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PREPARING THE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO EQUIP THE CHURCH BODY FOR
MINISTRY AT THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Samuel J. Garner

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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

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a project to guide the leadership team to prepare the church body for ministry at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ. This intervention involved the leadership team in a series of one-hour sessions in the fall of 2011 that brought together different sources for theological reflection, such as *lectio divina*, prayer, theology of equipping from Ephesians 4, contextual engagement with the congregation, and the participants' own experience of leadership. The sessions' purpose was to generate discussion and practices among the sources so that the leadership team could become more effective in its congregational role to guide the church membership in ministry. Evaluation of the project revealed several key insights: (1) the leadership team connected Paul's theology in Ephesians with their own ministerial tasks; (2) active engagement with the congregation provided the participants with opportunities to grow as leaders; (3) exposure to necessary spiritual and leadership practices created opportunities for the leadership team to broaden their expectations; and (4) recognition of the importance to become an effective team.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis reports on an attempt to prepare the leadership team to equip the church body for ministry at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ.¹ The purpose of this project was to guide the elders and ministry group leaders through sessions that invite participants to consider their role in leading the entire congregational body to full participation in ministry. Chapter 1 introduces the project with a description of the history of the church's leadership, an analysis of the current leadership context, and clarification of the problem, purpose, and delimitations. Chapter 2 outlines the theological framework for the project. Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach to the project by describing the intervention format, participants, sessions, and evaluation methods, along with a timetable for the project intervention and a description of the entire project. Chapter 4 examines the effectiveness of the project through an analysis and interpretation of the results of the data obtained through the evaluative methods. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by discussing this project's implications for my own ministry setting, possible use in other contexts, and future actions that might result from the project.

¹Herein labeled "Connecticut Valley."

Title of Project

The title of this project is “Preparing the Leadership Team to Equip the Church Body for Ministry at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ.”² The leadership team at Connecticut Valley includes the elders and the ministry group leaders, members who direct the nine ministry groups that oversee the congregational ministries. The term “body” identifies the church as the body of Christ based on Paul’s description of local congregations in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. To “equip” the body implies preparing the congregation to utilize their gifts given by Christ. As I will argue in my theological rationale, the sign of maturation for the church is when every part of the body is active in ministry participation as the unified body of Christ.

Ministry Context

Connecticut Valley began in 1983 when a group of young adults trained in the St. Louis Internship Program, a year-long program of the Mid County Church of Christ that prepared participants for church planting, moved to Windsor, Connecticut, to establish a congregation. The initial purpose was to establish a community of faith appropriate for the New England context.³ A group of young adults comprised most of the church’s membership, with a few older widows who left another local congregation in order to join a church in their hometown of Windsor. During the first ten years, the church

²The “leadership team” is not an official congregational label for this group. I will utilize this term for clarity in the project since the congregation does not have a term for the group.

³During the early years of the congregation, “listening groups” from the church participated in town meetings and visited community organizations to determine how the church might serve the context most effectively.

worshipped in rented facilities and received monetary support from a congregation in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1993, Connecticut Valley purchased property that included a commercial building the congregation would renovate to serve as a church building, and soon thereafter the congregation became financially independent.

Connecticut Valley has represented the racial and socio-economic diversity of its context during the congregation's history. Though the membership of the church has been white historically,⁴ the church has at times included a racially diverse makeup including people from every economic and educational level. Likewise, while the church has always included members with a Church of Christ background, the members have represented a variety of Christian backgrounds, including Evangelical, Mainline Protestant, and Catholic. Consequently, the Connecticut Valley members historically have prided themselves on being a place of refuge for a diversity of people. Many members have left other congregations and religious groups because they encountered difficult or even abusive situations. In addition to this diverse membership, fulltime ministers have served the church from the beginning. Connecticut Valley, in fact, commenced with three fulltime workers, and it was during this time that the church experienced its greatest numerical growth.

⁴At times Connecticut Valley has been more diverse racially. In fact, one of the first ministers was a young African-American. Also, most of the widows who joined the congregation at its beginning were African-American. Church members have valued racial diversity, as well as other types of diversity, and actively sought to incorporate various people into the church.

Full Participation of Members

From its inception, even while employing three fulltime ministers, Connecticut Valley sought to include every member as an active participant in ministry. Family meetings traditionally have served the church as the setting to discuss important decisions. These meetings are open to all members, and all participants can voice their opinion.⁵ Following Sunday morning worship, the church would weekly gather for lunch, including a time of prayer in which all could share prayer requests and important experiences in their life. Because the church was small, met in rented, informal contexts, and included mostly Windsor residents, the congregational personality evolved as a cohesive group in which members developed intimate relationships.

Even though the congregation was a unified group, the church's focus during the first decade was outreach oriented. Connecticut Valley was often involved in town events and provided seminars for people in the area that addressed a wide range of issues. One early minister, for example, who served the congregation during two separate tenures, was a trained counselor and offered seminars and assistance on marriage and family issues. The young, active church gained a reputation in Windsor as willing to assist residents in need. Town social services routinely called the church to perform a variety of tasks.⁶ In addition to assisting those in need, the church also held Bible studies in a

⁵For many years the family meetings took place on Saturday evenings in order to provide a lengthy, uninterrupted time for serious conversation and planning. Once the congregation purchased a facility, the meetings took place after worship on Sunday afternoons. This move changed the family meetings from longer, more involved conversations to more concise agendas.

⁶Many long-time members still describe these early years as the congregation's most effective time in maintaining a presence in the Windsor community, and they

variety of locations, including the local chapter of the Y.M.C.A. This specific effort introduced the Christian faith to many native New Englanders, many of whom have remained long-time members of this congregation and churches in other locations. In short, the church emphasized an outward focus, deeply involved in Windsor, and the congregation encouraged every member to be involved as an integral participant in the church and in the church's local context.

In order to organize the growing membership, Connecticut Valley instituted ministry groups to oversee the congregational ministries.⁷ A single member, man or woman, or a collection of members led each group. During the first decade these groups demonstrated great flexibility, reflecting a growing congregation constantly implementing new ministries. Typical family meeting agendas included the ministry group leaders reporting on the status of their groups and respective ministry work. The ministry staff worked with the ministry group leaders, even leading groups on occasion, and servant-leaders, a group of men chosen by the congregation, also provided pastoral leadership for the church as the primary church administrators.⁸ The servant-leaders worked alongside the ministry group leaders and staff, as well, regularly meeting to determine the groups' organization and tasks. However, the congregation's leadership

particularly recall the town requested the church to assist townspeople in need on numerous occasions.

⁷Initially, the congregation called these work groups.

⁸In the church's earliest years, business meetings, attended by the males in the congregation, served as Connecticut Valley's highest decision-making authority. When the church grew, this select group of men, called servant-leaders and chosen by the membership, provided ongoing leadership.

structure was constantly in flux, and despite several concerted efforts to provide a more definite arrangement, a consistent leadership arrangement never emerged.

As soon as the late 1980s and the early 1990s, family meeting minutes demonstrate concerns that many ministry groups lacked organization and involvement from the membership. Subsequently, turnover within the ministry staff proved difficult to manage, requiring months and years of continual discernment concerning future direction because the congregation was uncertain of the exact role they desired a staff to provide. The church also sought to establish elders instead of servant-leaders, which they viewed as the more biblical, definitive form of leadership for a local congregation. The church intended for servant-leaders to provide interim leadership until the congregation was prepared to install elders, but the congregation's servant-leaders essentially served the role that elders ultimately filled. Any attempt to create a consistent, long-term leadership team model faced difficulties due to frequent transitions. On several occasions, the congregation called certain members to prepare a working leadership model for the church based on biblical principles. One group drafted an extensive document to clarify an appropriate leadership structure and also introduce the congregation to visitors and new members. The document provided both an in-depth description of the church's organization and expectations of all members who would join or had joined Connecticut Valley. However, none of the leadership models or the extensive initiation document ever materialized as the formal church structure.

Transitioning as a Settled Church

In August 1993 Connecticut Valley moved into its first permanent facility, signifying an important transition on several levels; the once mobile congregation was

now in a more settled position. As a result many members noticed the church immediately became more inward focused. They devoted their efforts to prepare and establish the facility as the congregation's ministry location. The move to a permanent building also coincided with another significant transition in the congregation: the once youthful membership now possessed their own families, jobs, and homes to manage. The congregation, which once was comprised of mostly Windsor residents, now represented various locations in Central Connecticut. Members formerly engaged in Windsor altered their focus to family and interests in their new hometowns.

Concurrently, the minister on staff, who had served on staff during most of the church's history, announced his resignation and offered to remain only until a new minister was obtained. Having served the congregation during two separate tenures, he and his wife were involved in almost every facet of congregational life. He was integral in guiding the church toward an outward focus, encouraging the church to engage the community. He was not in favor of purchasing a permanent facility, but when the decision was reached to move forward and obtain the property, he drafted detailed plans to transform the facility into a community service building. Over time, however, he recognized that the church was moving in another direction. Based on an extensive church survey, the congregation determined the next minister should focus on providing preaching and teaching for the congregation, another sign of the gradual transition to a more inward focus. The subsequent minister did focus on those areas; in fact, he was unambiguous during his nearly ten-year tenure that his job was to preach and teach. Other than those specific ministry tasks, he would not provide much of a leadership presence.

In addition to the minister transition, the congregation also prepared to establish its first eldership. The church recognized this as a monumental occasion, even inviting other area elderships to participate on the Sunday the elders were installed in 2003.⁹ The eldership quickly noticed, though, that the church became too dependent on the new elders to provide direction. Connecticut Valley, historically valuing the participation of the entire membership, struggled to implement this new organizational structure and integrate the membership as active ministry participants. The ministry groups continued their inconsistent leadership during this transition time. Some groups remained effective and demonstrated effective, consistent ministry while others struggled to provide leadership. The new minister did not provide any administration for the ministry group leaders, and in an attempt to address this lack of direction, the elders called on a woman in the congregation, experienced in human resources, to facilitate the ministry group leaders. While she did provide much needed leadership, the groups demanded more work than she could provide, and after only a couple of years in this position, she and her family relocated from the area.

Connecticut Valley grew older in age as a congregation, and many of the young families graduated their children. After celebrating several large high school graduation classes, the church included few young people. In addition to the leadership transitions, this development created more anxiety. The members began to recognize they were aging, not involved in Windsor anymore, and uncertain of leadership structures. At the

⁹The congregation, according to their tendency historically, devoted many years to study the issue in-depth. Sermons, classes, and discussion groups provided all members with ample opportunities to discern the most effective way to choose and install elders.

same time, many important leaders in the church moved for a variety of reasons, and the minister offered his resignation in 2006. The church initiated a minister search process, which led to my hiring. In addition to providing preaching, teaching, and administration, my primary ministerial task was to facilitate the ministry group leaders.

Current Leadership Context

Facilitating the ministry group leaders has proven to be complicated. When I first arrived in 2006, there were about ten ministry groups, the number unspecific because a couple of ministry group leaders did not even realize they led a group. According to congregational tradition, ministry group leader meetings were open to the entire congregation. Only about half the ministry group leaders would attend, however, and most comments at the meeting emanated from participants not serving as ministry group leaders. Upon further investigation I discovered that several ministry group leaders held no desire to lead and had only accepted the role out of a sense of obligation. Over the next few years, the eldership took a more active role by merging some ministry groups, holding candid conversations with leaders not gifted to lead, and encouraging some other members in the congregation to lead groups.

Connecticut Valley's current leadership includes four elders, nine ministry group leaders,¹⁰ a part-time church administrator, and me.¹¹ Each elder is associated with at

¹⁰The current ministry groups are (1) adult education, (2) benevolence, (3) body life, (4) children and youth, (5) facilities, (6) missions, (7) outreach, (8) small groups, and (9) worship.

¹¹I serve as the leader of the worship ministry group, so I am included in the count of ministry group leaders.

least two ministry groups according to the elders' gifts and interests in order to provide counsel, support, and encouragement. The ministry group leaders meet regularly to discuss ongoing efforts as well as hold each other accountable for our leadership work. The church administrator, hired in November 2009, has provided leadership skills, specifically serving as an effective coordinator for the leadership team and the remainder of the congregation. According to many long-time members, Connecticut Valley arguably is in the healthiest ministry position in its history, particularly when assessing the organizational structure and the type of ministries the congregation is pursuing.

However, substantial growth areas still exist for the congregation. The leadership team members are still developing a working relationship with each other and with the congregation. Elders and ministry group leaders still do not communicate as effectively as they could; some elders maintain a better working relationship with their respective ministry groups than other elders. Similarly, some ministry group leaders have a close working relationship with their respective elder, and other leaders do not work well with their respective elder. The ministry group leaders do function as more effective leaders than when I arrived. They display a willingness to provide ongoing leadership for their groups, actively mentor those they serve beside in ministry, and provide clear communication for the remainder of the congregation concerning their particular ministry group. There are still some leaders, though, who are reactive, do not meet regularly or even communicate with their ministry group members.

Due to the inconsistency among the leadership team, not all the ministry groups function effectively. This is not from a lack of effort, though. Elders and ministry group leaders demonstrate the willingness to lead and guide the congregation into ministry. For

example, each year in May, Connecticut Valley devotes a Sunday as a reminder to the congregation about the ministry groups and their work. The next day all members receive a survey to indicate the ministry groups and activities they desire to join. The expectation is that each member will be an active member of at least one ministry group. While this process has been in place for only three years, most members have reacted positively; there is a high level of enthusiasm demonstrated to join the congregation's ministry work. An eagerness to join God's ministry exists, but the organizational structure to form that ministry needs more preparation.

In order to develop a more effective leadership team, the individual leaders not only require growth, but as I have described, Connecticut Valley leaders need to develop deeper understanding and ongoing practices as a leadership team. This necessity increases as our ministry groups partner for new ministry opportunities. The leadership team has recognized the benefits for continuing support and encouragement from each other. When one ministry group engages in a positive ministry experience, their experiences encourage the other groups and establish an atmosphere for other groups to lead effectively. Conversely, the lack of effective leadership in one area has had notable ramifications for the entire system.¹² If Connecticut Valley is to mature as a healthy body,

¹²Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 15. He defines a healthy congregation as one that approximates wholeness, for total wholeness is not attainable. Steinke grounds his idea of wholeness in a system theory approach in which each part of a congregation is interconnected with other parts. Also see Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching and Practical Ministry* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 5-27. According to Allen, to minister effectively, specifically addressing the preaching role, the leader must understand the congregation as a system. This project will seek to address the congregation's need to seek growth holistically as a community.

our leadership team must possess the ability to work as an effective team. Most importantly, the ability of the leadership team to demonstrate mutuality will encourage the entire congregation to join one another in ministry.

The Problem

The problem that this project addressed was that the leadership team at Connecticut Valley has not consistently engaged in preparation to equip the church body for ministry. While there have been periods of time in the congregation's history when the ministry groups and other leaders have functioned effectively, this has not occurred consistently. During the early years of its existence, an effective leadership team led the entire body to ministry. As the church grew larger in numbers and faced a variety of transitions among the membership and in its ministry context, the congregational leadership was not able to adapt sufficiently. The full participation in ministry that occurred in the early history of the church ceased to exist.

The leadership team's inability to provide consistent leadership signifies an underdeveloped ecclesiology present in the congregation. The church does not exhibit a full understanding of its position as the body of Christ, which is evident in the inability of the entire membership to participate in the congregational ministries. In particular, the congregation's need for a deeper Christology has contributed to this immature ecclesiological understanding. In order for Connecticut Valley to integrate the entire body in ministry, the church needs to discover a deeper sense of its place under Christ, and the leadership team must begin to equip the entire church to embody a mature ecclesiology.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to prepare Connecticut Valley's leadership team to equip the church body for ministry. My plan was to provide an environment where the entire leadership team could reflect, practice, and plan how they might invite the congregational body to God's work. The leadership team needs to be flexible and open to God's leading, so the project employed scriptural meditation, prayer, and discernment as necessary practices for long-term effectiveness. The project addressed the underdeveloped ecclesiology that stems from an inadequate Christology. The leadership team needed to demonstrate a mature vision of the church as the body of Christ in order to guide Connecticut Valley to become more Christ-like.

