 28th, 2012. Elder nominees and their spouses will be asked to participate in an anonymous online questionnaire. Following the completion of the elder selection process on November 11th, 2012, the Process Team will
engage in a group interview where the same question as posed to the other constituent
groups will be considered: “How would you say the elder selection process has involved
you?”

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

**Potential Benefits:** Your participation will benefit you by (1) active participation in a
project that will shape the selection of leaders at Monterey; (2) learning theological and
practical foundations for elder selection; (3) recognizing the value and importance of
collaboration in a church context.

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

**Rights of Research Participants:** I have read the above. Mr. Pickett has explained the
tenets of this research project and has answered all of my questions. He has informed me
of the potential risks and benefits of my participation.

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

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

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Pickett by telephone at (806) 392-
0379 or by email at bpickett@montereycoc.org.

Signature of Participant_____________________________________Date________________

Signature of Principle Investigator_____________________________Date____________
APPENDIX F

FIELD NOTES WORKSHEET

Field notes contain the description of what is observed (Patton, 2002). The worksheet below is a tool to record descriptive observations, comments, reactions, feelings, etc., for the Elder Selection Process at Monterey.

Date: ____________________

Meeting or Context: ____________________________________________

List any special conditions related to the setting of the meeting or session.

Diagram the seating arrangement. (Where applicable)
Key Words. (Note frequency, participant use, or synonyms)

| God   | Elder | Shepherd | Cruciform | Collaborative | Leader |

List other frequently used words.
List important conversations and interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
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Dear Class Leader: Thank you for participating in this process. Your involvement is important and the answers submitted will be valuable for this and future elder selection processes.

Please read Question 1 below to your class during the first 15 minutes of the Bible Hour and record their responses in the space provided. Also, please record your personal impressions of the process at the bottom of the page.

Question #1 – For the Bible Class: How would you say the elder selection process involved you?
APPENDIX H

PROCESS TEAM GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating in this process. Your involvement is important and the answers submitted will be valuable for this and future elder selection processes. Please respond to each question below.

Question #1: How would you say the elder selection process involved you?

Question #2: Given your role on the process team, how would you assess the effectiveness of the process to engage other groups?
APPENDIX I

ELDER NOMINEE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for participating in this process. Your involvement is important and the answers submitted will be valuable for this and future elder selection processes.

Question #1: How would you say the elder selection process involved you?
APPENDIX J

CODING SCHEME THEMES FOR BIBLE CLASS, ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE, AND PROCESS TEAM INTERVIEW

Cruciformity: Narrative Patterns
   Cruciform Faith
   Cruciform Love
   Cruciform Power
   Cruciform Hope

Selection Process
   Sermons
   Lessons
   Nominations
   Process Format
   Communication
   Involvement
      Personal
      Communal (General)
      Communal (Bible Class)

Hawthorne Effect

“Count the Cost” Session

Teacher Training Session
   Participation
   Lessons (general)
   Presenter

Collaboration
   With others (general)
   Teamwork
   Partnership

Theological
   What qualities important for an elder?
   Importance of prayer.
   Elders selected sign of God’s providence.

Group Dynamics
APPENDIX K

“ELDERS AND THE CRUCIFORM LIFE” LESSON MATERIALS

Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
By Ben Pickett

Segments:
Lesson 1  The Cruciform Life
Lesson 2  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith
Lesson 3  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love
Lesson 4  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power
Lesson 5  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope

The Cruciform Life
Lesson 1

Overview: This lesson will introduce the rationale for the series, the narrative patterns of Cruciformity, and an introduction to key texts.

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 2:2; Philippians 2:6-11; Galatians 2:19-20

Opening question for class discussion (optional): What does it mean to be “spiritual”?

Introduction

The selection of elders demands a time of inner reflection for church members. Members are asked to nominate and affirm other members of the church body as leaders and exemplars of faith entrusted with the direction of the church. Members who recognize the significance of the task exercise great care to identify and implement criteria on which to base their nomination and evaluation of candidates. For Churches of Christ, Scripture is the primary resource used to provide the essential criteria for the selection of elder nominees.\(^1\) Several texts in Paul’s writings in the New Testament articulate the role and function of an elder and provide characteristics important for the person affirmed in the role.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Though not fully explored in this series, it is assumed that other theological resources are important to the development and implementation of elder selection processes in Churches of Christ. Tradition is an important feature as well as extant perceptions of leadership in contemporary culture.

\(^2\) See 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are passages that inform the role of an elder. Towner, in his reflection on 1 Tim., describes the role of elder in terms of the various qualities articulated in the text—a similar approach to that of a “checklist.” Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, IVP NTCS, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994) 81-90. Ngewa provides a similar approach. Samuel M. Ngewa, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, ABCS (Grand Rapids: HippoBooks, 2009) 59-70, 338-44. For more on the setting and occasion for the writing of
I wish to honor this tradition and believe guidance sought for the function and role of elders begins with Scripture. However, the texts most often referenced for elder selection processes (1 Tim. 3:1-7 is a prime example) have unfortunately taken on a “check list” quality for church members as they consider nominees. Specifically, if the nominee’s spiritual history and present demeanor satisfy the rigors imposed by the text in question–if the candidate has “checked all the boxes” in that there are no “Scriptural objections” to his nomination–then the congregation may confidently affirm the nominee. On the surface, the requirements to fulfill the role seem satisfied by this approach.

[NOTE: An appropriate interpretation and application of 1 Tim 3:1-7 would recognize the problem in Ephesus was not the lack of elders, but the behavior of those already in place. Gordon Fee convincingly makes the case the elements I’m identifying as “checklist” qualities are more conducive to “Hellenistic moral philosophy” than exclusively Christian. In other words, the “checklist” approach employed by some as an interpretation of this text neglects the context and the occasion for Paul’s writing of 1Timothy.]

However, the summation of the task and responsibility of elders is not found exclusively in these texts. Members instinctively understand there is more to the nominee essential for the role of an elder that goes beyond the limits imposed by a narrow reading of 1 Timothy 3 (or other related texts). Certainly the candidate’s relationships within the church, his demonstrative self-giving nature expressed through acts of kindness, or pastoral qualities reflective of a Christ-like disposition, all point to the reasons why members would endorse someone to the role. To insist the list of “qualifications” for elders in these texts should serve as a “check list” asks too much of the text. The texts, rather, reinforce the Godly character and trustworthiness of those brought forward as exemplars of Christ-like faith. In other words, as Siburt said: “Now is the time to affirm the reasons why we have lifted them up and affirmed them as capable of being elders.” This is to say the congregation recognizes that nominees for the role of elder have already demonstrated their faithfulness and capabilities as potential leaders based upon years of interaction in a common community of faith.

**Spirituality**

Sheldrake captures the sentiment of our day when he points out “the word ‘spirituality’ is sometimes vague and difficult to define.” In contemporary society, spirituality can have different meanings—from a more Western cultural influence defined by inner “self-realization” and forms of “inwardness,” to Eastern cultural expressions found in the Buddhist or Hindu religions. But what is Christian spirituality? Spirituality is life in the Spirit. It is the beliefs and actions that constitute the substance of faith. These actions possess elements that are definable and recognizable as consistent with a personal orientation toward God. Gorman defines Christian spirituality as “the experience of God’s love and grace in daily life”. He believes the content for

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3 “Scriptural objections” is a term-absent from Scripture-used to identify specific reasons why a nominee may not serve as an elder. These “objections” are founded on a particular interpretation of 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 that insists the absence of any of the listed characteristics of a bishop or elder necessarily disqualifies the nominee from serving in the role.

