Lost and Found:

Spiritual Discernment for a Struggling Church

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Chapter 1 Introduction and Rationale for Study

1.1 A Vision Crisis

On June 24, 2014, I attended an Interim Ministry Network workshop titled “New Rules of Vision” by consultant Will Mancini. He affirmed much of what I have been seeing in the decline of churches in the past fifteen years I have been in ministry. In his book, Mancini wrote about “an epidemic we are witnessing in the North American church”\(^1\) that he described as “a vision vacuum.”\(^2\) Leaders clamor for the right tools, programs and resources and clone them, resulting in “photocopied vision in the body of Christ.”\(^3\) They lack a lifestyle of visionary leadership, focusing instead on the vision statement. A better way of leadership involves “careful observation, vibrant imagination, and demanding collaboration that forge a unique vision based on what God is uniquely doing in each church’s unique context.”\(^4\) One size fits all is no longer viable. “Until leaders not only embrace uniqueness but celebrate and leverage it, they will miss out on God’s best for their ministry.”\(^5\) Furthermore, when leaders think clearly, engage locally, focus redemptively and risk boldly, “their church becomes an unstoppable force and an irresistible influence. It becomes a church that prevails not because it is ‘purpose-driven’ but because it is purposeful.”\(^6\) This last sentence bears further explanation. Will Mancini relates that Rick Warren’s The Purpose-Driven Church\(^7\) failed to mention the uniqueness of a church’s call

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2 Will Mancini, Church Unique, xxv.
3 Will Mancini, Church Unique, xxv.
4 Will Mancini, Church Unique, xxv.
5 Will Mancini, Church Unique, xxv.
6 Will Mancini, Church Unique, xxv-xxvi.
to love God and others. It left many churches “ill equipped to define something purposefully specific.” Is this vision crisis an issue of ineffective methods or ineffective leadership or both?

According to Edwin Friedman in his final book on leadership, we are experiencing “a failure of nerve” affecting American civilization today: “…when anxiety reaches certain thresholds, ‘reasonableness and honesty’ no longer defend against illusion.” In this highly reactive “leadership-toxic climate” leaders who try to stand up amidst the raging anxiety are sabotaged, at a time when there is a need for “clarity and decisiveness.” Dependent members of organizations set agendas that are oriented toward weakness instead of strength, toward anxious members instead of “the energetic, the visionary, the imaginative, and the motivated.” This anxiety is easily projected into our church families, causing leaders to react, be worn down, “go through the motions,” and “seek peace rather than progress.” Leaders are forced to operate out of a “quick fix mentality” and seek scapegoats to blame and to bind up their anxieties. The least mature are chosen for responsibilities, while those with the greatest integrity and abilities are sabotaged and usually leave. In short, the organization becomes cyclically organized and operational around the dysfunctional.

I agree with Will Mancini and Edwin Friedman, that a main reason why so many of our churches are lost and struggling is leadership’s failure to deal with this vision crisis. I have repeatedly noticed that churched people become stuck where they are because they cannot

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8 Mancini, *Church Unique*, 105-106.
10 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 1.
11 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 2.
12 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 2.
13 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 12.
14 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 91.
15 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 91.
16 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 92.
17 Friedman, *Failure of Nerve*, 92.
imagine an exciting future different from the present. Symptoms of this disease include worshipping the building when it is falling down around them, idolizing their style of worship, fearing new people because the newcomers will change them, focusing on themselves instead of the community to which God calls them, and focusing on keeping and looking busy, instead of on how God wants them, as stewards, to use their limited gifts of time, treasure, talents and energy. Most of the churches that I have interviewed do not know that this lack of a unique vision from God is their main issue; finding leadership brave enough to lead it and congregations that will support that leadership, is a secondary issue.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to address this situation. This project attempts to give clarity amidst chaos, by helping courageous leaders direct the people back to God who is the One who is really in charge. While serving as a Transitional Minister and operating under the accepted practices of that ministerial specialization, I plan to intervene in a congregation’s life, by inviting, teaching and guiding its members to use an ancient practice of discernment that was developed for decision-making in accordance with God’s will. The expected outcome is that the people will personally and communally have a clearer idea of their callings from God. Their experience with discernment will guide them in starting to develop a vision for the future, as they prepare for their next pastor.

Reflecting back on my personal experience with discernment, I realize that seeking and following God’s will have been paramount for me. Over the years I have learned to listen for God through a variety of practices: worship, scripture, music, the words and images of others (especially spiritual directors), nature, journaling, and noticing if a particular thought keeps returning or brings me peace, among other practices. But I have never taught a congregation about discernment in great detail. I have “scratched the surface” by leading churches to ask
“What does God want for us?” But I have not guided them deeply into a practice that relates to listening for God’s beckonings. We Christians have been taught well how to pray to God for that which we want or need; but we receive little training about how to determine what God desires! Our materialistic, self-centered culture promotes this narcissistic attitude. However, strong relationships are two-sided with communication going back and forth freely between people and between people and God. From what I have observed about settled and interim (when congregations are in-between ministers) pastorates, “What does God desire for our church?” is not always a question asked, nor is this question central to how many churches function. In fact, discernment is the weakest link in a process I have been using since 2005 to guide congregations that are between settled pastors. So, I want to learn if the intentional injection of discernment into that process will enhance a congregation’s ability to envision the future to which God is calling it. Will discernment spiritually reinvigorate a “lost” congregation that sees little hope for its future? Will it set the congregation on an exciting new path? Finally, will that experience encourage people to sustain the practice in their personal lives and in their church?

1.2 Question

How does a Transitional Minister guide a congregation that has lost its sense of purpose to discern what God is calling it to be and do, in a manner that would be helpful to individuals in their daily lives, as well as to other struggling congregations?

1.2.1 Definitions

As an Intentional Interim Minister, I am a type of “Transitional Minister” who is trained and called specifically to guide religious organizations during the wilderness time between
pastoral leadership. The term “Transitional Minister” could also apply to a settled or permanent pastor who leads a church body through other types of transitions, such as merging with another church, change of mission and vision, recovery after a disaster, or disbanding and leaving a legacy for the future. What distinguishes Transitional Ministry from other types of specialized ministry are: 1) the work that prepares the congregation for a future that will be different than previously imagined because of the change, 2) the training both of and by the Transitional Minister to guide the congregation through this process, and 3) the limited timeframe involved to accomplish the above tasks.\(^\text{18}\) Often such ministry involves reclaiming a lost purpose.\(^\text{19}\)

Congregations that “lose their sense of purpose” have lost their identity and focus on God. They are often fixated on the past, their departed minister, their building, programs, staff and are stretched across too many ministries. They are worried about getting bodies in order to cover their overburdened budgets and programs, instead of finding and working toward God’s purpose for them. They often have an antiquated, huge governance structure that paralyzes their decision-making abilities and an aging membership that only wants its spiritual needs to be met. They are fearful of disbanding as a church, are riddled with anxiety, their leadership “wears too many hats,” and as a congregation, they have not envisioned a future for their church. Finally, they do not know that claiming a vision requires sustained discernment. As Proverbs 29:18 KJV says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

The word, “discern” originates from the Latin discernere, which means to separate or to distinguish. From the Greek diakrisis, it also means to test in crisis or distinguish good from evil. From a religious standpoint, to discern means to “see the heart of the matter with spiritual eyes.

\(^{19}\) I am grateful to my faculty advisor, Dr. Lisa Dahill for collaborating with me in developing this theme about how “lost” congregations can benefit from discernment.
from God’s vantage point, to see beneath the surface of events, through illusions within human systems, and beyond the immediate and transient.”\(^{20}\) It becomes a Christian issue when one brings the Gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit into that process, as well. However, renowned teacher and preacher in the Anglican Church, Bishop William Temple, cautioned: “Infallible direction for practical action is not to be had either from Bible or Church…or individual communing with God.”\(^{21}\) This is due in part to the fact that “discernment is a prayerful, informed, and intentional attempt to sort through” other competing voices in search of God’s voice.\(^{22}\) Competing voices often become idols that congregations worship, such as fear of closing, perceived scarcity instead of God’s abundance, and suspicion of those different than they are.

“Struggling congregations” are typically those at risk of disbanding and are in the Aging Stage of congregational development according to George Bullard’s “The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development.” Congregations in this stage lack communal acceptance of or have an outdated vision, mission, and purpose and may have little understanding of their group core values. Relationships, experiences and discipleship are often faltering, as are programs, ministries, services and activities. At this stage one sees an emphasis on management, accountability, systems and resources. Numbers take precedence over developing relationships.\(^{23}\) However, a congregation that faces difficult decisions and needs to understand God’s desires for that church may also be a struggling congregation. An example would be a church destroyed by a hurricane or harmed by the sexual misconduct of its pastor.

\(^{20}\text{Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, Discerning God’s Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church (Herndon VA: The Alban Institute, 2012), 13.}\
1.3 The Thesis and Variables

**Thesis:** Churches that are struggling with identity issues can be fruitfully guided, as individuals and as church, in the use of spiritual discernment practices, in order to increase clarity of God’s presence, activity, and leading for them.

1.3.1 The Dependent Variables

Dependent variables “represent the output or effect” to be studied while independent variables “represent the inputs or causes” that are expected to impact the dependent variables. Other names for dependent variables are lag or lagging indicators (which are measures that focus on the results of a time period), desired outcomes, or goals (what a project will do in relationship to a condition). For this project the dependent variables represent the desired outcomes that address a church vision crisis. These goals are:

1. Teaching individual and group-level spiritual practices of discernment to increase the people’s awareness of God’s presence, activity, and leading in their lives.
2. Fostering a sense of these practices’ helpfulness in deepening their relationship with God.
3. Integrating these practices into people’s spiritual disciplines, both for individual and group-level purposes.

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4. Promoting greater clarity of understanding regarding God’s desire for this church in its particular situation, which will later guide this church in future decisions such as developing a focus, ministries, restructuring, and calling a settled pastor.

5. Developing a new-found sense of hope for the future

How would I define “success” with this project? I would consider the attainment of any of the above goals as partial successes and “seeds for the spiritual future” of the individuals and church. A complete success would be attaining all of the above. Achieving the third and fourth goals would have the most influence on the long-term spiritual health of this church.

1.3.2 The Independent Variables

As noted earlier, independent variables are inputs or causes that impact dependent variables. Independent variables are also known as lead indicators (activities that predict outcomes\(^ {27} \)) or desired influences. In this intervention the independent variables are:

1. Assessing the congregation’s prior knowledge of spiritual discernment, both individually and as a group, using “a holding environment,” in a holding group to be interviewed. A “holding environment” is a term derived by Ronald Heifetz which “consists of all those ties that bind people together and enables them to maintain their collective focus on what they are trying to do.”\(^ {28} \) Group members will be chosen by random selection, within age ranges and by gender, that reflect an unbiased representation of the demographics of the congregation.

2. Teaching of individual and group level spiritual discernment practices conducted in a sermon series. Creative forms of discernment will be taught and artistic results displayed at


the church for the final discernment exercise. Children and youth will be involved in the creative exercises.

3. Designing a multiple-day discernment program that provides individual and group level discernment experience and meets a specific church decision-making need.

4. Guiding the congregation as a group to surface what God might be saying about God’s desires for this church, during a congregational retreat, followed by a week set aside for discernment.

1.4 A Struggling Congregation

During a phone interview with a Pulpit Committee that was searching for an Intentional Interim Pastor, I asked: “What is the biggest issue or challenge facing this church?” Without hesitation, the committee chairperson replied, “Everyone in this room will agree that we need direction.” “Bingo!” popped out of my mouth and I related how helping churches find their direction from God was my strength and my calling. So began my relationship with Disciples Christian Church in Boardman, Ohio, which, like other congregations with whom I had served, was wounded from its past and fearful about its future. Again, the purpose of this project was to intervene by teaching, inviting and guiding this church, which had lost its focus on God, how to discern God’s path. Why is discernment so important for the church in general?

[T]he purpose and goal of spiritual discernment are knowing and doing God’s will...Nothing is more urgent in our lives or in our congregations than yearning to know and do God’s will...God yearns for us to know God’s will for the world, for the church, and for ourselves...If we keep our purpose in sight, we will prevail in the effort of discernment, and the church will prosper because the church was created to discern and implement God’s will.²⁹

Sometimes, however, doing God’s will does not lead to prosperity, but instead leads to death or other undesirable situations. For example, God may call churches to disband because they no longer have the gifts, passion and energy to relate with a community in need of the living Gospel. Those churches might consider donating their assets to invigorate another ministry, such as feeding the poor. God may send individuals into highly sacrificial positions to bring the hope of Jesus to those on the margins dealing with addictions, violence, war, or injustices. Doing God’s will to help those who are lost from God’s beckoning does not necessarily have pleasant consequences on earth, but reaps eternal, joy-filled rewards.

1.5 A View from the Balcony

One of my greatest joys in serving as an Intentional Interim Minister has been studying congregations as systems, both within themselves and as part of other systems or environments. I also have a keen interest in processes, particularly when guiding change. In my experience, Pastoral Search / Pulpit Committees in denominations using call systems often have not known the reasons why their churches were in decline. They wanted pastors to relieve their anxieties, grief, and fears with pastoral care, when they didn’t understand that systemic factors were crippling their churches. To observe these systems, one must take a view “from the balcony.”

My previous education and experience have provided me with leadership skills that have enabled me to view churches as systems in this way. I realized from my Doctor of Ministry studies, particularly a class on leadership taught by Dr. C. Jeff Woods, that my secular experience also

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31 I hold a Master of Science degree in Systems Management from the University of Southern California, 1985 which first taught me systems thinking. I have also received training in Family Systems theory from courses over the years at Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Interim Ministry Network Conferences, and numerous other workshops. Family Systems theory is based on the groundbreaking work of Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press), 1985.
included Organizational Development. According to the Organizational Development Network, Organizational Development is a “planned effort, organization-wide, and managed from the top to increase the effectiveness and health of an organization through planned interventions in the organization’s ‘processes,’ using behavioral-science knowledge.”\(^{32}\) My business background before I was called into ministry provided valuable experiences in Organizational Development.\(^{33}\) My religious studies over the years have advanced my understanding of spiritual practices, as well. In short, God has further been using those same leadership skills developed over the years to help me to advance congregations as entities. And having this developed ability to observe and assess congregations “from the balcony” is a major reason why Transitional Ministry and Intentional Interim Ministry, in particular have been so fulfilling for me.

The Interim Ministry Network (IMN), of which I have been a member since 2005, provided my introduction to Intentional Interim Ministry and continues to offer cutting-edge venues for updating one’s education. IMN adopted “Five Focus Points for the Interim Time” for viewing and guiding congregations “from the balcony:”

- Heritage - how the congregation was shaped over time
- Leadership - developing new leadership to meet membership needs
- Connections - examining all relationships outside of the church
- Mission - redefining the church’s sense of purpose and direction
- Future - developing the church profile, calling and preparing for a new pastor\(^{34}\).

Accordingly, this project begins with an exploration of the history of the testing ground for this doctoral project, Disciples Christian Church.

\(^{32}\) [www.odnetwork.org/?page=whatisod](http://www.odnetwork.org/?page=whatisod) viewed on March 5, 2015.

\(^{33}\) My secular experience includes managing a family-owned photography business, overseeing and training Army and Army Reserve units at many levels, and serving multiple Divisions of General Motors supported by Electronic Data Systems Corporation to make necessary information protection changes.

\(^{34}\) This language comes from a collaboration of Transitional Ministry professionals summarized in “Reframing the Tasks” in 2007. Permission granted by the copyright holder, The Center for Congregational Health, Winston-Salem, NC to use in this paper. -
Disciples Christian Church is the first church I have served that is a result of the joining of members from at least seven Disciples of Christ churches, all in the Youngstown, Ohio area. I learned this through an exercise I led known as “Story Day,” where congregational members and visitors shared their stories about their churches on October 6, 2013. Additional memories were shared through conversations with individuals. The stories of most of these congregations were laced with intense conflict from their foundings, through the struggle between “Independents” and “Disciples,” to their present history. Brief histories of four of the major founding churches appear below.  

First Christian Church was organized in 1841 when Youngstown was a small village of no more than a thousand. As the fourth church in the city, it caused immediate controversy with neighboring mainline churches over its practice of adult baptism. Church historian A.D. Hayden related that First Christian “was born in the agonies of fierce contention.” One of this denomination’s founders, Alexander Campbell, came in 1842 to defend this particular church’s cause. First Christian continued to grow, finishing its third building during the Depression. The church sponsored a free medical clinic and provided space for the Protestant Campus Ministry for nearby Youngstown State University between 1971 and 1991.

The history of the second church, Central Christian, also involved conflict. Rev. George Anderson, of First Christian Church, had opened the doors of First Christian to all races and homeless people, causing a split in the congregation in 1895. Over a hundred members left and

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35 This history of the mergers of all the above churches was summarized from (no author noted), “I Remember...Disciples Christian Church,” a 50th Anniversary booklet created for Disciples Christian Church, 2008.

36 “I Remember...Disciples Christian Church, 1.
formed Central Christian Church, also in downtown Youngstown. This church grew, supporting global and local outreach programs like the first day care nursery in the city and other programs for the needy.

Hillman Street Christian Church was founded in 1900 by dis-satisfied members of both First Christian and Central Christian Churches. It is still operating today as Hillman Street Church of Christ, noting online that its denominational category is “spirit-filled” and its denominational affiliation is “Restorationist.” This affiliation and the conflict it generated will be explained shortly in this paper.37

Boardman Christian Church, located in the southern suburbs of Youngstown, was founded in 1957 by a group that broke away from Hillman Street Christian Church. The split was a nasty one according to former members, and a reflection of what was happening at a much higher level in the Disciples of Christ movement (see Section 1.7 for the background). In 1958, Boardman Christian Church received its charter as a full-fledged Disciples of Christ Church. In 1959 its members broke ground for the building now being used, and in 1968 a new sanctuary was dedicated. This church celebrated its “glory days” in the 1960’s. But as the years went by, there was a steady decline in the funds and attendance. The church members developed the habit of using their permanent funds to cover operating costs and the upkeep of the physical plant. Personal giving suffered because of this reliance. This practice, along with the aging of the congregation, placed the church on a financial track heading toward non-sustainability.

Members from the above mentioned churches eventually united together because they shared common values and beliefs and had assets that were mutually beneficial. First Christian, Central Christian, Hillman Street Christian, and Boardman Christian Churches were the four

37 http://www.churchfinder.com/churches/oh/youngstown/hillman-street-christian-church viewed August 19, 2014. A former member I was able to reach explained that he was too young to have memories of this church, other than the extreme conflict.
primary founding congregations, whose members in part eventually came together to form what is now known as Disciples Christian Church. Here is more detail on how they became united. In 2001, facing a deteriorating neighborhood and church building, Central Christian closed its doors and donated the facilities to a growing inner-city ministry named New Beginning Assembly of God. Central Christian’s leadership requested to merge with Boardman Christian Church. That request was denied, causing much consternation. However, some of Central Christian’s members eventually joined Boardman Christian Church, which was founded by members who broke away from Hillman Street Christian Church.

In 2004 a merger took place between Boardman and the original First Christian Church. The latter, whose shrinking and aging congregation faced exorbitant maintenance costs for the huge building in downtown Youngstown, placed its property on the market. First Christian sold its building to Butler Art Museum next door, providing a sizeable endowment for the future of the congregation that emerged. Boardman Christian also sported an active youth group and several young families. In 2006, the two merged congregations of First Christian and Boardman Christian renamed themselves Disciples Christian Church. Since this chain of events can be confusing, I will recap how these four major churches became one. Central Christian disbanded in 2001 and some of its members went to Boardman Christian, which was founded due to a caustic split-off from Hillman Street Christian. First Christian and Boardman Christian merged in 2004 and the new congregation in Boardman was renamed in 2006 as Disciples Christian Church.

1.7 Wounds of a Movement
Throughout the history of this denomination, “The Restoration Principle,” about which founder Thomas Campbell passionately wrote, had been called into question. This principle is based on “simply returning to the original standard of Christianity, the profession and practice of the primitive Church, as expressly exhibited upon the sacred page of New Testament scripture.” The Restorationists viewed the New Testament as the constitution for operating the church at all times and places. However, the advent of higher biblical criticism went beyond the textual criticism that was practiced by Campbell. Larger questions of history, authorship, literary forms and cultural considerations challenged traditional assumptions about the Bible, particularly through the writings of Herbert L. Willett. The misreadings of the Bible to defend the oppression of women and slaves raised the question of the need to adapt the Gospel to changing times and cultures. The Bible ultimately came to be known among Disciples and other mainline denominations as a record of human experiences with God’s revelation in a particular time in history. Furthermore, reading it had the power of making its readers aware of God’s presence in their lives.

In 1906 however, a group of Disciples congregations that clung to the Restorationist ideas created its own identity and became known as Churches of Christ. They opposed the Disciples’ adoption of state and national missionary societies and organs in church, because in their interpretations, the New Testament did not authorize any organization beyond a local congregation, nor did it allow for musical instruments in worship. These churches became known as “noncooperatives” or “independents.” Between 1967 and 1972, over 3,500 of these congregations withdrew from the Disciples Year Book, which records important data about the

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38 Thomas Campbell, Declaration and Address, and Barton W. Stone and Others, Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery, with brief introduction by F.D. Kershner (St. Louis, MO: Mission Messenger, 1978), 77.
denomination’s active congregations. Many of the churches that withdrew are known today as Christian Churches or Churches of Christ. In 1968 the remaining churches adopted a provisional design for restructuring a new denomination that changed its name from Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) to Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The change from plural to singular signified that all congregations had covenanted with each other to form one church body, instead of operating as individual churches.  

That covenanted network today includes 3,474 congregations with 497,218 members. This denomination continues to operate under the guiding principles of its identity statement: “We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has welcomed us.” This denomination’s heritage of splits in its founding and later years is a major reason why the need to work toward wholeness appears so prominently in its most recent identity statement.

This brief synopsis of the history of what is now known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is important because the conflict between the “independents” and the “disciples” raged among members of many of the churches that fed into Disciples Christian Church. In fact, these discussions were being raised at our Elders’ meetings, too. In this denomination, Elders are a group of spiritual leaders in the church. I found that most of the church leadership was not aware of the details nor the importance of this rift in the history of this church. For instance, the group that left Hillman Street Christian Church to form Boardman Christian split off because they passionately opposed the exclusionary restorationist viewpoints of others at Hillman.

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41 The most current figures are from 2013 per Howard Bowers of the Yearbook Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on March 31, 2015.
When speaking with individuals, I learned that Disciples Christian Church also has members who came from Bazetta Christian Church in Cortland, nearby Canfield Christian Church and Wickliffe Christian Church in nearby Austintown. We were receiving visitors from at least one struggling Disciples Church, so I anticipated that this trend of members leaving one Disciple Church for another would continue. I advised the Elders about this trend. Obviously the Disciples of Christ beliefs and practices were important to congregants who came from other Disciple congregations. Otherwise, they would have sought other denominational or non-denominational churches for their worship. Nevertheless, the conflicted relationships of leadership from all of these churches was still haunting this church, keeping it focused on the hurts of the past instead of what God wanted for the future.

Conflict does not exist simply at the church doors. The history of Mahoning County was also laced with conflict, due to various immigrant groups settling there during the iron ore and manufacturing industrial revolution in the early 1900s. There was a history in the Mahoning Valley of strikes and riots over unfair labor practices, housing discrimination, racism and classism, sexism, Mafia operatives, and political tension between polarized parties.43

Consistent with the history of conflict in the churches and community, I immediately noticed that several leaders attending Disciples Christian Church had strong opinions which they voiced, sometimes in intimidating ways. I witnessed several outbursts and tempers flaring between conflicted members, both publicly in the church and online. This verbalized conflict had a ripple effect that immediately raised the anxiety level of the congregation, the staff, and me. I am confident that these outbursts also sent any visitors present out the doors, never to return. I noticed that members showed love and compassion for each other (like the tip of an

iceberg), while under the surface there lay a deep, volatile tension (like the much larger remainder of the iceberg). To get the issue out in the open, I preached a risky sermon on September 29th, 2013, just two and-a-half months after starting with this church. I parodied the tension in the church in a mime where I ran into “the elephant in the sanctuary.” The elephant, representing this congregation, was injured because it was fighting with other elephants. Its tusks were broken, ears had missing chunks, and I could feel the cuts and deep lacerations on its rough skin. I was relieved that the mime was received well and helped members during later exercises to share openly about their concerns surrounding conflict in the church. I continued to hold regular discussions with the Elders of the church about patterns of conflict that I was observing repeatedly and how they could deal with them. We were beginning to make progress, simply by educating the Elders about the family system dynamics that occurred in this church. Family Systems is a formal theory with many schools of thought about how people within families or groups relate. In religious settings I have drawn primarily upon the works of Edwin Friedman, mentioned earlier in this paper and Peter Steinke. Nevertheless, was the conflict in this church to be my emphasis or was there another, more important challenge?