Delimitations

This project focused on discerning leadership functions for our congregational leadership team as it specifically pertains to the ministry groups' role to equip the congregational body for ministry. The project only considered other facets of the leadership team's role in connection to the project participants' task to equip the members of Connecticut Valley for ministry.

Conclusion

Connecticut Valley has sought inclusion of every member to the ministry work from its inception, and early in the church's existence, the church exhibited full participation in ministry. A leadership structure that encourages this full participation has not occurred consistently, however. In the midst of church transitions and changes in the

ministry context, the congregation did not continue to demonstrate the original goal for full participation in ministry. Further, an underdeveloped ecclesiology based on an immature Christology demands attention in order for the leadership team to guide the church. This project responded to this leadership issue and invited Connecticut Valley's leaders to consider and practice their role to become more effective and to equip the church.

CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

From its inception Connecticut Valley has sought to include each member in ministry. The current organizational structure, which consists of elders, ministry staff, and ministry group leaders, has evolved in an attempt to meet this expectation: everyone would participate. While full participation has been Connecticut Valley's goal, implementation has not always been consistent; many members have not become involved in the congregation's ministry efforts. An underdeveloped ecclesiology has contributed to this lack of participation, and the congregation's ecclesiological issues have occurred due to an underdeveloped Christology. As a result, the leadership team must address ecclesiological issues caused by christological misperceptions in order to guide the congregation effectively. The leadership team must be prepared to assist Connecticut Valley to assume its identity as the body of Christ.

Paul's letter to the Ephesians¹ describes the church² as the organic, living body of Christ. In Paul's depiction of the church, God incorporates the full participation of each

¹The authorship of Ephesians has been the topic of much discussion in scholarship. However, this important historical debate does not impact the purposes of this project. I will claim Pauline authorship while recognizing the issues with such a claim in the context of contemporary scholarship.

²In Ephesians Paul identifies the church as a cosmic entity. While my project addresses ministry in a local congregation, Paul's description of the cosmic church

body part, the historical and continual pursuit of Connecticut Valley. Thus Ephesians 4:1-16 offers Connecticut Valley a fitting, theological portrayal of God's people. In this text our congregation can discover an identity rooted in God's work in the world and determine how we might respond more adequately to God's call to serve in our local context. This chapter specifically will explore Paul's description of a functioning church body and attempt to address the underdeveloped ecclesiology present in the congregation. As Paul demonstrates in the letter, Christ blesses each part of the body with gifts meant to support the whole body. The Spirit leads the church and maintains the unity necessary for the church to be the body of Christ.³ Congregational leadership,⁴ as a result, is to live into that unity and equip the entire body for ministry. When a congregation is involved in this process of equipping, then it is maturing into a healthy, functioning body.

applies to my particular context because the unified church body presented in Ephesians necessitates particular implications in local congregations. Individual congregations, properly understood, belong to the universal church, which Paul describes in the letter. It is critical, therefore, that congregations develop awareness of God's work in creation in order to determine appropriate ecclesiological practices. Otherwise, local congregations will not develop a mature vision of their position in the body of Christ. In this chapter I will identify key points of Paul's theological depiction of the church and how his theology impacts the church's attempt to equip the body for ministry.

³John A. Witmer, "Paul's Trinitarian Epistle," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 115 (1958): 247-57. This article provides a helpful description of Paul's Trinitarian emphasis in the letter.

⁴Paul does not use the term "leadership" in the letter, and he does not promote a hierarchical church structure. In my congregational context, as this project demonstrates, the members given the task of equipping the body are the church leaders, elders, ministry group leaders, and the congregational staff. My intent is not to equate my contextual understanding of leadership with Paul's context in antiquity. Rather, I will utilize "leadership," and derivatives of the word, for the purposes of this project as a descriptive term. In the same way Paul encourages gifted individuals not to perform the ministry but to equip the body, this project invites Connecticut Valley's leadership to prepare our congregational body for ministry.

God Calls the Church to Ministry

In Ephesians Paul persuades his readers to consider their position in God's world and act accordingly.⁵ From the epistle's opening blessing (1:3-14) and through his prayers (1:15-23; 3:14-21), Paul invites his audience to identify themselves as God's chosen and loved through Christ. God, according to Paul, is enacting his plan in creation, and through Christ the plan of God reached its pinnacle. Ephesians establishes an important position for God's people. It is a positive identity rooted in God's actions in the past, present, and the future. Paul performs an act of pastoral ministry when he addresses the readers, and through rhetorical means he adopts a strategy of persuasion so that they might continue or even begin to comprehend the presence of God in the world and a proper response for their circumstances.⁶

In this letter Paul connects God's people to God's work in the world. He believes that the church has received the necessary resources to pursue completeness in Christ, so he reminds the Ephesians that embracing God's call is a realistic ambition.⁷ The letter is not a document intending to dissect controversies or problematic issues. Paul does not ask his audience to formulate a decision on the basis of argument. Rather than argue he

⁵Ben Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 217-18. Witherington claims Ephesians is the only epistle in the Pauline corpus that does not provide the exact purpose of the correspondence.

⁶Andrew T. Lincoln and A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

⁷*Ibid.*, 269.

stokes the Ephesians' thinking and sentiment.⁸ Paul creates a sense of awe, gratitude, and humility that inspires and motivates his audience to accept and practice what he urges.⁹ The church must learn to respond appropriately to its context in the world.¹⁰

Ephesians promotes peace and unity as the primary agendas in God's work. Eight times Paul describes God's efforts to provide peace. His calls for unity (4:3, 13) and oneness (1:13; 2:6, 13-22; 3:6, 18; 4:3-6, 12-16; 5:19-12; 6:18) demonstrate God's reconciling work. This unity exists only through God's work in Christ and through the Spirit, in which God breaks down the walls constructed to separate humanity (2:14-22). Through his Spirit, God lives in the church and actively fosters unity. Paul mentions the Spirit at a higher concentration than any of his other letters. Since the Spirit's primary work is to empower and maintain unity, Paul's frequent mentioning of the Spirit makes obvious the Ephesians' need to respond adequately to God's provision of unity. Regardless of the current, discordant status of the world, Paul invites his readers to accept a reality in which God is reconciling creation through Christ and the Spirit.

The Ephesian Christians, consequently, should assume a countercultural identity. In fact, through Christ, God has established the church as the central location of his reconciling work. The letter's first half portrays this requisite role of the church, and Paul constantly reminds his audience of their existence in Christ's body. Following a brief

⁸Roy R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2000), 46-47.

⁹Witherington, 221-22.

¹⁰Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 21.

introduction, the letter's opening eulogy (1:3-14) clarifies this fact. The Ephesian Christians receive election (1:4), adoption (1:5), redemption (1:7), choosing (1:11), inclusion (1:13), and a seal (1:13). They now possess an identity connected to Christ himself. The subsequent prayer seeks wisdom, enlightenment, and hope in the inheritance and power of Christ (1:15-23). The church, according to Paul, embodies the fullness of Christ's body; through Christ, God fills the church in every way.

Paul assumes that his audience has not always lived in this reality. Previously, they participated in the kingdom of death, but now their participation in the new creation, in Christ, should transform their existence (2:1-22). They used to be far away, but now they are near (2:13, 18-19). God's fullness is an identity-altering experience. Grace (2:5, 7, 8), love (2:4), and mercy (2:4, 7) now define their lives, and the destructive forces that once created divisiveness and chaos have disappeared due to the impact of God's presence. They have transitioned to a new location, residing in the church, where Christ also dwells (2:19-22). God's cosmic work through Christ directly impacts the Ephesian Christians. Even the Gentile believers, once separated from God's people and apparently a major faction among Paul's readers in Ephesus,¹¹ receive an invitation to join God's work. Paul encourages all of the believers to remain faithful and confident in the gospel message he has presented (3:1-13). They cannot be discouraged because they are participants in an important work (3:13).

Paul concludes the first half of the letter with a prayer that announces the blessings from God for the church. Riches (3:16), power (3:16, 18), and love (3:17-18)

¹¹For a description of the letter's Gentile audience, see Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (New York: T&T Clark, 1997), 2.

will sustain God's people. The church resides with the exalted Christ, seated at the right hand of God (1:3, 20-22; 2:6, 21-22; 3:8, 10-12, 18-19). They are participants in God's divine work in which Christ serves as the head of the body, directing the church and filling it (1:22; 2:22). The wisdom and strength Paul requests from God grant the church an identity unmatched by any other entity. The church, then, assumes a privileged position in God's work, which demands great responsibility.¹²

The Ephesian Christians, as Paul demonstrates, should discover their role in God's cosmic work. Through their participation in the church, they have joined Christ in the heavenly realms (2:1-17), filled with the presence of God (2:19-22).¹³ Conversely, their identity does not reside in the current status of their world or their particular context, for God has provided a way of life contrary to the destructive patterns of darkness. Paul's readers have received a calling from God; they are active participants in the eternal purposes of God (3:8-11). This important work will occur through the body of Christ, the church.

God Prepares the Church for Ministry

Following the doxological emphasis in the first half of the letter, Paul begins chapter 4 with a description of the church's appropriate response to God's work in the world. Paul introduces the letter's paraenetic material with "I urge" in 4:1, which is a

¹²Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 235.

¹³Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Settings* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 44-47. Banks argues that Ephesians presents the church as a heavenly assembly permanently in session.

common occurrence in his letters.¹⁴ He marks his most important points with the phrase in each of his letters. In Ephesians Paul transitions to the next section of the epistle by linking the subsequent discussion to his previous doxological description. Traditionally, scholars have emphasized the move to ethical teaching in chapter 4, and indeed, a transition from theological exposition to moral exhortation occurs. This transition, though, does not initiate a different purpose in the epistle's latter half. In other words, Paul does not separate *kerygma* (proclamation) and *didache* (ethical teaching).¹⁵ Instead, his transition indicates a connection, not a new topic altogether. While the first three chapters announce God's power and cause in the world, noting the role of the church, the final three chapters utilize the imperative mood to announce the proper theological conduct, character, and community as an appropriate response to God's work.¹⁶

¹⁴Lincoln, 226. 1 Thess. 4:1 and Rom. 12:1 are examples of Paul's beginning of a major paraenesis of his letters in this manner. See also Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 108, who argues that in antiquity, a society built upon the benefactor-benefaction system, this type of transition occurred frequently in documents. After summoning, exhorting, and encouraging those who had received a benefaction, the document would then urge a correct appropriation to the giver of the gift.

¹⁵C. H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 5. Dodd claims Ephesians displays Paul's rhetorical technique to open a letter with *didache* and then move to ethical teaching, particularly examining Paul's use of "therefore" to signal this transition. He also claims Romans, Galatians, and Colossians as good examples of this style. Dodd's argument, however, does not demonstrate that while "therefore" serves as a transition word, "urge" is more important for Paul when he makes his important point(s). This word, for Paul, links the previous claim to his subsequent discussion.

¹⁶Allen Verhey and Joseph S. Harvard, *Ephesians* (Louisville: Westminster, 2011), 131-32. "The gospel, for Paul, occurs in both the indicative and the imperative mood."

Thus Ephesians 4:1 signals a continuance of the previous chapters' theme, though Paul now provides a description for a specific response to God's work. He exhorts them to "lead a life worthy of the calling" they have received (4:1). This exhortation serves as a header for the remainder of the letter, but specifically in chapter 4 it calls the readers to complete the unity God has achieved through Christ. Again, a separation does not exist between the first half of the epistle and the second half; they are to embrace the cosmic calling they have received through their life together as the people of God. With respect to their privileged position in the world, they are to conduct their lives appropriately, as a distinctive people.¹⁷ Paul's description of "the heavenly places" demands a particular earthly, daily experience for God's people described in 4:1-16.¹⁸

Paul also exhorts the church to accept their divine calling, to be lived out in their particular context. Paul opens the second part of the letter with an encouragement to live worthily of the calling they have received. The Ephesians' calling from God should prepare them to live appropriately. In the same way unity and peace represented God's work in the world in the letter's early chapters, Paul now calls them to embrace this reality as a unified body. This idea of unity, in fact, bookends 4:1-16. The unity is central to God's plan to "gather up all things" in Christ (2:14-18). This unity, expressed in the indicative in Ephesians 1-3, is now in chapter 4 Paul's directed imperative for the church

¹⁷Lincoln and Wedderburn, 81. They describe the second half of the letter as "a lengthy ethical exhortation," though they do note the connection between the two sections.

¹⁸Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 46. He describes the importance of this "heavenly language" in the ancient Greco-Roman culture.

to put it into practice. The church is the location where they fulfill this call by exemplifying oneness.¹⁹ The community of faith is not a random collection of individuals; rather it is the joined people of God, led by God's Spirit, following Christ as the head of the body.²⁰ Paul claims this call to unity is the ultimate hope of the saints (4:4). God is reconciling the cosmos, and the church should embody a unified community worthy of his work in creation.

Unity, as Paul depicts it, occurs when the church practices humility, gentleness, and patience (4:2). These virtues, fully practiced, form a community even when great diversity exists. Contrary to boasting (2:9), humility prepares people to accept each other. Gentleness, likewise, contrasts the tendency to condemn others or display an arrogant attitude. When coupled together humility and gentleness foster a harmonious environment, a necessity when seeking unity. The third characteristic, patience, is necessary for attempts to dwell together in unity. The community will otherwise cultivate individuals who seek their own selfish ways and rights. When these virtues become a reality in the church, then the believers' way of life consists of "bearing with one another in love" (4:2). Even though Jews and Gentiles were once separated in profound ways, they can now discover unity among God's people. This is a perfect example for Paul of the power of God in the church²¹

¹⁹Ibid., 47. Martin claims that according to Ephesians, church by its very definition is unity.

²⁰Lincoln, 267. The top priority for the church, according to Lincoln's reading of Paul, is to practice unity.

²¹Verhey and Harvard, 138-40.

Paul emphasizes that these important characteristics of the Christian identity must occur. He describes this identity throughout the letter, but here in the fourth chapter, he begins to demarcate the exact way of life demanded by God.²² Paul understands, however, that Christians do not always accept this new existence God has provided.²³ The manner in which God worked through Christ must transform God's people in concrete ways; the church must reveal the unity that is foundational to God's work in the world. When the church displays this unity, then they have embraced "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3). This is the call of God for the unified church: becoming a community through which God, under the leadership of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit, ministers in the world.²⁴

The ability of the church to practice unity on a comprehensive level is crucial to its ministry. The unity creed, as traditionally identified in Ephesians 4:4-6, demonstrates the significance of seeking accord as a church, unified under God's providential guidance "who is over all and through all and in all." Paul is most certainly reminding his readers of what they already know. Nevertheless, this list articulates the fact that the church's distinctiveness exists in God's oneness.²⁵ In fact, the creed establishes every part of the

²²Lincoln and Wedderburn, 82.

²³Paul Tillich, *The New Being* (New York: Scribners, 1955), 18.

²⁴Malcom L. Warford, "The Hope of Our Calling: Thinking about Ministry in the Context of Ephesians 4:1-16," *Lexington Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 45. Warford discusses this text from the perspective of the Stone-Campbell movement, specifically his Disciples of Christ background, stressing the idea of one baptism as an important sacrament that connects the various parts of the body.

²⁵Talbert, 109.