4 Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) 2. Sheldrake notes the term “spirituality” was originally a product of the Christian religion and has since been used to identify similar qualities of other religions.

a Christian definition of spirituality is found in Paul’s letters in the New Testament. Of keen interest is the language from Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:2 and Philippians 2:6-11. Paul had a central aim while he taught and interacted with the Corinthian church during his time with them. The central aim for Paul was to demonstrate Jesus Christ crucified. It was to “narrate, in life and words, the story of God’s self-revelation in Christ.” Paul’s aim was to live the life of Christ both in word and deed in order to be an exemplar of a crucified Christ in every way. In his letters, Paul did not set out to define a particular theology but to “mold behavior” and to “affirm or alter patterns of experience.”

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”
I Cor. 2:2 – NIV

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ crucified.”
Alternate translation, Michael J. Gorman

This text is very important to a proper understanding of cruciformity because it points to Paul’s “master story” of faith and the substance of his commitment and understanding of Christ. Cruciformity is “conformity to the crucified Christ.” It is the “narrative spirituality” of Paul; a spirituality “that tells a story.” As an example, consider the life-changing experience of Paul on the Damascus road. This experience, for Paul, represents the seminal point at which Paul’s understanding of God was enlightened. There Paul experienced an encounter with the crucified and resurrected Christ that a) took him by “surprise,” b) which constituted a “reorientation” of his Jewish nationality and identity, and c) represented an initial, revelatory encounter with “Jesus as God’s Son” – revealing Jesus’ true identity and the call and commission Paul was “compelled to embrace.” As a result of this encounter, Paul knows God “more fully” such that the cross is now for Paul, the “interpreting, or hermeneutical, lens through which God is seen; it is the means of grace by which God is known.” In other words, this experience changes everything for Paul; His view of God, his perspective on violence, and his very identity as a Jew are irrevocably changed and are now informed by the story of a crucified Christ.

It is Paul’s narrative spirituality of cruciformity (conformity to the crucified Christ), which permeates his letters to the New Testament churches. This “master story”—as Gorman offers an intriguing metaphor as a definition whereby humanity is “the priest…who stands in the middle of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God…he transforms his life, the one that he receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with him.” See Alexander Schmemann, For the Life of the World, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1973.) 15.

6 “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ – that is, Jesus Christ crucified.” Author’s translation. Gorman, Cruciformity, 1. Gorman’s translation of 1Cor. 2:2 is paradigmatic to his argument because “Jesus Christ crucified” translated as such shifts the emphasis of the text from Christ in his totality, to a crucified Christ. The “hymn” of Philippians 2:6-11 is, for Gorman, Paul’s “master story.” Gorman, Cruciformity, 88.

7 Gorman, Cruciformity, 4.

8 Gorman articulates these criteria as foundational to Paul’s “master story” of the crucified Christ. Gorman, Cruciformity, 26. For more on Paul’s conversion experience see Michael J. Gorman, Reading Paul, (Eugene: Cascade, 2008) 10-21, or Michael J. Gorman, Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 56-60.

9 Gorman, Cruciformity, 17. Paul’s view of God is dramatically shifted and now paradoxical in nature because “if on the cross Christ conformed to God, then God conforms to the cross.” Crucifixion, then, becomes the “gauge of God’s immeasurable love.” Gorman is careful to note that cruciformity is the character, of God. God is “not crucified but cruciform.”
calls it—is made most clear in the hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 where all of the elements of Christ’s cruciform character are reflected.  

**Cruciformity and the Character Traits of Elders**

What character traits should church members look for when considering candidates for the role of elder in the church? In this lesson series, I believe the selection of elder candidates is informed and enhanced by the introduction and implementation of Gorman’s four narrative patterns of spirituality as criteria for discerning spiritual character and maturity essential to the role and function of elders. We will explore how each of his narrative patterns provides fundamental principles crucial for members to consider as they think about the character traits essential for elder nominees.

As noted earlier, cruciformity is “conformity to the crucified Christ”. By crucified Christ, I am referring to a perspective concerning what it means to be a follower of Christ informed primarily by the significance of Christ’s obedient, self-emptying posture reflected at the cross. In other words, the cross of Jesus Christ is the lens through which God and faith are understood. Because Christ’s death is paradigmatic to Christian faith, the cross then, shapes Christian commitments and dispositions in all circumstances. This is to say, the faith commitments actualized in daily choices should be informed by Christ crucified. Christians understand this implicitly, but the value of Gorman’s thought is the explicit and systematic approach he draws from Paul’s letters. The death of Christ on the cross and the fundamental lessons drawn from this central Christian event are the basis for Paul’s spirituality. I believe Gorman is correct when he asserts that Paul’s spirituality, or what Gorman calls Paul’s “master story”, is a spirituality that is reflective of Paul’s thought and the principles that inform his theological posture toward God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul’s theology informs his spirituality. The Pauline letters to the churches are not theological treatises, but rather letters that call first-century Christians to engage in certain behaviors consistent with Christian belief. To me, Paul is calling the early church to a particular spirituality; a disposition where thought and consequential behaviors are formed by a person’s understanding of God as expressed in the cross of Jesus Christ. To see the cross is to see God. This is not to say that God was crucified at the cross, but that God’s character, God’s nature is reflected at the cross.

Cruciformity:

- Is faithful obedience (Cruciform Faith)
- Is the voluntary self-emptying and self-giving regard for others. (Cruciform Love)
- Is, paradoxically, life-giving suffering and transformative potency in weakness (Cruciform Power)
- Is an inauguration to resurrection and exaltation (Cruciform Hope)

Criteria for leadership in the church should emerge from sources within the church. Christians need spiritual criteria in order to evaluate potential nominees for church leadership; cruciformity is a resource for these criteria. When members lift up other members as potential candidates, they have done so—either intentionally or unintentionally—based on certain behaviors they believe are consistent with qualities of faithfulness and leadership the role requires. Too

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10 Phil. 2:6-11 will be a primary text for this series.
12 I like how Gorman put it: “If on the cross Christ conformed to God, then God conforms to the cross.” Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 17.
13 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 93.
often, the character traits sought after in potential elder nominees reflect qualities consistent with leadership success in the surrounding culture. Meaning, if a candidate is successful in business, or has a reputation as a leader in the community in some other professional arena then the assumption is the candidate will necessarily make a good leader in the church. I believe this assumption is problematic and detrimental to leadership in the church because leadership success in a church context is defined by a different standard. Character traits for leadership in the church are found in the resources of the church.