1.8 Why Was Discernment the Focus?

This brings me to why I did not make the conflict my primary focus. I saw the conflict as a symptom of a much deeper issue. This church, like many others I have served, had lost its identity and focus and desperately needed Sabbath time to rest and recover. It needed time to get

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44 If trust has been developed with most influential leaders in the church, an Intentional Interim Minister may effectively bring touchy matters out into the open; whereas a settled, permanent pastor may be reluctant, due to the risks of losing his / her job.)
away from exclusively operating in decision-making mode, focused on the past hurts, and replace this mode with discerning what God would have it be and do. I introduced this idea repeatedly through another easily recognizable metaphor which I developed and placed into slide format, a golden retriever wagging its tail. (See Figure 1 below):

Figure 1. Business Purpose Drives Business Decisions
copyright ©2015 Sharon Kiesel

A business is always established with a purpose in mind, such as providing a delicious meal or healthcare to the elderly. Once the promoter or owner knows the purpose, decisions are made such as where to locate the business to target a particular audience, how much space will be needed, equipment, capital funds, staffing, services and products, marketing and promotions, visioning, research and development, among others. The key idea here is that the organization’s purpose (the dog’s body) guides the other decisions to be made (on the tail). Quite simply, “the dog wags the tail!” See Figure 2 below.
With most of the churches I have served, and especially those in decline, quite the opposite has been true. In their decision-making I have noticed the dangerous trend of the “tail wagging the dog.”

Many churches are anxiously focused on decisions such as the color of new carpet to be placed in the sanctuary or the style of worship that they want, and they have little awareness individually, nor as churches, about God’s purpose for them, nor of the churches’ imperative to serve outside of their doors. The intent of this project is for the congregation to place the “tail issues” that often consume a congregation such as the facility, location, programs, etc. on hold, until God’s specific purpose for the church is discovered.46

The conflict congregations reap from being in an inwardly-focused, decision-making mode is self-destructive and a major reason why so many churches are in decline and disbanding. Rick

46 This would be voided if there were an emergency or crisis like a disaster.
Morse, Vice President of the Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, at our denominational level states,

New churches look at their broader community as being their place of ministry - but long established “membership model” churches consider their membership to be their context....it really is a spiritual issue...We know that when a church turns its focus outward, the church is transformed...and the people in it find their lives changed. When a congregation works together to be present with community need, the people are practicing an important spiritual discipline.47

Again, I believe the conflict we are seeing in our mainline churches is only a symptom of the real issue, that churches have lost their focus on God’s purpose for them in their communities.

1.9 Inviting Transformational Change

Clearly, religious people could benefit from learning spiritual discernment practices that could be used to discover God’s wishes for them, especially in their daily lives. This introduction of a spiritual discernment practice into the Appreciative Inquiry process, which I have tailored to and used with congregations since 2005, is how I planned to invite a spirit of transformational change into the setting of Disciples Christian Church.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is “a model for analysis, decision-making and the creation of strategic change, particularly within companies and other organizations” 48 that has been foundational to my work as a Transitional Minister. The birthplace of AI was in the doctoral program in Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, in the collaboration between David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, Cooperrider’s faculty advisor in 1980. The Cleveland Clinic became the first large site where a conscious decision to

use an inquiry focusing on life-giving factors formed the basis for an organizational analysis.

The term "Appreciative Inquiry" was first written in a footnote in the feedback report of "emergent themes" by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva for the Board of Governors of the Cleveland Clinic. The report created such a positive stir that the Clinic Board called for ways to use this method with the whole enterprise. The momentum set the stage for David Cooperrider's dissertation, the first and one of the best articulations on the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry.  

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Appreciative Inquiry is a proven, positive approach to organizational change that builds on the strengths, passions, and values of all the people who have a stake in the future of the group. Changes are accelerated because the entire organization is engaged in visioning, designing and implementing change. When the organization accesses and understands its “positive core” of strengths, values, traditions, and practices, it builds organizational confidence. The people involved gain common access to all kinds of new information, such as a clearer understanding of how their gifts and passions fit into that of the organization and the community outside of the church that could benefit from those gifts. People excitedly support what they helped create. And finally, the process provides a means for sustaining positive change in the future.

52 Ludema, et.al. The Appreciative Inquiry Summit. xiii.
In my ten years of using it with churches, I have tailored the four phases of Appreciative Inquiry accordingly: 1. The **Discovery** phase names the church at its best, its positive core, connected with the needs of the community. 2. The **Dream** phase reveals a vision of the future to which God is calling the organization. (Note: this is where models for individual and group discernment are most needed and were injected into this project.) 3. The **Design** phase generates provocative ideas and action plans for changes that utilize the organization’s values and strengths and its newly-discerned vision from God. 4. The **Destiny** phase includes generating and implementing specific initiatives, along with the teams, priorities, and times to carry them out. 53

Due to the short timeframes that Intentional Interims tend to serve congregations between settled pastors (normally one to one-and-a-half years), an Intentional Interim could work through the Discovery and Dream phases and possibly start on the Design phase. With one exceptionally-motivated congregation, I completed all four phases in one year. I have developed Table 1, which correlates the phases of Appreciative Inquiry with the five focus points of Intentional Interim Ministry discussed earlier.

Table 1. Appreciative Inquiry Steps and the Interim Focus Points

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Appreciative Inquiry Step</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interim Focus Points</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>Heritage, Connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>Mission, Connections,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Mission, Connections,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leadership, Future</td>
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The Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry intersects with the Heritage and Connections focus points of Interim Ministry because of the focus on the past and present accomplishments, strengths, and relationships outside of the church. The Dream phase explores a new purpose or identity that builds on the strengths and gifts of the church and pairs them with needs in the community in the form of Mission and new Connections. The Design phase produces provocative plans for the vision discerned from the Dream phase, adding descriptions of the Leadership needed to accomplish the plans. The Destiny phase executes those plans through Leadership with specific initiatives, priorities and timetables. The Interim focus point of the Future deals with calling and preparing for the next pastor. If the congregation is motivated, the people may continue with the Design and Destiny phases while searching for the next pastor.

One important element in the success of this project is close coordination with a Transition Team of enthusiastic, trusted, open-minded leaders who represent the interests of different demographics of the congregation. Appendix 1 contains a description of the purpose, qualifications, and responsibilities of this ad-hoc team, which was nominated by the congregation and Board and appointed by the Board Chairman. The use of a Transition Team is a standard practice for Intentional Interim Ministry. In all the congregations I have pastored, the Transition Team has been a major facilitator in moving the church forward during the interim time. I cannot emphasize this point enough. Members of the Transition Team are current and future leaders of the church, and as such, are empowered to discover and lead during this entire process. After the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry is completed, some join the Pastoral
Search Committee, so that the learnings from the interim time are incorporated into the calling of the next pastor. By the time I depart and the new settled pastor arrives, members of the Transition Team have been so involved in the process that they continue to lead in the Design and Destiny phases (if the next pastor understands the calling and allows them to do so). An important outcome of this process is for the church to call a settled pastor who has the gifts and passion for the direction the church has discerned. In short, an excited, involved Transition Team is integral to the church understanding and pursuing its true calling, as well as the calling of the next pastor.

1.10 St. Ignatius’ Practice of Discernment

The major process I am injecting into this project, as the independent variable, is intended to help congregations discern God’s calling, so they can make decisions in consonance with that calling. The focus of my project is to teach and use St. Ignatius’ “Rules for Discernment” from *The Spiritual Exercises* in both an individual and a congregational context, for the purpose of making decisions pleasing to God. That brings me precisely to why I chose Ignatius’ practice of discernment as the basis for decision-making in this project. First, it is centered in a humble relationship with God through Christ. In Ignatius’ words, “To be humble is to live as close to the truth as possible: that I am created to the likeness of Christ, that I am meant to live according to the pattern of his paschal mystery, and that whole fulfillment is found in being as near to Christ as he draws me to himself.”

Secondly, like a bookend, consultation with God through prayer is in the beginning and the ending of the process. Thirdly, it provides a means for using reason to

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make a choice in life, by exploring as many options as God can bring forth, and then weighing the various advantages and disadvantages of the options relative to that decision. As an Intentional Interim, I am disturbed when churches have their own agendas and therefore, deprive themselves of the limitless possibilities that God could place before them for their future. St. Ignatius’ mode of discernment, when harnessed with Appreciative Inquiry, frees the creative juices of our God in the minds and hearts of the people. Appreciative Inquiry uncovers those values that a person (or a group) holds dear, facilitating the weighing of the options God reveals. Fourth, it incorporates feelings generated by the Holy Spirit that guide one to what God wants for that situation.

An excellent and user-friendly resource in understanding and employing *The Spiritual Exercises* for decision-making in consonance with God’s will has been developed by Timothy M. Gallagher, OMV. He makes the distinction between “discernment of spirits,” which is understanding the spiritual movements in one’s heart and “fruitfully responding to them” and the subsequent process of “discerning God’s will” to make a choice in the circumstance faced. This is a process of discernment that unfolds over time, with “daily attentiveness” to one’s interior experience of consolation and desolation.\(^56\) Consolation and desolation will be explained shortly. Within this latter process of discerning God’s will, Gallagher explores what he calls three “modes” or aspects of Ignatius’ teaching regarding this process. The first mode of discernment is when God moves the person to have “clarity beyond doubt” about God’s will.\(^57\) Since this clarity is not always the gift given at a time of choice, Ignatius describes a second mode of discernment that involves discerning the interior spirits, or “an attraction of the heart.”\(^58\)

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\(^{57}\) Gallagher, *Discerning the Will*, 69-77.
\(^{58}\) Gallagher, *Discerning the Will*, 83-88.
Repeated reflection records trends and answers the question: “In times of spiritual consolation, to which option have I felt inclined?”

During this second mode is a third mode Gallagher calls “a preponderance of reasons,” in which advantages and disadvantages for a particular option for God’s service are examined.

Specifically, St. Ignatius’ “First Pattern of Making a Good and Correct Choice” involves six simple steps that are basic to this project:

1. Clearly place before my mind what it is I want to decide about.
2. Try to be like a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to either side.
3. Pray that God our Lord enlighten and move me in the way leading to his praise and glory. Then I should use my understanding to weigh the matter carefully and attempt to come to a decision consonant with my living out God’s will in my life.
4. List and weigh the advantages and disadvantages for me of the various dimensions of my proposed decision.
5. Consider now which alternative seems more reasonable. Then I will decide according to the more weighty motives and not from my selfish or sensual inclination.
6. Having come to the decision, I now turn to God again and ask him to accept and confirm it if it is for his greater service and glory.

This list summarizes the “First Pattern of Making a Good Choice.” “The Second Pattern of Making a Good and Correct Choice” reinforces these four steps, but will not be used in this project. However, I have found it to be personally useful in my discernments:

1. Since the love of God should motivate my life, I should check myself whether the greater or less attachment for the object of choice is solely because of my Creator and Lord.
2. I present myself with a person whom I have never met before, but who has sought my help in his attempt to respond better to God’s call to him. I see what I would tell him, and then I observe the advice which I would so readily give to another for whom I want the best.
3. If I were at the moment of death...what would be the decision I would want to have made...?

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59 Gallagher, Discerning the Will, 88.
60 Gallagher, Discerning the Will, 102-120.
61 Fleming, Contemporary Reading, 44.
62 Ignatius switches the order of the words, “Good” and “Correct” between the two patterns.
4. I see myself standing before Christ my Judge when this life has ended and I find myself talking with him about the decision which I have made at this moment in my life. I choose now the course of action which I feel will give me happiness and joy in presenting it to Christ on the day of judgment. 63

Ignatius had much to say about discerning the good spirits from the evil ones in his section, “Guidelines for the Discernment of Spirits.” 64 He developed “helps” for recognizing movements, so that one could know whether to follow or reject them: The evil spirit discourages, deceives and deters us from growing into Christ-likeness. We feel thoughts of dissatisfaction, anxiety, rebelliousness, despair, pride and selfishness known as Spiritual Desolation. The good spirit, on the other hand, encourages, strengthens, inspires, makes peace, and gives hope, delight and joy. This is Spiritual Consolation, when the joy of serving God is foremost in our life. “By the grace of God, we are meant to recognize those that are good so that we might let them give direction to our lives and those that are bad so that we might reject them.” 65 Concerning the two patterns of making good decisions described above, listening for consolation and desolation are part of the last steps of each.

In churches that use a call system when the church enters its search process for a new pastor, there is a strong reason for discerning a church’s call from God. Congregations can make better decisions about the kind of pastor they need to lead them forward. This is one of the greatest benefits of using trained Intentional Interim Ministers. Disciples Christian Church had a history of calling pastors who had not always been good matches for them. Its history of internal conflict might have been a factor. Nevertheless, a major reason for these mismatches is that the church did not understand its own calling. Consequently, the people and their leadership stand to benefit from this project, if they incorporate any of the discernment practices into their

63 Fleming. Contemporary Reading, 45.
64 Fleming. Contemporary Reading, Sections 313-336.
65 Fleming. Contemporary Reading, Section 313, 75.
daily spiritual regimens. The congregation will benefit because it will hopefully become more open to God’s leading and will make better decisions in the future in calling their next pastors. Finally, I will benefit because I will have improved what I discerned as the weakest link in this Appreciative Inquiry-based model, the need for discernment. My hope is that testing this intervention in a congregational setting will further benefit struggling congregations that I and other Transitional Ministers will serve in future assignments.

1.11 Personal Reflections

I enjoy applying Organizational Development models and methods in my religious work as a Transitional Minister. For ten years I have been tailoring Appreciative Inquiry for the many kinds and sizes of churches I have served. I have been constantly adding new ways for assessing congregations, including asset mapping, demographic studies, interviews and panel discussions with community leaders, to name a few. I have been adding spiritual-based methods and disciplines too, such as a spiritual gifts inventory and prayer. All of the Appreciative Inquiry retreats I have led have reaped excitement, spiritual renewal, and hope for the future in congregations. As I related earlier, the weakest link I found in adapting the process to the church setting was the Dream phase, when the spiritual question, “What would God have us do?” is posed. Churches are experienced at teaching people how to pray to God, but very few understand how to listen for God’s beckoning, which is an important part of discernment. Nevertheless, accumulating more methods and processes is not my purpose in answering my call as a Transitional Minister, nor is it the purpose of this doctoral project. The vision crisis in our churches drives me to better equip them for developing their relationships with God, each other
and their communities. Others who study congregations have also noticed relational need as an integral part of defining an entity’s purpose.

William Enright’s findings of *The 2013 Congregational Economic Impact Study (CEIS)* depict another reason for seeking God’s direction for a church. He relates to the need for a paradigm shift in religious giving. “The future challenge of churches for fundraising is not about money. It is about relationships, vision, trust and calling. Churches need to have practices that nurture trust. Money is as spiritual as prayer...The Emerging Paradigm is donor centered and no longer institution centered.” Enright advocates asking and answering the following questions from the perspective of the donors, in order to bring about the needed paradigm shift in congregations.

1. What is your mission; what do you do?
2. Who are the people you serve; what needs do you address?
3. Are you in debt? If so, how are you addressing your debt?
4. What is your impact on your immediate community?
5. What programs and missions do you fund?
6. Do you have a strategic plan and goals for the future?
7. What does success look like in your congregation?

These questions serve larger purposes than fundraising. Both the Interim focus tasks and Appreciative Inquiry process guide congregations in the examination and research of these questions. How a congregation uses its money reveals much about its vision or lack thereof. In fact these same questions can be used to guide individuals to find their own purposes in life. But seeking the answer to the question, “God, what do you want?” must be the top priority for those of us who are part of religious organizations.

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Because of my experience in the business world, I struggled early in my ministry career with how to use the administrative and leadership gifts that had been developed in me. I found in Interim Ministry a perfect opportunity to use those gifts to help congregations rediscover who they were and where God was leading them. In effect, God was calling forth my secular, rational-based gifts, along with spiritual ones like prayer and theological reflection, developed in my seminary years. I have experienced the most personal growth in my exposure to social justice issues, for all kinds of people who have been marginalized systemically by society. I have intentionally made an effort during my time with this congregation to expose the people to social justice/systemic issues that affect their community and county. As part of their discernments, they must see the world with its good and evil through God’s eyes. Through discernment I hope to see their hearts convicted to action, using their gifts and strengths. As former General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Richard Hamm wrote, “As befits a people with a passion for justice, we Disciples should work together to create congregations that are truly alternative communities, that are safe places where all people are respected...where people learn about root causes of injustice and are supported in taking risks to do justice and love kindness in the name of Christ.”

An aspect of my personality is that I see multiple sides of an issue and often prefer to sit in the “gray area” in between, sorting out the details. Like my denomination, I am a proponent for “dialogue and discernment,” instead of conflict. So that which is a denominationally-endorsed practice was incorporated into my approach for this project, as well. As the founders of the Disciples of Christ movement recognized, “the church could never be united and effective if it continued to make doctrinal agreement the basis of membership. They recognized that

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68 Richard Hamm exposed me to this insight at my first General Assembly in October 17-21, 2003.
salvation is dependent not on doctrinal correctness, but on faith in the grace of God made known in Jesus Christ.”

Personally and professionally I have long dreamed of completing a doctoral degree in my lifetime. When I became a minister, the dream continued, but with two stipulations: God would tell me when and give me the energy faith, and the right congregation in need would be open to my exploratory spirit. I discerned through the same process I taught this congregation, that all the pieces came together for a purpose—guiding this lost congregation, as well as many others, back to focusing on God’s will.

In the following sections of this project, therefore, I will share theological and biblical foundations, the context for the project, the research design and process, and finally, the results and my overall evaluation. I want to learn if injecting discernment into the decision-making process during the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry will help a struggling congregation move from being lost in its search for God, to being found. Will individuals and a church, as a whole, gain a united perspective of their callings from God? Finally, if successful, can this model be used to help other struggling congregations?

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Hamm, 2020 Vision, 35.
Chapter 2 Theological and Biblical Underpinnings

2.1 The Main Biblical Metaphor for this Project

The overriding biblical metaphor for this project is the idea of God searching for and finding a lost child. Many of us have experienced this situation, from either becoming separated ourselves, as children, from loved ones while in a crowd or unfamiliar place. As caregivers of a child we might have been overwhelmed with panic when one suddenly disappeared. There are other ways in which children can become separated from their parents, such as under the influence of addictions, enticement over the internet, through kidnapping, or running away. For the purposes of this project, I am using the metaphor of a parent searching for a child who has unintentionally wandered off and become lost.

Parents often instruct their children when the children are old enough to understand: “If you find yourself lost, stay put so I can find you.” It is much easier to find a child who has remained in one place (provided that is a safe place), instead of wandering around. A lost child calls out “Mommy! Daddy! Where are you?” The concerned parent recognizes the child’s voice, and calls out the name of the child: “Johnnie, stay put. Here I come!” The child knows the parent’s voice, that the parent is close, and this brings hope that the child will soon be found. Guided by voice recognition, the parent finds the frightened child and a wonderful reunion of a hug ensues. The parent, with tears of joy from finding the lost child, either carries or takes the hand of the relieved child. The parent removes the child from the wilderness space of being lost and into the space of being found and being together again. In the act of the child going from being lost to being found, this family moves from feelings of desolation such as grief, sadness, and despair to feelings of consolation, such as hope, joy and peace.

70 Idea suggested in conversation with Intentional Interim colleague, Gretchen Switzer, September 18, 2012.
Likewise, the discernment exercises included in this project invite the parishioners of an “identity-lost” church to experience the joy of being found by God. As I related earlier, churches can be mired in the minute aspects of the interior church life, such as numbers of youth and young families, dollars to meet their ridiculous budgets, and color of the carpeting. They forget that God calls them to a higher mission of bringing the hope of Christ to their world. Like the lost child metaphor, they are reminded by God “to be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). They are instructed by God (and reminded by the Transitional Minister) to remain in place and intently listen for God’s voice, so God can find them. They call out individually and as a group by posing questions: “God, where have you been in our past and where are you now? Where do you want us to pour out our many gifts and energies? What community with needs are you calling us to serve?” God hears their cries and answers through many signs (which will be taught during the project). As they invite God to return back into their lives, they notice the signs and hear the answers to the questions (what happens as a result of discernment). God finds them and leads them out of their wilderness of uncertainties by guiding them toward a focus for the future, in consonance with God’s will. In the act of the church going from being lost to being found by God, the family with God moves from feelings of desolation such as grief, sadness, and despair to feelings of consolation, such as hope, joy and peace.

Fortunately, the Bible contains many pericopes to illustrate this very same metaphor. Here are three that I utilized in sermons during the course of this project. John 10 contains the powerful Parable of the Good Shepherd, whose sheep follow him “because they know his voice” (verse 4). They know how to discern, by listening for his voice. The stranger, thief, hired hand and the wolf represent idolized gods who, unlike the Good Shepherd, neglect, harm or kill the

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71 All biblical passages cited in this paper are from The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers for Cokesbury), 1990 unless otherwise stated.
sheep. They represent forces of evil such as the desire for wealth, fame or power which tempt churches and their members not to seek or follow God’s will. Jesus reminds his listeners that he is the gate for the sheep and that he “came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (verse 10). Jesus is the good parent who has the long-term welfare of the sheep in mind. And he is so driven by this, that he lays down his own life for them. Other parables in the Bible emphasize the extravagant goodness and grace of God, as our supreme, loving Parent who seeks people when they are lost.

Luke, chapter 15 contains the famous Parable of the Lost Sheep, and Parables of the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. What these parables readily have in common are: the joy of the owner, God when the lost are found. But looking deeper at each parable, another theme of discernment is found. Jesus welcomes sinners, who repent from turning away and ignoring the voice of God. There is grace, mercy, and acceptance to the point of joyful celebration for the runaway child who returns to God. Through God’s grace, they are returned joyfully to the fold. That means that individuals and churches who have not been particularly discerning of God and want to reopen their relationships, are welcomed back. As the Father of the Prodigal Son said to his other jealous son, “We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (verse 32). Concerning the aim of discernment, churches must welcome back all wandering sons and daughters, as well as those in the community who need to experience God’s grace through Jesus.

The Old Testament provides another metaphor for finding the lost. Ezekiel 34: 11-16 tells of God the Shepherd who seeks the lost “on a day of clouds and thick darkness” which causes them to scatter (verse 11). Again, people and churches are easily tempted to follow the materialistic, self-centered desires of our world, instead of what God requires of them.

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72 Also in Matthew 18:10-14.
Members become scattered in their focus on God and lose their senses of identity as specific churches. But God the Shepherd seeks and brings back the strayed, binds up the injured and strengthens the weak. Prostitutes, drug pushers and addicts, domestic violence offenders, and sinners of all kinds can experience God’s grace in community.

In summation, the basis of this project is to take a group of people feeling lost from God toward a state of feeling found by God, through discerning God’s focus for them, personally and as a spiritual community. My hope is that the use of the “lost and found” biblical metaphor will reinforce the church’s need to listen for God’s beckoning in all the decisions their members make.

2.2 The Theological Importance of Discernment

[W]e come to know God in the very process of our faithfulness to God - by doing God’s will as we know it.... If we love and walk with God, God and we create the path that leads to our awareness of the divine will as we move along together. Discerning God’s will is living fully in the profoundly personal and fulfilling relationship with God that God offers us in Jesus Christ.73

These words tell us much about God and how we are invited to relate with God through discernment. First, God loves us and yearns for us. God knows the right path for each of us and each church to draw close to God. It is the most urgent task that we seek to discover and follow God’s will, to grow in intimacy with God. We accomplish this ongoing task in partnership with God through a living, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, personally and communally. Accordingly, my favorite definition of discernment is “the process of intentionally becoming aware of how God is present, active, and calling us as individuals and communities so

that we can respond with increasingly greater faithfulness.” This is my favorite because it provides comfort in knowing that God is ever-present, yearns for a deeper relationship with us personally and communally, and calls us to service in our world. I refined this definition, so my parishioners could understand it easily: “Discernment helps us become more aware of how God is present, active, and calling us as individuals and church to respond with greater faithfulness.”

Elizabeth Liebert relates that discernment has a long tradition in the Christian tradition and that its meaning has varied, depending on the perspective, context and values of those attempting to define it. She notes the following contemporary understandings of discernment, which are ideas integrated into this project. Discernment is a spiritual gift, a discipline of faith, and a lifestyle. Foundational to it is a desire to follow Jesus, who is present as the Holy Spirit in daily life. Discernment shapes all our decisions in our personal lives, and it also occurs within the community of faith. It helps people sort through the ambiguities of their lives and support the larger community of God’s living beings. To the above theological understandings of discernment, I add one more that originates with the Greek diakrisis meaning described earlier in this paper. Discernment is distinguishing good from evil. Jesus said in Mark 10:18, “No one is good but God alone.” On the other hand, that which is evil emanates from the devil or Satan (Luke 8:12, Matthew 13:19) or from peoples’ own hearts (Mark 7: 20-23). According to James 1: 14-15 when people follow their own desires, that can give birth to sin.