Godhead as integral to unity, demonstrating the entirety of God as the source of the church's existence through the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Paul even moves "body" to the front of the creed, thus reaffirming his ecclesiological emphasis in the letter. The church should embody the wholeness of God. Church unity, as Paul explains, is not a task to be achieved; indeed, it already exists, guaranteed by the Spirit who motivates it, the one Lord who rules it, and the God who sustains it.²⁶ Therefore, the task of Christians is to live into that unity and to embrace it as their defining identity.

Though this oneness exists in the church, oppressive uniformity is not the outcome. The church incorporates a diversity of people, fostered by a diversity of gifts. Christ himself, the head of the church, has granted these gifts (4:7). Each gift serves the common good, and Christ determines the exact amount of gifts. The diversity present in the church is not a hindrance to unity, but as Paul demonstrates, the variety of gifts sustains the overall health and maturation of the congregation. He describes the receiving of gifts as a deliverance of grace. Every person, not only a select group, becomes a recipient of this grace in the form of gifts, and as a result Christ establishes the church.²⁷

Paul refers to Psalm 68 as a basis for Christ's provision of gifts to the church. The psalm is a call to God to rescue his people. According to the psalmist, God should receive praise for acts of deliverance and provision (vv. 4-6). God's victory after the exodus causes Sinai to shake (v. 8) and kings to scatter (vv. 11-14) and establishes his reign high

²⁶Witherington, 280. He concludes that Paul's understanding of unity is inherent in the church's existence; it is intrinsic to the church's nature.

²⁷Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1974), 435.

on Sinai (v. 17).²⁸ Paul quotes verse 18 in which the psalmist declares God has “ascended on high” and “received many gifts.” However, Paul’s wording differs from the psalm when he claims that God “gave gifts to his people.” Many attempts have been made to determine Paul’s usage of the psalm,²⁹ but it is clear that in the same way God ascended as a victor in Psalm 68, Christ has also ascended in victory. Thus Paul summarizes important aspects of the exaltation of Christ and his role in providing gifts to the church in terms of Psalm 68.³⁰

This ascension, according to Paul, took place “higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.” As he has demonstrated throughout Ephesians, Christ and all those in him are blessed in the heavenly realms. Indeed, Christ has raised Christians and seated them with him (2:6). Conversely, Christ has subjugated his enemies and taken captives. These gifts provided by Christ link the church with its head. Though the church continues to live on the earth, it is still participating in heavenly work.³¹ The

²⁸James L. Mays, *Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 225-28. Mays provides a helpful discussion of the psalm.

²⁹William Bales, “The Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 84-100. This article provides a summary of the views concerning Paul’s usage of Psalm 68.

³⁰William N. Wilder, “The Use (or Abuse) of Power in High Places: Gifts Given and Received in Isaiah, Psalm 68, and Ephesians 4:8,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010): 198-99.

³¹W. Hall Harris, “The Ascent and Descent of Christ in Ephesians 4:9-10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151 (1994): 213-14.

church should persevere because it will be able to its their ground and resist, for it is fighting from a position of victory.³²

God Calls Leaders to Equip the Body

Ephesians portrays a community ultimately led by the Spirit. The Spirit empowers the church, and the Spirit provides the unity and diversity of the church. The church, as a result, is to maintain the unity (4:3) and strive towards the unity of faith (4:13). Verse 11 identifies specific examples of those who receive gifts, through Christ, to lead others. These gifts do not restrict ministry to a select group; no dichotomy exists between leaders and the other members of the body. God has blessed each part. Together these diverse parts with various gifts embody a unified community.³³ Paul does not describe these gifted individuals as occupying an office, and the list does not appear to be exhaustive. Instead, he describes leadership's role "to equip the people for works of service, so that the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of God" (4:12). Thus this description of spiritual gifts demonstrates consistency with his other writings in which the gifts are the basis for edification of the entire body

³²Paul makes this victory abundantly clear in 6:10-17. In addition, see Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 41-56. Arnold provides a description of the supernatural beings in Ephesians. Also see Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992). In this book Arnold overviews Paul's letters to examine Christians' battle against the supernatural.

³³T. David Gordon, "Equipping Ministry in Ephesians 4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (1994): 78.

(Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12). Leaders have an important role to guide the entire body toward growth.

Therefore, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians expresses a high view of leadership. In order for the church to become mature, filled with the presence and knowledge of Christ, leaders, those gifted individuals who have received a call to prepare the body for ministry, must function effectively. Paul has already mentioned the significance of leaders in the letter (2:20 and 3:5, for example) explaining their unique role in passing down the teaching tradition that grounds the Christians so they might not return to their previous, ungodly way of life. He constantly prays for the Ephesians' wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of Christ, and leaders hold an integral role in guiding the community of faith to assume this godly existence. Specifically, these gifts primarily steer the church to attain the unity of faith.

In chapter 4 Paul explicitly discusses the function of leadership in the body of Christ. He has already established Christ as the giver of gifts, so the ascended Lord, overseeing all of creation, provides the necessary skills to equip the church.³⁴ All church members benefit from Christ's gifting, and Christ cares for all because each member receives exactly what is needed.³⁵ A community of gifted individuals exists; each part of the body is important to the overall ministry.³⁶ While no clergy-laity distinction exists,

³⁴Lincoln, 265.

³⁵Barth, 479.

³⁶Talbert, 115. The text, according to Talbert, demonstrates that the saints need leaders to provide guidance for everyone's gifts if those gifts are to contribute to the growth of the church.

there is a leader and follower distinction in which Christ chooses certain individuals to provide necessary guidance for the church. In other words, God makes certain the church possesses the requisite gifts needed for its circumstances. The leaders, accordingly, serve an essential role in equipping all followers to embrace their gifts. Every member must minister, but preparation must occur for the body to minister effectively.³⁷

Paul is clear in his attempt to call church leadership, regardless of the exact task, to equip the body. Paul's examples in 4:11 likely reflect his belief that the church needs teaching because the important task at hand for the Ephesian Christians is education, as is evident throughout the epistle in Paul's continual plea for his audience's knowledge and wisdom to deepen. The church's teaching specifically concerns practical living. The body of Christ must make an appropriate response to God's work in the world, and the church possesses the important commission to represent God in their context. There is a diversity of gifts present in the church, so leaders must value this diversity while also assisting the church to integrate each member as an integral part of the body. The end result of the equipping will be a unified, knowledgeable body, attaining the full measure of Christ (4:13).

The practical living focus in the congregational teaching will prepare the church for "works of service."³⁸ These works of service that glorify God will lead to the edification of, and unity in, the church. As Paul explains in 2:1-10, Christ has raised up

³⁷Witherington, 291. He argues that the persons listed in verse 11 serve as the foundational members in preparing all the saints to minister.

³⁸Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 549.

the saints and seated them with him (2:6). They no longer are under control “of the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (2:2). This essentially restates the beginning of the epistle’s opening prayer, where Paul claims the Christians through their incorporation in Christ are now connected to the heavenly realm and they already enjoy the blessing of that realm (1:3). According to Paul, God chose the church “before the creation” to be “holy and blameless” (1:4). The church will display their new status by doing the good works that God created them to do (2:10). These works advance God’s cause in the world because they are gifts from God (2:8).³⁹

Paul provides a christological emphasis for the works of service the church performs. Christ is the one who provides the gifts, for he is the victor who has ascended on high (4:7-8). The church, though still on earth, is “in Christ.” In both the letter’s opening prayer and the description of the life in salvation in chapter 2, Paul identifies the church’s location as “in Christ.” The saints’ privileged position is through God’s gracious work in Christ. Actually, all aspects of their new lives rely solely on God’s provision of grace through Christ. God even prepared their good works, which they carry out, in advance, and he now desires the church to act according to their position in the heavenly realms. The works of service will build and unify the church, consequently, toward Christ, who will maintain a continuing presence.⁴⁰ As Paul illustrates in 2:11-22, the church encompasses both Jews and Gentiles as a single community, “a holy temple” (2:21). God has created a new humanity, and through Christ he has brought those who

³⁹Andrew T. Lincoln, “Ephesians 2:8-10: A Summary of Paul’s Gospel?” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 45 (1983): 623.

⁴⁰Harris, 214.

were far away near to himself (2:13) and supplied peace (2:15). God's creative work builds the church into a unified community under the headship of Christ and a dwelling place of his Spirit (2:22).

God Forms the Body

The leaders equip so that the "body of Christ might be built up." This statement mixes metaphors; nevertheless, Paul provides a powerful job description for those given the task to equip. As he demonstrates in 4:13-16, all members of the church, not leaders alone, must participate in the work for the growth of Christ's body.⁴¹ Paul has demonstrated concern with growth throughout the letter. In 1:16-19, he prays for the Ephesians' growth in knowledge of the hope associated with their calling from God. In 3:14-19, he requests growth in the knowledge of the love of Christ and their experience of the fullness of the life and power of God. It is not an individualistic growth, however. As depicted in 2:21, God's people are a temple, in which Paul connects images of building and organized growth. For that reason, the growth of the entire community is Paul's primary concern.

The church is already a new person in Christ (2:15) and Christ's fullness (1:23). Now the church must attain the maturity and stature of Christ. The leaders identified by Paul enable believers to enter into a process of maturation. The end goal is the unified body of Christ, or as Paul describes it, "the fullness of Christ." This fullness implies that the church belongs to Christ and thus embodies all of his qualities. The spiritual maturity

⁴¹Witherington, 292.

demonstrated by Christ becomes the measure for the church.⁴² Ecclesiology is the focus in this passage, but Paul depicts an ecclesiology measured and viewed through Christology.⁴³

The leaders and all the saints will not complete their work until the church embraces unity as the body of Christ. This is the unity discussed in 4:4-6, characterized by seven areas. In 4:13, Paul calls his audience to pursue unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. He repeats the necessity of unity of faith mentioned in 4:5, and again he emphasizes unity of knowledge mentioned in his earlier prayers. This unity reaches full completion when the church grows to maturity. The communal growth experienced by God's people is not quantitative, but qualitative, a growth toward holiness.⁴⁴ In actuality, the church grows into Christ. The end result is a transformed community rather than adherence to a set of principles defined by orthodoxy.

Five times in this passage, Paul employs metaphors of growth (vv. 15-16), construction (vv. 12, 16), and maturity (v. 13), but the only defining success of this growth is if the church fully becomes the body of Christ in practice. Even in the first chapter, Paul describes the church as the dwelling place of the fullness of Christ (1:23), so now he is calling the church to embrace that reality. Leaders must guide the church

⁴²Richard L. Strauss, "Like Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (1988): 264.

⁴³Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 152. Matera demonstrates that in Ephesians Christology is not becoming subservient to ecclesiology. The church's ecclesiological practice and life together directly flows from its christological belief.

⁴⁴Lincoln and Wedderburn, 116-17.

through a process of maturation in order to be filled “to the measure of all the fullness of God” (3:19). The gifts that each member receives are important; without utilizing these gifts in ministry, the church’s growth ceases. Growth is made possible only when all of the parts of the body, determined by Christ’s measure, become full participants in the ministry.⁴⁵ Christ, as the head, provides the church with love and fullness, and the body responds by promoting growth nourished in Christ.

Paul, then, depicts a harmonious community, even though the church represents great diversity. The unity described in Ephesians 4 refutes any tendency to reduce formation or growth to an individualistic enterprise.⁴⁶ Christ is the head, and he gives gifts, serves as the unifying figure, and ensures the well being of the entire body. Indeed, he rules the entire universe, according to Paul (1:21-23).⁴⁷ Some in the church receive a call to be leaders, guiding the whole community to maturation. When this harmonious environment transpires, the former, discordant reality disappears. But each part must be committed to accepting God’s call and Christ’s provision of the proportion of gifts. This

⁴⁵Talbert, 117.

⁴⁶This individualistic emphasis is the common description of spiritual formation and growth in American churches, including Connecticut Valley. Ephesians 4, however, explains that as the people of God, our success depends on the process in which the entire body assumes the fullness of Christ.

⁴⁷MacDonald, 297. Members, according to MacDonald’s interpretation of Paul, must deem their gifts as apportioned by Christ. This is the only way this harmonious reality will occur. Some are called to lead, or as MacDonald describes it, “have authority over others.” Thus MacDonald argues the church’s task is to live into the headship of Christ as he has directed the church.

is Paul's definition of church growth in Ephesians: the place of peace and the place of reconciliation that characterizes God's work in the world.⁴⁸

An assessment of the church's maturation, according to Paul's description of the body of Christ in Ephesians, requires an evaluation of the community's ability to demonstrate the unity through love. In the concluding verses of this pericope, verses 14-16, Paul describes a matured body. He claims that once the church has attained "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ," the community will no longer be immature infants. If every new teaching and devious scheming distracts the church, then the body of Christ fractures, unable to adhere to Christ, who is the church's unifying head. The unity that Christ seeks for his body, in this case, does not exist. As Paul explains, it is time for the church to mature and discard immature ways of life. He encourages the church to "speak the truth in love" (v. 15). The believers should pursue a life of love when proclaiming the truth that reflects the maturity they have attained, representing the unity Christ provides.

The unity, as a result, is dependent on Christ. Throughout the letter Paul claims that the unity the church pursues relies on Christ alone. In fact, the Jews and Gentiles, two substantially different groups, now discover unity in the form of one man, Jesus Christ (2:5). He is the peace (2:14), and no one in the church "is a foreigner or a stranger, but fellow citizens with God's people" (2:19). In the church the two groups come "together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (2:22). Many

⁴⁸See Verhey and Harvard, 168. They criticize the church growth movement that reduces growth to numbers alone. Particularly, they disagree with homogenous churches, for that implicitly rejects the purpose of the church to embody a new humanity, the unity of Christ.

exhortations in the letter's second half concern activity that threatens this unity. For instance, later in chapter 4, Paul admonishes the Ephesian Christians not to spread falsehood about their neighbors (4:25), as well as not to steal (v. 27) or utilize language that destroys (v. 29). Instead, they are to share (4:28), edify with words (4:29), forgive (4:32), love each other (5:2), and speak to one another with godly, spiritual music (5:19). When these unifying actions are present within the members' lives, the church has embraced the unity of its head.⁴⁹

From Christ "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (4:16). In this verse Paul summarizes 4:1-16. God is performing an important work of reconciliation in the world, calling the church, the body of Christ, to a unity he has already provided. The church, appropriately responding to this call, is to live into this unity by utilizing the gifts Christ has provided. Some serve the body as leaders; their main task is to equip the entire body, so that it might exemplify the unified body of Christ. However, each part is crucial to the work. This work of equipping demands an intentional process and the measurement of the process's success is the church's becoming the body of Christ. As Paul begins this section in 4:1, the church must live a life "worthy of the calling" it has received. Their existence must befit the body of Christ, who is the head of the church.

⁴⁹Paul provides many more examples of the church's maturation in the second half of the letter. Characteristics such as forgiveness (4:32), righteousness and holiness (4:24), and goodness and truth (5:9) should emanate from the mature body, according to Paul. However, these are not individual ways of life alone, for Paul's exhortations in the letter serve to form the Ephesian Christians into the unified body of Christ.

Conclusion

Ephesians 4:1-16 provides Connecticut Valley's leadership team a theological description of the church as the body of Christ. According to Paul, leadership functions to equip the entire body for ministry, and all members, or parts of the body, accept their gifts from the risen Christ. The diversity present in the congregation continues to be a worthwhile pursuit, but the diverse membership must unite under the headship of Christ. This occurs when the entire body actively participates in ministry, led and unified through the Spirit. Leadership is crucial for the congregation's maturation process. An active unity in which the entire church works together, inviting and fostering the diversity of gifts, characterizes godly maturity. The way of love described in Ephesians must become the norm for our communal life. Then the church accepts the headship of Christ who sustains the church for God's purposes in the world, in which he dwells actively through his Spirit.