A final thought: the idea that God (or any god) would allow himself to be crucified was an outrageous assumption in Paul’s day and it remains so today. As we close out this introductory lesson, consider this from Hans Kung:

Paul succeeded more clearly than anyone in expressing what is the ultimately distinguishing feature of Christianity…the distinguishing feature of Christianity as opposed to the ancient world religions and the modern humanisms [or new age spiritualties – bp]…is quite literally according to Paul “this Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ crucified.” It is not indeed as risen, exalted, living, divine, but as crucified, that this Jesus Christ is distinguished unmistakably from the many risen, exalted, living gods and deified founders of religion, from the Caesars, geniuses, and heroes of world history.14

Questions for Class Interaction

Read I Corinthians 2:1-5 (with special emphasis on verse. 2)
How would you describe Paul’s disposition toward the Corinthians?
What does Paul’s conviction to know nothing but Christ mean for the Corinthians?
What does this conviction mean for us?
How does cruciformity shape the way Christians understand spirituality?
How does cruciformity inform the way we interact with others?

Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
by Ben Pickett

Segments:
Lesson 1  The Cruciform Life
Lesson 2  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith
Lesson 3  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love
Lesson 4  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power
Lesson 5  Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope

Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith
Lesson 2

Overview: This lesson will look specifically at the narrative pattern of Cruciform Faith. It will explore facets of this disposition as informed by key texts and will explore how these principles inform the selection of elder candidates. It would be helpful to review Lesson 1 during preparation in order to properly frame Lessons 2-5 where narrative spirituality and the basic definition of cruciformity is discussed.

Key Texts: Philippians 2:6-11; Galatians 2:20

Opening question for class discussion (optional): What does it mean to be faithful? In what ways do Christians connect their understanding of faith with Jesus Christ?

Cruciform Faith

The narrative pattern of cruciform faith is the first and the most foundational element necessary for understanding cruciformity and its usefulness for discerning the character traits of an elder. Cruciform faith is fidelity to God informed by the obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ. Cruciform faith is faithful obedience shaped by, and informed by the same obedient, self-emptying posture of Christ. In other words, it is both an act of love toward God and to others demonstrated and empowered by trust in God and a commitment to orient the will with His. What does this look like? By turning to Scripture there is concrete expression of cruciform faith found in the hymn of Phil. 2:6-11.15

6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing

7 rather, he made himself nothing

15 This text is an ancient hymn that pre-dates Paul. It was most likely sung in assemblies and represented theological commitments of the communities of faith at that time. Paul’s incorporation of this hymn is consistent with his life and commitment to a crucified Christ. The term that is translated “emptied himself” is the Greek word kenosis, from which the term “kenotic” is derived.
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  

8 And being found in appearance as a man, 
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death —  
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:6-11 (NIV)

Christ’s obedience is demonstrated in this passage first in his willingness to become human in the nature of a servant (v. 7). The Incarnation in all of its self-giving, self-emptying glory is a representation of cruciform faith. That is, Christ demonstrated Godly humility and obedience—he oriented his life to the will of God—by taking on flesh. This kenotic, or self-emptying, posture is foundational to an understanding of faithfulness.

Often expressions of faithfulness are defined by certain levels of piety or individualized expressions of spiritual ascent. While these are good practices, they are the result of a faithful posture toward God. A person who demonstrates cruciform faith will express behaviors defined by the foundational quality of obedience to God. That is, the choice to give up or to reorient the will to the Father. Christians experienced this kind of obedient faithfulness at their conversion. When converts respond to God in faith for the first time, they make a conscious choice to orient their will to the will of God…just as Christ did.

The faithful obedience of Christ is also spoken of by Paul in Romans 5:

18 Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

This text is the second occurrence Paul articulates as distinctive of Christ’s posture of faith toward God. His will was oriented with that of the Father. Christ’s act of love for God and for humanity is defined in terms of obedience.

Question for reflection: How does a narrative spirituality of cruciform faith, informed by the hymn of Phil. 2, shape our selection of elder candidates?

In the following section, I offer some possible ways of reflecting on the selection of elder candidates by discussing possible character traits indicative of cruciform faith. This is
not meant as an indictment of any sort, but an invitation to examine an alternative method for elder nominee selection.

How does cruciform faith inform character traits for elder selection? Elders must first be people of faithful obedience to God such that their lives demonstrate a commitment to life with God. The tendency in our culture to “compartmentalize” faith as a separate aspect of life individualizes and limits faith commitment. Elders shaped by the crucified Christ will resist the impulse to compartmentalize and privatize their faith. They will recognize the call of Christ is to “let your light shine before others” (Matt. 5:16) demonstrating cruciform faith in concrete ways. This is to say, an elder who has made a commitment to Christ will have shown choices—the way he spends his time, energy, and resources—consistent with the obedient and kenotic qualities of the crucified Messiah.

Participants in the Faith of Christ

Another facet of cruciform faith is an ongoing daily expression of commitment to God through the “faith of” Jesus Christ. The reason this distinction is important is because it points to the actions of Christ at the cross as a source for informing faith.16 It is important to connect Christ’s actions as demonstrative expressions of his own belief. I think Gorman is right when he says Christ’s death “is synonymous with Christ’s faith,” because this invites the Christian to see himself as a participant in the faith of Christ. What I mean by this is that the obedience demonstrated at the cross is the substance of what it means to be faithful to God. So when Christians exhibit this same commitment to faithful obedience, they “share in” or “have” the same faith as Christ.17

The ramifications of this particular facet of cruciform faith are significant in that it informs the Christian’s understanding of what it means to participate in genuine Christian faith. In the present culture, there exist impulses in the Christian community that equate economic or social success and influence as evidence of God’s favor.18 To the contrary, Paul’s own experience and his narrative spirituality make it clear that participation in the faith of Christ, to participate in a cruciform faith, necessarily comes at a cost. If conformity to Christ is a conformity to his death (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:8-12), then costly faith, as expressed by suffering in its various forms, is a consistent feature of a cruciform existence. As Gorman notes, “the life of obedient faith, of identifying with the

16 See Gal. 2:16; 2:20 and Rom. 3:22, 26. Gorman is a proponent of the subjective genitive form of πίστις Χριστοῦ. Space does not permit a thorough examination of this and other related texts pertinent to the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate. Downs provides an excellent summary of the current debate regarding πίστις Χριστοῦ in a recent paper concerning 2 Tim. 3:15. He succinctly states the contending sides when he says “proponents of the objective genitive emphasize that for Paul human faith is placed in Christ, with Christ as the object of such faith. On the other side, advocates of the subjective genitive contend that the πίστις Χριστοῦ construction refers to the faithfulness of Christ himself.” David J. Downs, “Faith(fullness) in Christ Jesus in 2 Timothy 3:15,” Journal of Biblical Literature 131 (2012): 143-60. For a perspective supporting the objective genitive view, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Romans, TAB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 344-46. On a personal note, I believe in all likelihood Paul could have easily intended both objective and subjective genitive meanings of the text. In other words, to hold to both, in my view, would provide a total commitment to Christ both as God and as a demonstration of faith in God.
17 Ibid., 120. See Gal. 2:19. This text demonstrates this conviction well.
18 I do not wish to deny this as a possibility, only to note that social and economic dispositions presupposed by Paul and the Christian church of the first century elevated suffering and economic difficulty as consistent with authentic faith and, therefore, consistent with the favor and grace of God.
One who died such a death, is a costly one, as Jesus, Paul, and some, if not all, of Paul’s communities knew well.”