The definition of sin which resonates with me originates in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12: 28-34). Sin is anything that separates us from a loving relationship with God, our neighbor or ourselves. Anything that follows the Great

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75 All the understandings listed are cited in Liebert, *The Way of Discernment*, 9-10.
Commandment is righteous in the eyes of God. Anything that violates the Great Commandment is sinful. Sin is evil because it does not come from, nor is it sanctioned by God, who is good. Nevertheless, how one defines sin is often based on what one values, such as the authority of the Bible, church tradition, personal experience, or relationships. And those values can conflict, depending on the circumstance. Also, we cannot underestimate the sinful values that our culture has embedded in the world, which will be discussed later in this section. Through the practice of discernment, it is possible to bring God’s guidance as the ultimate authority into our common life.

2.2.1 Jesus and Discernment

Quite simply, “Jesus discerned the heart of God.”\textsuperscript{76} His baptism as “God’s beloved Son” (Matthew 3:17) served as the foundation for intense testing during his life. Driven into the wilderness, he saw past illusions of power, fame and wealth offered by the devil, choosing a life of humility, poverty, and service. He told wise stories about countering delusion and desire and offered counter-cultural news for the socially marginalized throughout his ministry. At the end of his time on earth, he showed his total commitment to doing God’s will: his prayer at Gethsemane was: “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).\textsuperscript{77} On the cross of Calvary Jesus showed total obedience to the call he had discerned from God, to die in order that others would be saved.

2.2.2 The Holy Spirit and Discernment

\textsuperscript{76} Liebert, \textit{The Way of Discernment}, 14.
\textsuperscript{77} Morris and Olsen, \textit{Discerning}, 16.
Elizabeth Liebert writes that the Gospel of John and the First Letter of John provide the foundation of theology on the Holy Spirit, upon which to base an understanding of discernment. In John 14:26 Jesus revealed that God would send in Jesus’ name an “Advocate, the Holy Spirit (who will) teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.” John 15:26 explained that when this Advocate comes, the Spirit “will testify” on Jesus’ behalf and John 16:13-14 says that the Spirit “will guide you into all truth...and will declare to you the things that are to come.” This Spirit will glorify Jesus and declare what is of Jesus to listeners. We are to practice all discernment through this same Spirit, “whose purpose is to animate the life of Jesus in us today.”

I John 3:5 and 8 expounded on the discernment of the righteous spirit of Jesus versus the spirit of the devil. As children of God, we know that Jesus “was revealed to take away sins, and in him, there is no sin...Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil...The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 4:1-3 reiterated that not all spirits are holy and that they must be tested or compared with Jesus. “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (verse 3). Most importantly, 1 John 3:24 said that the Holy Spirit is part of an inner experience whereby we will recognize God: “All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.” Faith in God is essential to this process according to 1 John 5:4: “for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.” Finally, discernment completes other external revelations of God. When testing our discernments, we may compare them with scripture, church doctrines and practices, and with our previous experiences with God.

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In summary, Christian discernment means making a lifetime of discriminating choices between options, seeking what is best in God’s eyes. It is set and enhanced within the community of faith, and does not guarantee absolute certainty. Elizabeth Liebert summarizes its importance well as she quotes the work of Gordon Smith: “Seeking to follow God’s call moves us toward that which is better for us individually and for our world, and assures us that God will accompany us into the unknown.”

2.2.3 Spiritual Direction and Discernment

It readily became apparent to me that in teaching individuals and congregations about discernment, I am offering spiritual direction. My personal experiences with spiritual directors over the years helped me greatly in discerning God’s direction for me in my life. And since I am using a Jesuit-endorsed spiritual practice of discernment for this project, I consulted a classic Jesuit resource for an appropriate definition for “spiritual direction.” William A. Barry and William J. Connolly define Christian spiritual direction as:

help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship...The focus of this...is on experience...as an expression of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each of us. Spiritual direction has always aimed ultimately at fostering union with God...  

Additionally, each person and each congregation has a vocation or a “call” from God that utilizes their spiritual gifts and strengths to meet a need in a specific context. This is expressed

well in a quote by theologian Frederick Buechner, a quote which I have been using for years as the cornerstone for my approach (which will be described in more detail further in this paper):

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

My joy and passion in life is guiding individuals and congregations to discover the place to which God joyfully calls them. This too is a form of spiritual direction, and it is an important part of serving in any ministerial capacity.

2.3 The First of Many Practices

This brings us to the history of discernment as a practice by the Church. The following material is not meant to be an exhaustive or complete history of this complex and endlessly subtle practice through the twenty centuries of Christian life. Instead, it presents a few key figures and movements as brief touchstones pointing to some of the ways the language and practice of discernment took root in the church.

2.3.1 Discernment during the Early Church

Origen in the third century saw human thoughts as originating from three sources: God, evil spirits, and good spirits. If people could discern the spirits by tracing their thoughts, they could find a way to give themselves to the good spirit. People are moved by the spirits to do good or evil.

John Cassian in the fourth century studied the Egyptian ideal of a monk and presented his results in twenty-four Conferences. The second conference was dedicated to

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discernment. Like Origen he saw three sources of human thoughts: God as the illumination of
the Holy Spirit, the devil who makes sin attractive, and our selves, in our thoughts of what we
have done or heard. He wrote that we must exercise discretion as these thoughts surface, paying
attention to their origins, causes, and deciding how to react to them - in light of who is
suggesting them. He also developed an image of testing, placing thoughts on the scales of our
heart and weighing them:

1. Is it filled with what is good for all?
2. Is it heavy with the fear of God?
3. Is it genuine in the feelings that underlie it?
4. Is it lightweight because of human show or because of some thrust toward novelty?
5. Has the burden of vainglory lessened its merit or diminished its luster?  

For a monk, self-disclosure to a spiritual guide and obedience produced humility, which led to
discernment. John Climacus in the sixth century built on Cassian’s ideas of discernment for
monks in his Ladder of Divine Ascent. He presented three stages of discernment: beginner -
self-understanding; intermediate - the capacity to distinguish good from evil; and advanced -
direct light from God which affects people and the world. At this point the type of discernment
which was most explicitly reflected on seemed to be at the individual level. However,
communal discernment was well-established, as reflected during the Council in Jerusalem and
its deliberations about Gentile circumcision( Chapter 15 of Acts.) .

The churches of the East and West had different patterns of understanding discernment and
decision-making. The Eastern Church looked to the wisdom of the ascetics and mystics, the

85 John Cassian, Conferences, trans. and preface Colm Luibheid, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York:
Paulist Press, 1982), 114 cited in Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 18-19.
86 Cassian, Conferences, 1:21.57 cited in Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 19.
87 Cassian, Conferences, 1:21.57 cited in Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 19.
desert fathers and mothers. When God spoke through one of these persons, it had a tremendous impact on the listeners because discernment was considered a gift of God. The *Philokalia* (1782) gathered important sources on discernment from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries that guided the spiritual pilgrim.\(^89\) The Western Church, on the other hand, adapted to the patterns of the Roman Empire. The great Christian councils were like the Roman senate, debating issues of state and doctrine.\(^90\) Participants stood alone, presenting their arguments and citing other authorities. Then the council voted to agree, disagree, or abstain. As an institution, the Roman Catholic Church was hierarchical, based on the supreme authority of the Pope. However, the monasteries represented an alternative model, where debate and discussion took place in a circle of (at least theoretical) equals in Christ, where the wisdom of the community was shared. The abbot or abbess was meant to embody Christ’s own spirit of humility and wisdom, and the voice of God was intentionally sought among the youngest and least powerful members of the community:\(^91\)

Whenever at important business has to be done in the monastery, let the Abbot call together the whole community and state the matter to be acted upon. Then, having heard the brethren’s advice, let him turn the matter over in his mind and do what he shall judge to be most expedient. The reason we have said that all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best.

Let the brethren give their advice with all the deference required by humility, and not presume stubbornly to defend their opinions; but let the decision rather depend on the Abbot’s judgment, and all submit to whatever he shall decide for their welfare.\(^92\)

\(^{91}\) Morris, *Discerning*, 20-21.
In the abbeys and monasteries, wisdom was gathered from all the members; however, in hierarchical fashion, the abbot or abbess made the final decisions. In summary, both personal and communal discernment were taught and practiced in the early church.

2.3.2 From Examen to the Spiritual Exercises

That brings us to the practice of Examination of Conscience or Examen, a classic spiritual discipline. In the post-Vatican II renewal of Jesuit life and Ignatian spirituality, the Examen has been brought into our contemporary world and is sometimes called the Awareness Examen. The language of “Awareness Examen” invites persons into reflecting on and celebrating God’s presence, activity and leading in their lives. In this context, one can notice where one has fallen short and, more broadly, where God is alive and active in one’s experience. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, was so convinced about the power of Examen that he counseled Jesuits to never abandon it.93

Fundamental to his rendering of The Spiritual Exercises, which emanated from the Examen, was Ignatius’s early lifestyle and how he developed a conscience in the first place.94 Ignatius was born in 1491 to a mother who died shortly after birthing him. He was initiated into a family culture of arrogant nobility, wealth, sexual promiscuity, gambling and aggression. At sixteen his father died, passing the family wealth to Ignatius’ older brother. At the age of 30 Ignatius commanded two-hundred Spanish men against 12,000 superiorly-trained French soldiers in the Battle of Pamplona. Ignatius’ leg was shattered by a cannon ball. Three surgeries later, one of them life-threatening, he was just as arrogant as before. However, during his boring convalescence, his sister-in-law gave him Ludolph Saxony’s The Life of Jesus Christ and Flos

93 Liebert, The Way of Discernment, 3-5.
94 This paragraph is summarized from William M. Watson, S.J., Sacred Story: An Ignatian Examen for the Third Millenium, (Seattle, WA: The Sacred Story Institute, 2012), 4-27.
Santorum, a book of short stories about popular saints. He came to realize the two spirits that affected him: the evil spirit and God, and that there were two polarities of dissatisfaction and contentment (desolation or consolation, both ideas foundational to his rendering of The Spiritual Exercises). These reflections and a vision of Mary with the Christ child made his past seem repulsive. In August of 1522, three months after his wounding, he was enlightened about his addictions to sin and self. Over the course of the rest of his life, which ended in 1556, his experiences of grace and insight deepened in ways that found great resonance in others’ lives as well. These experiences led him to develop the texts, practices, and spirituality known as “Ignatian,” along with founding the religious order of the Society of Jesus. Ignatius’s writings show us that he examined his conscience right up until his death. His conversion was a life-long endeavor, starting with fear of God due to his failings, and growing into tremendous trust and love for God because of God’s mercy.

Ignatius’s compatriots in 16th century Spain, the mystics John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila joined Ignatius in connecting the dimension of human desire to the process of discernment. All three, in diverse ways, noted that our deepest longings are for God. When we strip away all other desires, which may be a painful process, we find that true satisfaction comes in doing God’s will. Susan Rakoczy explores the differences in the insights on desire from Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. For both, desire is the energy that moves a person toward God; however, John notes that it can also move us away from God. Teresa sees that true, good desires are demonstrated by their objects: the love of God and neighbor (Interior castle V.3.7).

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know that we are doing God’s will when we love God and others intensely. With John of the Cross, desires can enslave us when directed toward other than God. So for him, discernment is both the power of desire and the purification of desire by judging the intentionality of that desire as that which God loves. Racoczy concludes that knowing the will of God, for either ourselves or our community is “the awakening of our deepest desires in response to the desire of God that we be the cherished persons God has created us to be.”

Using Examen as a basis, and incorporating his own similar theology of desire, Ignatius of Loyola thus outlined “Rules for Discernment” in his Spiritual Exercises. Many of the rules originated from traditions of discernment, but some were new. The rules spoke of the imagination, reason, using the Bible, experience, testing the spirits of good and evil, and feelings emanating from the testing experience. “People involved in spiritual discernment put matters to the test - resting them in the heart, looking for consolation, which leads toward God in peace, or desolation, which leads away from God in distress.” Discernment does not always yield a pleasant choice. For Ignatius, one option during consolation about his calling from God guided him to choose complete poverty for himself and the companions he led, the Company of Jesus! The rules Ignatius developed could be used for individual discernment, but also be expanded for group discernment as well. I will explain more about the enhancement of group discernment practices in further sections..

2.3.3 Protestant Renderings of Discernment

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100 Rakoczy, *Discernment and Desire*, 279.
The Protestant Reformation, and the influence of John Calvin in particular, sent the practice of discernment in new directions. Calvin took to heart the Roman and Greek methods of debate and Paul’s command that “all things should be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). He both contributed to and limited the practice of discernment by emphasizing the importance of the following: church government; God’s calling to those who lead and decide; Christ’s presiding over all councils when the assembly was governed by his word and his Spirit; the importance of reason in weighing decisions; and organization, structure, law and form in binding all together. Calvin espoused another belief: the danger of spirituality. He never used the word “discernment” and he feared that spirituality moved beyond the control of reason. So he separated governance and administration from worship and spirituality. We see evidence of his thought, rooted in the Reformation, nowadays in the burderning governances and the lack of spirituality of many of our mainline church councils and boards.

It is important to note, however, that other leaders in the history of the Reformed tradition embraced the theology and practices of what we now call “spirituality” and discernment. For instance, Jonathan Edwards rejected the two competing camps of religious feeling versus religious thinking that were pervasive during his era, by combining them into “religious affections,” which are souls inclined to approve or love one thing and disapprove or hate another. Like Ignatius’ thinking, the source of these affections may be the Holy Spirit or they may be motivated by self-interest or demons. Edwards distinguished signs of gracious, holy

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104 Calvin, Institutes, sections 4.3.8, 4.3.10, 4.9.1-2, 8, 4.10.27 cited in Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 23-24.
105 Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 24-25.
affections as being divinely inspired, divinely seeking, and marked by humility, tenderness, the character of Jesus, and bearing fruits of obedience, devotion, and perseverance with suffering for Christ.\textsuperscript{107}

Meanwhile, the Anabaptists tried to model their churches on the New Testament church, where the entire community was involved in decision-making. The Anabaptists were persecuted and came to distrust the state, because too many churches were forced to compromise their discernment by cooperating with the state. Following the Reformation, the Quakers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made new contributions to the practice of discernment. They looked for the presence and activity of the Spirit, as well as listened in the community of Friends for the Spirit’s promptings. Listening in silence is still a characteristic of some Quaker meetings nowadays.

The Friends also introduced other communal discernment practices, such as coming to a consensus, the clearness committee, making a minute, and non-concurrence.\textsuperscript{108} Quakers do not vote to reach a majority view. Instead, they seek a spiritual consensus. They require everyone present to share their experience and knowledge, they are open to the ideas of each other, and they work toward discerning a common truth that unites all of them.\textsuperscript{109} A clearness committee is appointed by a group of Friends to help a focus person gain clarity about a particular issue or leading. Examples are clearing a person for marriage, membership, or ministry. The committee members worship with the person, listen deeply, gently question the individual and reflect. In mutual trust, they try to find clearness about whether they should

\textsuperscript{108} Morris and Olsen, \textit{Discerning}, 25.
\textsuperscript{109} American Friends Service Committee website, \url{https://afsc.org/testimonies/decision-making} viewed January 12, 2014.
support that individual’s leading.\textsuperscript{110} “Making a minute” is an important part of a Quaker business meeting. A meeting begins with worship. Once the clerk opens the business segment of the meeting the group “tries to discern, in an atmosphere of worship, what love requires of them.” Spoken contributions are offered, wrapped in silence. No vote is taken, as they are not trying to reach a consensus nor establish the will of the majority, but to unite in harmony with the Spirit. This approach ensures that minority views are raised. The clerk discerns the outcome of each item (often called 'the sense of the meeting'), and prepares a draft minute to lay before the gathering.\textsuperscript{111}

What impresses me most about Quaker discernment is how similar it is to St. Ignatius’ \textit{Spiritual Exercises}. Both seek unity through silence with the Holy Spirit, involve both affective and rational aspects of decision-making, and pursue through listening, clarity for making decisions to move forward. Where they differ is how the community of Friends works this into issues that members may have and in church business meetings. There is no pressure to vote and all voices are heard, including the Spirit’s. Rather than debating and trying to reach a consensus, the group attempts to discern the loving approach of the Spirit. How effective our churches would be if they would adopt this form of discernment, instead of always pursuing a consensus, let alone majority rule!

The Methodist movement (1738-1784)\textsuperscript{112} created three types of groups for spiritual nurture and guidance: classes, bands, and the select band. The class was a small group of people seeking a relationship with God. Gatherings were weekly and led by a class leader often appointed by John and Charles Wesley. Discernment came through interactions with the class leader who

\textsuperscript{111} “Quakers in Britain” website \url{http://www.quaker.org.uk/how-quaker-meetings-take-decisions} viewed January 12, 2014.
\textsuperscript{112} \url{http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Methodist+movement} viewed August 19, 2014.
inquired about the spiritual state of members, offered prayer and guidance and encouraged people to think about the Spirit’s movement in their lives. Methodist bands were for believers who experienced new birth; therefore, the focus was on deepening one’s discipleship through dialogue, prayer, confession and accountability with one another. The select band or select society supported those who had the desire or experience of perfect love of God with all one’s heart, soul and mind. The purpose was understanding and experiencing perfect love for God and neighbor.  

Moving to the U.S. context, as denominations developed, rules and procedures for institutional decision-making developed along with them. Henry Martyn Robert, an officer in the United States Army became frustrated at the inept deliberations of his American Baptist Church. In 1863 he drafted rules of order based on Thomas Jefferson’s rules for the United States Congress, and later expanded them into what we know as Robert’s Rules of Order. General Robert believed that religious bodies make decisions like other organizations. His rules are still widely used in the church. Although the rules are most useful in emotionally volatile situations (they were found to limit combat in some meetings), “they cannot, in and of themselves, provide the structure for spiritual discernment.” With a resurgence of interest in spirituality and unhappiness with the burdensome board structures in many churches, interest in the more ancient and demanding practice of discernment is growing. This practice both invites and requires the church to draw on its lengthy history of discernment, so as to try to order its life and missions according to God’s will.

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113 Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 26.
115 Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 28.
116 Morris and Olsen, Discerning, 29.
2.4 Other Contributing Theological Considerations

2.4.1 Sabbath

As Wayne Muller writes, “All life requires a rhythm of rest…We have lost this rhythm…Because we do not rest, we lose our way. We miss the compass points that would show us where to go, we bypass the nourishment that would give us succor. We miss the quiet that would give us wisdom…and for want of rest, our lives are in danger...Our lack of rest and reflection is not just a personal affliction. It colors the way we build and sustain community.”

“Sabbath” originates from the Hebrew word, “shabbat, meaning rest or cessation from work. It is described in Judeo-Christian circles in Genesis 2: 1-3 as the time God hallowed, by resting from the six days of creation and it is also the First Commandment (Deuteronomy 5: 12-15). But Wayne Muller notes that it is also a practice deeply infused in other religions. Muslims practice Sabbath during their calls to prayer five times a day while Buddhists find the refuge of Sabbath in nature and internally in the place where Buddha lives within a person. Sabbath is important because it helps us rediscover who we are, where we have been, and experience the gifts of eternity and spirit. If we are lost, Sabbath leaves a marker so we can find our way back to our center. In honoring the Sabbath, we are better able to serve those who need us.

Disciples Christian Church was an overly busy congregation that had lost its focus from God and deeply needed Sabbath. As Jan Linn writes, “A congregational sabbatical can be a time for nurturing spiritual roots, a time for slowing down and taking the time to listen, pray, and

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118 Muller, Sabbath, 6,9.
119 Muller, Sabbath, 6,11.
to learn”...taking time from the routine schedules that define a church’s life. The theological purpose of the Sabbath agreed to by this church’s leadership was to help the church rest from all its franticness, to come individually and together before God in prayer and to listen to each other and their community, and to provide a still atmosphere for discernment of what God was calling them to be and do. Like a lost child in a crowded mall, the Sabbath was to calm the panicky child to sit still, and to remove the noisy distractors that prevented the child from hearing the voice of the Parent God, so he could be found.

2.4.2 Stewardship of Gifts and Relationships

Another theological strand that runs throughout this project is that of the stewardship, and in particular, of one’s spiritual gifts in developing one’s relationships. Spiritual gifts are important because they are how God implants capacities or charisms within us that enable us to be Christ’s body on earth. As Paul said, “Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit...To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Paul also related, “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” Every person is endowed with spiritual gifts and so is every congregation. The main issue I have observed over the years is that most people do not know their spiritual gifts individually, nor collectively as groups. This is especially true with Disciples Christian Church, with so many congregations feeding into it. Because they do not understand how God has gifted

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121 1 Corinthians 12: 4, 7.
122 Ephesians 4: 15-16.
them, they do not use their gifts effectively in order to develop relationships with God, each other, and those in their communities (per the Great Commandment). The purpose of each person’s spiritual gifts is not to build up the owner of the gifts, but to build up the whole community of God, including those outside of the church. This is fundamentally a stewardship issue because we are blessed with spiritual gifts for this communal purpose of bringing and being the Gospel of Jesus to the world (Matthew 28:19).

2.4.3 Mission

My project rests on a theology of the church as a relational extension of God’s mission. From the Latin Christian theological term, “missio Dei,” the church’s mission, like the church itself, is relational: the Trinity reflects a missional God, a sending God who sent Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the church into the world. According to Jürgen Moltmann, mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.” Furthermore, there is church because there is mission, not vice versa. How is the church called to participate in God’s mission? Rick Barger says it is to do so “authentically, with integrity, precision, passion and cultural relevance.” Discernment helps Christians to notice and reject the evil spirits that deceive and destroy our world. Douglas John Hall cites ideas from Ernest Becker in stating that “the church can only

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offer ‘its own special heroics’ - the triumph of the cross - only if it dissociates itself from its past functioning as the cultic supporter of the dominant social illusion.”  Hall calls the church to embrace a true contextual theology that names the illusions to which society clings, and creatively constructs “metaphysics of hope” out of God’s Word, instead of our own desperation. Like Jesus in his “discerning the heart of God”, the church in mission must be gripped with compassion for the actual needs of its context and yearn to relate authentically and specifically with those in need. Reggie McNeal writes: “We must nurture the relationship side of our faith….that is what will capture the curiosity of those seeking the truth.” Furthermore, “the church was never intended to exist for itself. It was and is the chosen instrument of God to expand his kingdom.” So the church is called to be a relational, contextual community.

### 2.4.4 Denominational Theology

Because I am ordained through the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I drew on its theology in this project. I believe that the two most powerful relational images in my denomination are the church as communion (koinonia) and covenant. In the Disciples of Christ tradition, the community welcomes all believers to the Lord’s Supper. Traditionally offered every Sunday, and often before or after gatherings of all sizes, it represents the divine action of God’s forgiveness of sinners who repent. Through Christ’s broken body, we understand

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127 Hall, *Thinking the Faith,* 195.
129 Hall, *Thinking the Faith,* 195.
130 Morris and Olsen, *Discerning,* 16.
ourselves as loved by God, and the Holy Spirit assures Christians that God’s grace has saved them. Baptism is also performed in the midst of worship to remind the community gathered that there is an intimate connection “between baptism and participation in God’s mission in and for the world.”¹³³ Covenant is another powerful, relational word one will hear among Disciples of Christ, as well as United Church of Christ circles. “As a response to God’s covenant, we commit ourselves to one another.”¹³⁴ This covenant is meant for all Christians, not only those of our circle; thus Disciples are strongly ecumenical as well. We Disciples of Christ take John 17:20-21 seriously, as we look forward to a time when all denominations may find tangible ways to express the unity of the church universal. In fact, General Minister and President, Sharon Watkins once noted at the 2003 General Assembly: “To not be ecumenical is a sin.”

So what do my denomination’s “all are welcome at the table” and ecumenical theology have to do with discernment? If one is truly discerning the heart of Jesus, then extravagant welcomes and sharing tables with sinners must be routine practice. As children of God, we all have times when we are prodigal sons and daughters, lost from our loving Parent. We need each other in community to guide us back to God’s embrace. And that embrace extends around the world.