The purpose of this project was to prepare the Connecticut Valley leadership team to equip the church body for ministry. As Paul affirms in Ephesians, leaders should guide the congregation to "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (4:13). Since this will occur only when each part integrates, the project sought to guide Connecticut Valley's leadership toward reflection and practices that prepare them to lead the body toward the acceptance of God's call. Only through a pursuit of this type of equipping leadership will the body begin to embrace the unity Paul describes and become more Christ-like, the measurement of church growth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to prepare Connecticut Valley's leadership team to equip the church body for ministry. My equipping strategy utilized training sessions designed to guide the leaders through reflection and activities that prepared them in their congregational positions. I was convinced that the church, both the leaders and the remainder of the congregation, was willing to engage in active ministry. However, the elders and ministry group leaders had not received adequate preparation for this ongoing task of equipping. This chapter describes a method to achieve this goal through creating an environment for the leadership team to reflect communally and engage practices that support their leadership role to equip the congregation. The chapter will provide details about the methodology, project format, participants, and the methods of evaluation that were employed.

Project Methodology

I employed qualitative research for this project since I was researching a human community.¹ This project was a type of participatory action research in which I introduced an intervention in order to provide ministerial leadership for congregational

¹Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 7.

transformation.² Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative methods, enhances evaluation in a context where local grounding, holistic descriptions, and lived meaning are of great concern to the researcher. Primarily, this project's effectiveness depended on the perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes of the leadership group in a church. When utilizing a qualitative research approach, the researcher engages personally in the activities as a participant observer. Data derive from firsthand descriptions from open-ended sources such as observations, documents, and focus groups. The researcher then analyzes the data content by organizing them into major themes and categories.³ Subsequently, the researcher forms an interpretative story based on the data.⁴

Thus qualitative research is a rigorous narrative-based process. The researcher does not enter the project expecting an easily discernible interpretive process. Instead, qualitative research is an interpretive process in which the researcher attempts to make sense of the experience, including the experience of God's presence. Evaluating this type of research requires a way of seeing that presupposes the nature of reality is much more complicated than it first appears.⁵ For qualitative research, consequently, narrative is a

²Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 58.

³Thomas L. Lee, *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 39-40.

⁴Michael Q. Patton, *How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1987), 7.

⁵John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 28-32.

legitimate and valid form of knowledge. Stories are not meaningless anecdotes; they provide important meaning that describes reality.⁶

Project Format

This project involved eight one-hour sessions in which I trained the leadership team to equip the church body for ministry based on Ephesians 4:1-16. A ninth, and final, session provided an opportunity for an outside expert to conduct an evaluation of the project. The sessions combined the practice of *lectio divina*, activities, instruction, assignments, and communal prayer. The sessions utilized the theology Paul describes in Ephesians 4:1-16, in which the church is the embodiment of Christ, called by God to perform ministry. Paul values leaders as an integral role in the body. Leaders principally serve the body by equipping it for ministry wherein each part of the body is an active participant, and they guide the body to become more like Christ. The ultimate goal is a functioning, mature church. The form of Ephesians 4:1-16, therefore, formed the organization of the sessions, individually and as a whole.

The largest upstairs classroom in the church building afforded a quiet, open space for the sessions and promoted dynamic involvement from the participants. We utilized moveable chairs that allowed flexibility for arrangement appropriate for each particular session. The non-participant observer positioned herself in a corner in the room so she could observe the dynamics of the group without interfering unnecessarily. As the facilitator of the ministry group leaders, I was active in the sessions, but I also served as

⁶Ibid., 38. Swinton and Mowat provide a detailed description that explains how qualitative research serves practical theologians. They provide several examples of how practical theologians employ qualitative research in various research projects.

the sessions' leader. However, I allowed the leadership team to control most of the conversation, and I provided the necessary guidance to encourage active reflection from the group. This encouraged the entire group to struggle with the implications of Paul's theology in Ephesians, as well as allowed this theology to form their own understanding as leaders, individually and as a leadership team.

Participants

The entire leadership team participated in each of the sessions. This included the leaders of the nine ministry groups and the four congregational elders. In addition, the participants interviewed members during this project on two separate occasions. The interviewees were in the same ministry groups as the leaders and elders performing the interviews. As a result, the conversations represented the diversity of the congregation's ministries and membership.

Description of Project Sessions

The eight one-hour sessions occurred during the regularly scheduled Sunday morning classes at nine-thirty, beginning September 11 and concluding November 5.⁷ The final two-hour evaluation session took place on Sunday, November 13, following the congregational worship gathering, from twelve-thirty to two-thirty. Each of the sessions guided the leadership team to become an effective equipper of the church body for ministry, and each session invited participants to reflect actively on their role as leaders.

⁷The eighth session originally was to occur on Sunday, October 30, so that the project sessions took place on consecutive weeks. However, a snowstorm caused the cancellation of all congregational gatherings for that Sunday. The session took place on Sunday, November 5, instead.

The sessions encouraged the leadership team to consider its important position in the congregation, and the team began to consider the necessary practices for their leadership role. Further, the project sessions created an open atmosphere in which the various leaders experienced working together as an effective team for the sake of the entire church body.

Each individual session invoked a particular theme that invited the participants to reflect on Ephesians 4:1-16. We opened with a communal practice of *lectio divina*. Each week we read Ephesians 4:1-16, utilizing a variety of translations during the project, and then the group discussed their understanding of the text based on a prompt I provided according to that session's theme.⁸ The activity during the sessions was primarily an opportunity for group reflection and feedback on the previous week's assignment. I did not receive any artifacts from the participants; their written work served only as a discussion aid. Each session I provided instruction on the homework assignment. These assignments served two main purposes: invited the participants to consider and perform their role as congregational leaders and prepared them for the following week's session. Each session concluded with a group prayer for one of the ministry groups in the

⁸*Lectio divina* is an ancient practice of reading Scripture in which the participants engage the text in a prayerful experience. The sessions employed a communal version of this practice. This type of group *lectio divina* has also received the title of "dwelling in the word." For a description of *lectio divina*, see Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: The Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 17-30; Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 65-75; and Christopher A. Hall, "Reading Christ into the Heart," in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 140-59. All of these sources offer practical guidance and position *lectio divina* historically as an ancient Christian practice.

congregation. The ministry group leaders shared important aspects of the ministry groups' work, and the elders offered a prayer for their respective ministry groups.

Session 1, "God's Calling of the Church," provided an introduction to Ephesians 4:1-16, specifically detailing Paul's description of the church as an important part of God's plan in the world. The session's guiding question was "What role does the church occupy in God's work in the world?" I invited the leaders during the activity to share experiences of the role of church in their life. During the instruction segment, I prepared the participants to reflect on God's working in their lives that brought them to their specific ministry area, so the assignment for the following session was to summarize in writing how God had formed their interests and willingness to serve in their particular ministry group. The concluding prayer was for the adult education ministry group.

Session 2, "God's Calling for Ministry," asked the question during the time in *lectio divina* was "How does this text portray God's ministry?" Participants shared their written summaries about God's calling them to their particular ministry area. I then prepared the participants to interview a member of their ministry group for the group member's own reflection concerning God's call to participate in that particular ministry area. The elders chose someone from one of their respective ministry groups.⁹ The primary question for the conversation with the ministry group members was "How has God worked in your life to lead you to join this ministry area?" For the assignment each participant interviewed a member. This assignment prepared participants to discuss the

⁹Currently, each elder is associated with two ministry groups. Following the fifth session, they had the opportunity to interview a member from the other ministry group.

importance of each body part by listening to another member's experience with God's call. The concluding prayer was for the benevolence ministry group.

Session 3, "God's Call for Each Body Part," explored in the practice of *lectio divina* the question "What expectations does God have for each part of the body?" The session's activity allowed leaders to share their experiences from the interviews. I asked the question "What was the most impactful part when listening to other members' reflection concerning their calling from God?" I instructed the participants to consider the list of ministry group members for assessment of the gifts and talents God has provided. Their assignment was to have a meeting between the ministry group leaders and the elders associated with their groups following their own personal evaluation of the lists. In the meeting they shared with each other reflections based on an analysis of the group member lists. This assignment prepared the participants to discuss God's work in the various ministry areas of our congregational body. The body life ministry group was the focus of the prayer.

Session 4, "God's Work in Each Ministry Area," invited the participants in the time of *lectio divina* to consider "How does this text describe the diversity in God's church?" For the activity the leadership team reported some of the surprising facets from their examination of the ministry group members. Participants also brainstormed, with my guidance, significant abilities and gifts Connecticut Valley has overlooked or ignored. I then instructed the leaders to evaluate their respective ministry group's current official description and tasks. Each ministry group at Connecticut Valley wrote an official group description and set of tasks. I offered some time during the session for each participant to pray and meditate over the group's current work and how God might call each group

forward. The assignment for the following week's session was for each participant to list a few themes or ideas that emerged from the reflection. This assignment prepared the group for a discussion regarding their role as leaders. The finishing prayer was for the children and youth ministry group.

Session 5, "God's Preparing Us for Leadership," asked the question for the practice of *lectio divina* "What does this text claim about leadership in the body?" During the activity I asked the participants to offer their ideas on each group's ministry description and activity lists. They discussed their role as leaders in guiding their particular groups and offered their own vision based on prayer and meditation concerning the groups' future ministry. Following the activity I instructed the participants on the week's activity: They were to interview a member of their particular ministry group, a different member from the one in the earlier interview assignment, to solicit the group member's reflection on the ministry group's description and list of tasks. The primary question for the interview was "How might God use this ministry group in the future based on your experience in this ministry group?" The assignment for the following week was the interviews. The concluding prayer was for the facilities ministry group.

Session 6, "God's Provision of Unity," asked the question during the time in *lectio divina* "How does this text describe the church as the unified body of Christ?" The activity provided the participants with an opportunity to share any notable responses from their interviews. They also made connections among the groups' interviews, noting common occurrences. For the instruction I led the participants in a conversation that considered how the groups might work together in ministry in the future. I also explained the assignment for the subsequent session, in which the participants identified some

options for their particular group's ability to work with other groups in future ministry endeavors. This assignment prepared the participants to analyze the process of a congregational body reaching maturation. The session concluded with a prayer for the missions ministry group.

Session 7, "God's Process of Maturation," explored the question for the practice of *lectio divina* "How does a church mature according to this text?" During the activity the participants shared some of their ideas in working with other ministry groups based on the previous assignment. I listed the items on the board, and the participants looked for common themes or ideas. I then provided instruction on the idea of maturation from Ephesians 4:1-16, specifically noting ideas or themes not covered during our time in *lectio divina* or during the activity. I also prepared the participants for the assignment to reflect on the previous seven sessions and compose a definition of the church as God's living body based on Ephesians in preparation for the next session. The concluding prayer was for the outreach ministry.

Session 8, "The Church as God's Living Body," asked the question during the practice of *lectio divina* "How does God form the church together according to this text?" During the activity participants shared their definitions from the assignment. I summarized on the board the main themes that emerged from the definitions, and the participants analyzed the various definitions and any similarities or points of contention. I then performed the group interview, which served as a participant evaluation.¹⁰ There

¹⁰The details of the group interview will occur in the following section, which describes the methods of evaluation for the project.

was no activity since this was the final session. The final prayer was for the small groups ministry.

Session 9 completed the project sessions and utilized an outsider evaluation. The session occurred following the Sunday morning worship gathering, and Dr. Paul Clark served as an independent expert. He administered a case study and engaged the participants in dialogue.¹¹ The session concluded with a prayer for the worship ministry group.

Method of Evaluation

I employed the concept of triangulation of qualitative methods to enable a thicker interpretation of this intervention. Triangulation provides a cross-check for the information I assessed. The specific type of triangulation I utilized is data triangulation, which makes use of a variety of data sources. The three data sources, researcher, insider, and outsider, enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings.¹² While the three data sources provided a level of trustworthiness, they did not provide a complete picture of reality.¹³ Triangulation offered three angles of vision to evaluate the project's effectiveness to prepare the leadership team to equip the church body for ministry. The usage of triangulation, then, invites reflection on the ministry intervention necessary for evaluating the project's usefulness.

¹¹In the following section I will describe the specifics of this session.

¹²Patton, 107.

¹³See Sensing, 72-78, for a description in employing triangulation for qualitative research.

Researcher

Though I was the project researcher, my involvement during the sessions minimized my ability to collect field notes, so Jeri Erman served as a non-participant observer. Erman is an original member of the congregation who now serves as the church administrator, and the leadership team trusts and respects her. She was not a distracting or threatening presence in the sessions. Erman recorded field notes from each session that provided a raw data stream that I analyzed as part of my perspective.

I trained Erman on the protocol for taking field notes.¹⁴ I emphasized that the field notes needed to be detailed and descriptive concerning specific observations while avoiding judgments, vagueness, and generalization. She took field notes during each session according to the protocol:¹⁵ (1) attendance and seating of the group, (2) participation and nonparticipation during the activities, (3) style of interacting with each other and me, (4) content and manner of conversations, (5) silences and non-verbal communication, (6) casual conversation within five minutes of the session's beginning and concluding, and (7) use of key words and phrases of participants. Erman noted the following key words and phrases, including synonyms and derivatives, during the sessions: equip, maturation, unity, calling, ministry, body/parts. Erman dated the notes and submitted them to me.

I typed and saved these field notes by date in a Microsoft Word document to be used as a data set to interpret the evolving effects of the project. I identified themes and

¹⁴Appendix A.

¹⁵Appendix B.

categories through a coding protocol.¹⁶ I progressed by (1) reading through all the data available at the time and recording my reflections in the margins of the data document, (2) creating a record of emerging themes and topics in columns on a separate document, (3) identifying recurring grammar and language, (4) grouping similar items and topics, (5) assigning codes to similar themes and topics, and (6) categorizing themes and topics.¹⁷

Insiders

During the eighth session I conducted a group interview in order to gather an evaluation from the participants. This evaluation tool allowed the entire group to openly share their reaction to the project sessions in a conversational format.¹⁸ The open and dialogical format of the previous sessions continued. I used three questions to invite reflection: (1) What is the role of the leadership in this congregation? (2) How should leaders equip the body? (3) How would you describe a healthy and mature Connecticut Valley body? Though these questions served as a guide for the interview, I did not use them as a stringent plan. Instead, I sought open conversation. As a result, I afforded the participants freedom to address these topics without my prompting. I also allowed the group to direct the conversation in an unexpected, yet helpful direction for my evaluative

¹⁶Appendix C.

¹⁷ For a description of coding data that informed this project, see Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1998), 150-60.

¹⁸Patton, 390-91. He discusses the benefits of group interviews opposed to other techniques of evaluation.

purposes. Due to my involvement in the conversation, Erman continued her role as nonparticipant observer. She utilized the same protocol as in the other sessions, and she provided me with field notes. I employed the same coding protocol to evaluate the responses during the group interview.

Outsider

Clark served as the outside perspective to assess the effectiveness of the project. Clark holds a doctor of ministry degree and is the minister at the Nashua Church of Christ in Nashua, New Hampshire. He is well acquainted with Connecticut Valley's cultural context and particular ecclesiastical organization. In order not to affect the participants' reactions during the case study, I did not attend this session, and Erman continued her role as a nonparticipant observer. I provided directions for Paul prior to the session, and he led the session.