_How would a commitment to the “faith of” Christ inform character traits for elder selection?_ Because elders “share in” the faith of Christ, they will possess a daily walk of faith that incorporates the virtuous and self-giving qualities of the crucified Christ. Their lives will show evidences consistent with a drive to be oriented by their faith—meaning their careers, accomplishments, social status, and reputation are all gifts in service to God. With this orientation in mind, church members, in their identification of elder candidates, should resist the urge to select nominees based solely on career successes or achievements. Career advancement does not necessarily suggest cruciform faith.

Cruciform faith begins with the choice to take on the life of Christ as a disposition and commitment before God. It is a choice that brings justification, but also involves a life of obedient self-giving and humility toward God and others—just as Christ did. It is a faith that comes at a cost, yet there is grace and joy knowing that such suffering is demonstrative of authentic faith. As we consider nominees for the role of elder, questions such as “How does this nominee publicly demonstrate cruciform faith?” or, “How does this nominee talk about or view the importance of his career, social status, or achievements?” would be worthy of reflection and consideration.

**Summary:**

- Cruciform faith is both faithfulness to God expressed by obedience and service to others.
- Cruciform faith is a participation in the “faith of” Christ as demonstrated in Phil. 2.

**Questions for Class Interaction**


In Philippians, Paul is attempting to instill the church with a renewed sense of joy. How would this hymn encourage the church? How would it encourage you and me?

How does cruciform faith speak to our expectations of what it means to be successful?

How does cruciform faith inform our consideration of potential candidates for elder?

If time permits, consider exploration of Galatians 2:19-20.
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Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love
Lesson 3

Overview: This lesson will look specifically at the narrative pattern of Cruciform Love. It will explore facets of this disposition as informed by key texts and will explore how these principles inform the selection of elder candidates. It would be helpful to review Lesson 1 during preparation in order to properly frame this facet of cruciformity in its proper context to the lesson series.

Key Texts: Romans 12:9-21; 2 Corinthians 6:3-13; 2 Cor. 5:18-21

Opening question for class discussion (optional): Name a time when you have witnessed the genuine acceptance or offering of Christ-like love.

Cruciform Love

Cruciform love is the tangible expression of cruciform faith as it interacts with others. It is the demonstrative outcome of cruciform faith. At the center of cruciform love is a commitment to the other that reflects the same posture of self-sacrifice and others-centeredness as demonstrated by Christ on the cross. Cruciform love consists of choices and behaviors which represent concrete evidence of the presence of the Spirit and a commitment to Christ. I like the way Gorman describes the paradoxical nature of cruciform love when he says that “cruciform love does not seek its own advantage or edification…it seeks the good, the advantage, the edification of others.” Here is another way of thinking about this facet of cruciform love:

Love has a proactive posture: it seeks the good and the advantage and edification of others.
Love has an antagonistic posture: it does not seek its own advantage and edification.
In other words, love that is informed by the *crucified* Christ takes an active and engaging posture directed toward the well-being (both spiritual and physical) of others while consistently refusing any attempts to bring honor or attention to itself. This is to say that the person who exhibits cruciform love will be consistently self-giving, sacrificial, and “status-renouncing” in their orientation toward others; they will offer love to others for the other’s sake. See 2 Cor. 6:3-13.

The apostle Paul exhibited cruciform love in the context of his ministry by embracing the same self-giving and status-renouncing disposition as Christ. This commitment to a status-renouncing disposition was evidenced by his profession. I agree with Gorman when he makes the case that Paul’s profession as a tentmaker was not one of practicality, but a choice consistent with his cruciform character of love for others. Meaning Paul, out of love for Christ and for believers, intentionally worked as a tentmaker in order to send the message that he is committed to a cruciform existence that is status-renouncing in all circumstances. Cruciform love, then, is a disposition that shapes all of life by the qualities that place the importance of the other—both an expression of love for God and for others—above all things.

*In the following section, (as in the previous lesson) I offer some possible ways of reflecting on the selection of elder candidates by discussing possible character traits indicative of cruciform love. This is not meant as an indictment of any sort, but an invitation to examine an alternative method for elder nominee selection.*

*How would cruciform love inform character traits for elder selection?* Elders who exhibit cruciform love are living testimonies to an others-centered existence. They are people who make choices and commitments that consistently seek the best possible outcomes for others for the other’s sake—even if it comes at a cost—as an authentic expression of Christian faith. They will be people who recognize that love for God and love for others necessarily rejects notions of self-aggrandizement or status as desired dispositions consistent with the role of an elder.

Elders shaped by cruciform love will understand the function of an elder demonstrates qualities that are sacrificial and status-renouncing. Choices and commitments such as the way they spend their time, and how they spend their money, would be informed by the same loving disposition. In other words, like the person who spends time in service to the homeless at the cost of greater income or status, or those who use their resources in ways consistent with a love for God and others, elders who demonstrate cruciform love make intentional choices consistent with Christ’s kenotic (self-emptying) nature.

*NOTE: The outlets for expression of cruciform love are not limited to these examples. A narrative spirituality informed by cruciform love means that it is not limited by a specific set of rules or to a particular place and time. Cruciform love continues the “story” of the cross in different times and places as they occur. It is “imaginative” in that it is conditioned by context.*

19 Gorman uses the term “polyvalent” to describe the imaginative nature of cruciform love. Though not specifically expounded upon by the author, the term ‘polyvalent’ seems to be used in the sense found in art appreciation and interpretation. In other words, ‘polyvalency’ describes how “different artists interpret the same [thing] differently.” See Doug Adams, “Changing Patterns and Interpretations of Parables in Art” in
times of the week, or for certain groups. Cruciform love, applied appropriately, seeks the
good of all and can manifest itself in any circumstance.

**Reconciliation**

The pattern of cruciform love also emerges in the theme of reconciliation. At the
cross, Christ reconciled humanity to God (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Reconciliation is a consistent
and needed facet of cruciform love because reconciliation is consistent with God’s desire
for relationship with his creation. This same desire for reconciliation is found in Paul’s
interaction with the Corinthian church.⁵⁰ He extends the love, grace, and forgiveness of
God by asking the Corinthians to reconcile themselves to the Gospel he preached.
Forgiveness was demonstrated by Paul in the way he felt the Corinthian church should
treat the person among them who had previously caused offense to the church or possible
even to Paul.⁵¹ The desire for reconciliation, then, involves a spirit of forgiveness in
hopes of attaining restoration and wholeness among God’s people.

_How would this idea of reconciliation inform character traits for elder selection?_ In this instance, elders who exhibit cruciform love in terms of reconciliation would show
qualities of empathy toward the other that stretched beyond the limits of established
social or cultural norms. Elders would demonstrate compassion even when there existed
an opportunity for judgment. This does not mean that the elder is complacent toward the
need for justice, but instead this particular facet of cruciform love shapes the way and
elder thinks about the other in terms of compassion and mercy, while being mindful of
the need for godly dispositions regarding judgment and accountability.

**Inclusivity**

Reconciliation also informs another facet of cruciform love as demonstrated in the
lives of elders who are inclusive. Elders who readily embrace the other (beyond social,
racial, and gender boundaries) reflect a heart for others created in the image of God as
worthy recipients of love of Christ. They manifest a sacrificial posture that seeks to
respond with love even when it is unwarranted or undeserved.