2.5 Concluding Thoughts

The overriding biblical metaphor for this project is the idea of God searching for and finding a lost child who has wandered off. This metaphor represents the plight of many of our churches, which have lost their focus on God. The practice and lifestyle of discernment was developed in order to seek the mind of God, so that those separated from God could be “found

¹³³ Toulouse, Joined in Discipleship, 151, 148.
by God.” Christian discernment means making a lifetime of discriminating choices between options, seeking what is best in God’s eyes. Discernment has a long history in the Christian tradition as a personal and communal spiritual discipline. This project invites the parishioners of an “identity-lost” church to experience the joy of being found by God, through discerning God’s focus for them personally and within their spiritual community. Addressing this need is tied to the larger purpose of the church to grow the Kingdom of God on earth and bring hope to our troubled world. Other theological concepts that are incorporated into this project are Sabbath, the stewardship of spiritual gifts, God’s mission, and theology from my denomination, The Disciples of Christ. The next section of this paper describes the context for this project and how the biblical and theological ideas raised were integrated into the project.
Chapter 3 Contextual Analysis and Statement of Theological Construct

3.1 Contextual Analysis of the Area

Disciples Christian Church is located on the main shopping thoroughfare of Boardman Township, Ohio, which was founded in the late 1780s. Boardman is a suburb of Youngstown that grew with the thriving steel industry after the turn of the century. Boardman’s thoroughfare sports a major retail area of strip malls. Nevertheless, with the decline of manufacturing and the auto industry in the 1980s and 1990s, Boardman and nearby Youngstown have suffered economically. U.S. Census Data from 1999 and American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2010 indicate rising trends in poverty. The American Community Survey, in full production since 2005, is an ongoing Census Bureau survey that samples a small percentage of the population every year. In 1995 the Census Bureau started changing the gathering of demographic, housing, social and economic data from the long survey form sent to every household every ten years to the annual ACS. According to Joan Naymark, former Director of Research and Planning for Target “The American Community Survey is an improvement over the census long form because it provides small-area information annually instead of once a decade.”\(^{135}\) Entities like churches and businesses, using the ACS have access to more current information for making more responsive decisions than using what could be outdated data from the decennial Census survey. The percentage of households in Boardman living below the Federal Poverty Level in 1999, according to US Census data, was at 5.5%. Of all the people in Boardman, according to 2007-2011 American Community Survey data, 10.2% lived below the poverty level. Owner-occupied housing decreased from 1999 at 71.1% to 67.6% in 2010 and

\(^{135}\) Both of the above sentences are cited in https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/american_community_survey/ viewed August 20, 2014.
renter-owned housing increased from 28.9% to 32.4% in that same period.\textsuperscript{136} Some members of this church had moved to wealthier suburbs like nearby Canfield and Poland, while others remained in Youngstown or moved even further away to neighboring Trumbull and Columbiana counties.

Table 2 below compares median household income and the percentage of persons living below poverty level, 2007-2011 for Boardman, Youngstown, Mahoning County (which includes both Boardman and Youngstown), Ohio and the United States.\textsuperscript{137} This was the ACS data that was available to us at the start of this project.

Table 2. Area Comparison of Median Household Income and Poverty Levels, 2007-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Boardman</th>
<th>Youngstown</th>
<th>Mahoning County</th>
<th>Ohio</th>
<th>USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median household income ($)</td>
<td>44,265</td>
<td>24,880</td>
<td>40,570</td>
<td>48,071</td>
<td>52,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Persons living below poverty level</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data reflects that Boardman was in a wealthier area of Mahoning County, as compared to Youngstown, and that Mahoning County lagged significantly behind the state of Ohio and the United States in median income. Mahoning County was significantly higher than Ohio and the US in percentage of people living below the poverty level.

\textsuperscript{136} From http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP03 viewed September 26, 2013.

Through my denomination I have access to a company called MissionInsite, which provides information and tools that church leaders can use to better understand the current and future estimated demographics of an area. The following is a summary of extensive MissionInsite data that was compiled in a QuickInsite Report on January 17, 2013, of the study area of Boardman. The population of this area in 2012 was 30,638. The growth rate had been in a small decline since 2010 and was expected to decline by about 2.9% by 2022. Family households were evolving from the traditional married couple structure into more single parent families. There were signs of an aging Baby Boomer generation and the decline of live births as a percentage of the total population forecast of ten years. In the next ten years little change in the population of school age children was expected. Probably due to its proximity to Youngstown State University and the fact that white-collar workers from the industrial and professional sectors settled in Boardman, the overall education level of adults age 18 and up was very high: 5.8% had no high school degree, 33.5% were high school graduates, 26.4% had some college, while another 34.3% had Bachelor’s degrees or higher. Seventy-one point three percent were white collar workers, while 28.7% were blue-collar. Racially in 2012 this was a very homogeneous area: 89.7% were whites, 4.3% were Black/African American, 2.8% were Hispanic, and 1.9% were Asian. Only the Black population was expected to increase by .1% in 2017. Another part of the QuickInsite report gave a glimpse into the lifestyles of some of the people in that area.

Mosaic USA is a detailed database, “a segmentation tool,” maintained by MissionInsite that currently describes 71 US household types based on 300 data factors. It provides insights

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into the lifestyles, attitudes and preferences of households within the study group. Data on the top ten (by percentage of total population of Boardman) Mosaic Lifestyle types from the Quickinsite report reflected an aging population.\footnote{QuickInsite Report for Boardman, 2013, 8.} The types, short definitions from Mosaic\footnote{From http://missioninsite.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/2014-Mosaic-USA-reference-guide.pdf viewed March 17, 2015.}, and percentages of the total population appear in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Top Ten Mosaic Segments in Boardman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mosaic</th>
<th>Short Definition</th>
<th>Percent of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Years–Aging in Place</td>
<td>Middle-class suburban seniors</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn Years–Settled &amp; Sensible</td>
<td>Older middle-class, empty-nesters &amp; singles in city neighborhoods</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving Boomers-No Place Like Home</td>
<td>Upper middle-class multi-generational families</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booming with Confidence-Aging of Aquarius</td>
<td>Boomer-aged couples in city and suburbs</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Singles-Bohemian Groove</td>
<td>Older unattached, urban</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Union-Blue Collar Comfort</td>
<td>Middle-class, blue collar</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Year Guardians-Reaping Rewards</td>
<td>Retired or widowed in suburbs</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Year Guardians-Senior Discounts</td>
<td>Settled retirees in metro apartments</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Elite-Picture Perfect Families</td>
<td>Child-rearing in wealthy suburbs</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Year Guardians-Town Elders</td>
<td>Minimalist seniors, old residences, sedentary</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In combining data from the Autumn Years and Golden Years segments, we note a total percentage of 55.8% in Boardman for those who were newly retired, or close to it (44.5% combined), and golden-agers, who were retired for a quite a while, (11.3%). From a religious standpoint: 47.5% of Boardman residents considered themselves as spiritual people; 35.6%
were conservative evangelical Christians; 19.3% considered it important to attend religious services; and 16.4% considered their faith to be really important.

As summarized in the Quickinsite report, and the Census Bureau data, the demographic data collected for this project indicates little population change in the next ten years, little change in the school age children population, little change of diversity in the homogeneous white population, high levels of education, a white color population that is almost double the blue color, levels of poverty below the county and nearby Youngstown, an increasingly aging population, and mixed levels of religiosity. Demographically these trends and figures could also mean that poorer people from the county and Youngstown would be interested in the wealth of nearby Boardman.

Interviews with others affirmed this trend. I served Disciples Christian Church from July 14, 2013 through September 9, 2014. According to the church secretary of fifteen years, people from the poorer Youngstown area often came to the wealthier Boardman area for aid. She estimated that about 1% were transients passing through who needed a motel or money for traveling. From her perspective, the primary needs appeared to be food and baby items. Baby supplies were bulky, expensive, and hard-to-find among service agencies. Many of our church members, especially those who came from those inner-city churches, continued to support ministries in Youngstown to feed the hungry. The Office Manager at Boardman United Methodist Church (who administered the Boardman Ministerial Association funds to help local transients), said that food and shelter were the most common needs. Unfortunately, an interfaith hospitality network for the homeless, named Family Promise, was discontinued. I noticed that those who were on the brink of homelessness lived in cheaper, dilapidated motels around

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143 QuickInsite Report for Boardman, 2013, 2, 5.
Boardman. Their residents often asked for assistance in the form of money for rent and food. According to the secretary for the Boardman Schools Superintendent, in 2012 41.9% of the district’s students utilized the free lunch program. A Protestant Family Services’ 20-year volunteer said that the needs they saw most often were for food, funds to pay for utilities, and emergency medications. Clearly, the Boardman community was known by those in need as a good place to get assistance, especially when one was transient or homeless. I noticed this also, in the weekly calls I received at the church, where people in homes outside of Boardman most often were asking for help with rent, utilities, food and gasoline.

3.2 The Church Itself

The demographics of the church as of December 31, 2013 reflected both an aging congregation and the changing dynamics of family structures. There were 114 active members who had supported the church during the past year, although 45 of these had only been to worship once or not at all. Of these 114 active members, there were 17 homebound members (mostly inactive, but visited by church members) and two participating non-members. So, in effect, 69 were active members who regularly supported the church. This congregation, like many of its mainline counterparts, showed a steady decline in the figures often measured for signs of congregational vitality. For example, average worship attendance had been declining since 1982 per Figure 3 below.\textsuperscript{144}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3}
\caption{Figure 3: Average Worship Attendance (1982-2013).}
\end{figure}

Forty-nine percent of the 114 active members in the church were over 65 years old. A handful of dedicated members did most of the work, often serving on multiple committees. On a good note, nine families had seventeen children or youth who were active in the church. Of those families with children, there were four blended families (where children were from another relationship outside of the current marriage) and one single-parent family. In addition to me as their full-time pastor, there were five part-time staff member stakeholders, four of whom participated in this project. A child caregiver was hired in February of 2014 and a second one was planned, so that parents of children could participate more fully in the church. Financial giving and income continued to lag seriously behind the operating expenses for the church. Like many other mainline churches, this one had been drawing from its endowment funds, in order to cover the deficit. Eighty-six percent of the funds for their generous outreach support came from distributions from a special fund that was left to the church. Nevertheless, all those funds do have a limit. If the church continued drawing from them at the current rate of expenses, it could
deplete them within the decade, and possibly sooner, depending on building maintenance issues that might develop, the attrition of the congregation, and giving rates of any new members.

Clearly, this church had too much overhead expense, and their well-educated leadership realized this problem. I knew that understanding its purpose from God better would help guide this congregation in the future about its investments in staffing, building, and programs, as well as options that would be explored enabling the church to live within its means long-term. This church, like many others, was paralyzed and fearful of making these decisions because they didn’t see a purpose, nor have a vision of the future from God. That is why the metaphor of the lost child being found by God was so important. That is why we started with God’s desire for us first in the project.

With the context of both the community and the church now described, it is important to assemble the theological construct from the pieces given earlier and relate it to the particular model developed for conducting this intervention. The theological construct is important because it is foundational to the process used for taking Disciples Christian Church from being lost in its identity with God to being found. Furthermore this entire process was designed to guide the church, both its individuals and the entire congregation, in discerning where its focus should be from God, as far as serving its community.

3.3 Theological Construct

First, this overworking, frantic congregation, both as individuals and as a church, was encouraged to devote more time to Sabbath, so that they could listen for the quiet voice of God. They were discouraged from starting any new projects and any events because they barely had enough commitment to complete some events in the past. I used the framework of Appreciative
Inquiry, the theological underpinnings and individual and group discernment methods drawn from spiritual forefathers and mothers described in Chapter 2. The project concentrated on utilizing the historical form of discernment based on *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, which had at its heart, helping “people make choices resonant with God’s call.” I incorporated elements of the most current thought on group discernment practices, into the model for discernment. Whenever small groups such as the Transition Team and small groups from the congregation met, their purpose was either exploring options God was giving or gave them and/or trying to come to a spiritual consensus about an issue. Listening Hearts Ministry had excellent ideas for developing one’s listening skills in a group setting, so that limitless ideas could be raised and explored. However, in guiding the congregation toward clarity about its direction from God, individuals discerned in the silence away from the church. The results of their individual discernments were reflected in their votes on an opportunity map. In essence, spiritual consensus by group discernment was utilized repeatedly to draw out ideas from God through all the members. Voting on an opportunity map, which originates from the Appreciative Inquiry process, brought individuals back from these group experiences to discern for themselves what they thought God was calling the church to be and do.

Why is spiritual consensus so important? Many churches have moved beyond Robert’s Rules of Order and voting to embrace consensus-building. Consensus involves discussion that leads to general agreement. Though a slower means to reaching a group decision than voting, consensus results in greater ownership of the participants. It focuses on what people need and

146 I chose Suzanne G. Farnham, et.al., *Grounded in God, Revised Edition: Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations* because it was user-friendly and involved the Ignatian steps for discernment.
want in theory, but unfortunately, “some people just go along to get along.” Discernment, however, expands this process and re-centers it, because it focuses on God’s voice and God’s desires for people’s lives and ministry. “If discernment of God’s will is not pursued in the faith community, the church will be left with secondary motivations (efficiency, expediency, politics) for decision and action.” These secondary motivations for churches are what I depicted in Section 2 as “the tail wagging the dog.” Spiritual consensus, on the other hand, is when a group tries to come to a conclusion about what they together are hearing from God. Determining one’s group purpose from God is done through taking time to learn to listen to God, being willing to speak what people think they might be hearing from God, listening carefully to all the others, and pausing from time to time to pray and reflect. Knowing God’s purpose is what I call “the dog wagging the tail.” If spiritual consensus was not attained as a result of the congregational retreat, at least this church and its individuals, who were accustomed to using Robert’s Rules of Order, would receive the gift of knowing how to conduct spiritual discernment.

3.5 The Project Plan

Again, the focus of this project was to address the vision crisis in a particular church setting. The question to be studied was: How does a Transitional Minister guide a congregation that has lost its sense of purpose to discern what God is calling it to be and do, in a manner that would be helpful to individuals in their daily lives, as well as to other struggling congregations? I studied this challenge by intervening in a congregation’s life, by inviting, teaching and guiding its members to use the ancient practice of discernment from St. Ignatius, which was developed

147 As observation from Dr. Lisa Withrow, Academic Dean of Methodist Theological School in Ohio.
148 Morris and Olsen, Discerning God’s Will Together. 33.
for decision-making in accordance with God’s will. The expected outcome was that the people would personally and communally have a clearer idea of their callings from God. Knowing this would guide them in starting to develop a vision for the future, as they prepared for their next pastor.

I tailored the Appreciative Inquiry process of Dreaming to involve cycles of brainstorming in small groups and presentations of the findings to the larger group of the congregation. What was unique in the planning of this project was integrating the training and use of discernment for a congregation that had never been exposed to neither Appreciative Inquiry nor St. Ignatius’ “Rules for Discernment.” Discernment either occurred at the individual level, or at a group level (Transition Team, small groups, or the entire congregation). Table 4 below summarizes how the training on discernment, the practice of individual and group level discernment, and presentation to the larger group were integrated cyclically into nine steps of the Dream phase tailored for this project:

Table 4. Discernment Plan during the Dream Phase
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (2013)</th>
<th>Ignatian Discernment Step(s)</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>How Decisions were Made</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/19</td>
<td>Explore, weigh, choose most favorable options</td>
<td>Transition Team</td>
<td>Training and group discernment during retreat</td>
<td>spiritual consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/20, 10/27, 11/3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>training on discernment via sermons/ exercises</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Present the issue and possible solutions</td>
<td>Transition Team</td>
<td>present findings and options to congregation</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Listen to others’ ideas, and explore them</td>
<td>Small groups from the congregation</td>
<td>Dreamed, discerned about an option that excited them most</td>
<td>Spiritual consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/27</td>
<td>Listen to others’ ideas</td>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>Presented their ideas to congregation</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Weigh, choose most favorable options, search for clarity</td>
<td>Transition Team</td>
<td>Discernment about major ideas to go on opportunity map</td>
<td>Spiritual consensus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3</td>
<td>Present the issue, congregational ideas and options</td>
<td>Transition Team</td>
<td>Presentation of opportunity map to congregation</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/3-11/10</td>
<td>Listen to others’ ideas, sit with ideas &amp; sense which one(s) brings consolation</td>
<td>Individuals</td>
<td>Discern &amp; vote reflects individual discernment results</td>
<td>Individual discernment reflected by vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>Searching for clarity around the issue</td>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>Presentation of results of congregational discernment on opportunity map</td>
<td>Majority vote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My plan was to begin with the declaration of Sabbath and orientation to the process, then to take the people during a sermon series and a congregational retreat from the use of a rational, head-based approach to progressing toward the heart. "Spiritual discernment begins with the rational and progresses toward the very center of our being…give careful attention to assembling information and ideas. Evaluate them. Then let the mind descend into the heart. Stay there, centered in God’s presence, seeking signs of the Spirit." Ending the Appreciative Inquiry process of Discovery, the congregation witnessed a presentation by a Transition Team which was assembled October 27, 2013. Team members gathered, analyzed and presented information and assisted me with exercises to answer these questions: “Who are we?” and “Who is our community and what are the needs?” The general intent followed Frederick Buechner’s famous quote that was repeated throughout the process: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Basically, *the Team and I aimed to take the gifts and passions of the church as a whole and try to match them with the needs of the*

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150 Farnham, *Grounded in God*, 78.
community. We discerned in a separate retreat on October 19, 2013 what we thought were the most favorable general possibilities for a future focus for the church. On that retreat the Transition Team was trained on St. Ignatian discernment and we practiced it, in entertaining most-favorable options for the congregation. I will expound more on this later in the paper. I preached a sermon on individual discernment practices on October 20th and group discernment practices during worship on October 27th, giving parishioners laminated cards with tips to guide them. During the congregational retreat following the October 27th service, the congregation explored and dreamed in teams about the general options the Transition Team had proposed for this church for the future, including any new options that came out of the process itself. On November 3rd I introduced the congregation to creative discernment through an exercise after worship. I guided them into a state of discernment, of being found by God and discerning what God would desire for their future as a church. They had a week (which could have been be extended, if need be) to individually weigh and discern the options God brought forth to them. The results of their discernments were then reflected by “voting with their feet,” during Discernment Week, November 3-10, on an opportunity map, according to the practice of Appreciative Inquiry. At best, I hoped that this “lost - found” rationale for discerning God’s will would re-orient these people and this church back to attending to God and moving on to God’s path to building the Kingdom of God on earth. The lost-found metaphor, incidentally, appeared in my teaching sermons and was indirectly represented by the path centering to God’s hands on the opportunity map. Whichever direction the discernment took - whether they could not discern, they needed more time to discern, or they discerned to continue with a new focus –would help guide leaders and congregation in their future life together. I or their next pastor would move them forward from there. We celebrated the end of the three-month Sabbath and this stage of
discernment on November 10th with a Thanksgiving dinner. That completed the intervention portion of this project.

It is important to note that discernment is a life-long practice for individuals and churches. Teaching discernment was designed to start them on a new journey of discovering God’s will. It addressed the key adaptive challenge of this church, with its need for direction from God. If they continued to use the practices taught, they would benefit over the long run. The specific methodologies used for discerning will be described in the next chapter of this paper. In the meantime, I will explain other theologies that were interwoven into this project.

3.6 A Theology of Stewardship

One excellent characteristic of Disciples Christian Church was that it continued to support a variety of outreach activities in the county and beyond. For example, Disciples Christian Church had a well-developed program of collecting food and other necessary items for local food pantries and other servicing agencies, crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. It is mandatory for a church’s members to support those who are different from them, because Jesus taught and modelled that attitude and behavior. Disciples Christian Church was famous in the county for fund-raising dinners to benefit particular causes, as well as making or collecting items for causes such as a member needing a lung transplant, or the need for crutches in Haiti, school supplies for Hispanic children in Youngstown, or blankets for a women’s shelter. The church sent volunteers of teams to make and serve meals at the local Rescue Mission. They also sent a mission team down to an area ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. Those who participated in the restoration efforts from the hurricane were blessed tremendously by this experience. There is no doubt that this church’s members had a heart for those suffering anywhere. Nonetheless, I noticed three
problems with their current practice of stewardship. 1. Distributions from one endowment fund (largely from the sale of First Christian Church) continued to support most of the church’s charities. Knowledge of this practice discouraged parishioners from giving out of their own pockets. 2. The church had become insulated from developing personal relationships with people in need and 3. There was no focus to their outreach. Those who came to Disciples Christian from other churches brought some of their outreach ministries with them, but they failed to determine which were more important and should be retained. They were quick to help wherever they saw a need, but were finding themselves overextended and having increasing difficulty in supporting commitments in the process.

My husband, Mike Kiesel\textsuperscript{152}, described their level of giving as “third-party stewardship,” meaning that the development of relationships could be improved. His comment and the work of Mark Toulouse inspired me to develop a progressive, relational model of stewardship, to raise people’s awareness of their stewardship and their potential to “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Toulouse writes that the relationship between American Christianity and American public life exists in four styles of interaction—iconic faith, priestly faith, the public Christian, and the public church—with each model appearing in different forms in American history. In various ways, “Christians have confused public life and faith and have offered biblical and theological rationales for assumptions important to narrow views defined by culture, but not to broader conceptions defined by faith. Christians have also tried to grab hold of public life to define it according to exclusive and absolutist categories.” \textsuperscript{153} Iconic faith deals with the use of religious icons in the form of symbols and language that affect how Christians understand

\textsuperscript{152} Permission was granted to use his name in this paper. I am also grateful to him for his support of my work on this project.

their faith. Iconic faith is problematic when the symbol becomes an idol, instead of worshipping God. For example, some people resist biblical criticism because they revere the Bible as a supernatural wonder.\textsuperscript{154} With “priestly faith” the purpose is to “‘restore the nation’ to the purity of its ‘Christian origins’…or describe the mission of the nation as somehow directly representing God’s purposes in history.” \textsuperscript{155} Priestly faith is problematic when activists use legislation and politics to advance their narrowly defined agendas for public life.\textsuperscript{156} It is the next two styles of how Christianity relates to public life that are foundational for the levels of stewardship that I developed.

Toulouse relates that “Christians are encouraged, outside the church, to participate fully within the public life of the nation. They vote, run for office and are as active as other responsibilities and commitments allow them to be. But their congregations are not.”\textsuperscript{157} He names this posture “public Christian.” On the other hand, the fourth posture, “public church,” expects the church to engage in social life in America, especially wherever political realities exploit human beings or deny them justice… Where public Christians largely understand sin as resulting from the activities of individuals, the public church also emphasizes that human beings exist with a context where sin is systemic in nature.” \textsuperscript{158} In other words, good and evil are individual and collective.

Accordingly, I translated my learnings about stewardship in churches and how Toulouse unveiled opening churches to more social involvement into the following model of “Levels of Stewardship” below in Table 5: ...

Table 5. Levels of Stewardship

\begin{itemize}
\item Toulouse, \textit{God in Public}, 51, 57, 60.
\item Toulouse, \textit{God in Public}, 77.
\item Toulouse, \textit{God in Public}, 78-80.
\item Toulouse, \textit{God in Public}, 108.
\item Toulouse, \textit{God in Public}, 136.
\end{itemize}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Stewardship</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Church donates money from its special funds/charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individuals donate money, items or volunteer/charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Develop and maintain relationships with people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Teach individuals how to help themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Deal with the cause of issue as social justice/systemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Bible contains examples of the practice of helping another, where one would insulate oneself from developing a relationship with another. Sometimes there were practical reasons for not developing a relationship. In Leviticus 19: 9-10 and Ruth 2: 23 we see the Old Testament practice of leaving the gleanings from the field behind for the poor. Paul's collection for the poor “saints” of the Jerusalem church occupied significant portions of his letters (1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15 and Romans 15:14–32). These were all examples of Level 1 and 2 Stewardship practices. In Youngstown, Ohio, Disciples Christian Church generously supported many charities that handle collections for the needy and that is, in itself, a good and righteous thing. But from a theological viewpoint, God calls us to provide more in the way of support, if we can. In Acts 6 seven disciples were chosen to provide the daily distribution of food to the widows, so that the others would not “neglect the Word of God” (Acts 6: 1-7). This is a good example of the disciples delegating a team to minister specifically to the widows (Level 3 Stewardship) and actually deal with a social justice issue (Level 5 Stewardship) that was present in Hebrew society and still continues today. As for examples of Level 4 Stewardship, we saw many striking examples throughout Jesus’ ministry, especially in the form of his healings and miracles. In Mark 9: 14-29 Jesus healed a boy with a spirit, but after he convinced the boy’s
father of the life-changing need to “believe; help my unbelief!” Ten lepers were healed because they begged for mercy. The one grateful leper returned to praise Jesus and Jesus noted that this leper’s faith made him well. We surmise from the story that all were restored to the community. (Luke 17: 11-19). His encounter with the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11) ended with the command, “Go and from now on, do not sin again” (verse 11). In all three of these examples, Jesus showed different ways of relating to people. First, he had the compassion and courage to associate with people debilitated by an evil spirit, illness, or their sin. Secondly, he then taught them (and sometimes others nearby) a lesson about the consequences of believing in Jesus: a spirit was exorcised, ten lepers healed, and one had special favor for acknowledging Jesus for the healing. In the case of the adulterous woman, the lesson was that all people are sinful and should therefore, not judge others. He was dealing with a social-religious issue here, too. Thirdly, he made an effort to help those sufferers to help themselves. With the grateful leper and the adulterous woman, Jesus issued commands to get on with their lives. The adulterous woman was also told to sin no more. This brings to mind a good question: is commanding the same as establishing relationship? In most of the healing narratives “Jesus healed, commanded, and disappeared.” He established relationships, but we doubt that he had time to maintain them. However, we speculate that those healed and the witnesses of the healings were changed forever because of their new beliefs in Jesus. We see Jesus developing more of a relationship with the Samaritan woman at the well, with whom Jews were not to associate (John 4: 1-26). Jesus paired the metaphor of thirst with the living water in Christ: “Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty”(verse14). He revealed extraordinary knowledge about the woman’s husbands, which led her to believe he was a prophet, directing her to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus instructed her that “true worshipers will worship the Father in

159 Another observation of Lisa Withrow.
spirit and truth for the Father seeks such as these to worship him” (verse 23. ) The woman realized he was talking about the Messiah and learned that Jesus was he. Because of her testimony back in the city, many Samaritans came to believe (verse 39). Here we note that the time Jesus spent developing his relationship with the woman at the well brought other new believers into his following.