Clark used a case study I chose to present to the leadership team during the final evaluative session.¹⁹ This case allowed the participants to process a ministry event in order for Paul to evaluate and provide feedback concerning the intervention's effectiveness. I solicited expert feedback along the following lines of query: (1) What type of roles for leadership do the participants exhibit? (2) Is there evidence of Paul's theology in Ephesians 4:1-16 in their responses to the case? (3) What is their vision of congregational ministries? (4) How do they describe the process of maturation for a church? (5) Is there coherence between their responses in analyzing the case with earlier

¹⁹Appendix F.

project sessions? I requested Clark submit a written evaluation. I incorporated his feedback into the discoveries made through the field notes and group interview.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to prepare Connecticut Valley leadership to equip the church body for ministry. I attempted to accomplish this through leading the leadership team through nine sessions that combined the practice of *lectio divina*, activities, instruction, assignments, and communal prayer to consider their important roles in the congregational body. Ephesians 4:1-16 served as the theological foundation to form the project intervention, and the sessions focused on the leadership team's role in guiding Connecticut Valley to ministry participation. I expected that the qualitative evaluation methods would provide insight concerning the project's effectiveness and demonstrate that the intervention has encouraged more active leadership in equipping the entire congregation.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The eight project sessions concentrated on guiding the Connecticut Valley leadership team to equip the church body for ministry. I sought through the project to form the leaders by engaging various sources and offering opportunities in the sessions for communal theological reflection. As previously mentioned, I employed a qualitative research method that focused on the human interactions and perspectives of the participants to evaluate effectiveness of this project. To facilitate a thick interpretation of the intervention, I used three different angles of data streams: (1) field notes, which represented my perspectives as the intervention leader; (2) a group interview, which sought input from the participants; and (3) a case study discussion led by an independent expert to ascertain the perspectives of an outsider. This chapter describes the results and draws conclusions suggested through an analysis of the data streams in order to interpret the effectiveness of the project sessions.

Description of Results

This project utilized triangulation of qualitative methods to enable a thicker interpretation of this intervention. The non-participant observer recorded field notes in each of the project sessions. I recorded these notes, observed themes and patterns, and

coded the resulting data according to the prescribed protocol established for the project.¹ During the eighth session I conducted a group interview to discover the insiders' view of the project.² The final project session employed Dr. Paul Clark as independent expert to provide feedback from an outside perspective on the effectiveness of the project. He presented a case study to the leadership team and evaluated their responses. After his interaction with the project participants, Clark presented a report that outlined the case study, his observations during the case study session, and his evaluation of the leadership team's responses in the session.³ From these three angles of evaluation, three themes emerged.

Leadership Team for the Body of Christ

The most repeated theme the participants used in the sessions to describe the church was the metaphor of body. The leadership team not only favored this imagery to describe the cosmic church, but they also used the body imagery to depict a local congregation. The participants frequently alluded to and quoted 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul utilizes the metaphor to portray a local congregation. Throughout each session leadership team members characterized Connecticut Valley as a body in order to express their ministerial understandings and begin to propose ecclesiological practices. According to the leadership team, the congregation must promote mature relationships because we are connected to each other intimately as one body. By the eighth project session, in

¹Appendix D.

²See 48-49.

³See 49-50.

which the homework assignment to prepare for the session was to define the church as God's living body, the participants had developed a deeper comprehension of Paul's body metaphor in Ephesians 4 than was evident in the opening session. During this session, including the group interview, the leadership team applied the body metaphor to Connecticut Valley's situation to prescribe an appropriate leadership approach. While the participants expressed a deeper awareness of the church as a body, they still struggled at times to demonstrate ecclesiological implications. They were not able to connect Paul's depiction of the church as the body of Christ with appropriate ministry and leadership practices.

The data suggest that the leadership team understood their roles in the body as a call from God. Even though a few of the ministry group leaders revealed a lack of confidence in their leadership ability, they still believed strongly that God had called them to their particular position in the congregation. As one ministry group leader shared, "I am still not entirely sure why I am in this position. But I feel that God and the elders felt I needed to use my experience in this ministry." When reflecting on the exercise to summarize how God had called them to their respective ministry area, the group easily described how God had worked in their previous experiences and circumstances to prepare them for their current congregational roles. Several ministry group leaders throughout the sessions shared detailed examples from other congregational contexts and ministry involvement beyond this congregation to illustrate the ways in which God had prepared them for their present role at Connecticut Valley. These examples represent one of the more extensive ways the leadership exhibited an awareness of the cosmic nature of

the church; they specifically described God's work to connect Christians around the world for his purposes.

The leadership team believed the most important aspect of their calling was assuming a proper position under the headship of Christ. A ministry group leader clarified this idea during the first session: "Our calling is for oneness. It begins with Christ and how we follow him." This idea permeated the conversation during the sessions, and the leadership team regularly portrayed the church's task, cosmically and locally, as a continual pursuit to follow Christ's leadership. The participants often claimed that a focus on Christ's leadership should characterize every congregation. One elder, during the practice of *lectio divina* in the second session, noted that Paul's emphasis is not on the gifts, but "the emphasis is on Christ." His argument was that churches tend to focus on the gifts Christ has bestowed and lose focus on our task to follow Christ.

The participants frequently proposed that Christ's body is comprised of a diverse group of members, for Christ, as the leader of the church, blesses each member uniquely. This diversity, according to the participants, is not a difficulty, but it is an asset to be embraced. One ministry group leader regularly declared that the most positive characteristic of Connecticut Valley is our diversity. For her, the church must embrace this diversity as a blessing from God to utilize for congregational ministry. She believed that God had granted many people in the congregation with extensive experiences in churches around the world and that God intended those experiences to shape our work in Central Connecticut. Another ministry group leader often declared that Christ represents the fullness of God, and that since he is our leader, he serves as our principal exemplar.

According to this ministry group leader, we follow Christ by accepting our diversity, which provides the basis for involvement in ministry. He claimed, “We are called into oneness, though we are different, and it all starts with Christ.” This ministry group leader believed that the church expresses Christ’s fullness beyond the confines of any local congregation. He reminded the group of recent congregational attempts to join other churches, local ecumenical ministries, and town organizations to serve Windsor. His depiction of Connecticut Valley’s broader connection to others was distinctive during most sessions; other leaders did not demonstrate similar depth when explaining the church as a cosmic entity.

Because Christ has blessed everyone with gifts, the leadership team claimed each member is important to congregational work. During each session at least one participant would denounce any attempt to create hierarchical structures in the church. The participants’ common refrain was that God has called leaders for the sake of the entire body. In fact, the leadership team commonly devoted several minutes during reflection on the previous week’s assignment to describe the necessity to recognize the uniqueness of each member. Even difficult relationships within the congregation, according to the participants, support God’s purpose. He desires that we learn to coexist as a single body despite our diversity. The data demonstrate one of the leadership team’s principal concerns is that an authoritarian or a hierarchical structure develops within the church in which some members become “too powerful.” Consequently, during our practice in *lectio divina*, the participants commonly described Paul’s lack of establishing a hierarchical structure as an important aspect of Ephesians 4:1-16. This recognition, though, never fully developed during the sessions. When I requested practical implications of a non-

hierarchical ecclesiology, the leadership team struggled to propose a detailed description. Instead, they tended only to criticize other churches in their own experiences that demonstrated authoritarian tendencies. They were confident, therefore, in identifying and describing unhealthy ministry structures, but they struggled to offer positive examples, either in our congregation or based on other personal experiences, of alternate church practices formed by a non-hierarchical ecclesiology.

When the participants cited ministry work in Connecticut Valley's history, they tended to highlight the diversity God had granted the congregation. During the case study led by Clark, one elder noted that the case's divisive issue has not occurred in this congregation because, unlike the church in the case, Connecticut Valley has valued the diversity present in the congregation. A ministry group leader agreed with this assessment, and he noted the healthy leadership from the elders as a reason that Connecticut Valley has not struggled to exist with diversity. The elders, according to the ministry group leader, allow members to possess various theological views. The data suggest, however, some participants desire greater congregational diversity. Several times during the sessions participants claimed diversity needed to increase. Some of these comments projected a sense of inadequacy as a small congregation. For instance, during the fifth session some participants claimed if greater diversity existed in the congregation, especially including more young families, we might grow numerically. However, even though some participants sought numerical growth to attain better diversity, the leadership team still believed God's provision of diversity is a necessary characteristic for a congregation of any size.

The data demonstrate a realization of the many ways God has worked through Connecticut Valley. According to the leadership team, God has blessed the congregation with a diversity of gifts, which are exemplified in two specific works often recognized by the participants during the sessions: Hope for Haiti, an organization that serves children in the poorest country in the western hemisphere, and a congregation that Connecticut Valley supports in Marseilles, France. Both of these ministries are considerable examples, according to the participants, of how the congregation has maintained a presence in the cosmic church. Not only did the church start Hope for Haiti and support the work in Marseilles from the beginning, but the leadership team noted our ongoing efforts to remain connected and maintain a presence with these ministries. The participants were not able, though, to connect our presence in Haiti and Marseilles with our own congregational ministry in Connecticut. Again, the data suggest the leadership team was aware of the church beyond the local congregation, but participants rarely provided implications for our own ministry.

The leadership team believed it is important to recognize God as the primary constructor of the church. The participants often described the church, based on Paul's description in Ephesians, as integral to God's plan for creation. Most of the comments, with some exceptions, did not describe God's assembly of the church cosmically, as Paul does in Ephesians. The data demonstrate, on the other hand, an awareness of God's work beyond local congregations. Whether the participants discussed God's presence in local churches or his presence over the universal church, they referred to God as the initiator of ministry. One ministry group leader during the case study repeatedly expressed that the characters in the case did not seek God's will. In his view they were too concerned with

their own goals and objectives and not God's. While he was more adamant than others, including in other sessions, concerning the necessity to search for God's guidance, the data clearly show a leadership team aware of God's presence in the church. They expressed a desire to be leaders who seek God's guidance, for their task is to serve Christ's body.

Leadership Team in a Growing Body

Since the leadership team valued Paul's usage of the body metaphor, the data also signify a major concern for growth of the church body. Every session included multiple conversations concerning church maturation. These conversations included a struggle to understand what defines church growth, as well as discerning the type of growth a congregation should pursue. The participants recognized the difficulties in pursuing congregational growth; however, they also realized the necessity in "maturing into Christ-likeness," expressed in a variety of comments. A ministry group leader summarized the concern for growth when he affirmed, "As the church grows, members begin to participate in ministry in full." He was not the only participant who voiced this sentiment. The data, then, demonstrate the leadership team's intention to establish a body at Connecticut Valley that will grow toward Christ-likeness. However, the participants never established a full account of becoming like Christ. The data suggest the leadership team never grasped the entirety of Paul's description of church growth in Ephesians or how a local congregation grows into Christ. The leadership team did not describe the specific practices that characterize a church formed in the image of Christ. The

participants, for instance, did not identify examples of Christ-like virtues in Ephesians, such as humility and gentleness, as the ultimate goal of the church.

As I stated in the previous section, the leadership team engaged in many conversations about diversity and how to achieve unity in the midst of diversity. These conversations also examined the church growth process with a diverse membership. During the group interview in the eighth session, one elder identified the tension between unity and diversity as the most significant theme in the project sessions. Indeed, the data display the leadership team's constant effort to seek both a diverse and unified body. According to many of the participants, church growth according to Paul in Ephesians 4 is the process of living out the tension between unity and diversity. In effect, the leadership team believed that Paul claims unity cannot exist without diversity; otherwise, it is not unity but uniformity. As one elder stated, "Unity cannot be uniformity. Our diversity provides our strength, but while we all have different gifts, we have the same foundation in Christ."

The data do not, however, identify a clear perception of how this foundation unifies a church, especially data from early sessions. Many participants noticed Paul's emphasis on unity, particularly Paul's emphasis on serving under Christ as a single body. This recognition of unity as a necessary characteristic for a growing congregation, though, took most of the sessions to develop into a concrete expression. In early sessions the leadership team employed abstract language to describe the reality of unity in a congregation. In the final two sessions, they provided clearer language to describe unity. For instance, during the group interview in the eighth session, one leader exclaimed she finally noticed during the practice of *lectio divina* that day that Paul provides a way for

unity by members who serve as exemplars. She recounted Paul's advice from the first couple of verses in Ephesians 4 to "be completely humble and gentle." "If we as leaders practice those ways," she exclaimed, "we will provide an atmosphere for unity." This comment represents one of the clearest examples of the leadership team's description of Christ-likeness. However, her description was highly individualistic and did not provide much detail for ecclesiological implications, particularly on a cosmic level. The participants' idea of growing into the unified body of Christ, as a result, never developed into a comprehensive explanation. The idea of church unity as a fundamental goal of the church was pervasive in the sessions, but the participants never fully articulated how church unity actually occurs in practice, especially beyond the local congregation. The data demonstrate moments in the sessions when the participants identified church unity that had occurred in their own personal experiences, but they struggled to form implications for their own leadership in guiding a church body as a unified community.

The leadership team consistently discussed the importance of assisting members to identify and practice gifts as a way to embrace unity as a congregation. If members recognized their own call from God, then according to the participants, the congregation could unify. In the third session, when participants reflected on their assignment to interview members, one ministry group leader desired to share her experience because it represented the type of church Connecticut Valley should strive to be. Her interviewee discussed his decision to attend college and seek a degree in ministry because an elderly lady in the church had encouraged him after he gave a sermon as a new Christian and continued to encourage and offer constructive criticism to him as he gained more experience in teaching. The ministry leader stated, "This is a great example of the church

encouraging each other in ministry. Without people encouraging one another, we can't be unified in serving God." In addition to this example, the leadership team regularly connected congregational unity to assisting one another in serving God. The participants considered their most important role in the congregation to assist the congregation to use the gifts derived from Christ, as individuals and as a body. If this ongoing mutuality in ministry occurred, the leadership team felt the church would grow as a unified body.

While the group shared positive examples of Connecticut Valley's unity, the participants also identified some signs of disunity. In the sixth session when the group described their interviews with ministry group members, an elder admitted his interview had shocked him. His interviewee strongly suggested our church does not accept innovative ministry ideas. The interviewee had not garnered much interest in two separate ministry proposals. The leadership team devoted a significant portion of the session to a discussion of this matter and attempted to determine the reasons someone would have this perception. The group's general consensus was that Connecticut Valley must value the ideas of its members, as innovative and risky as the ideas may be. A ministry group leader established his understanding of the struggle to be a unified church and offered a prescription to support members who feel underappreciated when he said, "Leaders must enable the members. We have to encourage and mentor and bring people along, even sometimes when we are not sure about certain ministry ideas." While other participants agreed with the ministry group leader's statement, no one provided a thorough description of how the leadership team could enable members or mentor them. In fact, the leadership team rarely mentioned the necessity for mentoring, which would represent an appropriate leadership style based on Paul's ecclesiology in Ephesians.

According to Paul, leaders should guide and join the entire church in ministry.

Conversely, the participants were hesitant to identify their own leadership role as mentoring, even when their personal examples demonstrated effective mentoring.

In addition to the idea that unity contributes to growth in the church body, the leadership team also focused on the importance of encouraging all members to practice their gifts so the church can navigate congregational transitions as a unified community. Several participants noted that since the congregation is an organic structure and always changing, it is crucial that the body exhibit adaptability. For many on the leadership team, if members did not embrace their gifts in practice, the body would become stagnant and unable to cope with inevitable transitions. Drawing from Paul's description in Ephesians 4, in which he describes the church "joined and held together," the participants repeatedly commented on the necessity in a congregation for different parts to work together effectively. One ministry group leader, during the seventh session's discussion of groups working more collegially, simply stated, "I need to know what other groups are doing, or our group will not be able to plan properly." Many other ministry group leaders agreed with her position. Her statement came in the midst of a larger conversation about the church's dealing with unavoidable changes. For her and other ministry group leaders, the church must keep connected in order to pursue an appropriate ministry direction. The only way to keep connected, according to the leadership team, was for each part to practice the gifts God has provided; Connecticut Valley will transition, but if the people God has placed in this congregation accept their call, God can use the body as a unified group for ministry.