As members consider the dynamics of cruciform love in their selection of nominees for
the role of elder, questions such as: “In what ways does this nominee demonstrate a
desire for the advantage and edification of others?” and, “Is this person someone who
readily includes others?” and, “How does this person spend their free time?” would be
helpful for congregations as they consider nominees.

**Summary:**

- Cruciform Love has both proactive and antagonistic postures.
- Cruciform Love is sacrificial, self-giving, and status-renouncing.

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⁵⁰ See 2 Cor. 6:11-13; 7:2.
⁵¹ 2 Cor. 2:6-9.
- Cruciform Love invites reconciliation.
- Cruciform Love is inclusive.

Questions for Class Interaction

How does cruciform love shape the way we view others?
In what ways do you find cruciform love the most challenging?
How does cruciform love redefine the substance of what it means to love and to receive love from others?
How does cruciform love inform our consideration of potential candidates for elder?
Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
by Ben Pickett

Segments:
Lesson 1 The Cruciform Life
Lesson 2 Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith
Lesson 3 Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love
Lesson 4 Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power
Lesson 5 Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope

Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power
Lesson 4

Overview: This lesson will look specifically at the narrative pattern of Cruciform Power. It will explore facets of this disposition as informed by key texts and will explore how these principles inform the selection of elder candidates. It would be helpful to review Lesson 1 during preparation in order to properly frame this facet of cruciformity in its proper context to the lesson series.

Key Texts: I Corinthians 1:22-31; 2 Corinthians 12.

Opening question for class discussion (optional): How would you describe “power” in the current culture?

Cruciform Power

Cruciform power is power conformed to the crucified Christ. This means that a proper understanding of power is shaped by God’s decisive action at the cross. Authentic expressions of power are understood when we think of power in terms of a crucified Christ. Power understood in this way means Christians must embrace the paradoxical nature of power understood in terms of weakness. It is a paradox—to be weak is to be strong—because in weakness the true power of Christ is on display (1 Cor. 1:27; 2 Cor. 12).

Cruciform power, as demonstrated by Christ at the cross, shows definitively that power—meaning authentic power as exercised by God—is demonstrated in terms of weakness, suffering, and love. Each of these qualities of cruciform power is reflected in Paul’s ministry by his own experiences of suffering and ongoing challenges of life defined by an others-centered existence. Paradigmatic to understanding power in this

22 Gorman correctly identifies five different expressions of cruciform power in Paul’s apostolic ministry useful for discussion: a) his personal presence and lack of rhetorical skill, b) his constant suffering, c) his “thorn in the flesh” (1 Cor. 12), d) his refusal for financial support and performance of manual labor, and e) his attitude of humility and meekness.
way is to recognize that Paul understood that “weakness makes Christ’s power present” (2 Cor. 12:8; 4:7-12) and may include “concrete physical pains suffered for the sake of the gospel.” Cruciform power has only one agenda: the use of influence for the sake of others.

In the following section, (as in previous lessons) I offer some possible ways of reflecting on the selection of elder candidates by discussing possible character traits indicative of cruciform power. This is not meant as an indictment of any sort, but an invitation to examine an alternative method for elder nominee selection.

How would an understanding of cruciform power inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who display cruciform power understand power is to be used only in service to others. They recognize that power is measured by the qualities and standards of a crucified Christ—not those of the current cultural climate. They embrace a posture that understands power in terms of paradox—to be weak is to be strong because in weakness Christ’s power is revealed (2 Cor. 12).

Power as Status Transcendence and Reversal

Paul’s stance on power shaped the way he interacted with the community of faith. He consistently appealed to his own weakness and commitment to Christ as an invitation for believers to listen to him. When given the opportunity to exercise authority, he refrained (Rom. 14, 15; 1 Cor. 8)–appealing to their understanding of cruciform faith and love in their treatment of one-another. I contend Paul’s refusal to control the community reflected his belief that the church–as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12)–should be defined by the same qualities of self-giving love, humility, and vulnerability, as Paul portrayed in his own life informed by the cross. Therefore, the exercise of power in the church must reflect these same qualities. Doing so does not negate the authority for leaders to act, but redefines the reasons why they possess the authority to lead in the first place.

Another way of understanding this point is found in Gorman’s explanation of “status transcendence and reversal.” “Status transcendence and reversal” is a way of describing God’s selection of “what is weak in the world” and “what is low and despised in the world” (1 Cor. 1:26ff) as a representation and demonstration of the substance of the power of God. Meaning, authentic power reverses cultural definitions of power based on position and social rank and replaces them with cruciform postures of vulnerability, lowliness, and weakness. Power understood in this way “transcends” cultural

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23 This includes current theory on the various books, classes, and seminars on contemporary “leadership” in the present culture. “Christian Leadership” should reflect the qualities of the cross if they are to be consistent with tenets of the Gospel of Christ.

24 See Hall for discussion on the nature and exercise of ecclesial power in the larger North American context. He argues convincing that the church is in a post-Christendom era and struggles with the same understanding of power and control as those who have lead the Christian church since the time of Augustine. Douglas Hall, The Cross in our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003)

25 Power as “Status Transcendence and Reversal,” “Moral Transformation,” “Boasting and Victory in Suffering,” and “Cruciform care for others” are four categories Gorman uses to explain Christ’s “downwardly mobile” action at the cross. Gorman, Cruciformity, 298-303.
conventions. This is important to our concern for elder selection because power understood in terms of status transcendence and reversal invites a reconsideration of what the definition and exercise of power mean for church governance. In other words, I think Gorman is on to something when he asks the reader to define power as something that “transcends and reverses social status” because the “cross reveals the way God works, not just the way he achieved salvation” for humanity. Cruciform power is the ongoing exhibition of the same self-emptying, status-renouncing postures consistent with those demonstrated by Christ at the cross; where God’s divine power is demonstrated. Therefore, believers who seek other forms of power and control outside this dynamic misunderstand what it means to be cruciform.

How would cruciform power in terms of status transcendence inform the character traits for elder selection? Cruciform power means elders possess humility, love, and vulnerability informed by the crucified Christ as they interact with others in the church. Elders will be people who exemplify this quality in the way they make requests of others in the church, of the way they encourage and offer guidance to others, and in the ways they exercise leadership on critical matters important to the future of the congregation. In other words, on matters of direction critical to the life of the congregation, elders who exercise cruciform power open themselves to the voice of the congregation. All impulses to hierarchy or status as defined by cultural norms outside the church are held as suspect because elders recognize authentic power is defined by traits and resources consistent with the cross. They listen to the church because they understand as elders they are in service to the church. They are vulnerable to the concerns and commitments of the congregation and resist the urge to move in directions without serious consideration of the views of the congregation in mind. Listening invites the church to grant leadership a great gift; the gift of trust.