Going back to my model of Stewardship and particularly Level 4, relationships can be developed quickly with people or over a longer time. We could surmise that the more time we spend on nurturing relationships, the more time people will have to see Christ at work in us. Finally, Jesus’ ministry could be viewed as Level 5 Stewardship, where he took on the religious authorities of his day and the social systems those authorities supported that ostracized and neglected people on the margins. Jesus paid the ultimate price for confronting the powers and principalities, by laying his life down on the cross.

Moving on to another aspect of stewardship prevalent in my approach is that the level and types of giving relate to the spiritual gifts one has. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, there are varieties of gifts which are to be used for the common good. And the weaker parts of the body are to be honored by the stronger parts.\footnote{1 Corinthians 12: 4,7, 22-26.} I have found that The Spiritual Giftabilities Inventory\footnote{which originated from the National Evangelism Network out of their NetResults magazine. Permission was granted for me to use it in congregations I serve.} used during the Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry has long been a strong indicator of the individual, as well as common church-wide, gifts for ministry. The issue often becomes that people and churches do not know their spiritual gifts and thereby do not give to their potential. David Edman Gray points out that there are two extremes of behavior for wasted spiritual gifts. In other words, not using one’s gifts results in these behaviors: 1.
Idleness and 2. idolatry.\textsuperscript{162} Idleness is equivalent to sloth, which John Calvin felt was the tendency to ignore or waste God’s gifts, rather than follow God’s call to use them in the world. When a friend asked Calvin to stop working so hard, Calvin retorted, “What! Would you have the Lord find me idle when He comes?”\textsuperscript{163} Gray argues that there should be a balance between idolatry and idleness. He offers four strategies for seeking balance in one’s life: 1. Saying “no” sometimes is the right thing to do. 2. Rest must be a priority. 3. Reflect on what balance means. 4. Living in balance means we must be intentional about the use of our time. In the short time that I spent with Disciples Christian Church, this issue of balance in the use or lack of use of the spiritual gifts was a big one, not only for the individuals in the church, but the church as well. I observed church members unaware of their spiritual gifts either overworking with no focus, or not involved and not sharing their badly-needed gifts. Churches that do not understand their gifts, as communities of believers, often do the same.

Obviously, Disciples Christian Church was accustomed to offering their stewardship to people in need outside of the church at Levels 1 and 2. If a member of the church was in need, however, they were glad to move their giving to Level 3. I used this model to plant seeds for the future: to expand their horizons about stewardship, so that they would be more open to increasing their levels of stewardship and working toward Level 5. One aim of the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry was to invite the congregation to be open to and explore as many options as God placed before them for ministry. Steps 4 and 5 of St. Ignatius’ Rules of Discernment work to achieve that purpose:


\textsuperscript{163} “The Life and Times of John Calvin,” \url{www.ChristianityToday.com}, October 1, 1986 cited in Gray, “We Need to Change our Thinking,”
4. List and weigh the advantages and disadvantages for me of the various dimensions of my proposed decision.
5. Consider now which alternative seems more reasonable. Then I will decide according to the more weighty motives and not from my selfish or sensual inclination.\textsuperscript{164}

The recurring theology of Level 3 Stewardship, developing relationships and particularly outside of the church, is described more fully in the next section.

3.7 A Currency of Relationship

I found the insights of Eric Law to be particularly useful in summarizing the importance of building what he calls a “currency of relationship.” The word “currency” comes from the Medieval Latin word, currentia, which literally means “a flowing.” And just like money, it is more useful when it is flowing or circulating, rather than being stockpiled. Law cites six currencies that form a cycle of blessings essential for sustainable, missional ministry: time and place, gracious leadership, relationship, truth, wellness, and money.\textsuperscript{165}

The foundational belief that we are connected to God through Jesus, making all of us closely relational and interconnected...is the reason why we need to pay attention to and develop our relationships as a currency of exchange. The Christian community is called to be a network that connects people from very diverse backgrounds and experiences...When our churches, through our membership, make real faithful connections across the diverse people of God, we are building up the divine-human network...These internal and external networks of relationships are foundational structures, the frame in which sustainable missional ministries are built.\textsuperscript{166}

The existing network of churches and other helping agencies also needed to be accessed by this church, once it discerned to which issue or diversity this church was being called. I relished this metaphor of the currency of relationship because it highlighted how internally focused churches

\textsuperscript{164} Fleming, Contemporary Reading, 44.
\textsuperscript{165} Eric H.F.Law, Holy Currencies: Six Blessings for Sustainable Missional Ministries (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013), 10-12.
\textsuperscript{166} Law, Holy Currencies, 22.
could become outwardly focused, by working along with others in what God was already doing in a community.

3.8 Conclusion

The greatest need for this “lost” church at this time was to be “found by God” and united around a vision of God’s desire for it in the community. A symptom of their “lostness” was their lack of understanding of stewardship and particularly, the stewardship of relationship. Since they had become a smaller church, they needed a focus that capitalized on their strengths, values, and discerned spiritual gifts, excited their passions, and guided them to focus their limited resources of time, talents, energy, money and their facilities on relationship-building, both internally and externally. The spiritual excitement generated by this process of discerning God’s purpose was meant to help this congregation be more involved with those in its community, in the hope that outsiders would see and feel Jesus at work in the hearts of these parishioners. When the Spirit is alive in a church, visitors are more likely to want to return and get involved, particularly if they share similar spiritual gifts to the ones already in the church. And since this church would be embarking on a search for a new settled pastor, it was vital to know its direction from God, in order to attract and call a pastor who was a good match. My hope was that this whole process might reorient this church in its most perplexing adaptive challenge: going from being lost from God to finding God’s purpose and direction for them in their community.
Chapter 4 Research Design and Procedures

Again, the question explored in this project was: How does a Transitional Minister guide a congregation that has lost its sense of purpose to discern what God is calling it to be and do, in a manner that would be helpful to individuals in their daily lives, as well as to other struggling congregations?

4.1 Qualitative Measures

The following qualitative measures were studied both before and after the intervention was applied: 1. Individual and group level knowledge of and experience with spiritual discernment. 2. How individuals’ personal relationships with God changed, if at all, as a result of the intervention. 3. Whether or not individuals continued using the spiritual practices learned. 4. Whether the intervention with discernment helped the congregation understand God’s purpose for the church or helped people in any other ways. Data for these qualitative measures was gathered during two sets of one-on-one interviews with a ten percent random sampling of active members, representative of the age and gender demographics of the church.

These practices were chosen to help provide valid data in order to determine if teaching and guiding the people in discernment would help them, both as individuals and as a congregation, to understand God’s wishes for them when making decisions. Specifically for this congregation, discernment was taught in order to guide them in an effort to discover their direction from God. My hope was that both as individuals and as a church, they would continue to use the spiritual consensus practices learned for future decision-making, instead of relying on Robert’s Rules of Order for every decision. Finally, if this intervention proved successful, I planned to use these
newly developed practices of faith at other churches, as I guided them to seek their direction from God.

4.2 The Research Plan

In simple terms this intervention, with its independent variables injected the spiritual practice of discernment into the second phase of Appreciative Inquiry known as Dreaming, and studied for effects on individuals and the congregation, in doing so. First, it is important to understand the foundation that was laid down, beginning with my calling to this church and engaging them in the first phase of Appreciative Inquiry, known as Discovery. The second phase, known as Dreaming, built directly on the Discovery Phase. That was where my project on discernment was injected. As was related in Chapter 1 of this paper, the vision crisis in our churches drove me to better equip them for developing their relationships with God, each other and particularly, their communities. I wanted to learn if injecting discernment into the decision-making process during the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry would help a struggling congregation move from being lost in its search for God, to being found. Would individuals and the church as a whole gain a united perspective of their callings in their community from God? Finally, if successful, could this model be used to help other struggling congregations?

4.3 How the Groundwork was Laid

As early as my first interview as a candidate for the Intentional Interim Minister position, I began educating leadership on the overall plan for my time with them. In addition to my profile, which detailed my experience with Appreciative Inquiry, the Pulpit Search Committee received a short handout explaining what Intentional Interim Ministers do, that attempting to discern God’s
desires was the primary goal of our time together, and explaining how using Appreciative Inquiry enabled them to seek a better fit for the next pastoral leader they called, one whose gifts and passions would hopefully take them in that direction in the future. My employment covenant with them stated the five interim focus points as being my key tasks and that the congregation would support me on my doctoral project and benefit from it, too. I also ensured that one group oversaw all my work, the Elders, the spiritual leaders of the church. My covenant included a clause that the Elders and I would meet quarterly to informally discuss my performance, as well as the performance of the church, in supporting our mutually-agreed upon emphases for each quarter. The quarterly performance review is an extremely beneficial practice that in the past has provided a rich source of feedback for all. It was no different here, as it kept minister and church focused together and going in the same direction. During those review sessions we openly raised any major issues hindering that direction and other problems, before they spun out of control. Most of all, the review sessions were designed to sustain trust between me and those leaders as we discussed difficult changes that needed to be addressed during the transition time.

My sermons sequentially informed the congregation about the plan, what my responsibilities were, and my expectations of them. I told them, “You will be the laboratory where I will test a solution to a common challenge in many churches...how to listen for God’s beckoning.”¹⁶⁷ These are the words I first used to explain how the congregation would benefit from my doctoral project. In retrospect, calling the church a “laboratory” was not a good choice of words. Church leadership understood and welcomed my doctoral project; however, I had to tone my language down considerably around congregational members. Because we intentional interims stay a short time and need to build trust with the people quickly, I normally preach a

¹⁶⁷ Preached on my first Sunday, July 14, 2013.
four-part sermon series that has been well-received in the past on the story of Ruth, paralleling her spiritual journey with mine and with the church’s during this transitional time. In this church I utilized the summer months to get to know people, attend committee and group meetings, start gathering data about the church and community, and support the children and teachers in Vacation Bible School.

I developed a general plan for moving forward during the interim time that went into the spring of the following year. I take a hard look at the seasons (both secular and Christian) as I map out what the emphasis will be for me and the church on a monthly basis. Sometimes work has to put on hold due to Advent and Lent and other times, my plans must fit in theologically with local church traditions, such as All Saints’ Day or the church anniversary. This planning dynamic, which requires flexibility on my part, will be described later in this paper. At any rate, the interim plan I developed was approved by the Elders in July, 2013 and with a few revisions, the Board in August, 2013. (See Appendix 2.) During the August Board meeting I proposed and received approval to declare a congregational Sabbath from September 8 - November 10, 2013.

Besides getting to know people, my first two months were occupied with collecting as much information about the church and community as I could find (to be used later for the Discovery Phase), forming the Transition Team, and educating the congregation about Appreciative Inquiry and the general plan for going forward. I actually “hit the ground running,” hoping we could get both the Discovery and Dream phases done before Advent, which began on December 1, 2013.

Keep in mind that I arrived at this church on July 14, 2013. The Transition Team met for the first time on August 27, 2013, at which time they received the plan already approved by the Board. Team members volunteered for one of two teams: 1. The “Who Are We?” Team (abbreviated “We Team”) which would collect information about the church itself and 2. The
“Who is our Community?” Team (abbreviated “Community Team”) which would collect information about Mahoning County, the Youngstown area, and Boardman, and especially the needs of those areas. The calling and populating of the Transition Team set the framework in place for beginning the first phase of Appreciative Inquiry.

4.4 The Discovery Phase

The Discovery Phase, which I tailored years ago for churches, enables the discovery of the church at its best, its positive core, then connects that core with the needs of the community. The goal is to produce ministry options that will combine the church’s strongest gifts and passions in order to address community needs, to provide a focus for the future. This process attempted to embody Frederick Buechner’s words: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” For Disciples Christian Church my plan was to work closely with the two sub-teams of the Transition Team to gather as much data as possible on the church’s “deep gladness” (its history, strengths, passions, spiritual gifts, values) and its community’s “deep hunger” (needs and issues). We also needed to assemble a list of adaptive challenges. An adaptive challenge is a priority, belief, habit or loyalty that prevents a group from achieving its potential. At this point, I will briefly describe the plan for collecting the above data and the tools used, as part of the Discovery Phase. However, since the focus of my doctoral project is on discernment, I will not describe these Discovery tools in great detail. I recommend looking at Appendix 3 for the schedule of and responsibility for each of the exercises during both the Discovery and Dream phases.

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168 Buechner, Wishful Thinking, 15.
169 Heifetz, Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 19.
4.4.1 “Who are We?” Tools

The first tool was a pin map, where each family unit was invited to place a colored pin on a map to show where they lived. The color of pin they chose was based on whether they worked with no children at home (Yellow), worked with school-age children in the home (Red), or were retired or disabled (Blue). This tool gave an idea of where the church people lived in relation to the church and showed their status in life. The next two tools were inventories that I had been using for years to help individuals and congregations become more aware of their spiritual gifts and their talents and passions. I developed a short sermon about building on one’s strengths and passions and I asked the people to fill out their short surveys during worship. I have found that I have a much better response in doing it this way, than sending out surveys and trying to collect them later. Appendix 4 contains the questions used to determine one’s spiritual gifts. Appendix 4A is the answer sheet that accompanied the questions. I developed Appendix 5 from two resources to educate parishioners specifically about their spiritual gifts and where they appear in the Bible. Appendix 6 (which I also developed) gathers information about secular talents, desire to work alone or with other people, and specific areas of need about which people are passionate. The top three to five spiritual gifts of each person’s Giftabilities Survey and the top three passions from the Talents, Passions, and Workstyle Sheet were tabulated for the whole church, giving an idea of its spiritual gifts and passions as a group. After each person completed the above surveys and their individual results were tabulated, they were to receive their own personal tabulated Spiritual Giftabilities Answer Sheet and The Description of Spiritual Gifts. I have found both the Spiritual Giftabilities and Talents, Passions, and Workstyle inventories to be

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helpful to new and existing members when trying to discern where they should serve both inside and outside of the church. These are good tools to help redirect one who is tired of working in a particular ministry, over-working, or needs a new focus. And it has the same benefits for churches as a whole. Churches, especially ones that are aging and have a history of decline in size into small family or pastoral size churches\(^\text{171}\) can become tired. Their members over-extend themselves with trying to support too many ministries. Like individuals, churches that do not understand their gifts and strengths communally can lose their focus and vision of their calling for their future.

The next tool, the “Story Day” Exercise utilized a congregational timeline for two purposes: 1. to elicit stories from the congregation about its history, so the entire organization would get a common understanding of its history and 2. to extract core values, strengths and adaptive challenges from the stories told. As consultant Susan Heathfield writes, “Core values are traits or qualities that you consider not just worthwhile, [but] they represent an individual's or organization's highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and core, fundamental driving forces.”\(^\text{172}\) I condensed this commonly used definition down to an easily-understood definition that I have used over the years: “A core value is a trait or quality that represents a deeply-held driving force.” “A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity.”\(^\text{173}\) As Gallup’s research for over 30 years on human potential has shown, people become most successful when they build their lives around their greatest natural abilities, instead

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\(^\text{171}\) A family sized church has 0 to 50 average worship attendance while a pastoral sized church has 50 to 150 average worship attendance according to the foundational work on congregational sizes by Arlin J. Rothauge, \textit{Sizing Up a Congregation: For New Member Ministry}, (New York, NY: The Episcopal Church Center), undated, 5.

\(^\text{172}\) Susan M. Heathfield on the About.com Human Resources website of \url{http://humanresources.about.com/od/glossaryc/g/Core-Values.htm} viewed March 6, 2014.

of their weaknesses. I notice that Gallup’s findings hold true for groups like churches, as well. There are factors that can hold an entity back, too. As I noted earlier, an adaptive challenge is a priority, belief, habit or loyalty that prevents a group from achieving its potential.

As stories were told, Transition Team members and I were listening for core values, strengths, and adaptive challenges and listing them on easels. Other tools for understanding “Who is this church?” were later gathered from the administrative records of the church. These include membership data and demographics, the usage of different areas of the facility, financial reports, and where outreach monies were allocated, among other data. Due to the sensitive nature of some of these reports, not all will be included in the project report. Trends will, however, be described later.

4.4.2 “Who is Our Community?” Tools

Demographic reports from companies such as Missioninsite and Link2Lead (Percept) provide valuable data about the community at large and around the church. Both use census and other survey data to extract information about demographics and religious preferences. I utilized an existing report from Missioninsite left by my predecessor. I have also found that local government offices can share online or via interviews information on any development plans, social issues, demographic and financial trends, and community needs. Interviewing other helping agencies and the local school board, especially can also update one on the issues. At other churches I have gathered community panels that included government, health, safety, and human services people to give us an idea of the major issues in the community. For this

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174 Winseman, Clifton, and Liesveld, *Living your Strengths*, x.
project we gained quite a bit of information about the community from studying demographic information and conducting interviews in the community.

4.5 Transition Team Retreat

Rather than having the congregation as a whole match their gifts and strengths with particular options for future ministry, due to time constraints, I hosted a productive retreat with the Transition Team and spent part of a day offsite with them in a secluded location. The purpose of the retreat, from an Appreciative Inquiry standpoint, was to receive training on individual and group discernment, review all the information collected on the church and the community during the Discovery phase, and start dreaming about some viable mission options for the future of the church. In other words, we started to brainstorm Buechner’s guidance on where personal gladness and the world’s hunger meet. See Appendix 6A for the agenda. During the retreat, there was a thread of group-level spiritual practices running concurrently with the Appreciative Inquiry process: a. devotion and prayer b. foundational training on individual and group level discernment based on St. Ignatius’ “Rules of Discernment.”176 The Transition Team received this training from me before the congregation did, because the Team needed to practice discernment at this retreat, in order to gather feasible options for the future that would be explored and discerned by the congregation. The Transition Team received the same laminated cards which appear in Appendices 8 and 9 that the congregation received later during my upcoming sermons. c. The employment of St. Ignatius’ basic six “Rules of Discernment” during this retreat was as follows:

1. The three questions up for discernment were “Who are we as a church?” and “Who is our community and what are its needs?” and “What are the most feasible options for where God might be calling this church in the future?”

2. Through devotion and prayers, we centered ourselves in God’s presence by pausing and being silent at times during the retreat. Breaks also provided quiet time to walk outside in nature for personal reflection and share ideas with each other.

3. Our prayers always asked for God’s guidance in our group decisions.

4. The information gathered about the first two questions generated ideas for options that would be feasible matches for the passions and gifts of the congregation.

5. These ideas were weighed for their advantages and disadvantages and by spiritual consensus, a smaller list of the most feasible ideas was generated.

6. Transition Team members offered this list up to God and agreed to sit prayerfully with it over the next week as we prepared for the congregational retreat the following Sunday.

The next section brings us to the injection of discernment into the congregation, via the Appreciative Inquiry process that was already in progress.

4.6 The Missing Link is Added

As I described earlier, the goal of the Discovery phase was to rationally and spiritually collect information that answered the questions, “Who is our Church?” and “Who is Our Community and what are its needs?” The second phase, the Dream phase was designed to produce ministry options that would combine the church’s strongest gifts and passions in order to address community needs, so that a focus for the future for this church could be discerned by the congregation. The options which were discussed and discerned during the Transition Team
retreat then became “seeds” that germinated into all kinds of ideas from the congregation during the Dream phase retreat. As I wrote earlier, this part of the Appreciative Inquiry process has been the weakest in my past experience. I have found that people know how to pray to God, but very few know anything about listening and discerning what God would have them be and do. Again, the independent variables, the desired influences in this intervention were:

1. Assessing the congregation’s prior knowledge of spiritual discernment, both individually and as a group, using a holding group of randomly-selected people within age ranges and genders to be interviewed.

2. Teaching individual and group level spiritual discernment practices conducted in a sermon series. Afterwards, creative forms of discernment were taught and the artistic results were displayed at the church for the final discernment exercise. Children and youth were involved in the creative exercises.

3. Designing a multiple-day discernment program that provided individual and group level discernment experience and met a specific church decision-making need.

4. Guiding the congregation as a group to surface what God was saying about God’s desires for this church, during a congregational retreat, followed by a week set aside for discernment.

4.7 Populating the Study

Before I started the intervention, I needed to populate a holding group of people that would be studied. Here was the plan for working with this group.

a. Interview a chosen sampling of ten percent of the participating adult and youth parishioners, representative of the different age groups and sexes of actively participating
members in the church. The seven interviewees ranged in age from 14 to 77. Their identities were kept confidential to encourage their openness in sharing. One member was from the Transition Team and another represented the staff of the church. The first set of interviews commenced before my first project-related sermon on October 20th, which was on individual discernment. The final interviews were held about two weeks after the congregational discernment exercise that was completed on November 10th. It was necessary to complete the interviews before everyone’s focus turned to the busy Advent season, which started December 1st.

b. The purpose of the interviews was threefold: initially, to assess the experience of individuals and their receptiveness to discerning God’s will in their personal lives, so that the sermons and retreat could be tailored to match their need for training. The later interviews measured the effectiveness of the retreats in introducing spiritual discernment disciplines that they hopefully would use in their personal spiritual journeys. Finally, the interviews determined if participants had gained a sense of what God was saying to them as a group about the next steps for the church.

4.7.1 Proposed Interview Questions

The methods used for the investigative section of the project included interviews of a representative sampling of adult and youth human subjects by age group in the church. Below were the questions discussed in the interviews:

Interview questions before the retreat:

a. What do you sense as the biggest question (challenge) facing this church?
b. What factors are most important for you, as you think about this question?
c. When you want to gain clarity of God’s desires for you, what spiritual practices do you use?
d. Would you mind sharing a time when you had a major decision to make and a spiritual practice worked well for you?
e. Have you ever practiced spiritual discernment in a group setting? If so, how did it go?

Interview questions after the retreat:

a. Did you observe the church wide Sabbath that was declared for September through November? If so, how? Was the Sabbath helpful to you in any way? Was it helpful for the congregation?
b. Now that some time has passed since the congregational discernment exercises, how do you feel about the conclusion that surfaced?
c. What new energy, insight vision or reality have you found, as a result of our time together?
d. Did anything occur that helped you understand God better through this process?
e. Did the exercises have an impact upon your ongoing relationship with God?
f. Have you used any of the spiritual practices from the exercises since then?

I was not only the architect and the initiator of this intervention, but I expected to be affected by it, because of my joining with the family system at Disciples Christian Church. I studied its results and effects on me, individuals, the church as a whole, and the community. My personal observations and learnings are included in Chapter 5 of this paper.

4.8 Organizational Development Activities

The following organizational-level activities were planned to inject discernment into Phase 2, Dreaming in the Appreciative Inquiry process: 1. Emphasis on continuing the Sabbath during this time. 2. A four-part sermon series teaching the congregation about individual and group-level discernment. 3. A congregational retreat to dream more specifically about the potential options discerned by the Transition Team in their retreat. 4. A creative discernment exercise for the congregation, utilizing their fine arts skills. 5. Declaration of “Discernment Week” where the individual results of discernment were to be displayed on an opportunity map on which people would “vote with their feet.” Now I will describe each of these activities in more detail.
Concerning the emphasis of Sabbath for this overworking congregation, my August, 2013, church-wide newsletter article explained the theology of Sabbath, why it was needed at this church and what it involved. “The purpose of Sabbath has always been to contemplate the spiritual aspects of life and spend time with family,” I wrote. “We Americans are so fixated on keeping busy that we lose track of our God-given purposes in life.” Then I explained that during the next three months, the church would continue worship, celebrate meals and church “family time” together on some Sundays, reflect on the past, present, and learn the focus in the community that we think God wants for this church in its future. I suggested that we not start any new projects, and cut back where we could, both as individuals and as a church, so that we could spend more time being with God and each other. We could still feed the needy, because Jesus’ words in Mark 2:27 say, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humans for the sabbath.” Basically, quoting the subtitle to one of my favorite books by Wayne Muller, Sabbath is about finding “rest, renewal and delight in our busy lives.” I knew there needed to be a solid foundation of Sabbath for this overworking congregation to experience discernment at its fullest.