The data suggest, then, that the leadership team understood growth toward unity as a process. The group noticed Paul did not call the church to be able to quote a list of doctrines, but Ephesians invites the church to ministry, as several participants voiced. Participants were not able to describe in full, as I mentioned, their exact role as leaders in the midst of this growth process. Also, the leadership team always described growth toward unity on a congregational level, not on a cosmic level, so certain significant elements of church growth from Ephesians did not occur during the sessions. Even when I prompted the group to consider the cosmic nature of our unity and the growth that occurs, the group did not display a willingness to discuss this idea. The most important idea for growth as Paul describes in Ephesians, as the participants understood, was to accept the blessing of the head of the church, Christ, and for the whole body to put gifts into action. Despite the tendency to become overwhelmed as circumstances change, which participants believed have occurred at Connecticut Valley, God has still, through Christ, provided the necessary gifts for ministry.

Therefore, the role of leadership in the midst of inevitable congregation transitions occurred frequently in the data. The leadership team did not want changes to derail ministry. However, they were willing to be flexible and to grow in unexpected ways. One ministry group leader's comments during the third session illustrated the realization of difficulties when attempting to remain focused on congregational growth in the midst of transitions. In reflecting on his own call to be a leader, he discussed his own hesitancy to step forward as a leader: "I never considered myself capable of leading," he declared. "But eventually willingness came as I got more involved since the church needed me. That can happen to other people." His experience echoes most of the other

participants' comments. Change would happen, but if members were willing to use their gifts for God's work, then the church would be effective in ministry. As more members assumed this stance, the leadership team believed the church would grow as a unified body.

Leadership Team to Equip the Body

The work of the leadership team to equip the body for growth into a unified body was the third major theme that emerged from my analysis of the data. The participants frequently wrestled with the process of equipping a church body effectively. In the eighth session a ministry group leader referred to his own work environment as a negative example in allowing immature people to cause stagnation. According to his assessment, "We have too many squeaky wheels that slow a growth process for years. As church leadership, we can't allow this to happen." His proposal was that the Connecticut Valley leadership team become effective equippers. "Leaders need to clearly have focus in purpose and direction, and they need to prepare the entire church for that direction." His comments during the group interview summarized his understanding of the project sessions. Other participants supported his appraisal to become more effective leaders. The data suggest, though, that the leadership team did not demonstrate a full understanding of their role as leaders who equip; the group was uncomfortable, especially in early sessions, to describe their ministry work as "equipping." In addition, though the participants occasionally described how church leadership should equip the church, they struggled to connect their understanding of equipping with Paul's theology in Ephesians. The data imply that as the group grew more comfortable in describing their role as

equippers, they began to identify and share the ways the Connecticut Valley leadership team could equip the congregation.

The most prevalent evidence in the data of equipping the church dealt with the necessity to become more active leaders. The group believed they should be the members of the church body who provide direction and assist in connecting various parts of the congregation. In fact, during the eighth session, one elder declared there is a tension between allowing all members to provide direction and supplying leadership for this process. For him, this was the defining issue for our church based on his experience in Ephesians 4:1-16. The participants desired to maintain a core identity in the church's history wherein each body part is significant to the ministry work. However, the leadership team believed the congregation did not exhibit the involvement of every part, so mature leadership is necessary. In the past, the participants felt Connecticut Valley's leadership was too reactive. In order to call the church body to ministry, the group sensed a need to provide clear direction.

The data demonstrate a major concern from the leadership to equip people in light of the idea of oneness that bookends Ephesians 4:1-16. Not only did participants note this oneness during our time in *lectio divina* almost every session, but they also clarified oneness as a goal in equipping the church. According to the leadership team, congregational leaders should equip the body to be one. However, they also frequently described the necessity for leadership to equip people according to the gifts each has received from Christ. Thus the data signify that participants attempted to equip the congregation as a single body while they also attempted to honor the diversity. This tension led some participants to struggle with their self-understanding as leaders. They

did not want to overstep their role and ignore the congregational diversity. Other participants, though, stressed the need to display strong leadership. One ministry group leader regularly stressed the need for people to serve in roles that are befitting of their gifts. According to her, “Some of us are provided with the gift of leadership. We must use that gift.” The idea of leadership discussed during the sessions never developed into a cohesive idea within the leadership team. Some participants defined leadership according to their own corporate background or previous church experiences, which represented a variety of contexts. Other participants sought only to characterize leadership according to Paul’s description in Ephesians or other biblical texts.

Most of the leadership team was comfortable with the necessity for some type of leadership to equip the congregation. The most important leadership goal, according to the data, is the pursuit of Christ-likeness. Participants characterized appropriate congregational leadership as guiding the church to become more like Christ, its head. The leadership team demonstrated a desire to lead the church to embody the characteristics of Christ. During the sessions when I asked the participants to explain various aspects of equipping, they eventually pinpointed Christ as the ultimate focus. One ministry group leader, during the group interview in the eighth session, specifically argued that our congregational pursuit to become like Christ is the only goal worth pursuing. His comment led immediately to a considerable amount of conversation about the process of equipping members, both individually and communally, to become Christ-like. In the third session an elder defined maturity as “being focused on Christ alone.” He emphasized that there is no other legitimate end for a church. The data signaled

agreement from the other participants, in that session and other sessions, that if our primary interest is not to lead the church to Christ, then we are not equipping properly.

Even though the sessions included a substantial amount of conversation about the need for leadership to guide the church to Christ-likeness, the Christology exhibited during the discussions was lacking in substance. The data show that the leadership team normally expressed Christ-likeness in abstract terminology. The participants frequently identified Christ's position with God as head over all of creation, but descriptions of Christ's actions did not occur. Therefore, they did not provide specific ways that a church becomes more Christ-like, other than infrequently mentioning some of the ideas Paul provides in Ephesians 4:1-16. Most importantly, they were not able to connect the goal for the church to become more like Christ with an appropriate leadership strategy. During a couple of sessions, I summarized Paul's directives in the second half of Ephesians to become more like Christ. While the group was able to describe the way of Christ revealed in the later sections of the book, they demonstrated an overt concern for individuals, not a congregation. The data signal, subsequently, christological understandings that significantly formed the leadership team's underdeveloped ecclesiological belief and practices.

During some sessions conversations about the role of the leadership team to equip the congregation in the image of Christ led to discussions of the participants' roles as exemplars. The data suggest uncertainty among the leadership team in this particular area. Some displayed discomfort in serving as a model or mentor similar to their uncomfortable acceptance as leaders. This anxiety was more prevalent among the ministry group leaders than the elders. A few ministry group leaders, though, openly

called the leadership team to serve as exemplars in order to equip the body. One ministry group leader, who otherwise remained quiet during most of the sessions, claimed it is crucial that leaders “take someone along when doing ministry.” Though she did not use the term equip, I quickly questioned if she was describing an important aspect of equipping. The ministry group leader, as well as several other participants, concurred with my opinion. The data seem to indicate the leadership team understood the importance of exemplars to equip the congregation, but some felt inadequate to fill that role. However, none of the discussions about the need to become exemplars included a description to guide the church to become more Christ-like, and individualistic concerns outweighed any communal implications.

Though some participants exhibited discomfort as an exemplar, the group overwhelmingly established one necessity as a crucial element to equip the congregation: the leadership team must encourage members to accept a call from God to serve in ministry work alongside them. The importance of this leadership function appears in the data during every session. The group routinely defined equipping as the leadership’s ability to assist the entire membership to respond to the call of God. One ministry group leader recalled our recent efforts to begin every ministry group meeting in prayer and Scripture. She believed that this emphasis “reminded the membership that we seek to serve in God’s ministry.” Another ministry group leader mentioned attempts to invite members not currently serving on a ministry group to consider joining one. This specific effort integrated new members into several of the ministry groups. According to one ministry group leader, “Several of these people are involved for the first time since they joined the church.” The ministry group leader believed these members “were realizing

God's call in a new way." Further, the participants believed that inclusion of the entire body into the ministry group would provide a basis for Connecticut Valley to be formed by God into a body that "does works of service." As the data identify, the leadership team concluded that leaders must pursue efforts to invite the entire membership to reflect on and respond to God's call in our lives. Thus even though the participants did not demonstrate a full understanding of their role to lead the church to become like Christ, they did confirm the necessity that they lead the entire body to join together for ministry work.

Description of Conclusions

The discoveries from the field notes, the group interview, and the independent expert coincided. All three streams of data allowed me to construct a conclusion concerning the project's effectiveness to prepare the leadership team at the Connecticut Valley to equip the church body for ministry. The data demonstrate mixed results. The congregational leadership team became more prepared for their role to equip the congregation, but the data also signify additional preparation is needed for the leadership team to become more effective. The data illustrate the participants' ability to implement Paul's theological description of the church in Ephesians 4:1-16 for their own task at Connecticut Valley. However, the participants still struggled with important aspects of Paul's theological description of the church, particularly with implications for their leadership roles. According to the triangulation I employed for this project, practicing *lectio divina*, participating in activities and homework assignments, receiving instruction, and praying over the ministry groups, all prepared the leadership team. The final results,

though, suggest the project did not achieve all of its goals and fully address the problem the project sought to address. While the leadership team appears to be more prepared to equip the church body, the data reveal that they still need to develop more understanding and better practices to lead the entire congregation to ministry participation.

After reflecting on Paul's description of the church in Ephesians, the leadership team developed an understanding of the church as an important location of God's work in the world. The participants regularly used language derived from Ephesians 4:1-16 to explain the significance of the ministry the church pursues. The idea of call, the concept of unity, and the necessity of being the body of Christ framed much of the sessions' conversations. In fact, the group transitioned without difficulty from the practice of *lectio divina* in each session to a description and reflection of the homework assignment. The participants recognized the connection between Paul's description of the church and their work as congregational leaders. Even when a clear connection between Paul's theology and their work did not emerge immediately, the participants displayed a willingness to consider the implications of Paul's depiction of the church in Ephesians. The data clearly show, therefore, the leadership team's serious consideration of their role as equippers for the congregation, especially with respect to Paul's theological portrayal in Ephesians 4.

While the leaders engaged Ephesians 4:1-16 as a basis to understand the church and their role in the church, they still did not grasp fully Paul's theological portrayal of the church. For instance, much of the conversation concerning the church depicted local congregations, and not the cosmic church as Paul describes throughout Ephesians. The participants were not able to demonstrate Paul's view of how leaders equip the church until the final few sessions. Even then their perception did not match Paul's description

completely. Most significantly, the leadership team exhibited an underdeveloped Christology, which this project sought in part to address. By the conclusion of the project, the participants were more able to describe the Christology present in Ephesians and revealed a deeper perception of the christological basis for their ministry. The group's Christology, though, still needs more consideration. Because of the underdeveloped Christology, the participants at the conclusion of the project displayed an inadequate ecclesiological conception. They could not describe the process in which the church becomes more Christ-like, and they could not describe how they would guide Connecticut Valley to embody Christ. The leadership team showed signs they were beginning to develop a more robust ecclesiology, but they will need to reflect and begin to transform their leadership practices to gain a more mature awareness.

Despite issues in gaining a more mature awareness, the leadership team regularly identified the necessity to become more proactive leaders. As I described in chapter 1, Connecticut Valley traditionally has struggled to implement a consistent leadership structure. Instead, the church has been reactive for much of its history, unable to form an appropriate leadership arrangement to provide direction. The primary goal (according to the data) in being proactive is to guide the church to a maturation process rooted in Christ. The virtues Paul contributes in Ephesians 4:1-16, such as humility and gentleness, became essential leadership characteristics for the group. The group attempted in numerous conversations to understand how a church embraces the "fullness of Christ." Also, the participants discovered unity as a reality to be lived out rather than merely an abstract idea. The leadership team recognized a call for more proactive leadership if they are to become more effective. In order for more effective leadership to occur, however,

the group recognized the need to develop a more mature sense of the “fullness of Christ” that Paul describes in Ephesians to form their attempts to become more proactive.

The participants believed that becoming more proactive, thus more effective, demanded a better working relationship among the leadership team. The data established a major concern in the group to develop a more effective team structure as leaders. Both ministry group leaders and elders discussed openly the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership group during the sessions. The homework assignments that invited the elders and ministry group leaders to have candid conversations about their respective ministry groups proved to be beneficial, according to the participants. Even if the participants did not solidify plans for the future, they expressed a desire for better working relationships to go forward. Several members of the leadership team specifically connected the necessity for a more effective team with Paul’s description of unity. Without a unified leadership team, as some participants argued, the remainder of the congregation will not be able to live out the unity God has provided through Christ. As the data demonstrate, the leadership team still needs to consider the idea of unity and how they lead a congregation toward unity under Christ. But the participants are better prepared than before the project to initiate a process to lead the church toward Christ.

The pursuit of unity for Christ-likeness was the most prominent goal for the leadership team in equipping the church, even if the underlying Christology was underdeveloped. The participants’ understanding of their task to equip the church was absent during early sessions. I frequently noticed the participants using the word equip without offering much detail. However, as we reached the final few sessions, the leadership team produced more depth. As the group became more comfortable assuming

the role of proactive leaders, they became more comfortable describing how they might equip the congregation for ministry, and they even began to detail the exact leadership style necessary to guide a congregation to ministry. The data, even in the last few sessions, still suggest a need for more discernment concerning their role to equip the church, but the leadership team gained a more robust vision of this task going forward. Developing a more mature Christology and thus ecclesiology will position the participants to better consider their role as equippers. They need to recognize the existing connection between the church's view of Christ and the church's formative practices.

The ability to transition forward as leaders called by God possibly represents the most telling conclusion of the data. As I described in the first chapter, when I arrived at Connecticut Valley, the ministry group leaders, and the elders to a certain extent, were overly reactive, lacking any propensity to provide the necessary guidance for the congregation. During the project sessions many leaders began to demonstrate eagerness to serve as more effective leaders. The elders, as a result, affirmed the ministry group leaders' sentiment. My expectation was that in response to this project the participants would exhibit this deeper understanding to lead. My conclusion is that the data present a leadership team more focused and eager to lead, yet more preparation will be needed. The leaders did not acquire a complete awareness of their role with respect to Paul's theological portrayal in Ephesians.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to prepare Connecticut Valley leadership to equip the church body for ministry. I attempted to accomplish this through leading the leadership team through nine sessions that combined the practice of *lectio divina*,

activities, instruction, assignments, and communal prayer to prepare them to equip the congregational body. Ephesians 4:1-16 served as the theological foundation to form the project intervention, and the sessions focused on the leadership team's role in guiding Connecticut Valley to ministry participation. The data streams suggest three primary themes emerged throughout the project: (1) leadership team for the body of Christ, (2) leadership team in a growing body, and (3) leadership team to equip the body. The triangulation I employed demonstrates the project's effectiveness to encourage the participants to become more focused on their role of equipping the church and also demonstrates the need for further preparation. I also learned some important lessons during this project. The final chapter offers some concluding reflections that attempt to address such lessons and reflect on future implications of this project.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

I attempted through this doctoral project to address a leadership need in my ministerial context by applying competencies gained through participation in the doctor of ministry program. This thesis addressed the problem of the leadership team at Connecticut Valley; it has not engaged consistently in preparation to equip the church body for ministry. The focus of this project was to lead a process in which the leadership team would become more effective leaders of the congregation through participation in an experience of intentional, communal, and theological discernment that engaged various resources in a series of progressive project sessions. This final chapter extends the scope of the project to discuss ministerial and personal learning, implications for future practice in ministry, issues of reliability, and the project's sustainability.

Ministry and Personal Learning

This project provided opportunities to grow and learn. I have matured in my understanding of the leadership team, the congregation, and myself as a minister. Through this project I facilitated conversation among the three entities. The success of the project depended on the relationships existing among the elders, the ministry group leaders, the congregation, and me. The fundamental issue this project examined was if the leadership team could offer the necessary guidance for the church. Through this process I acquired a more significant awareness of my role within the congregational body.