The exercise of cruciform power engenders trust between elders and the congregation because in doing so the elders demonstrate their commitment to the crucified Christ in terms of vulnerability; they demonstrate their self-emptying, obedient disposition of love for God and for the other. On the surface, this may seem counter-intuitive because our culture is accustomed to defining leadership as making “hard decisions” that go “against the grain” or that “challenge the status quo” through the exercise of positional power similar to structures found in business or other institutions where “top-down” hierarchy is the norm. Yet by courageously embracing these cruciform postures, elders engender the trust of the church by appealing to each member’s own understanding of Christ and the same self-emptying, obedient dispositions that come with it. When elders empower others to take responsibility for ministry and bless others, when they listen with a cruciform posture that portrays a willingness to consider what others are saying, they open themselves to receive the trust of the congregation. This trust empowers elders to move forward confidently when difficult decisions must be made because they have invested the church with a genuine voice in the conversation. It is an act of love for elders to hear and to be shaped by the congregation.

As members consider the dynamics and qualities of cruciform power for the role of elder, questions such as: “How does the nominee understand and exhibit cruciform power?” and, “In what ways is this nominee vulnerable to others?” and, “How does the

26 Ibid.
nominee understand the relationship between the church and its elders?” might prove helpful.

Summary:

- Cruciform Power is measured not by human or worldly standards but by the standards of the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected.
- Cruciform Power is demonstrated through weakness.
- Cruciform Power is influence at work for the good of others.
- Cruciform Power engenders trust in the community of faith.

Questions for Class Interaction

1. How does cruciform power shape our understanding of leadership?
2. Why is power understood as weakness so challenging for Christians in the current culture?
3. In the lesson we talked about the important place of “trust” connecting elders and the congregation. In what ways can this connection be enhanced on the part of the congregation? Or, on the part of the elders?
Overview: This lesson will look specifically at the narrative pattern of Cruciform Hope. It will explore facets of this disposition as informed by key texts and will explore how these principles inform the selection of elder candidates. It would be helpful to review Lesson 1 during preparation in order to properly frame this facet of cruciformity in its proper context to the lesson series.

Key Texts: Philippians 2:6-11; Philippians 4:4-7, I Corinthians 15

Opening question for class discussion (optional): Ask the class to define “hope”: In culture, in the church, and the ways it is understood by Christians.

Cruciform Hope

Cruciform hope embraces a view of the world that anticipates Christ’s return and the grand renewal and reconciliation of all things. It is positive and uplifting, while recognizing suffering is consistent element within the life conformed to Christ. Phil. 2:6-11 is important for understanding cruciform hope because the hymn concludes with God resurrecting and exalting the crucified Christ. Cruciform hope looks to the future confident of God’s presence and of his certainty of his promises. It represents the “completion”, that is, the telos of “conformity to the narrative pattern of the Messiah.”

Wrapped into this understanding of cruciform hope is an implicit eschatological consideration. In other words, when Christians look at the cross they do so with the knowledge that the resurrected Christ will return and reconcile all things. As Paul reminds believers in 1 Cor. 15, Christ’s resurrection is the foundation for the assurance that his followers will be raised as well. So to properly understand cruciform hope, there must be both faith in the resurrected Christ and faith in the promise of God to do the same for believers. The substance of cruciform hope is found in Christ’s humiliation and subsequent exaltation. This narrative posture, oriented toward the future, provides
courage and strength for cruciform living. Christians can take solace, and be confident in, a God who is the source of our future resurrection and exaltation.

**Suffering and Hope**

Cruciform hope also provides meaning in suffering. With echoes of I Cor. 15, I agree with Gorman when he contends that Christian suffering is a basis for a “continuation of the narrative of divine love” and a cause for encouragement knowing “the power of the resurrection operates in the present as the power of cruciformity to the death of Christ, which in turn guarantees a place in the future resurrection.” In other words, meaning is found in suffering in the sense that the person who must endure suffering can be confident of the presence of God to provide compassion and peace in the midst of the trial. Suffering in the Christian community, though unpleasant and painful, in Gorman’s view, may have a positive component in that Christians would heed Paul’s exhortation to identify with Christ and “the whole creation of people in pain.” I disagree with Gorman to the extent that he believes suffering may be viewed in a positive light. Suffering is painful. However, this does not diminish the possibility of Christians, inspired by the encouraging and redemptive presence of God, from “redeeming” the experience and turning it into a means to encourage others. Cruciform hope makes sense of suffering in that it equips the Christian with concrete evidence of both the presence of genuine faith and assurance of resurrection and exaltation in the future. When suffering becomes part of Christian existence, cruciform hope “means the very thing (suffering) that suggests that glory is distant is, in fact, the proof of its proximity.”

**Joy**

It is in this sense that we discover and understand the value of Christian joy (Phil. 4:4-7) Joy for the Christian is witnessed in the ways they find hope in the midst of all circumstances—in particular those that involve suffering. Joy is the “by-product” of a life oriented to the self-giving, others-centered existence. It is the by-product of the “master story” (Lesson 1) where the most fulfilling life is a life committed to God in service to others. Joy is somber and reflective and not prone to emotionalism. Meaning joy is a constant disposition that exists in the hearts of Christians who recognize that the brokenness of this world manifests itself in suffering and difficulty. Yet in the midst of these conditions, Christians maintain confidence in God and the promises of resurrection and God’s ultimate reconciliation of all things.

*In the following section, (as in the previous lesson) I offer some possible ways of reflecting on the selection of elder candidates by discussing possible character traits indicative of cruciform hope. This is not meant as an indictment of any sort, but an invitation to examine an alternative method for elder nominee selection.*

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27 Phil. 3:10-11 is central to Gorman’s thought on cruciform hope. To participate in Christ’s death ensures participation in his resurrection. Therefore, the “future of cruciformity is glory.”
28 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 345. Pain is never pleasant and the notion that harm, purposefully imposed, to shape Christian behavior is a difficult topic beyond the scope of this series.
How would cruciform hope inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who exhibit cruciform hope possess a spirit of joy regardless the circumstances. They are quick to suffer with others and invest themselves in the lives of others who are in need of compassion and mercy. They display an attitude inspired by faith in the reality of a resurrected Christ and the promises of the God who raised him. Cruciform hope empowers elders to be courageous under the threat of persecution and will encourage them to be exemplars of faithfulness and compassion when those challenges arise.

Kingdom Hope

Cruciform hope for daily living also involves a “rejection of imperial eschatology.” In this simple but critical distinction believers understand that it is God, not the state, which is the source of salvation. It is the recognition that believers possess “an alternative hope through loyalty to God” rather than empire.29 There is a temptation and expectation in some Christian circles that an appropriate use of Christian influence is through the power of the state. Christ rejected this notion (Mark 10:35-37) and so should his followers. The use of the state as a means to advance the gospel is an appeal to the days of Christendom (theocracy). To place hope for advancement of the Kingdom in the coercive influence of government is to misunderstand what it means to place our hope in the hands of God as demonstrated by Christ’s resurrection.

How would rejection of reliance on the power of the state inform character traits for elder selection? Elders who display cruciform hope are encouragers who remind others of the certainty of Christ’s ultimate victory. They do not dismiss the challenges and difficult circumstances of this world, yet they are quick to frame them in the larger redemptive story of God’s love. They are confident of God’s presence and place the substance of their hope and trust in God’s ability to redeem any condition or circumstance and above any notions of imperialism.