2. Appendix 7 details the dates, titles of sermons, associated scriptures and themes for the four-part sermon series which I taught and allowed people to develop their individual and group-level discernment skills. Having served as a Christian Education Director for six years, I learned that the sooner one can employ what one has learned, the more ingrained that learning will be. So this approach combined learning with immediate experiences to reinforce what had been learned. Table 6 below summarizes the plan, the teaching aids or exercises utilizing these new-taught skills that were associated with each sermon, and the Appendix where the teaching aids were shown:

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177 No author, Disciples News, (newsletter of Disciples Christian Church of Boardman, Ohio) October 1, 2013.
178 From the title of Muller, Sabbath.: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives.
Table 6: Discernment Teaching Activities  
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Teaching Aid</th>
<th>Appendix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 20, 2013</td>
<td>Teaching sermon on individual discernment</td>
<td>Laminated card 1: “Listening for God When Making a Decision”</td>
<td>Appendix 8: Individual Discernment Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 27, 2013</td>
<td>Teaching sermon on group discernment; congregational retreat with breakout into “Dream Teams”</td>
<td>Laminated card 2: “Guidelines for Group Discernment” ; easels for displaying ideas of each group</td>
<td>Appendix 9: Guidelines for Group Discernment Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 3, 2013</td>
<td>Service of Remembrance; sermon on listening for God’s voice; creative discernment exercise after worship; start of Discernment Week</td>
<td>Opportunity map and materials to create artwork, poem or other artistic expression of “What are the cloud of witnesses calling us to focus on in the future?”</td>
<td>Results will be detailed in Section 5 of this paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 10, 2013</td>
<td>Veteran’s Remembrance; Sermon on pursuing hope for the future and voting on the opportunity map; end with Thanksgiving Dinner</td>
<td>Opportunity map with colored Avery dots for “voting with one’s feet”</td>
<td>Results will be detailed in Section 5 of this paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both laminated cards in Appendices 8 and 9 which I developed for this project use the simple framework of St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* for the ordering of the steps, in
incorporating both the rational and the spiritual in decision-making. These six simple steps were previously described in Chapter 2, “Theological and Biblical Underpinnings.” The Individual Discernment card includes a popular prayer known as “The Merton Prayer,” from Trappist monk, Thomas Merton. It is a prayer of submission to God and it puts one in a state of humility as one is discerning God’s will. I added how to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of options, based on what a person values. For example, faced with the same decision about taking a new job, two people could come to very different decisions. One values his or her career advancement as most important, leading to a decision to move up in the company. The other decision-maker values time with family as being more important and decides not to accept the new position of greater responsibility. In both cards I incorporated the thoughts of Elizabeth Liebert and the Listening Hearts Ministries concerning signs of consolation (signs of God) and desolation (lack of God’s support). The guidelines for group discernment originated from Appendices 1, 5, and 8 of Grounded in God. Next, the Transition Team and I developed plans to maximize congregational attendance at the exercises.

4.9 Excitation and Participation

How does a transitional pastor infuse a spirit of excitement about the future into a fearful church that needs to participate as fully as possible in the process? I promoted the plan, its purpose, and the timetable in sermons, weekly bulletins, and the monthly church newsletter. Transition Team members were instructed to remind people. We also took advantage of a most useful tool for reaching congregants quickly in a computer-based software program called

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179 Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude, (Kentucky: The Abbey of our Lady of Gethsemani), 1956, 81.
180 Liebert, Way of Discernment, 122.
182 Farnham, Hull & McLean, Grounded in God, 57-61, 72-73, 78.
“PhoneTree.” 183 This program can record a short message that goes out to every person’s home or cell phone (who wants to be on the phone tree list) and can be scheduled and sent at any time. This church already used it to notify the congregation of funerals, prayer needs, meeting changes, group notifications and reminders, and other important notices. It generated reports of who received the calls, whether it was answered by machine or by person, and if the person hung up early. The messages that I delivered over the phone tree the three critical weeks we needed strong congregational participation are included in Appendix 10.

So how does communication infuse excitement? First, the Transition Team and I felt that we could not communicate enough about the congregational events, so we planned to promote the events using every medium to which we knew the church members accessed, that we could afford. Second, all of the communiques targeted the peoples’ values about the future of the church. We knew that was one of the greatest concerns of all the members. Third, the people were invited into the process of discerning that future, together as a congregation, most often with a meal included. Fourth, the Transition Team and I kept emphasizing that together we would get clarity on this issue, unlike other approaches that took much longer and left members frustrated and quitting. Fifth, the Transition Team and I were genuinely excited and enthusiastic about the process. Because the team members were highly respected leaders in the church who were empowered throughout the process, I hoped that most church members would grow to trust them and the process. Finally, we cannot forget the role of the Holy Spirit in infusing excitement. Transition Team members and I prayed that the Spirit would come into the hearts of the congregational members. So, over-communication, the genuine excitement of the leadership, and appealing to the Holy Spirit and peoples’ values about the future of the church were the

ingredients infused into this project in order to achieve the best possible participation of the members.

4.10 Practicing What Was Learned

This process was designed so that the people and the church would have the opportunity to practice spiritual discernment immediately after they learned about it from my sermons and the laminated cards on October 20th. Individuals were encouraged to try discernment the next time they faced a decision, particularly a major one. The church was involved in group discernment immediately following my sermon that dealt with it, during the congregational retreat on October 27th. Using the steps recommended in the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry, the congregation was informed about the different possible options discerned by the Transition Team for focusing the ministry of the church. Small groups were designated for each option. Individuals were encouraged to join the small group that excited them the most and brainstorm ideas for developing that ministry. Appendix 11 contains the two-sided handout that each participant received at the start of the retreat. This handout contains the Appreciative Inquiry “dream question,” worded by the Transition Team and me that was the focus of our discernment: “On which path is God calling us?” Each of the groups representing the areas of possible focus discerned by the Transition Team were led by one to two members of the Transition Team into a session that lasted between an hour and a half to two hours. All groups came together once done with their brainstorming, and briefed their ideas to the congregation. The Transition Team met the next Tuesday evening, in order to analyze the results of the retreat and decide how the opportunity map would look. Later that week, Transition Team members designed and posted
the opportunity map in Fellowship Hall. The next section of this paper will describe the results and contain visual evidence, as well.

The next Sunday, November 3rd, I theologically incorporated the church’s All Saints’ Day Tradition (known to them as “Remembrance Sunday”) with the unveiling of the opportunity map, and a creative discernment exercise. My sermon spoke of John 10:1-16 and how the sheep knew the sound of Jesus’ voice. I explained that in our discernment we would listen to the voices of the children’s hopes for the church, the voices of the past, the voices of the congregation in the creative discernment exercise and on the opportunity map, and most importantly, the voice of God in our own personal discernment. We added at the top of a clever and beautiful opportunity map a sign labeled, “Cloud of Witnesses: What would the heavenly voices of the past dream for our future?” so that we could discern, in their loved ones’ honor, the church’s future. After worship we invited the congregation to adjourn to Fellowship Hall for a creative discernment exercise. In the short time that I have served with this congregation, I noticed that many of all ages had artistic talents. I thought that this congregation might enjoy and benefit from trying creative discernment as a spiritual discipline. Various media materials such as poster board, paper, markers, paint, pencils, lined paper, scissors and magazines were out on tables and congregants were invited to create something artistic to reflect a future direction for the church. Their artwork, much of which was collages, was eventually affixed around the opportunity map. “Collage is a particularly accessible medium for those beginning to work with visual expression, because it relies on found images rather than accessing images from within and then giving form to them.” 184 Participants worked alone or in groups, whichever they chose. The children were encouraged to participate, with assistance from the Youth Director or

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their parents. I hoped there would be enough time afterwards for presenting and explaining the artwork to the whole group, but we did not have time.

That Sunday each older youth and adult person present received a handout, explaining the opportunity map, what was being discerned, and the options or approaches to be discerned. See Appendix 12 for the details. Thus began the Week of Discernment, November 3 -10, 2013. Participants were instructed on the handout sheet to use their white, laminated cards to pray and discern about an “intergenerational, sustainable mission over the long-term on which to base other ministries in the future.” Participants began voting that Sunday, some came in during the week, or waited until the next Sunday. Discernment Week ended on November 10th with a celebration of veterans and active duty military during worship (their church tradition), final voting on the opportunity map, and Thanksgiving Dinner. Everyone who had a stake in the future of Disciples Christian Church and who was affiliated with the church was invited into this process, including active members, participating non-members, the staff, inactive members, and children (where feasible).

4.11 Criteria for Evaluating the Outcomes

The outcomes were evaluated based on the achievement of dependent variables listed in the first section of this project paper. The dependent variables (desired outcomes for this project) were again:

1. Teaching individual and group-level spiritual practices of discernment to increase the people’s awareness of God’s presence, activity, and leading in their lives.

2. Fostering a sense of these practices’ helpfulness in deepening their relationship with God.
3. Integrating these practices into people’s spiritual disciplines, both for individual and group-level purposes.

4. Promoting greater clarity of understanding regarding God’s desire for this church in its particular situation, which will later guide this church in future decisions such as developing a focus, ministries, restructuring, and calling a settled pastor.

5. Developing a new-found sense of hope for the future

Again, I considered the attainment of any of the above goals as partial successes and “seeds for the spiritual future” of the individuals and church. A complete success would be attaining all of the above. Achieving the third and fourth goals would have the most influence on the long-term spiritual health of this church.

4.12 Limits of this Project

This doctoral project was limited in its scope because of its focus on the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry, using discernment as a spiritual tool. Again, the purpose of that phase was to dream a vision of the future to which God was calling the organization. The scope of this phase produced results that were usually general in nature. The next phase, the Design phase, which could be developed by the next pastor, would be designing more specific, provocative ideas and action plans for changes that utilized the organization’s values and strengths and its newly-discerned vision from God. How long I remained with this congregation, as well as their excitement and commitment levels, would determine ultimately how far I would guide them into this phase. But for the purposes of this project, I was concentrating on the Dream phase and how the insertion of training on discernment would affect it.
Another limit of this project was the lack of involvement of the homebound members of the church. Because most of them could not physically attend church due to health and mental issues, sadly, we simply were not able to involve them in the process. A few were able to participate but found the process taxing. One Elder expended four hours in helping a homebound person with the Spiritual Giftabilities Inventory, which takes a person whose cognitive abilities have not been impaired normally 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

4.13 The Time-Line

The major events in the timeline for this project were as follows: I arrived at the church July 14, 2013. By late August the Church Board approved the general plan for this project and my interim time, and the Transition Team was formed and started meeting. In September I received the approval of the Human Subjects Review Committee for the interview process for the project. The project proposal was formally approved November 1; however, due to time constraints of the impending holidays, I had already moved forward with elements of the project before that. The pre-intervention interviews were completed by mid-October. Laying the groundwork for this project was completed on October 19, with the Transition Team Retreat learning about discernment and exercising it in choosing favorable options for future ministries for the church. Thus began the intervention period for this project, which went from October through November, 2013.

During that period I used a sermon series and a creative exercise to teach the congregation about individual and group-level discernment. They employed what they learned during a congregational retreat late October to dream about the ideas raised by the Transition Team. The first half of November was spent in discerning on an opportunity map the path which God was
calling this church to follow. The intervention phase of this project ended on November 10. Post-intervention interviews were completed on November 26, which ended the research for this project. My project paper was drafted between December of 2013 and the first of August, 2014. My faculty advisor provided input and I made corrections between August, 2014 and February, 2015. The second reader did the same during March and April, 2015. The project is expected to be approved before May 7, at which time a presentation to the wider community is scheduled.

4.14 Summary

The thesis of this project is that churches that are struggling with identity issues can be fruitfully guided, as individuals and as church, in the use of spiritual discernment practices, in order to increase clarity of God’s presence, activity, and leading for them. The results described in the next section explain how successful this theory was, when tested in a congregational setting.
Chapter 5 Results and Evaluation of Research

In this section the data gathered from the implementation of the research design phase is discussed and evaluated. The intervention of the practice of discernment into this ministry setting is analyzed. The results are summarized textually and presented with illustrations, and graphically using themes and patterns, charts and tables, to display key outcomes from this study. The information provided by suitable qualitative measures is then discussed in assessing what changes occurred and how significant those changes were for the life of the congregation as a whole, specific members, its community, and for me as an intentional interim minister.

5.1 Results of Laying the Groundwork

Since the interventions described in the Research Design and Procedures were inserted within the framework of the Appreciative Inquiry process, it is important to briefly share highlights from laying the foundations for this project. As early as my first phone interview with the Pulpit Search Committee for Disciples Christian Church, I went to extensive means to assess this congregation for its need for direction and whether this project and my skills and passions would be a good fit for that need. Frederick Buechner’s statement, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet,” has been a wonderful guide for me in answering my personal call to specific congregations, as well as helping them answer their calls. I also knew that my passion had long been working with groups that have lost their sense of direction. My skills as an organizational developer were honed both in my secular and religious fields and these skills have overlapped well into my calling as a Transitional Minister. After interviewing with three other congregations, I felt almost

185 Buechner, Wishful Thinking, 15.
immediately called to this one, because they knew they lacked direction from God and openly articulated it. Many congregations that are in-between settled pastors do not know what they need or they already have preconceived notions and agendas for who they think they need as an Intentional Interim pastor. I felt blessed that Disciples Christian expressed how they lacked direction for the future and that most of the leadership knew that would need to come from God.

Throughout my time with this congregation, I made extensive efforts to keep people informed about the plan for moving forward, and sought feedback along the way. Because of the high potential for conflict in this church, I tried to listen to all the voices and to show no partiality to any individuals, groups or families. I worked extensively to keep people constantly informed at meetings, parties, newsletter articles, the Phone Tree, and personal exchanges about the progress of the plan, how they fit into it, and why it was important. These practices helped to develop and sustain trust during the process. My quarterly meetings with the Elders about my performance and that of the congregation in supporting the plan were helpful to all in adjusting and clarifying the plans. Most importantly, making progress with the plan was an imperative. An esteemed colleague, Terry E. Foland\textsuperscript{186}, said, “The best way to build trust is to come through with what you promise.”\textsuperscript{187} The part of the overall interim plan that concerned this project was executed on time and completed by the start of Advent, December 1, 2013. As will be discussed later in this paper, moving forward with the rest of the Interim plan suffered some delays, due mostly to the ongoing nature of discernment. However, framing the progress as a continuing discernment process helped maintain the trust of most of the leadership. As I preached on February 9, 2014, “we are on God’s \textit{kairos} time” (citing the Hebrews’ impatience with God in Exodus 17: 1-7).

\textsuperscript{186} Permission was granted to cite Terry’s quote in this project.
\textsuperscript{187} Terry is one of the founders of the Interim Ministry Network, who spent many years with the Alban Institute and has served at both the local and judicatory levels in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
Working with a committed, spiritually-based Transition Team was also a blessing in this process. They all clearly understood the importance of the “dog wagging the tail,” that is, God’s purpose driving all other decisions. During the Discovery phase they unearthed a wealth of information about the church itself (its “deep gladness” according to Buechner) and the community and “its deep hunger.”

5.1.1 Results of the Discovery Phase

Here are highlights of the results of our research that were foundational for the rational and spiritual pieces of the discernment phase. The “Who Are We?” Team constructed a pin map that appears below in Figure 4. The location of Disciples Christian Church on the map is in the southwest portion, just east of the long and winding green area known as Mill Creek Park. North of the church and east of the northern end of Mill Creek Park is downtown Youngstown.
Figure 4. Pin Map Results.

Disciples Christian Church is typical of many Disciples of Christ congregations, in that their membership lived all around the church, in different school systems and spread into the two
adjacent counties of Hubbard and Columbiana. Having children in so many school districts is partly due to the fact that members came from many different churches around the Youngstown area. Other reasons are that family members remained tied to the church, even when they moved further away. Several family units that were retired or disabled lived south and east of the church, while the rest, with working members, were located all over. Young families with children were all in different school districts, unfortunately. This spread of the membership contributed to the loss of the church in its ability to relate to its community. “What is its community?” was the big question here, when members were so spread out. The good news is that the church was centrally-located within this spread. Rolling out the next two methods, the Spiritual Giftabilities Survey and the Talents, Passions, and Workstyle Sheet in worship on September 15th yielded some shocking reactions, which I had never experienced with any of my other congregations. Mostly older parishioners were offended that the exercises disturbed worship. Some complained that they could not hear the instructions, were distracted by the multiple times that instructions were given, and others clearly had difficulties understanding how to fill out the surveys, even with the assistance of roving Transition Team members. Younger members had no trouble with the surveys and quickly completed them. I sensed that some of the older members felt devastated because they simply did not have the cognitive abilities to fill the surveys out. They were given the option of declining, which many did. This was a terrible way to finish a worship service and it left some people not trusting me, nor the plan that had been proposed. The Transition Team and I later discussed the need to slow down the pace, explain everything more clearly, and avoid changing worship in major ways. I was left to question the use of the Spiritual Giftabilities Tool with churches where members are older than 65 or have cognitive or hearing issues. I wrote more about the delivery of this method later in the paper.
Nevertheless, we did reap useful results from the surveys that were completed. Transition Team members did an excellent job of following up on members who had not completed their surveys or who were not in worship that day. Appendix 13 shows the breakout of individuals’ top three gifts for the entire congregation. Appendix 14 depicts the breakout of the individuals’ top three spiritual gifts by age group. From analyzing these charts and reviewing the outreach ministries of this church, the Transition Team and I concluded during our retreat on October 19, 2013, that Disciples Christian Church was a serving church with great compassion for those in need (the spiritual gift of mercy). They had gifts for encouraging, helping and teaching those in need. And they also had a great variety of other spiritual gifts, especially those involving being creative. The same trends were also reflected across the different age groups; although the younger adults were slightly more gifted in teaching and encouraging. This may have a lot to do with the fact that they were raising children during that phase of their lives.

I have noticed in the past that there are many kinds of missions other than the service-oriented ones to which churches can be called and characterized, based on their array of spiritual gifts: teaching the Word, spirituality, social justice, creating new churches, evangelism to new believers, and ministries of forgiveness. Disciples Christian was clearly a serving church with a passion for living out its calling by helping those in need.

The next congregational exercise to gather information about “Who are We?” was Story Day, held after worship with lunch on October 6, 2013. It was rescheduled two weeks later than planned and renamed from a “congregational timeline exercise” to “Story Day” to allow emotions from the spiritual gifts exercise to subside and regain the trust of many in the congregation in the process. The Transition Team constructed and mounted a timeline on paper.

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188 I am grateful to Jenny Kluchar of Disciples Christian Church for assembling the extensive data for the charts in Appendices 13 and 14.
in Fellowship Hall. Dates and names of the different churches that fed into Disciples Christian were noted on the timeline. I asked questions that facilitated the sharing of stories about these congregations while Transition Team members captured strengths, core values, and adaptive challenges on separate pieces of butcher paper. Fortunately, this exercise went extremely well, with many of the estimated forty participants avidly sharing stories about their former Disciple congregations. Many told stories about the painful split-offs of churches described earlier in the Context Section of this paper. The group, as a whole, came to the realization that they had brought some of the good and bad practices of their congregations with them to Disciples Christian. One woman, in tears, told me she “wished we would stop fighting.”

Strengths (which provide consistent, near perfect performance) could be summarized as: a few people with a dream holding together even when they lost a building; intense support of the Ohio Disciples camp program known as Camp Christian; a history of reaching out and welcoming those in need; up to six generations of Disciples of Christ history among some current members; a history of faith and fellowship while working as extended family; and skilled tradespeople in the church.

Core values that were traits or qualities representing deeply-held driving forces were identified as: believer’s baptism, open communion to anyone, the individual’s ability to interpret scripture himself or herself; “The church is the people” and a second family; the importance of working together as a team; and service and compassion. This list shows how important the Disciples of Christ theology and practices continue to be to this congregation, which is really another strength. The Disciples of Christ theology of welcoming all, in spite of our differences, is demonstrated in its practices of open baptism, open communion, and openness to different interpretations of the Bible. It also told me, as an Intentional Interim pastor, that Disciples
Christian Church enjoyed working in teams, as well as together in large-group meetings. It gave me hope that the intervention planned would excite the people as a whole.

During Story Day we also captured adaptive challenges, which are priorities, beliefs, habits, or loyalties that prevent the church from achieving its potential. One quote, attributed to a descendant whose name was not recorded, said it all: “We were born in a fight - if we’re not careful, we’ll die in a fight.” Transition Team members also captured other challenges, such as the strong wills of people bickering over small issues; mavericks who broke away because they were more liberal and more inclusive about membership; and a need to focus, instead of trying to do everything that these feeder congregations brought into this church. I noted to them the history of conflict in the Youngstown area, due to the influx of immigrants and union issues, and libertarianism stemming from extreme individualism, that conflicts were not just church issues. Looking back, Story Day was a crucial turning point for this church, keeping it engaged in the Discovery process; more importantly, the congregation, as a whole, learned how its contentious history had carried forward to the present.

One of my greatest joys in ministry is studying how congregations are and work, and tailoring processes to help them understand themselves better as church families. It was very gratifying to learn right along with the members of Disciples Christian Church about their conflicted history that was still influencing them, about their resilience in the face of so many split-offs, about the values they placed on the grace of Christ and educating people of all ages about him, and their love of their denomination’s theology and practices. It was humbling for me that God would use my talents to enable church members in discovering and rediscovering what many of them lost: an understanding of their church’s DNA, as well as how their community
had changed. That is why the Discovery Phase of Appreciative Inquiry must be done before a congregation goes into the Dream Phase and discerns its future call.

5.1.2 Results of the Transition Team Retreat

The Transition Team retreat at the Old Log Cabin in Mill Creek State Park on October 19, 2013 went well, even though two of our Transition Team members could not attend. Concerning “Who are We?” the team concluded that Disciples Christian was a service-oriented church. We discovered that 58 out of 93 responses (a 62% response rate) on the spiritual and talents surveys were high enough to make decisions about trends in the church. The top three spiritual gifts were serving, mercy, and encouragement. Congregants were most interested in children and families, the elderly, those hospitalized, the hungry, and to a lesser extent, veterans and soldiers and animals. Concerning additional adaptive challenges, the Transition Team noted that many people were “stuck in the past, and afraid of change, losing control, closing the church, and separation.” Much of the learnings we reviewed about “Who is our Community and what are their needs?” already appears in the contextual section of this paper. The Transition Team concluded that Boardman Township was getting more culturally diverse, drug addiction was a major issue with both parents and their children, and that neglect and abuse were related issues. Youngstown had basically shifted into Boardman, what they called “the inner city moving to the suburbs.” People of color had moved in, and the whites had been moving out to other suburbs. When I spoke with the Boardman Township Police Chief during a community forum we hosted on March 23, 2014, he named this phenomenon as “the collapse of Youngstown into the suburb of Boardman.” Other community needs identified by the Transition Team included abused and neglected children, and parents “falling through the cracks” between
agencies and organizations that could assist them. There were also trends of weak family units and transient families due to the newly arriving shale oil industry.

Then I asked the Transition Team members for future ideas “that excited them” about how this church could serve Boardman. Those ideas brainstormed appear in Appendix 15. The process changed the tone of the retreat from mellow to exciting! The final step of the retreat was to condense all those ideas down to the most favorable options that the Team thought the congregation would want to discuss in the upcoming congregational retreat, scheduled for October 27, 2013. The Team, with my guidance, discerned the following five options as: 1) Families in crisis 2) Families in need 3) Drama Ministry 4) Elderly / Homebound / Hospitalized and 5) Any other ideas. A long-time, highly respected leader in the church and member of the Transition Team, put together a short PowerPoint presentation, summarizing the entire process, the results and the recommendations of the Transition Team. Transition Team members took turns briefing this presentation to the congregation after worship on October 27th, before the congregational retreat. The Team was also prepared to brief it again the following Sunday, for members who missed it the first time; however, the second viewing was not needed.

To summarize, at this point the extensive research about the church and its community had been gathered and analyzed. Favorable options for focusing the future, options that the Transition Team felt believed would excite the congregation’s passions and use their strengths, were developed. The rational piece of decision-making was in place, along with indications of the spiritual gifts and passions of the congregation. The Discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry was winding down, although elements of it continued into the next year. It was time to engage the congregation in the Dream phase of Appreciative Inquiry, by coupling these findings with discerning God’s will.
5.2 Results of the Intervention of Discernment

To reiterate, the intervention in this project, as described in the Research and Design section of this paper, involved a five-step process:

1. Assessing the congregation’s prior knowledge of discernment using a randomly-selected (within age ranges and gender) holding group,
2. Teaching the congregation about discernment using a sermon series over four Sundays,
3. Designing a discernment experience that met a specific church decision-making need,
4. Guiding the church to surface what God might be saying about the decision facing this church, and
5. Assessing the congregation’s post knowledge of discernment, using the same holding group.