The most significant aspect of my ministerial role this project impacted was my position as a congregational leader. As I described in the first chapter, one of my main tasks is to facilitate the ministry group leaders. This has proved to be more complicated than I had expected. The ministry group leaders as a group were not prepared to offer mature leadership, particularly in light of the recent congregational transitions. This reality has changed. The current collection of ministry group leaders is better prepared to lead. Since Connecticut Valley had not maintained a consistent leadership structure, I believed this project was necessary to provide a process for the leadership team to mature as congregational leaders. My assumption that the current leadership team was capable of becoming more effective seems to be correct, for the group demonstrated an affinity for and willingness to supply more consistent leadership. The project, though, proved that a need still exists for more preparation. My congregational role requires that I personally address the growth areas this project identified in order to provide appropriate guidance for the ministry group leaders.

A particular need exists for Connecticut Valley to develop a more mature ecclesiology. To this end, I learned that in my role it is important I serve as a mentor for the ministry group leaders. All of our current leaders are gifted to lead in their particular ministry area. Not all of them, however, are confident leaders. I detected during the project sessions that when I invited the leaders to consider their roles in the congregation, they responded positively. The leaders revealed their potential during the project's assignments and activities; and during the practice of *lectio divina*, they displayed their ability to connect theological understanding to their ministerial roles. The project proved that the leadership team requires even more opportunities to reflect theologically and put

into practice leadership skills. In my own ministry I must model ecclesiological practices directly formed by a well-developed Christology. Specifically, I must exemplify the type of mentoring that is appropriate according to Paul's depiction of the church leadership in Ephesians. The non-hierarchical ecclesiology that Paul embraces is unfamiliar to many among our leadership team. Instead, their corporate backgrounds and past experiences in hierarchical religious environments have formed their leadership understanding and style. A more developed ecclesiology and Christology, provided through teaching based on continual mentorship, should support the leadership team to offer more effective guidance for the congregation.

Despite this need for more preparation, the project granted me opportunities to listen to the congregation's leaders and discover the extensive ways in which they can provide direction for the congregation. The leaders exhibited many positive signs of the ability to oversee the congregation's ministry groups. I should seek opportunities to empower their leadership efforts. I had already begun to step back from attending the various ministry group meetings that did not involve me directly. In order to allow the ministry group leaders to develop appropriately, I must take a less visible role. Essentially, the ministry group leaders and the ministry group members must utilize the gifts Christ has supplied. The ministry groups, representing the diversity present in the congregation, should offer their distinct leadership. According to Paul's theology in Ephesians, God has blessed them with the necessary gifts for their roles, and the elders and I should seek to support those efforts. Thus the project reinforced my need to encourage independence for the ministry groups. Throughout the sessions the ministry group leaders displayed the critical abilities to lead the congregational ministries from

their particular backgrounds and according to their specific talents, which reflects the depiction of the church in Ephesians.

Paul argues in Ephesians that full integration of the entire body promotes growth. As a result, my ministerial role is to equip for that necessary growth. I learned through this project that I must encourage the leadership team to promote congregational maturity. I especially was reminded of my significant role as a congregational teacher. One of my primary tasks in that role is to communicate with clarity and conciseness, supporting the leadership team in their ministry work. This includes instructing and guiding the leaders in prayer, theological reflection, and meditation concerning their ministry, which encourages them to process their ministry theologically. The experiences in *lectio divina*, for instance, led to theological conversation regarding Connecticut Valley's ministry and underlined my role to introduce opportunities for the leaders to grow in their own roles through these crucial practices. The participants valued these experiences during the sessions precisely because it granted them opportunity to reflect on their roles as leaders. The leadership team must in turn invite the entire body to pursue these important spiritual disciplines, individually and communally. In my role as the facilitator of the ministry group leaders, I should prepare the leadership team to become more effective for their roles as mentors for the rest of the congregation.

Implications for Ministry

This project leads to additional steps toward growth in preparing the leadership team at Connecticut Valley to equip the church body for ministry. Specifically based on my analysis and reflection of the project data, I perceived a need for our leadership team to develop our ecclesiology. In the previous section, I addressed the implications of this

underdeveloped ecclesiology for my leadership as a minister in the congregation. Through my role I intend to invite the leadership team, and the entire congregation, to consider our ecclesiology and the implications for our communal ministry. Our practices as a leadership team, and as a congregational body, directly flow from our ecclesiological understanding. This project attempted to address an ecclesiological concern, but the data reveal the leadership team did not grasp all the implications of Paul's portrayal of the church in Ephesians. In fact, the leadership team's lack of confidence stems in part from an underdeveloped ecclesiology. They are not always able to perceive the communal or cosmic nature of the church. Their ministerial understandings and practices, then, are built on highly individualistic premises. Their leadership styles, consequently, do not align with Paul's theology in Ephesians.

The leadership team can pursue a more developed ecclesiology only through an examination of its Christology, as Paul argues in Ephesians. This examination must influence the leaders' active presence in the congregation. The leadership team's lack of vision of the church as the body of Christ is indicative of the underdeveloped ecclesiology present in the entire congregation. The congregational leaders, consequently, merely reinforce an immature image of the church through their leadership style. Thus the leadership team needs to guide the congregation to embrace a more mature perspective of Connecticut Valley as Christ's body. When I first arrived, the congregation as a whole possessed little understanding of the church's leadership structure or the congregational ministries. Many members could not even identify the ministry groups and their leaders. The elders and ministry group leaders must introduce the entire membership to a similar process as this project. During the various interview

assignments, the project participants discovered a congregation ready to pursue ministry and utilize gifts from Christ. The leadership team must respond accordingly and provide guidance through mentoring and working alongside the church body.

Ecclesiological formation, as a result, will not occur at Connecticut Valley without a consideration of Christology. In Ephesians Paul roots ecclesiology in Christology; the church's understanding of Christ directly impacts the way of life it pursues. The project data signified a need for the leadership team to reconsider how a congregation becomes more like Christ. The participants were clear in their belief that becoming like Christ is the ultimate growth goal, but their descriptions of the process were individualistic. They struggled to connect the virtues Paul provides in Ephesians 4:1-16, and the virtues described in the remainder of the epistle, to a congregation's communal growth or as a part of the cosmic church. Subsequently, the leadership team needs to examine our leadership style and appraise our efforts according to Paul's admonition to grow "in the fullness of Christ."

The leadership team should equip the church body to become more like Christ. Paul claims this will occur when people accept their gifts and perform works of service. Members need to receive specific descriptions of the ministry opportunities and plans. They need opportunities to reflect and pray for the church's ministries. Most importantly, though, they need to receive constant invitation to join and fully participate in the ministry groups' work. If the leadership team mentors and works alongside the congregation in ministry, then Connecticut Valley will grow. Effective leadership will not occur from afar, but appropriate leadership guides and joins others in works of service.

Generalizability

This project maintains a level of generalizability. The design of this project was for the leadership team to participate in a process to discover a more effective leadership style for this congregation's ministry context. I never asked the participants to translate to other ministry settings. Nevertheless, key themes that emerged in the group's interactions may apply in other congregations.

The project engages Paul's characterization of the church in Ephesians as a cosmic entity. Christians, though they remain on earth, now reside with Christ in the heavenly realms. Any congregation would benefit from a reflection on Paul's portrayal of the church in Ephesians. This particular project sought Ephesians 4:1-16 as a theological description for church leadership to equip the congregation. Many congregations struggle to integrate all congregational members for ministry, and this project could provide a helpful process. Different congregations, even among Churches of Christ, represent a variety of ecclesiastical forms; congregational leaderships take on various forms in order to represent local contexts. No matter the exact ecclesiastical structure and leadership form, congregations need to consider Paul's directive for leaders to equip the body for ministry. Local churches can then assess if their particular leadership structure guides the body into the image of Christ.

A willingness to engage such a process must be present if a congregation is to replicate this project. My expectations leading toward this project were that the leadership team at Connecticut Valley was willing, if not eager, for this process. If the desire had not been present, then open reflection and adequate preparation would not have occurred. Further, the project leader must demonstrate patience. Unexpected

outcomes can occur when a congregation invites a leadership team to engage in serious dialogue concerning God's calling and ministry expectations. Formation for ministerial leadership, as this project revealed, happens in various ways. Some leaders view leadership through a perspective informed by an American business model. Other leaders have witnessed church leadership only in dysfunctional congregational settings. This project, conversely, attempts to invite participants to be formed through Paul's theology in Ephesians wherein leadership is not hierarchal. Instead, congregations should point the way toward Christ. This transition will not occur easily for most leadership groups, so the congregation must be willing to embrace the countercultural virtues Paul offers in Ephesians.

A willingness to engage this process must be coupled with trust in order for this project to be applicable in other churches. This project invites significant conversation; it does not seek to ignore potential congregational issues or conflicts. If the participants do not trust each other, then the process will stagnate. My assumption before beginning the project was that Connecticut Valley's leadership team would display mutual trust in each other. I also assumed that the congregational members trusted the leadership team enough to serve as interviewees for some assignments. Congregations that do not display a similar level of trust will struggle to implement a similar process, even if all the participants are willing. According to Paul's description of the church in Ephesians, Christ has blessed all parts of the body with gifts, and the Spirit empowers the church for ministry. Congregational leadership serves to encourage acceptance of the gifts and living into the unity provided by the Spirit. My supposition that Connecticut Valley was a congregational body interested in meaningful dialogue led me to believe that they were

prepared for this process. Other potential ministry contexts must assess their own readiness for mutual dialogue.

As project researcher and leader of the sessions, I struggled at times to allow the participants the requisite freedom to formulate the conversations. It was a balancing act to offer direction and also promote the participants' interaction. As our leadership team claimed and demonstrated during the sessions, a church body constantly is in flux and leaders must be prepared to change as well. The congregational focus, in this case, must be on God's work, which occurs through Christ's blessing the church with gifts and the Spirit's empowering of the church. The works of service performed by the church brings glory to God and does not elevate its own status. Thus any congregation that seeks to prepare leadership to equip the church body for ministry should engage a process that strives for inclusion. All parts of the body are gifted and necessary for growth. While this project focuses on the leadership team, the ultimate goal is to incorporate all parts of the body for ministry. The process, accordingly, must value mutual conversation and reflection. This project's generalizability depends on a church's ability to implement such communal concerns and openness.

Sustainability

The indispensable efforts we pursued in our sessions must continue to form the leadership team's ministry work. Consideration of Paul's theology in Ephesians still demands attention, and the leadership team must continue to call the entire church body to join the congregational ministry. While the group examined our own leadership self-understanding during the sessions and contemplated future directions, this process will be even more difficult as the leadership team involves the entire congregation. The project

did invite participants to interview members on a few occasions. In order to grow as a church body, the entire church will need to become even more involved. It is crucial that the healthy process we engaged during the project will continue to form our ministry. Otherwise, the previous inconsistent leadership will once again become the norm.

My next step is to address the christological issues the project identified as demanding further attention. The leadership team meets regularly, and these meetings provide opportunities to discuss crucial aspects of Paul's connection of Christology to ecclesiology in Ephesians. Specifically, the leadership team needs to determine what it means for Connecticut Valley to grow into the image of Christ. Paul's discussion in the second half of Ephesians concerning the virtues that form the life of Christians would be helpful. The project participants routinely perceived Paul's discussion in Ephesians on becoming Christ-like as an individual endeavor. In order to provide effective leadership for the entire body, though, we will need to realize implications of Paul's theology for our congregation.

The focus of these christological conversations must address our role as congregational leaders. The project participants recognized the need for the congregation to become more Christ-like. They also perceived the necessity for leadership to guide the congregation to become a unified body. The leadership team must connect these two initiatives, but as the project confirmed, the leaders require more active reflection in order to discover this connection completely. Accordingly, I will introduce further conversation that invites reflection on our role to guide Connecticut Valley to become more like Christ. I will provide opportunities for the leaders to identify the positive ways this guidance is already occurring, and I will encourage the leadership team to consider how

we might improve in this area. In Ephesians Paul describes the church as the location where all parts of the body perform works of service that reflect Christ. The Connecticut Valley leadership team needs to encourage this pursuit of Christ-likeness through effective guidance. This demands the leaders work alongside the members in God's ministry, encourage all members to use their gifts provided by Christ, and live into the unity of the Spirit.

Conclusion

This thesis reports a doctor of ministry project to prepare the leadership to equip the church body for ministry. This project resulted in a nine-week process in which participants and I reflected together on Christian leadership, engaging various theological sources of discernment and bringing them into conversation with each other. The results indicate that although the stated purposes of the project did not occur completely, the leadership team is better prepared. I believe that, if this process continues, the leadership team can equip the church body for effective ministry participation.

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APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

- 1) Instruct Non-Participant Observer on Observations
 - a. Detailed and descriptive
 - b. Avoid judgments, vagueness, and generalization

- 2) Observe:
 - a. Attendance and seating of group
 - b. Participation/non-participation in activities
 - c. Style of interacting with each other and me
 - d. Content and manner of conversations
 - e. Silences and nonverbal behavior
 - f. Casual conversation within five minutes of session's beginning and conclusion
 - g. Use of key words/phrases recorded by initials each time used:
 - Equip
 - Maturation
 - Unity
 - Calling
 - Ministry
 - Body/Parts

- 3) Place data on researcher's desk box following each session

APPENDIX B

WORKSHEET FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

Key Words, Phrases (use initials each time used):

Equip:

Maturation:

Unity:

Calling:

Ministry:

Body/Parts:

Descriptive notes of interactions among participants (participation or lack of, style, manner, non-verbal behavior, and “verbatim”):

Descriptive Notes on Casual Conversation:

APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR CODING FIELD NOTES

Protocol for Coding Field Notes

- 1) Type up the field notes by date in a Microsoft Word Document
- 2) Read through all data extent at the time, recording reflections and questions in the margins of the data document (Doc A)
- 3) Construct a record of emerging themes and topics in columns on a separate Word document (Doc B)
- 4) Archive repeating grammar and terminology
- 5) Group similar items and topics in Doc B, also drawing lines where interrelationships exist
- 6) Assign code and themes to topics from Doc B, inserting these into the data records (Doc A)
- 7) Categorize themes and topics, preparing the data for an interpretation of the project's effectiveness, according to the principle of convergence
- 8) Produce Iteration of Coding Scheme

Questions that will inform analysis of Coding Scheme:

- 1) How does the leadership team explain their role in the congregational body?
- 2) How do they connect Paul's theology in Ephesians 4:1-16 with their task as church leaders?
- 3) What is their vision of the work of the ministry groups?
- 4) How do they understand their role in guiding the maturation process of Christ's body?
- 5) Do the sessions and activities affect behavior and perspective beyond the project sessions?