Possible questions to consider while discussing cruciform hope and elders: “In what way does the nominee talk about God and the future?” and, “how would this person interpret Christian suffering?” and, “How does this person talk about the relationship between God and government?”

Summary:

- Cruciform Hope is confident in the “triumph” of God in terms of both the cross and resurrection.
- Cruciform Hope expects and overcomes suffering.
- Cruciform Hope leads to joy regardless the circumstances.
- Cruciform Hope is hope in God’s capacity to bring salvation in a broken world.

Questions for Class Interaction

1. For Christians, what is the relationship between joy and suffering?
2. How does cruciform hope inform our understanding of suffering (thinking in terms of the cross)?
3. In what ways is hope realistic about the present and the future?

29 Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 346. This point challenges nationalism in all its forms.
4. How does cruciform hope inform our consideration of potential candidates for elder?
APPENDIX L

“ELDERS AND THE CRUCIFORM LIFE” LESSON OUTLINES

Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
By Ben Pickett

Lesson 1: The Cruciform Life
Teaching Outline
Dear Teachers,

Thank you again for your willingness to serve Monterey as you engage your class in conversation about the selection of elders. Needless to say, this is an important time in the life of our church and your ministry of teaching blesses us immensely.

This is the first of five simple teaching outlines for you to use as a guide in hopes it will help provide a basic structure consistent with the material in each lesson in the series.

Before getting to the outline, I would like to offer a thought about the premise behind the material as introduced in lesson one in hopes to provide a “launch platform” or a “framework” for your first lesson and a point of reference for the remainder of the series. A key point of entry into this conversation concerning elder selection is the recognition that we in Churches of Christ have traditionally approached the process of elder selection—and the texts in Scripture employed for selection—in a particular way. I believe when someone asks us if we know of someone who could serve as an elder, we typically have someone in mind before we go to the texts in Scripture most often thought of on the subject (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). This rationale raises a concern for a couple of reasons. First, the texts in Timothy and Titus take on a “checklist” quality (see material on this in Lesson 1) and secondly, the antecedent criteria for elder selection, that is, the reasons a person thought of that person as an elder in the first place, may be informed by other things independent of those qualities consistent with spiritual maturity in Christ. These lessons invite our church to consider the qualities of spiritually mature men—character traits of elders—before they lift up a person for the role.

The material in these lessons, the four narrative patterns of spirituality articulated by Paul called “Cruciformity”, are proposed as a basis for considering candidates for elder selection. Cruciformity is important because the narrative patterns reflect maturity in Christ (Christian spiritual maturity) consistent with what Paul called those to whom he served and consistent with the way he lived as an apostle of Christ (“The Cruciform Life” refers, of course, to the way Paul describes what it means to be and to live as a Christian). These lessons contain material we all should aspire to embrace and to exhibit in our lives. Because we are selecting elders, these qualities are introduced as an invitation to think about elder selection in a more holistic way.

It is important to remember that when Paul asked Titus and Timothy to appoint elders in their churches, he did so with a keen understanding of their particular context (see note in Lesson 1). The character traits Paul describes for elders in Timothy and Titus were shaped by the contexts of the churches to which he wrote. This does not mean the lists are not useful for us today, I am only suggesting we should be mindful of the context of Paul’s correspondence.

For members of Churches of Christ, the traditional way we may remember employed for the selection of elders was to nominate candidates, see if they match up with Titus and Timothy (“checklist”), and if
there were no “scriptural objections” (a term not found in scripture), then the nominees were affirmed. This process can be and has been effective for selecting elders. However, I believe this approach tends to stretch the Timothy and Titus texts beyond their intent. By introducing Paul’s spirituality of cruciformity, we invite our church to think about the qualities of a mature disciple of Christ and ask them to think about these qualities in their own life and that of potential elders before a name is placed on the nomination form. It is this point that is important for you to communicate to your class. This is the basis for introducing the remainder of the series.

Finally, let me reiterate that the qualities of cruciformity we find in Gorman’s wonderful explanation of Paul’s correspondence are not exclusive to elders; they are for all of us. They are of particular use for us in this study because the church needs leaders who are mature in Christ—who reflect spirituality consistent with a life devoted to Christ. So, the application portions of each lesson (the “How does this inform the character traits for elder selection?”) are presented as possible outcomes of character traits exhibited in the lives of elders. The question could just as easily be shifted to point to each of us.

OK! My hope is that the above can add some clarity to our task. Let me know how I can be of service to you. Send me an email or call if you have any questions or concerns. I want to hear from you.

And now a suggested teaching approach, or outline, for Lesson 1. This is a simple approach based on the material in each lesson. Also remember you may only have 30-35 minutes of teaching time so you may need to move quickly in order to get to the section on Cruciformity and the way it informs elder selection. I think discussion is very important so please engage your class in the questions found at the end of this and subsequent lessons.

   a. What happens when asked if you know of someone?
   b. The checklist quality tied to Timothy and Titus.

II. Our Task for these five lessons.
   a. The first criteria: Character traits that inform our first impression.
   b. Character traits that teach us to be like Christ.

III. Defining Spirituality
   a. Opening Question (optional)
   b. Spirituality is...

IV. Cruciformity is…
   a. A life conformed to the Crucified Christ.
   b. Paul’s “Master Story”
   c. Cruciformity and Elder selection.
      i. Read Phil. 2:6-11 - discuss
      ii. Read I Cor. 2:2; Gal. 2:19-20 - discuss
   d. Introduce four basic patterns of Cruciformity

V. Open Discussion for application. See questions bottom of page 4.
Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
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Lesson 2: Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Faith

Teaching Outline

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for a great first week! I’ve spoken with several of you and have heard the material and our trajectory for the series was well-received. Thank you for your careful preparation and presentation.

This week, we move to the first of the four basic narrative patterns outlined in Paul’s spirituality. Cruciform faith is the first and most basic posture toward God. It is the first step or “fundamental option” a person makes in his relationship with God. A person chooses, in obedience, to orient their life around and toward God. From this all other things follow.

Also this week, we press further with application. The lesson calls participants to apply what we have learned about the nature of Cruciformity and Cruciform Faith to our thoughts on character traits of elder nominees. This application segment will be very important as it asks us to connect Paul’s spirituality with elder selection process. Conversation and discussion on this in your lesson time will be very important as it will provide an opportunity for the class to demonstrate that they are making this important connection.

May God bless your preparation and presentations this week.

I. Introduction: Lesson 2 – Cruciform Faith

   a. Review from last week: Cruciformity is…
      i. Cruciform Faith
      ii. Cruciform Love
      iii. Cruciform Power
      iv. Cruciform Hope

   b. Intro question(s): the relationship between faith and Christ.

II. Cruciform Faith: Faithful Obedience

   a. Explore Philippians 2:6-11 and the obedient character of Christ
   b. See Romans 5:18-19 and faithful obedience in conversion
   c. Cruciform Faith and Elder Selection Application segment (class discussion)

III. Cruciform Faith: “Faith of” Christ

   a. Distinguish “faith of” and “faith in” Christ as facets of faithful obedience to God. (this may take some time; see footnote from this section at the end of the lesson)
   b. If time permits, explore Gal. 2:19-20.
   c. Cruciform Faith and Elder Selection Application segment (class discussion)
      i. The nature of “success” and its connection to elder selection.
      ii. Consider conversation about the display of faith in our culture.