Here is a brief description of how each of the five steps fared. I met with the individuals in the holding group on October 16 and 17, 2013, and found them all to be excited about participating in this research project. After the discernment was done I again met with them individually or over the phone on November 25 and 26. The results of their interviews appear later in this section. The teaching sermons on October 20 and 27 seemed to be accepted, although I heard comments afterward from some that they didn’t like my using PowerPoint slides and they didn’t like the teaching format. Some wanted me to go back to preaching the way I normally did, adding more stories, which I did on November 3 and 10. It was a theological challenge, weaving this entire intervention into the traditions celebrated during this season at the church, such as the end of the stewardship campaign, the Service of Remembering those who died the past year, Veteran’s Sunday, and finally Thanksgiving. But it did work out.
Incidentally, for Veteran’s Sunday during the sermon, I shared the true story of a paraplegic British major who climbed mountains, to show the limitless potential of those who have faith in God. We ministers must be theologically flexible in dealing with holy days and special days in our congregations, especially when injecting a project of this importance into their routine traditions. Instead of changing worship, the Transition Team and I learned to schedule exercises immediately after worship with a meal. I strongly believed this congregation needed help immediately, and that was another reason why we pushed forward in such a short timeframe. As indicated from the interviews of the holding group and the Transition Team members, the congregational retreat on October 27 was a resounding success that brought much excitement into the church and a plethora of ideas for the future from the “Dream Teams.” Appendix 16 summarizes Ideas Brainstormed by the Congregational Teams. Many of these ideas were also raised during the Transition Team retreat and then duplicated in some of the congregational teams. The Transition Team and I concluded, according to the discernment guidelines, that the redundancy was an indicator of a possible common direction for the future. As Table 4 showed, up to this point the congregation had been engaged in learning about discernment and applying it in small groups with presentations made depicting the results of spiritual consensus. With the use of an opportunity map, the focus would change to individual discernment. The results of that discernment would be visual, in the form of a dot placed by each individual on the opportunity map.

Tuesday, October 29, 2013, the Transition Team and I met with the difficult challenge of determining what the main ideas would be for the opportunity map. My experience of using Appreciative Inquiry in churches for ten years has shown that this is best done by the Transition Team, instead of the whole congregation. There must be plenty of time for discernment about
what goes on that opportunity map. Appendix 11 relates that we condensed the ideas down to two approaches for discernment: serving a meal or adopting individuals, families, or institutions. Serving a meal involved opening the doors and inviting people in; whereas adoption involved developing a much deeper relationship with people, starting on their turf. Both during the congregational retreat and the Transition Team meeting two days later, the word “adoption” was mentioned repeatedly. So I suggested it as the second approach. I was looking to see how committed this church was to developing relationships with the needy in our community by going to people and becoming immersed in their lives, instead of merely opening the doors and feeding them a meal. In other words, was God encouraging them to increase their level of stewardship, not simply their money, but their time, talents, and relationships, according to the model developed in Chapter 3?

A member of the Transition Team with a fine arts background and a seminary diploma in Pastoral Studies, designed and produced the beautiful opportunity map pictured below in Figure 5 that was used in this phase of the project for “voting with their feet.”
Figure 5. The Opportunity Map

Of the five churches where I have used Appreciative Inquiry, the process of developing this particular opportunity map was the most challenging. Originally I was planning on having the people vote on one sub-area (one white strip on the brown stepping stones above, representing a specific program, which is usually what I do at this stage) within either the meals or the adoption option. However, this time there was much overlap of programs between the two broad approaches to which the people felt called: Meals - open the doors and invite them in – or Adoption - come to them where they are. The individual programs on the white stones above
could be future off-shoots of either approach. We needed to discern using St. Ignatius’ “Rules of Discernment,” by examining those two options, choosing one that felt most favorable, and offering it up to God in silence. That response from discernment fed back into the Appreciative Inquiry process of placing one’s vote on an opportunity map. The Transition Team and I also wanted to see if there were any generational trends, by having each person with a stake in the future of the church (staff, members, other participants) sign out a colored Avery dot according to his or her age, as it fell in the age ranges below. Table 7 shows the breakdown of voting results by age group (represented by a color of dot) and by the option chosen, all as a percentage of the total vote:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range in years</th>
<th>Color of Dot</th>
<th>Meals Votes</th>
<th>Meals Percent</th>
<th>Adoption Votes</th>
<th>Adoption Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 - 20</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 45</td>
<td>blue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13%</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 - 70</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
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<td>11%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Voting Results by Age Ranges

Sixty-four people voted, which was an excellent response from those 69 actively supporting this congregation! Our homebound and those in nursing facilities were invited to vote, but none chose to participate. Sixty-nine percent of those voting voted in favor of the Adoption Option while the remaining 31 percent chose the Meals Option. And this trend was strong across the different age groups as well, demonstrating that the Adoption Option could be an
intergenerational ministry that could strengthen relationships within the church, while serving the community.

The creative discernment exercise on November 3 was well-supported, even though we did not offer a lunch in conjunction with it. Some enthusiastic supporters remained in the church, foregoing lunch to work on their collages and artwork, until two o’clock in the afternoon! I saw families, spouses, and friends choosing to work together on their projects. Clearly, this exercise highlighted the creativity and artistic skills that were prevalent throughout this congregation, as well as their excitement about the ideas discerned. Figure 6 shows how the artwork and poetry were affixed around the opportunity map during the discernment process. Because we were remembering loved ones who passed away in the past year in an emotional worship service that Sunday, the question for discernment became “Cloud of Witnesses: What would the heavenly voices of the past dream for our future?”
Finally, the children (many of whom participated excitedly in the above exercise) under the supervision of the Youth Director had also made squares earlier for a quilt hanging, as a sign of their hopes for the church. See Figure 7 below. The quilt was also on display during Discernment Week.
The Music Director and I had also planned to use music as a creative discernment tool during November 10th; however, there was already too much happening at that time to do a decent job of developing that as a spiritual discipline. I was extremely pleased, however, with the spiritual excitement generated by the congregational retreat, the opportunity map and the creative discernment artwork. Next, the focus of my research turns to the results gathered from interviews with the holding group that had also participated in these exercises.

5.3 Results from the Holding Group

First, Table 8 shows some key characteristics of members of the holding group interviewed, all of whom were Caucasian (as was the entire congregation at that time). In randomly selecting this group, I sought people who mirrored the different age groups by their
numerical breakdown in the church and also the distribution by gender (which was close to 50% women and 50% men). Of course, participants needed to be available for all exercises (which eliminated some candidates immediately):

Table 8. Demographics of the Holding Group Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Years in the church</th>
<th>Married?</th>
<th>Children in this church now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subjective data collected from the pre- and post-retreat interviews appears by question discussed in the charts below. I have also broken down the responses by three age groups: Teen (one respondent), Middle Age (age 35 through 42, two respondents) and Older Age (age 61 and above, four respondents). In the post-retreat interviews I added one section of questions that were not covered in the pre-interviews. These questions related to the impact of the church-wide Sabbath that was declared from September 8 through November 10. Again, these results were analyzed below to determine what criteria were or were not met that related to the five desired outcomes listed under the Thesis statement earlier in this paper. But first, Tables 9 through 19
reflect the qualitative data gathered from both sets of interviews. These tables also reflect that some interviewees gave multiple replies to the questions.

5.3.1 Results from Pre-Retreat Interviews

Table 9. Biggest Challenge Facing this Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Teen Responses</th>
<th>Mid-Age Responses</th>
<th>Older Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inability to work together in one direction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handful of people in charge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to try new ideas suggested</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of closing / failing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people not being pulled in.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for tempered leadership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church must adapt to needs outside of church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God needed in decision-making</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church not growing in membership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 reflects that the major issues facing this church were summarized as the lack of a unified direction from God; an inability to relate to the needs of those who are outside of the church (especially young people); a lack of growth in numbers; fears of change, failing or closing; and concerns about the effectiveness of current lay leadership (not clerical) One
respondent, a teen was interested in adaptation to needs outside of the church. Two others saw an inability to try new ideas and pull young people in. In light of the vote to “adopt” people, the most significant answers here related to fighting and fear of closing. So this interview question revealed that most of their focus before the discernment exercises was inward and they realized they lacked a unified direction.

Table 10. Factors Valued Concerning the Biggest Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Valued</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Teen Responses</th>
<th>Mid-Age Responses</th>
<th>Older Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need to work together</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People afraid to change</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for one direction for the church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to minister to young people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People need to use their gifts and get involved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small churches can have a large influence.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach children that God is with them when I cannot be there.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who do not judge and who care about each other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who together put God’s will before their own</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for good pastoral leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money is always the problem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 added the following additional issues to those raised in Table 9: members needed to get more involved and treat each other better, the church needed strong pastoral leadership, and the financial situation was of concern. Looking at trends in answers from these two charts by age group, I noticed that only one middle-aged respondent felt the true issue was a lack of direction from God. Another middle-aged respondent was the only one who was positive about possibilities for a vibrant future for a small church. The teen and the middle-aged respondents were mostly concerned about adapting to and reaching out to the community and bringing in young people. The older segment was mostly concerned with the conflictual issues currently plaguing the church. There was some overlap expressed across all age groups in the need for unity of direction. Again, this distribution of answers showed an internal focus, which is common for lost and struggling congregations.

Table 11. Current Discernment Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Responses</th>
<th>Mid-Age Responses</th>
<th>Older Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting about God’s presence and activity in their lives</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for a sign</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God speaks through other people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read devotions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned language of “good versus evil spirits”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 shows that all of those interviewed engaged in some kind of prayer and reflection about God’s activity in their lives. Many seemed adept at looking for signs of God and the older people benefited from listening for God’s leading through other people. I was surprised to learn that only one respondent read devotions regularly. I was surprised that no one mentioned the “good” Holy Spirit leading them, as opposed to evil spirits, which is something Ignatius recognized in his discernment practices. Nevertheless, I am refining that distinction in favor of studying this group for their attention to the Holy Spirit. My faculty advisor, Lisa Dahill noted that contemporary Jesuits tend to speak of the language of evil spirits as “powerful shadowy psychological forces that threaten our life with God and others.” People today may be “using more contemporary psychological language to do so.” Lisa Withrow also related, “Evil spirits points to a particular worldview…that tends to be found in non-denominational or Pentecostal traditions.” What is relevant to this project is the presence or absence of attention to the Holy Spirit in one’s prayer life and decision-making. This set of questions revealed that all of those interviewed had a prayer life; however, some had limited ways of listening for God’s will.

Table 12. Group Discernment Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Responses</th>
<th>Mid-Age Responses</th>
<th>Older Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulpit Search Team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judicatory Program or Retreat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 shows that the interviewees had limited exposure to group discernment practices. In fact, 3 of the 7 professed to no group-level experience at all. The answers to the individual and group questions about discernment experience affirmed my suspicions that, though there was some experience with discernment, there was a real need for training at both the individual and group levels, and for all ages.

5.3.2 Results from Post-Retreat Interviews

Table 13. How Respondents Celebrated the Church-Wide Sabbath

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Number celebrating</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut back on activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent more time in silence and in prayer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent less time with other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out in nature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 reflects that six of the seven interviewed did try to slow down their busy lives to spend more time in silence or other forms of presence with God. Three spent less time keeping busy and being around other people, while five indicated spending more quiet time by themselves, being present to the Spirit where they were. Having that quiet time to listen for God’s voice is paramount to discernment.

Table 14. Did the Sabbath Help Them Personally?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Number celebrating</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time being present to the moment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did nothing new</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in nature clears your head, you cannot doubt God with all the beauty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I appreciate my blessings more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been praying more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt closer to the Lord</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Yes, Sabbath Helped Them Personally</td>
<td>Teen Response</td>
<td>Mid-Age Response</td>
<td>Older Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took time to breathe and look at things for what they were</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall I did a lot less than I normally do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t get the break I expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded my understanding of scripture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy to take advantage of it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So did the Sabbath help them personally? Table 14 reflects that where they did cut back, slow down, and reflect more, they reaped benefits. Three felt closer to God, one had more time to reflect on life, and one increased in understanding of scripture. As expected, the one person who did not take advantage of the Sabbath did not report any benefits. So my conclusion from this group is that taking Sabbath offered them the benefits of appreciating their blessings, drawing closer to God, being more enlightened by scripture, and offered more time to reflect on life.
Table 15. How Sabbath Impacted the Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was observed by some.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t see anyone observing it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People talked about Sabbath more.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t see anyone talking about it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are more open to trying new things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church is more unified and working toward a direction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some events were not held</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People kept asking me to do things and I said “no.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased awareness of personal time for prayer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More people were involved.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 shows that the recommended Sabbath was not uniformly celebrated at the church level, regardless of the age level of the respondents. Some interviewees observed that “business was as usual.” Overall people talked about it more. One event that was held in the past (“Trunk or Treat” for Halloween) was not held, and no new activities were added to this overly busy church’s docket during the conduct of this project. However, the church still supported the annual stewardship campaign, collecting food for the hungry, volunteered at the Rescue Mission, and celebrated the All Saints’ remembrance and Veterans Day traditions. So I conclude that the rollout of celebrating a congregational Sabbath needed much more planning and better execution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some tried, some kept pushing projects, and some cut back</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16. Feelings after the Discernment Exercises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surprised at the outcome but sees the benefits of the adoption option</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glad because we always collect stuff for the needy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprised at the level of participation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could help us join other helping organizations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome is a place where a “small congregation can make a big contribution.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to change lives for families</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can easily expand on it in the future</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People knew they were being led</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Number of Responses</td>
<td>Teen Response</td>
<td>Mid-Age Response</td>
<td>Older Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t see the difference between the two options. Saw them as short-term vs long-term</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People “put their hearts into it and were Godly-focused”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone chose to do something different from the usual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvelous exercises and “everything is special on that opportunity map”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw excitement and lot of conversation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people excited because gives them an opportunity to do things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not consistent with how people have wanted to participate here (will be touched on later in this analysis)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feelings | Number of Responses | Teen Response | Mid-Age Response | Older Response
---|---|---|---|---
No response | 0 |  |  | 

In spite of the many activities during this timeframe, Table 16 showed that all seven had very positive feelings resulting from the training and the group discernment exercise. People were pleasantly surprised at the level of participation, spiritual excitement, and that a unified direction emerged. They saw people working together, thinking “outside of the box,” and interested in the needs of others in the community. This was a good sign, in light of the majority vote to adopt people. Learning discernment had moved the focus from internal to external.

Table 17. New Insights Encountered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insight</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned to keep an open mind, be patient, and not be judgmental</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am an encourager now.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to spend more time reflecting than keeping busy.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

135
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insight</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The needs of the community were an eye-opener</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God can speak to me through people, not always directly from God</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discernment must be a daily practice, not just for big things.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to streamline the church structure and make it more fluid.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need more fellowship time for people to mingle.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurgence of involving the youth is needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No new insights recorded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 shows that all those interviewed gained new insights from this process. They learned to be more open to new ideas, not to be so judgmental, that they had spiritual gifts for helping build up their community, that there were different ways to discern God, and that the process
invigorated the whole church, including youth. Again, there was more of an external focus, a unified direction emerged, and a realization of the spiritual gifts of individuals and the church as a whole.

Table 18. Individual Spiritual Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I pray more to God and think about God more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved how I listen to God</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel closer to God</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God guides me in daily aspects of my life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened me up to new ways of thinking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my relationship with God to lead me and this congregation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned that God is with our congregation and guiding us toward a direction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Number of Responses</td>
<td>Teen Response</td>
<td>Mid-Age Response</td>
<td>Older Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can think outside the box</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We look small but we are not failing. “Stop looking at not filling the pews means we are failing.”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sermons came from St. Ignatius’ learnings centuries ago</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular spiritual benefits noted</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 reflects that all the respondents reported stronger relationships with God from learning discernment and that the church’s relationship with God also improved. God opened them up to seeing new insights. Finally, one thoughtful person recognized and was grateful that the process came from a wise spiritual leader who developed this approach centuries ago (St. Ignatius) and that his approach still works today.
Table 19. Used Discernment Since The Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Teen Response</th>
<th>Mid-Age Response</th>
<th>Older Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, but I plan to use it</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About two weeks passed between the time the exercise concluded and the holding group was interviewed a second time. Table 19 reflects that five of the seven had already used the individual discernment techniques taught and two more were planning to use them. One person related a deeply-personal experience, where discernment guided the accomplishment of a dangerous and courageous task. God’s providence and care in that outcome alone made this project worth all the effort.

5.3.3 Themes and Patterns

Based on the first set of interviews, the holding group members identified the same major challenges that I noticed in my assessment of the congregation. These issues reinforced my resolve to focus the church on discerning God’s direction, because that focus would reap the most benefits for the members and the church overall, which needed an answer to their vision crisis. Another reason is that this focus on discernment would help them collectively see their new identity, so they could make a better decision in calling their next pastor to lead them forward in that direction of serving their community. They identified many issues that were symptoms of their vision crisis, their state of being lost, such as fear of change and failing, problems working together, lack of outreach into the community particularly to new and young
people, and money issues. Their personal discernment practices mostly involved prayer, reflection, and listening for God in other people, and thus could be expanded by learning St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*.

I was not surprised about their previous experiences with group discernment. In fact, I expected them to be more pessimistic. Churches I have pastored as an Intentional Interim have complained to me that they were upset with many consultants and judicatory staff for the following reasons:

1. External advisors gave the churches data, such as demographic reports they could not understand and put them through training programs, but did not help them analyze the data nor figure out the next steps that would lead them to clarity in a mission or vision.
2. Church people spent a year in prayer groups and did not get any clear direction from it. In other words, the process took too long and did not reap any results.
3. They hated being surveyed repeatedly.
4. “Been there, done that” was a constant response to outside visitors trying to help them, myself included, at times.

My challenge was convincing them that, though my approach was often seeking the same outcome as their external advisors, I would “hold their hands” as we would collect the data, go into discernment, and seek that clarity of direction from God. *Our time together would reap results!* And because, within the framework of Appreciative Inquiry, we were incorporating rational tools for organizational development and spiritual decision-seeking tools like St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, those results might come quicker and be more obvious than other methods. St. Ignatius’ approach mirrors a balance of the rational and spiritual parts of decision-making and, therefore, makes it such a good addition to the Appreciative Inquiry process. To my
knowledge, I have not yet seen nor read of other ministers intentionally injecting St. Ignatius’ spiritual practice for discernment for decision-making into the Appreciative Inquiry process. In fact, I have observed in my state and within the Interim Ministry Network that Appreciative Inquiry is not currently used much among interims, either. So using Appreciative Inquiry and injecting it with this particular kind of discernment is unique.

5. Another concern about their previous experiences with group discernment advice from external experts is that some processes yielded a limited number of “choices” for the future, and choices discerned by the experts. *Instead, context-based community discernment opens individuals and congregations up to the unlimited possibilities and potential of God. The congregation itself must discern this, not just a consultant nor the pastor.* That is why it was the Transition Team, with my guidance, who developed the two primary approaches from the huge list of ideas and possibilities the congregation had discerned and brainstormed. In this process I introduced this congregation to practices to help them understand themselves, individually and as church, and their community better and I spiritually guided them to explore God’s many possibilities for their future.

Concerning the celebration of Sabbath, I was trying to change the mentality of overly busy people in too short of a time. It is difficult to stop a run-a-way freight train on a dime. Those who did try to cut back, slow down, and reflect more did benefit from it, in their relationships with God, others, and in how they viewed themselves. Overall more time was needed for teaching them spiritual disciplines to give them more time to “be still and know that I am God.”  

Perhaps rolling out the Sabbath during a more appropriate time of year would have helped. But as Lisa Withrow noted, “Sabbath makes most impact when people are at their busiest – which also makes it the hardest of disciplines.” Unless a congregation was in immediate

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189 from Psalm 46: 10.
danger of closing, a settled pastor could have more time to develop this kind of training before launching into discernment. For Intentional Interims with their limited time with congregations, teaching about Sabbath and other spiritual disciplines should be incorporated into sermons as early as possible, even if the church is in the middle of a crisis like a hurricane.

Clearly everyone interviewed was surprised and pleased with the outcome of the discernment exercises. One didn’t participate in Sabbath, but all those interviewed participated in the discernment exercises and enjoyed them. They were pleased with the level of participation and how excited people became when they shared their ideas with each other. They experienced much more openness to the community and to new ideas because we were in discernment together with God. They realized that a small congregation could have an impact on families in need and that they had the gifts for doing so. One interviewee commented that the outcome of an adoption program was not consistent with the way this church had functioned in the past. Members preferred to give items instead of developing relationships. Months later that person approached me, indicating a complete change of mind on that issue, that there was a new openness to reaching outside of the church.

The responses indicated spiritual benefits for the individuals as well as the church. Those interviewed all grew in their relationships with God and in knowing how to listen for God’s beckoning. And they experienced the excitement of the church as a whole, when it came together to discern a direction for the future. I was pleased that five out of seven had already used some of the discernment techniques taught in the first two weeks after the exercises.

5.4 Key Outcomes
Again, the overarching question for this project was: How does a Transitional Minister guide a congregation that has lost its sense of purpose to discern what God is calling it to be and do, in a manner that would be helpful to individuals in their daily lives, as well as to other struggling congregations? The Thesis was: Churches that are struggling with identity issues can be fruitfully guided, as individuals and as church, in the use of spiritual discernment practices, in order to increase clarity of God’s presence, activity, and leading for them. The desired outcomes for this project were:

1. Teaching individual and group-level spiritual practices of discernment to increase the people’s awareness of God’s presence, activity, and leading in their lives.
2. Fostering a sense of these practices’ helpfulness in deepening their relationship with God.
3. Integrating these practices into people’s spiritual disciplines, both for individual and group-level purposes.
4. Promoting greater clarity of understanding regarding God’s desire for this church in its particular situation, which will later guide this church in future decisions such as developing a focus, ministries, restructuring, and calling a settled pastor.
5. Developing a new-found sense of hope for the future

Based on the qualitative data from the interviews and my observations of these five areas both during and immediately after the project was conducted, Outcomes 1, 2, and 5 were clearly achieved. Outcome 3 of integrating discernment into people’s spiritual disciplines had begun, but it was questionable how far it progressed with the rest of the congregation. Outcome 4 was not reached immediately with this phase of discernment, but progress had been continually happening since then, as will be discussed shortly in this paper. I noticed that leaders in the
Elders and Board regularly used the word “discern” in their dialogues and prayers, which excited me. I saw them use the discernment cards in a Board meeting. The Board also suspended the use of Robert’s Rules of Order and opted to look at other means of decision-making. I emphasized that discernment was one of those. I pulled out the Discernment Cards, Appendices 8 and 9 and used them during Transition Team meetings, as we were praying, exploring and making decisions. Clearly, teaching them how to discern, both as individuals and in groups and allowing them to experience the benefits of it indeed had an impact on this congregation. As for Outcome 4, the congregation emerged from the initial discernment process with a general direction for the future, that of adopting people in need. Next, I will describe the exciting developments after the project was concluded, emanating from that initial stage of discernment.

5.5 Evaluation of the Results: the Discernment Continues...

In this section I will describe what surprising changes occurred in the year and a half since Disciples Christian Church learned and exercised discernment, and the significance of these changes. I will detail my observations of how individuals have been affected by this entire process, and how it has impacted the congregation, the community, and me as a Transitional Minister.

5.5.1 How Individuals Have Been Affected

Two months following the November discernment exercise, three family units containing key church leaders stopped participating in the church. Three members of the Transition Team were from those families and those members resigned from the Team as well. I learned through personal contact and conversations with others that they had major differences with the direction
the church was going. It was deeply saddening for many of us in the church to see these long-serving, dedicated folks disconnect. Unfortunately, that may well be one of the prices paid when not everyone is in agreement with the approach to visioning, nor the direction discerned.

What was most remarkable was observing how this church’s members began practicing adoption by reaching out to its needier members. I saw one-after-another instance of members taking extraordinary measures to help other members in need, who they previously did not know, nor associate with. These adoptions were internal, not external. For example, one woman who lost her job was “adopted” by another of similar age, who drove the unemployed woman to interviews and eventually encouraged her back to work. Members figuratively fell over themselves, helping one family to move from an apartment into a house, because one member’s disabled mother was coming to live with that family. A lawn mower and multiple used household appliances materialized, as well as bedframes and mattresses. One member even helped another toothless person to get poorly-fitting dentures refitted. I often recognized this wonderful behavior publicly, while not mentioning names. *Disciples Christian Church discovered that it does have a spirit of adoption and its people were practicing it on their own members!* One of the questions in my mind was: Had this process contributed toward developing a discerning lifestyle in the parishioners? Elizabeth Liebert wrote that discernment is a habit of faith where we choose to notice God at work, to believe in God’s larger plan and grasp it at the moment. We align ourselves with God’s preferred future with such consistency that it becomes habitual.\(^\text{190}\) Yes, a growing spirit of adoption is what I had been witnessing with Disciples Christian since the initial exercise of November 10\(^{th}\), 2013 and it was inspiring, hope-filled, and exhilarating, even if it was focused internally at first. I wondered, “Were they capable of extending this spirit out into the community?”