APPENDIX D

FIELD NOTES CODING SCHEME

1. God's Calling of Leaders

- 1.1. God calls leaders
- 1.2. Leaders answer call
 - 1.2.1. Respond to Christ's leadership
 - 1.2.2. Learning to recognize the call
 - 1.2.3. Fulfilling role as leader
 - 1.2.4. God's servants
- 1.3. God values diverse leaders

2. Maturation of Body

- 2.1. Focus on God
 - 2.1.1. God is primary actor
 - 2.1.2. Maturity measured by God
 - 2.1.3. End result of maturity
 - 2.1.4. Not about us
- 2.2. Focus on whole body
 - 2.2.1. Each part must seek growth of body
 - 2.2.2. Each part contributes by accepting gifts
 - 2.2.3. Numerical growth
 - 2.2.4. Body becomes Christ-like
 - 2.2.5. Weakest parts' dominating effect on growth
- 2.3. People mature differently
- 2.4. Body is living organism
 - 2.4.1. Transitions are natural
 - 2.4.2. Stunted growth
 - 2.4.3. Unhealthy growth
- 2.5. Leaders facilitate growth
 - 2.5.1. Demonstrate love
 - 2.5.2. Display Christ-likeness
 - 2.5.3. Create environment for growth
 - 2.5.4. Dictatorial/authoritarian leadership
 - 2.5.5. Encourage weakest parts
 - 2.5.6. Churches depend on leaders' maturity

3. Diversity of Body

- 3.1. Diversity as gift
 - 3.1.1. Church needs diversity
 - 3.1.2. People must fulfill roles

- 3.1.3. Church uniqueness
- 3.1.4. Diversity is strength
- 3.1.5. Conformity
- 3.1.6. Discovering weaknesses
- 3.1.7. Accepting each other
- 3.2. Christ grants gifts
 - 3.2.1. Each person different
 - 3.2.2. Everybody receives gifts
 - 3.2.3. Need other gifts
- 3.3. Connecticut Valley diversity
 - 3.3.1. Ministry groups different
 - 3.3.2. Members should take risks in service
 - 3.3.3. Ministry groups reflect congregation diversity
 - 3.3.4. Ministry surveys allow diversity
- 3.3. Oneness
 - 3.3.1. Christ demonstrates oneness
 - 3.3.2. Same foundation
 - 3.3.3. Prevalence of “oneness” in Ephesians 4

4. Equipping Leadership

- 4.1. Encouraging others
 - 4.1.1. Ministry as partnership
 - 4.1.2. Identifying others’ gifts
 - 4.1.3. Ministry as adventure
 - 4.1.4. Reproducing leadership
- 4.2. Christ-likeness leadership
 - 4.2.1. Point people toward Christ
 - 4.2.2. Teaching as important leadership gift
- 4.3. Active leadership
 - 4.3.1. Passive leadership fails
 - 4.3.2. Leaders can’t overcompensate
 - 4.3.3. Ministry groups partner for work

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Preparing the Leadership Team to Equip the Church Body for Ministry at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ

Principal Investigator:

Samuel J. Garner Abilene Christian University, Abilene, TX

Advisors:

Charles Siburt Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University
Curt Niccum Graduate School of Theology, Abilene Christian University

Introduction: I understand that I have been asked to participate as part of the leadership team in a project to lead us to equip the church body at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to prepare the leadership team at the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ to equip the church body for ministry. The project will incorporate reflection upon biblical concepts, group discussion, and practical exercises through a series of eight sessions with additional exercises outside the meeting sessions. These sessions will conclude with an evaluation of the project to determine its effectiveness.

Procedures: This project will enlist the leadership team, which includes the elders and the ministry group leaders, in a project entailing eight, one-hour sessions on Sunday mornings, beginning September 11, 2011, and concluding October 30, 2011. A final two-hour evaluative session will occur on Sunday, November 13 from twelve-thirty to two-thirty in the afternoon. Upon signing this document, you acknowledge your understanding that your input will be solicited and incorporated into this thesis.

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

Potential Benefits: Your participation may benefit you by: (1) Providing affirmation and confidence in functioning as a leader at Connecticut Valley; (2) enhancing relationships as a leadership team; (3) assisting you to embrace a mature vision for your leadership in equipping the church body.

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

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

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

If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Mr. Garner by telephone at (860) 683-0591 or by email, samjgarner@gmail.com.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Principle Investigator _____

APPENDIX F

REPORT FROM INDEPENDENT EXPERT

The Connecticut Valley Church of Christ (CVCC) ministry leaders and church shepherds met with me on Sunday afternoon, November 13, 2011 to process a case scenario. Over the course of two hours, we discussed a case study and made application to the current ministry/leadership structure found within the congregation.

My goals were to assess the types of roles for leadership that these participants possess. I wanted to see if there was evidence of theological sensitivity to Ephesians 4 in their responses. It was hoped that an understanding of the vision for the ministry could be expressed as well as describing the process for maturation within the congregation.

The Case

In beginning our session, we read through the case study, paying special attention to the characters in the scenario. The characters in the case are the following:

- Chris: director of Christian education for two years, church member, has problems with starting preschool
- George: pastor for 14 years, supportive of Chris, lets Patty go around the process
- Patty: member, ran a preschool at another church, wants to start a preschool at Canyon Presbyterian, part-time staff in evangelism, member of Session
- Carol: church member with children who was excited about new preschool
- Tammy: chair of Christian education committee, church member, children grew up in church and were involved.
- Mike: newer church member, concerned about finances of preschool

The case study is the following:

Should the Church Start a Preschool?

Looking at the new building plans posted in the fellowship hall, Chris found herself staring at the large classroom space designate for young children. What would be lost and what would be gained for the church's educational ministry if Session voted to go ahead with the preschool? As the Director of Christian Education, she knew tomorrow's Session meeting would be critical. Patty had been director of a church-based preschool at her previous church and was pushing to begin one here. Chris wasn't convinced it was a ministry that Canyon Presbyterian Church should do at this point in time. Patty had admitted to her the preschool would need to be initially subsidized by the church, so Chris was concerned the money would impact her programs. "Can the education program afford the money and space for something new?" she thought. But she also had grandchildren and knew the importance of good preschool programs. And most of the twelve members of Session were parents; a few were also grandparents.

Canyon Presbyterian Church was founded as a family-focused church over 40 years ago, and had always had a strong children's program. A middle-class church in a middle-class suburb, its membership had sat at about 450 for the past 5 or 6 years and the leadership was hoping the building expansion would help Canyon grow. One of the known strengths of the church was a strong commitment to children and youth; its reputation as a church with a good educational program had made the position as DCE very attractive to Chris when she interviewed two years ago.

The other draw to joining the church staff was the pastor, George, who seemed to be very committed to the educational work of the church. Working with George was usually great. He had been the pastor for fourteen years, and had a good reputation in the Presbytery. Chris quickly realized how supportive he was of her work, and trusted Chris with all the aspects of education. Chris soon joined the church alone, as her husband was Episcopalian and their boys were grown and married.

It was in the process of joining the church that Chris became acquainted with Patty and her husband. They had joined about three years earlier, and had quickly become very involved. She was aware of how others in the church would talk to Patty about what they did or didn't like in the church. For a newer member of the church, she was well known and influential. Her children were grown, and Patty had become very involved in the church's evangelism program. She had recently been hired as the part-time staff person in evangelism, and yet was still allowed to remain on Session as an elder on the Evangelism Committee. Chris was still wondering about that decision, as George had admitted to her it was irregular, but he didn't ask Patty to resign from Session to avoid a conflict of dual roles.

The educational programs with children were doing very well, and a new part-time youth director had recently been hired. There was a real interest in the church and on the Session to expand the youth director's position to full time. This would require additional money in the Christian Education Committee's budget, so was another reason Chris still had so many questions about starting a preschool. Also, the Session had been doing some long-range planning and there were no plans to expand to a larger educational program.

Chris remembered the first time she heard of Patty's plans. Carol, a Sunday School teacher who had two young children, mentioned to Chris that she was excited the church's building expansion would include a preschool run by Patty. Later that day Chris asked George if he was aware of Patty talking about a preschool. "Yes, she told me she would really like to build the kind of preschool program here that she ran at her previous church. I suggested she talk with you." "Well, she hasn't," Chris said, "but she has been talking to others." Chris was very uncomfortable with the feelings she was having, so she called Patty and asked to meet.

"I've heard you're interested in our church having a preschool," Chris began. "Yes!" Patty responded. "There is a real need for another preschool in this area. It would be a great outreach to the community, as well as strengthening our educational program for children. Don't you agree?"

"I'm interested, but not sure, Patty. Tell me more." Chris replied.

"Think about it! The new space for younger children in the new building could be designed to meet all the state regulations for a preschool, which would make it even better for the Christian education programs." Chris had to admit that sounded very good,

and certainly the space could be shared. “What about funding?” she asked. “I’m still working on that,” replied Patty. “Should I bring my ideas to the CE Committee next week?” Chris agreed, and knew she needed to talk with both George and Tammy, chair of the Christian Education Committee.

George seemed to realize Chris was surprised and upset that Patty had talked to him but not her. “I’m sorry,” he began. “I really assumed she was talking with you, and that a proposal for a preschool would go the CE Committee from both of you. What do you think of the idea?”

“I have mixed feelings, George. I recognize the importance of good preschools. My son and daughter-in-law are trying to find one for my grandson in Toledo. But why us, and why at this time? It feels like Patty is pushing this because she wants to do it, but we really need to think about our overall ministries, and the impact on building use and budgeting. And what about staffing? Gosh, I feel like I am supposed to help make a decision I know very little about. I have asked Patty to come to the next CE Committee and fill us in, and I’m meeting with Tammy on Tuesday.”

“Thanks for doing that, Chris. I know this is very important to Patty, and I appreciate you helping the Committee take her idea seriously. I’ll make it clear to Patty that she needs to work through you. Keep me posted, okay?”

After promising to do so, she went to her office and called Tammy. Tammy was a very good chair of the CE Committee. Her children had grown up in the church, and were involved to varying degrees. She was a good, clear thinker and Chris appreciated knowing that Tammy would both listen to Patty’s ideas and ask necessary questions. In their brief phone conversation, Tammy expressed interest in finding out whether it would be primarily a preschool for members’ children or for families in the area. She also had concerns about funding it. As Chris understood herself as primarily a resource to the Committee, she was grateful she could let Tammy and other members ask Patty questions and she could just carefully listen.

At the next Christian Education Committee, Patty presented her ideas and talked a bit about funding. She did tell the Committee she wasn’t sure what it would cost, but told them, “We wouldn’t be able to expect the preschool to pay for itself at the beginning. I hope it will eventually.” When asked by Tammy what kind of financial support the preschool would need, Patty responded, “In addition to making sure the rooms are build to state regulation, it might cost about \$12,000 to \$15,000 the first year over above any income from student fees. But that should quickly drop to probably \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year. And I have already started thinking about fund raising possibilities. I hope in a few years it will be able to be funded through student fees and fund raising.”

“But it will have to be part of the church budget, for at least a few years?” asked Chris. Patty responded it probably would. After Patty left the meeting, Tammy invited the Committee to discuss the preschool idea. Mike, a newer member of the church, voiced concerns about the financial commitment, and others agreed. Laura, a mother of a pre-teen, asked about the youth director’s position being expanded. Chris asked whether or not this fit into the long-range plans for strengthening their program that the Committee had discussed the last meeting. After a serious discussion of the advantages and risks of starting a preschool, the Committee expressed deep concerns, but out of respect for Patty decided to ask her to meet with them again, with more specific details and budget. Chris said she would call Patty the next day.

Patty expressed her disappointment to Chris, but said she would develop a more detailed proposal. Chris thanked her, and assumed she would hear back when Patty was ready to meet with the Committee again. She knew the rumor of a possible preschool had worked its way through the church. Other church members mentioned to Chris they had heard about the church starting a preschool, and she noted a diversity of opinion in their comments.

Six weeks later, reading through the monthly minutes of all the standing committees before the next Session meeting, Chris discovered a recommendation in the Evangelism Committee minutes: “The Committee voted to recommend to Session that Patty Oliver be given permission to develop a detailed proposal and budget to establish a preschool at Canyon Presbyterian Church.”

Walking into George’s office, she asked, “Were you at the last Evangelism Committee meeting?” George looked up and, seeing the look on her face, responded, “No, but Patty told me she told them of her hopes and they offered to take it to Session. When she told me last week, I asked her about her meeting with Christian education. She told me what you had told her, but she wanted to get it before Session to see if there was the interest before she invested in developing a complete proposal. I am uncomfortable with this, Chris, but let’s see what happens.”

The conversation with George ran through Chris’s head as she looked at the drawing of the new classrooms. Her feelings were still so mixed. She was concerned about finances, but she was more upset that Patty had circumvented the proper process through Christian Education. Chris knew she had to call Tammy and prepare her to be an active part of the Session’s discussion of the recommendation. And Chris knew she might need to speak to it directly. What did she want to convey to Tammy, and what did Chris need to consider saying? She rarely spoke at Session, but she knew that this situation might be an exception.

The Conversation on the Case

Following the reading of the case, we spent the first half of our time discussing a few of the characters in the scenario. As we explored each character, we sought to understand the motivations and values behind some of the character’s behavior. This was an important first action. Taking the time to do evaluate the characters can help ministry leaders understand themselves as they seek to work within the established ministry system at CVCC. Unpacking the characters can perhaps expose blind spots in the participants. It can help participants evaluate their own personal motives for ministry leadership. The ministry leaders group did a thorough job in this discussion. There were no evident “red flags” that might point to a dysfunctional ministry group. Giving the benefit of the doubt, this ministry group has a healthy self-awareness of who they are, what gifts they bring to the church, and how they function together.

When asked how the characters in the scenario could have been better equippers the group pointed to the need for ministry leaders to follow through with their tasks, to maintain connection with others, to keep promises, to follow process, to be flexible. Above all, an equipper needs to keep God front and center. Hopefully, CVCC ministry leaders see these as essential practices for their group.

The second half of our time was spent evaluating how (if) this kind of scenario might play out at CVCC? Most agreed that the particular situation of the case study

would not be in play. The participants believe there is a keen sense that the minister and elders/shepherds are connected to the ministry leaders. Ministry leaders feel they have an awareness of others. There is a sense that most in the congregation shows concern for others.

The participants did, however, show awareness that the case scenario involves a larger church with a different ministry structure. The group recognized that, if CVCC were larger and had a more dense structure, some of the issues raised in the case scenario might have to be faced. This realization shows an understanding of the culture of CVCC as a dynamic, fluid body. They have not arrived, nor do they sense they are perfect. They have struggles like most. In fact, the group acknowledged a time when a ministry lost its way. The church shepherds had to step in and dismantle that ministry. That ministry did not seek to live within the core values found within congregation.

What might help CVCC to not fall prey to the struggles presented in the scenario? The group was reminded of the four “undeniables” which are built into the culture of CVCC. In particular, the fourth value of “unity” was promoted. It was expressed that this particular core value can help prevent the congregation from becoming like the congregation mentioned in the case study.

This high value for unity indicates that CVCC has a theological sensitivity to Ephesians 4. This group desires to live out this ideal in their congregational ministry and life. Unity doesn’t collapse into uniformity. Unity is seen in the diversity of the group. So, as the group explored the characters in the case study, they also pointed out the virtues necessary to uphold unity in the midst of a diverse church culture. Humility, gentleness, patience are essential virtues and it seems that CVCC desires for these virtues to be evident in their congregational ministry and life.

Out of this desire for unity, CVCC also respects the gifts that are evident in the body. Each gift is a resource for the Kingdom of God. The ministry leaders, at first blush, do want people to utilize their God-given talents in service to the Kingdom. Their goal is for the people to participate in ministry.

While this goal is before the group, CVCC desires for the body to be above all a place of love. This is the higher motive for ministry. As the group explored the case scenario, the actions of love rose to the surface. The group mentioned that any process must have prayer, open communication, contemplation, seeking wisdom, a lack of ego, a desire to listen, and a spirit of “yes” (we see a spark in people) governing all matters. All these are actions of love indicate that the ministry leader group desires to be a people of love. They are living out Ephesians 4.

Going forward, CVCC is on healthy journey of equipping and living out the ministry ideals presented in Ephesians 4. As the group continues to grow and mature it will be challenged to maintain those ideals and not succumb to the temptations of success. Having a theologically astute minister and a group of shepherds with caring hearts, along with a ministry leaders group that is motivated by love, will help these temptations to be avoided. These people are in place at CVCC. The future is bright, hopeful, and full of potential.

BRIEF VITA

Samuel J. Garner was born in Sheffield, Alabama on July 20, 1981 and raised in Brandon, Mississippi where he attended Northwest Rankin High School. He graduated from Harding University in 2003 with a bachelor of arts in Biblical Languages and Preaching. He later received the master of divinity degree from Abilene Christian University Graduate School of Theology in 2006. After marrying Rachel Maul in 2005, the Garners moved to Windsor, Connecticut in 2006 to begin serving the Connecticut Valley Church of Christ.