IV. Summarize:

   a. Tenants of Cruciform Faith
   b. Questions for Discussion; see Lesson 2, pg. 4 for questions on Philippians 2 and for application.
Lesson 3: Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Love

Teaching Outline

Dear Teachers,

The cruciform pattern of love flows out of cruciform faith. Without cruciform faith there is no foundation for cruciform love. So as you enter into conversation this Sunday, a quick review of Christ’s obedient posture of faith may provide a good launching point to move into cruciform love.

Application for character traits of elders truly comes to the forefront this week as the practice of cruciform love informs concrete expressions of sacrificial and status-renouncing postures toward others. There will be much opportunity to explore how cruciform love shapes both our thinking and our behavior as we submit our impression of love to the model of Christ at the cross.

God bless your study and your presentations this week.

I. Introduction: Lesson 3 – Cruciform Love
   a. Opening question and reflection.
   b. Cruciform love’s connection to cruciform faith.

II. Cruciform love…
   a. Exploration of proactive and antagonistic postures of cruciform love. See 2 Cor. 3:3-13 where Paul demonstrates cruciform love in the life of the community of faith.
      i. Sacrificial
      ii. Status-renouncing
      iii. Others-centered.
   c. Application of these postures as characteristics of elder traits.
      i. The diverse nature of the consequences of cruciform love.
      ii. How does this shape our selection of elder candidates?

III. Cruciform Love and Reconciliation
   a. 2 Cor. 5:18-21
   b. Reconciliation and the traits of elders.

IV. Cruciform Love and Inclusivity (time permitting)

V. Summary statements

Close with discussion questions. In particular, please be sure to focus on the third question: How does cruciform love redefine the substance of what it means to love and to receive love from others?
Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
By Ben Pickett

Lesson 4: Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Power

Teaching Outline

Dear Teachers,

Understanding cruciform power this week will take us in new directions. The default mode of understanding power in our culture is easy to recognize because we live in it almost every day. The context of our work environment—where one person has authority (positional power) over another such that the other must submit to the person above him is consistent with power structures throughout the ages. What is so striking about power from a cruciform perspective is both the method for the exercise of power, and the motivations behind those methods. Power in the Kingdom is paradoxical in the sense that the use of power is demonstrated through weakness. At the cross, Christ overcame sin through non-violent means. His self-giving posture, his position of weakness (as humanity may understand it), is a demonstration of the power of God.

I think it is also important to note that the exercise of cruciform power does not mean Christians or Christian leaders cannot act. They most certainly can and do. Their actions, however, are motivated through by the same vulnerable posture of love for other Christ demonstrated at the cross.

God bless your study and preparation this week.

I. Introduction: Lesson 4 – Cruciform Power
   a. Opening question and reflection.
   b. Power in terms of weakness

II. Cruciform Power…
   a. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
      i. Explore Paul’s experience
      ii. Note carefully words of Christ in v. 8-11.
         1. Power and the grace of Christ.
   b. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12
   c. Application of these postures as characteristics of elder traits.
      i. See questions 1 and 2 from lesson materials.

III. Cruciform Power and Status Transcendence and Reversal
   a. 1 Corinthians 1:26ff.
   b. Power understood as vulnerability and weakness replaces social conventions of position and social rank. It transcends cultural conventions of the function and purpose of power.

IV. Application for the character traits of elders
   a. Importance of humility
   b. The relationship between vulnerability and trust in the church context

V. Summary statements

Close with discussion questions. Of great importance will be question one because it connects these principles with the way we think about elder selection.
Elders and the Cruciform Life
A lesson series for the Monterey Church of Christ
By Ben Pickett

Lesson 5: Elders as Exemplars of Cruciform Hope

Teaching Outline
Dear Teachers,

This week we conclude our lesson series on Cruciformity with an uplifting and encouraging note. Cruciform Hope is, at its heart, about the promise of redemption and exaltation that all of God’s people can anticipate as the final work of God in their life and the final conclusion to all things in this world. Pointing again to the Paul’s “master story” of Philippians 2:6-11, we read how God raised and exalted the perfectly self-giving Christ. Christ was the “first fruits” (I Cor. 15:20ff) of God’s ultimate redemption of all things. As such, Cruciform Hope is grounded in the eschatological (“end times”) posture of the return of Christ.

When Christians consider the reality of Christ’s return, they are empowered to re-frame the meaning of suffering and persecution. So part of your conversation for Sunday will be to explore how Christians make sense of suffering and to ask the class to consider how suffering can be understood as evidence of both the presence of God and the promise of his redemption. Christians who frame the challenges of suffering in their lives with the story from Philippians 2 will come away with a perspective on suffering that places the challenges endured in the larger context of God’s ultimate redemption.

Because Christians live by faith, they place their confidence in God regardless the circumstances and in doing so may hear echoes of Philippians 4 where Paul encourages a suffering church to “rejoice in the Lord always.”

God bless your study and preparation this week.

I. Introduction: Lesson 5 – Cruciform Hope
   a. Opening question and reflection.
   b. Cruciform Hope – the completion of the story of the Messiah

II. Cruciform Hope…
   a. Suffering and Hope
      i. Philippians 2:6-11
      ii. Substance of Cruciform Hope found in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation
   b. Christ’s resurrection as the power and promise for the future.
   c. Cruciform Hope in suffering as a demonstration of presence of faith.

III. Cruciform Hope and Joy.
   a. Phil. 4:4-7
   b. Joy the “by-product” of the cruciform life.
   c. Joy as the source for a hopeful future.

IV. Application for the character traits of elders
   a. Presence of Joy
   b. Confidence, through faith, of the promises of God.
   c. Courage

V. Cruciform Hope – Kingdom Hope.
   a. Affirmation that God is the source of salvation
      i. Practical application: In what other things are Christians prone to place their faith and confidence as an alternative to God?
      ii. Rejection of theocracy (Mark 10:35-37)
      iii. Application for Elders selection
1. Confidence in Christ’s victory.
2. Rejects notions of nationalism as means to advance the Kingdom of God.

Close with discussion questions. The third question should invite considerable discussion.
APPENDIX M

Count the Cost Session

Sunday, October 28, 6:00 p.m.

1. Called To Be Shepherds (Philippians 2:5-11) – <Process Team Elder/Chair>

2. A Cruciform Life – Ben Pickett

3. You and Your Family’s Commitment

   A. Time Commitments – <Process Team Elder>

   B. Basic Orientation – <Process Team Elder>
      1) Relationship to the congregation.
      2) Relationship to fellow elders, and commitment to unity in the group.
      3) Importance of confidentiality.
      4) What to expect during your first several weeks/months.

4. Commitment to Monterey’s Mission – <Process Team Member>

   A. Our mission is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus who make a difference by being a visible presence in our community and world.

   B. Our vision and values…

   C. Our ministry organization (ministry leaders)…

   D. Our ministry and support staff structure…

5. Potential Retreats and Study Sessions.


7. Perspective From An Elder’s Wife.

   A. <Elder’s wife>
   B. <Elder’s wife>
8. Questions…

9. A Season of Prayer…