5.5.2 *How the Congregation was Relating with the Community*

During a treacherous winter, the Transition Team and I discerned that it was time to move forward again with our discerning, as far as an adoption program was concerned. Specifically, who was God calling us to adopt and how best to approach this need? On March 23, 2014, we hosted a community forum called “Voices of the Valley” that helped us listen for answers to those questions. I have used this practice for years at other churches. Eric Law names it appropriately as a “truth-telling event.”\(^{191}\) I have found it be an excellent way to develop relationships with community entities, either when a general understanding or a particular issue is being explored. The following five panel members interacted well with the crowd and the media that arrived that afternoon. We were pleasantly surprised when a television station also came, uninvited, and interviewed panel members, congregational members and myself.

Panel members included:

- Mahoning County Common Pleas Judge
- Executive Director of Hands On Volunteer Network
- Social Worker/Drug Prevention for the Boardman Schools
- Police Chief, Boardman Township Police Department
- Program Director, Doris Burdman Home, Compass Community & Family Services (mental health services)

The following questions were posed to the panel by a member of the Transition Team\(^ {192} \):

1. What social, economic, and spiritual trends do you currently see in Boardman and the Mahoning Valley?

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\(^{191}\) Law, *Holy Currencies*, 44-59.

\(^{192}\) I empowered members of the Transition Team to lead activities like this as much as possible, because they were the ones who needed to develop relationships with their community, not me as a temporary pastor.
2. What do you think Boardman and Mahoning County will look like in ten (10) to twenty (20) years?

3. Is there any segment of the population that needs to be adopted more than any other? Who else is serving this segment in need and how? How best can we refer people to these helping agencies? What about people who can’t afford the treatment or care they need?

4. What services or ministries could Disciples Christian Church offer to help with the needs and challenges for the present and future?

Detailed suggestions from the panel members are included in Appendix 17. The panelists affirmed that the church was located in a helpful geographical area for serving the many needs of Boardman and that the church would make a great community center for hosting classes and support programs for broken families. The Boardman School District was a good potential partner for finding and helping those needy families.

5.5.3 More Specific Discernment Was Needed

The Transition Team went into discernment again and felt God calling this church to specifically adopt needy families. It is important to interject the role of the Church Board, in this whole discernment process, too. While I, assisted by the Transition Team, led this discernment process, the Board approved the plans for going forward. Board members were informed at their meetings about the progress, asked questions, and provided valuable feedback along the way. Board members supported all the activities with their enthusiastic involvement, which I am confident, helped to unify this church during the process. Half of the Transition Team members were also members of the Church Board, two of whom served as the Board President during and
after the project. This project was developed as a congregational process, with feedback from and endorsement by the Church Board, and it was guided by my leadership and that of the respected Transition Team. Finally, it was a good example of organizational development in a church setting.

Once the church discerned its focus on family adoption, we needed some ideas on how to accomplish that work. On Sunday, April 6, 2014 Cindy Farnham (a program leader with whom I served in another church) came to worship to explain the family adoption program she conceived in Medina, Ohio called “Help a Family...Make a Friend.” Basically, churches in Medina provided teams of four to six families who adopted each a needy family referred to their ministers. Captains of each team interfaced with the needy families and team members provided items for holidays, birthdays, and other occasions like the startup of school. One team encouraged a mother to earn her GED and another team split firewood for the winter. Most of all, the teams provided encouragement for their families to get back on their feet and sustain themselves. This idea set Disciples Christian Church on fire! An organizational meeting was held on May 4, 2014, which resulted in twenty family units committing to this new focus. One of the members on the Transition Team prayerfully discerned a call to lead this new ministry and the social worker at the Boardman School District enthusiastically came on board with the idea. Incidentally, the corporation of the leader of this ministry donated money to this ministry after I departed. The plan was for guidance counselors at the area schools to refer needy families to the church. Guidelines were written for volunteers and the ministry was named by the Transition Team as “Igniting Hope: Family to Family.” See Appendix 18 for the original volunteer guidelines developed. So the excitement of the congregation had already propelled the idea of family adoption from the Dream Phase into the Design and Destiny Phases of Appreciative

193 Permission was granted on March 23, 2015 to use her name in this project.
Inquiry! The church planned to kick off the program with the Boardman Schools in August of 2014. Sadly, I was forced to resign in September 2014 due to health concerns and another Intentional Interim Minister was available to quickly replace me. But the fruits of the discernment process continued on. I was pleased to learn that the church adopted several families over the Christmas season. Below is an excerpt of a touching letter the church received in gratitude for the hope they spread at Christmas in 2014:

To the Angels” of Disciples Christian Church,
There are those who talk and do nothing…then there are those who get the job done…your church members fall into the latter. How do I thank you for your generosity…the time you took to shop and wrap? Turn it into a learning time for the children…rewards from giving…pay it forward…inherent good in mankind…Christmas is about love.
A Very Big Thank You! Respectfully, Boardman High School

5.5.4 More Signs of Transformational Change

There were more fruits from the discernment process. On July 20, 2014, the Transition Team and I invited the congregation after worship to develop a simple, relevant and achievable guiding mission statement for this church. I have found that most groups like to brainstorm in small groups and share with the larger group. They see results faster and take pride that their ideas are being considered as part of the group effort. At this particular gathering we harvested key words, phrases, and possible mission statements that reflected who this church was under its new identity and how the members were anxious to reach out further into its community. Using their words, the Transition Team and I developed three options for mission statements and the congregation voted, using the Avery dot system again, to adopt this one: “Inspiring hope by serving people with the love and grace of Jesus Christ.”

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194 From the January, 2015 newsletter of Disciples Christian Church.
One option that repeatedly had been raised in conversations about a future vision of Disciples Christian Church was introduced to the congregants at that mission statement gathering. Panelists from the community forum back in March suggested that the church become a hub or community center for a variety of services and agencies, which could partner with the church in serving the needs of that particular area. See Appendix 19 for a rough diagram for this extraordinary vision that came from the community. Advantages of this approach were:

1. It would be much easier for those in need in the area to come to one place (the church) than to go to other agencies located throughout the county.

2. Programs could be led by experts outside of the church or church members with particular forms of expertise or interests.

3. Some programs, like parenting classes or Financial Peace University, could also be biblically-based and taught by church members.

4. The church would make better use of its space. One risk that was raised at the gathering was the security of the building.

5. Most importantly, “Igniting Hope: Family to Family” could well serve as a source for identifying the needs of families in the area.

I noticed other changes in Disciples Christian Church as we were on this journey of discerning God’s direction together. This is the second time I have seen this phenomenon that when church members find the direction, they excitedly want to run away with it “like a freight train.” The challenge is slowing them down long enough to plan their new ministry, develop guidelines, train their volunteers, make sure they cover their risks, and develop new relationships in the community. Overall the church’s openness to change also increased. There was
overwhelming support from leadership concerning streamlining their burdensome governance structure (which they began brainstorming in August, 2014) and they continued to share their gifts to bring artistic creativity into worship. Maundy Thursday and Easter involved new adventures into drama, lighting, liturgies, music, and sanctuary decorating that involved the senses. Imagine coming to Easter service into a darkened sanctuary with water and bird sounds emanating from the garden near the tomb of Christ. Then the drama of the discovery of the empty tomb unfolds before your eyes with background music from the choir. I can still see the bright flash of light that accompanied two guards falling down and the appearance of the brightly lit angel to the two women in Matthew 28: 1-10.

The stress level in the church dramatically decreased. I had not observed nor heard of any conflict in public, although there had been disagreements at times. There was a growing joy because they were recognizing the usefulness of their spiritual gifts and talents, starting with helping their own members. God was bringing more young people into the church, too. Five youth joined the church from the Pastor’s Class (Disciples of Christ version of believer’s baptism and becoming a member of the church) the spring of 2014. Our first inter-racial family joined the church, ten youth attended Camp Christian that summer, and four new babies / toddlers were dedicated in the church on September 7th. A new Bible class was started for when the youth met, taking advantage of parents’ time dropping their children off. One of the Pastor’s Class youth, age 13, did not receive her offering envelopes after her baptism, because she was moving out-of-state. When the family decided to remain in town, the teenager came back to me, requesting her offering envelopes! This young person was really taking her new membership seriously. Vacation Bible School was coordinated with St. Patrick’s Catholic Church and it was
a resounding success, if one paid attention to the excitement and learnings of the children. As one of our teachers said, “God is at work here.”

There were other exciting signs that the church was going in God’s direction. The Transition Team, under my guidance, drafted specific goals for the church to be entered on the Pastoral Search and Call profile for the church. The Board adopted those goals and then decided, after I left, to hire the seminary graduate from the Transition Team part-time as a Church Ministry Associate, to help lead in accomplishing some of those goals. Finally, our Associate Regional Minister, a judicatory minister, visited the church during worship back in September of 2014, also after I had departed. He reported to me that “this wasn’t the same church he had seen before.” He sensed a new Spirit in the place through their overwhelming welcomes and the worship, and they were actually talking about doing God’s will, he proclaimed. He said that he had never heard them speak in those terms before.

5.6 How This Approach was Different

My approach in this project differed from other methods used to transform “identity-lost” congregations in the following ways:

1. It taught discernment, a classic spiritual discipline which few Disciples of Christ Church members know and allowed them to experience it personally and in community.

2. It combined the rational with the spiritual in discernment using St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, exploring and weighing God’s limitless options for the church guiding them to envision a future by listening for God’s spirit.

3. As a minister I influenced the system by joining it, assessing it, gaining trust, and working with the people and the system. This temporary membership in the church family
system is not always afforded to consultants, who may not be trusted because they are working from outside of the system.

4. It tied the mission to actual spiritual gifts, strengths, passions and values of the congregation in relation to real needs in the community (Buechner’s approach repeated throughout this paper) and

5. It networked this church with other organizations where God was already at work in the community.

5.7 How I was Affected Personally and Professionally

This adventure affirmed my hunch that individuals and congregations need training in the spiritual discipline of discernment as a lifelong practice. Teaching a simplified discernment process drawing on St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises* as a discernment discipline is a good place to start, because it involves something people and churches do daily - make decisions. And it involves both the rational and spiritual aspects of decision-making, that are part of the Ignatian process of discernment. I would be remiss if I did not mention the joy that seeing individuals and congregations “get it” brings to me. That joy is one of St. Ignatius’ signs of consolation, that I have been following God’s direction in my life, and they have, too!

There is a down side to this type of ministry. The stress of working with conflicted churches is very high. In this case, a long commute of over an hour took its toll on me. Balancing my time between church work, doctoral studies, my family, and my own need for rest and relaxation were constant challenges. Balancing the need to be a pastoral presence with the need to intentionally move this church forward toward God was stressful, too. But as the *Harvard Business Review* relates,
Do what *only you* can do... The higher up you get in an organization, the more you need to focus on what the company needs from you, not on what you want to do. While management experts advise doing what you are best at, great leaders do those things that only they can do. Figure out what functions only you can perform. These may be tasks that are unique to your role, such as meeting with a key client or calling a top official. Or they may be strengths that the organization lacks, such as solid marketing skills. Gauge how you can be most useful and focus your time and effort there. Then delegate the rest.195

I am glad that I kept reminding myself about my focus there: “What this lost church needs now is to find God and to listen for God’s guidance about its purpose, or it will not have a future.”

As I noted in my rationale for this project, church leaders often do not realize that they are facing a vision crisis. Transitional Ministers who want to engage in this kind of work need to be courageous, energetic, persevering, listening to all the voices, but giving priority to God’s voice. Transitional Ministers who serve or are about to serve churches that face vision crises and want to use the process outlined in this project should look for these characteristics in the leadership of churches they feel called to serve:

1. Openness to God’s leading
2. Acknowledgment about the realities facing them, that they have lost their direction, and that they fear for their future
3. Willingness to engage the process as a church, not just with the leaders.
4. Vision to see the intentional process as the priority for the minister’s time with them.
5. Capacity to pay a full-time living wage, mileage, health coverage (if required) and educational expenses to keep current on the latest trends in Transitional Ministry.196

196 It may be possible to use this methodology in a part-time pastorate; however, it would probably take much longer. I always encouraged my congregations to hire me full-time for this.
6. Presence of several actively-participating young families, so there is a foundation for the future.

“With God anything is possible.” This list of church characteristics does not preclude what God can do beyond the abilities of mere human beings. The list, based on my personal experience with churches facing vision crises, is a suggestion of church characteristics where this process might work best.

5.8 Discernment for My Future

Unfortunately, repeated exposures to water-damaged, moldy buildings, in the form of residences, churches, and commercial buildings over the past thirteen years forced my unexpected resignation on September 9, 2014 from this church and what may be my career as a church-building-based pastor. I now suffer from Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome – Water Damaged Buildings (CIRS-WDB) and a subset of it known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). I experience life-threatening reactions to chemicals, fragrances, molds, dust, and basically, a host of environmental toxins. I have ordered lab tests to see if I am genetically predisposed to this condition, which is often the case for those sickened by mold. My immune system is broken. The remainder of my life I will most likely go into relapses every time I am exposed to water-damaged buildings. My chemical sensitivities may be curbed, but so far there is no cure for my extreme reactivity to building-based molds. As I am finishing this paper, I have lived with a relative, in a motel, in my car, and in our new camping trailer in the past two months, because I have had to flee mold and chemicals that threaten my life. Recently I have been able to sleep in my own house. It has taken months for me to come to terms with my

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197 Matthew 19:26
198 There are many other names for this condition such as Chronic Neurotoxin Illness, Environmental Illness, Sick Building Syndrome, Biotoxin Illness, toxic overload and more.
new reality of not being able to be safely out in public. Yet I still feel like I have many years ahead of me left to minister. My most recent experiences have prompted me to re-evaluate this question: “Should I consider doing church vision crisis work as a consultant?” Serving as an Intentional Interim allowed me to develop enough trust to join church family systems, which is a major reason why enabling adaptive change is possible during the Intentional Interim time. However, since my new reality no longer allows that, could I continue to effectively assist churches by going into a teaching, coaching, mentoring role? My peers, mentors and regional leadership have repeatedly expressed to me concerns that my wisdom and experience need to be shared. I could provide those needed services through the technology available, such as phones, webinars and videoconferencing over the internet. However, there is another exciting path my calling could be taking, and that is to help other wandering sheep like me who are “lost” and surviving MCS. The question is, “at what level or levels could I minister?”

Briefly, MCS and other related immune diseases have been recognized and treated by open-minded medical practitioners who see the plight of millions exposed to environmental toxins around the world. This includes workers in the chemical industry who were unprotected from exposures to toxic chemicals, U.S. Gulf War veterans serving near the burning oil fields of Iraq, victims and cleanup workers at the U.S. World Trade Centers after 911, and victims and cleanup workers after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. Neurotoxins are also affecting people through algae blooms, the latest one in Lake Erie near Toledo, oil spills from the Exxon-Valdez and in the Gulf Ocean, and bacteria from fish kills. Disasters, floods and typhoons add toxic petrochemicals, sewage, radioactive elements, and bacteria to the cocktail of neurotoxins making people seriously ill with MCS and other immune system compromising diseases. Modern medicine as a whole does not believe MCS exists. Sufferers, including myself, are told that it is
a mental issue and that we need to be on tranquilizers. Many alternative, natural practitioners understand that when an MCS survivor flees a building because her throat is closing up, it is because of exposure to a trigger such as mold or chemicals. But MCS goes far beyond being a serious health issue…

The faces of its many victims show the despair of being homeless, living in tents, trailers or huts in the desert or in cars, because its sufferers simply cannot find safe housing, safe air, safe drinking water, and safe food to eat free from their environmental triggers. Many are nomadic, unemployed, and very ill because they are running from pesticides, fragrances on people, or mold in their homes, work or cars. MCS is a disability according to the American Disabilities Act, HUD and Social Security, but employers do not always see it as so; they listen to the disbelieving modern medical and chemical worlds, supported by the powerful pharmaceutical industry and decline desperately-needed workers compensation or disabilities benefits. Dr. Ann McCampbell, an Internal Medicine doctor was sickened by MCS in 1989. She wrote, “the chemical manufacturing industry has launched an anti-MCS campaign designed to create the illusion of controversy about MCS and cast doubt about its existence.” Even though government offices have policies for fragrance-free environments, there are few laws to protect nor help the average person who contracts MCS. I notice that animals in shelters receive more funding and media attention than do millions of MCS survivors worldwide who are dying slow deaths in unsafe environments. I see MCS as the new kind of leprosy, breeding a new kind

199 For more information on MCS, there is a plethora of websites. Among my favorites, which contain inspiring stories of coping with this chronic illness are: http://www.thrivingwithmcs viewed March 26, 2015 and http://www.momsaware.org viewed March 26, 2015.

200 The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine published a position paper, Adverse Human Health Effects Associated with Molds in the Indoor Environment , 2002 that has been the basis for court cases not favoring MCS sufferers since 2003.

of homelessness. It is a huge social justice issue. So I am wondering: Am I being called to minister to MCS’ers in person and over the information ways? Or am I being called to help to raise this issue of a “lost and struggling” people to highest public and government levels? Those with MCS, by virtue of their illness, cannot march for their cause down the streets of Washington…or can they? Or can someone else be their advocate?

“For every change with MCS there is both a loss and a gain. Taking a moment and truly feeling the impact of both the loss and the impact of the gain will help with the transition.”

MCS is my new reality, and I sense that it is the start of a new calling. I will continue to use the very same techniques of discernment that I taught Disciples Christian Church for my own personal discernment of the new direction my calling is taking. Little did I know that practicing discernment in the face of a chronic illness would become one of the major outcomes of doing this project! I feel blessed for learning and teaching it, too. Perhaps I could continue imparting this wisdom to other MCS survivors around the world. Finally, I pray that Disciples Christian Church will continue to move forward in the direction they discerned as their God-given calling in their community.

5.9 Concluding Remarks about the Results

The desired outcomes and goals for this project were:

1. Teaching individual and group-level spiritual practices of discernment to increase the people’s awareness of God’s presence, activity, and leading in their lives.

2. Fostering a sense of these practices’ helpfulness in deepening their relationship with God.

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3. Integrating these practices into people’s spiritual disciplines, both for individual and group-level purposes.

4. Promoting greater clarity of understanding regarding God’s desire for this church in its particular situation, which will later guide this church in future decisions such as developing a focus, ministries, restructuring, and calling a settled pastor.

5. Developing a new-found sense of hope for the future

In the Introduction and Rationale section of this paper I wrote that “I would consider the attainment of any of the above goals as partial successes and ‘seeds for the spiritual future’ of the individuals and church. A complete success would be attaining all of the above. Achieving the third and fourth goals would have the most influence on the long-term spiritual health of this church.” Through this project, many seeds were planted and it is obvious that quite a few of them have already germinated into fast-growing seedlings. Taking into account the feedback from the holding group and the anecdotal results observed since discernment was inserted into the Appreciative Inquiry process, Goals 1, 2, and 5 above were solidly achieved. Goal 4 is well in-progress and will hopefully result in a good fit for this church’s next settled pastor. Time will tell how well the third goal, of integrating discernment into the individuals’ and church’s spiritual disciplines, was done. All of the above suggest that inserting spiritual discernment into Appreciative Inquiry is not only a viable option, but a successful one when dealing with congregations that have lost their sense of direction from God.
Chapter 6 Summary/Significance

In this section I will complete the task of theological integration, summarizing the significance of the work done in the life of the ministry setting and of the church at large. I will describe the implications of my findings, how my theological understanding of ministry has changed as a result of this project, and any unintended consequences and discoveries of the study. Then I will describe future plans for my ministry and what these findings suggest for others with interest in congregational discernment.

As I related earlier in the Theological and Biblical Underpinnings section of this paper, the purpose of this project was to assist a church experiencing a vision crisis. I was to take a group of people feeling lost from God toward a state of feeling found by God, through discerning God’s will, as best they could, in spiritual consensus. The next sections describe the theological significance of my efforts in more detail.

6.1 How This Project Addressed A Vision Crisis

This project addressed the most perplexing adaptive challenge facing Disciples Christian Church: “going from being lost from God to finding God’s purpose and direction.” Furthermore, the integrative work of research, results, and theological reflection has provided a model for guiding other churches, struggling with any difficult decision. Congregations can be moved from depression caused by considering solely the people’s and group’s wants and needs, to discernment by listening reverently and respectfully for God’s desire for individuals and churches. The key stakeholders of this project included not only the congregation studied, but other struggling congregations in need of a spiritual consensus model of discernment, as well as their judicatory representatives advising them. Finally, the community of Boardman and
agencies of Mahoning County were also benefactors of this process, as it ultimately networked the church with others who saw and supported the need, too. It is important to note that the process utilized cycles of individual and group discernment in order to attempt spiritual consensus. The majority vote on the Appreciative Inquiry opportunity map, though not a spiritual consensus, was a reflection of the communal results of what people discerned individually. As a visible model of what the people discerned from God, it propelled the congregation to excitedly develop a new ministry of adoption of needy families.

Within my own denomination of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Church Extension has estimated that 67% of our churches are at great risk of disbanding. Other mainline denominations have similar dismal projections. I am confident that this model of group spiritual discernment would be especially useful for other Intentional Interim Ministers, Transitional Ministers, and settled pastors serving churches in times of crisis or growth, not just those at risk of disbanding. I hope that churches struggling with major decisions and/or wanting to move from decision-making mode to including other means such as spiritual consensus would also benefit from using this model.

Ben Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”[203] This quote reveals another reason why this approach has been successful: this project has made use of the experiential activity of discernment, both individually and collectively, in order to help people and churches to grow in this practice.

There was another remarkable benefit to this project. The congregation’s interest in the Level of Stewardship, described in Section 3 of this paper, had risen from Level 1 (Church donates money from its special funds) and Level 2 (Individuals donate money, items or volunteer) to include Level 3 (Develop relationships with people) and Level 4 (Teach them to

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help themselves). I recognize this because the congregational discernment vote distinguished between the meals option, which was focused on Levels 1 and 2 (offering services), and the adoption option, which was more about Levels 3 and 4 (developing relationships). I remember feeling intuitively uneasy at first about developing the opportunity map so as to cover only those two options. Now I realize that the Spirit was telling me that we needed to make this distinction, to see where the people’s hearts were being led. Though I would not characterize this church as an openly social justice-oriented church, I can see them siding even more for marginalized groups in the future.

Has the intervention of incorporating discernment into the Appreciative Inquiry process helped this congregation? I return to the definition that I placed before the congregation, from Chapter 2: “Discernment helps us become more aware of how God is present, active, and calling us as individuals and church to respond with greater faithfulness.” Christian discernment means making a lifetime of discriminating choices between options, seeking what is best in God’s eyes. It is set and enhanced within the community of faith, and, because we are fallible, it does not guarantee absolute certainty.” Elizabeth Liebert summarizes its importance well, as she shares the work of Gordon Smith: “Seeking to follow God’s call moves us toward that which is better for us individually and for our world, and assures us that God will accompany us into the unknown.”

“Discernment” is now part of this church’s vocabulary and of its decision-making practices as a congregation. I hope individuals will continue to use it in their daily lives, now that many have experienced its benefits during this process.

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6.2 How The Project Affected My Understanding of Ministry

One of the roles I served during this project was that of an itinerant teacher. My field as an Intentional Interim Minister made me itinerant. Teachers impart their wisdom and experience to others in an effort to help their students maximize their potential. As a Rabbi, Jesus was also an itinerant teacher, in that he traveled the countryside imparting his wisdom. And he wanted people to maximize their potential by repenting of their sins, trusting in him and his plan for salvation and following his commandments, which would guide people to their eternal homes with God. Another role I served in this process was that of a spiritual director. Gratton relates that “it is the Spirit, the Mystery that the seeking human heart longs to encounter. That gives life and joy... Indifference and fear are the typical responses to a church that does not know spiritual joy.”

Furthermore, “What is true for the church is true for spiritual guides...Guides must be people who are moved by ‘the dynamics of delight.’” They must have tasted and seen “how good is the Lord.” Gratton says they must be “faithful to the inviting joy of that encounter” and be willing to share their delight. Paraphrasing Ricoeur, she notes that “it is our delight in experiencing the Mystery that makes us willing to sell other things in order to have more of it.... Spiritual guides...help people reflectively uncover what has drawn them, fascinated them in their experience of the Mystery.” This move from fear and confusion to excitement, joy and delight has precisely been my experience with this project in this church.

Frederick Buechner’s words, quoted several times already, provided an inspiring quote to describe the process we undertook for two reasons: 1) my strength of guiding congregations, to what hopefully is God’s will was matched with a congregation’s need to find its direction from

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God. 2) I helped a congregation rediscover its spiritual gifts, passions and talents so that the group could build on them to address a need in their community or world. I appreciate how Will Mancini describes this process: “In this intersection, the vision is both God’s and ours, for the work of the Spirit moves us so completely that the distinction of ownership blurs in our intimacy with Jesus...it helps form the mosaic of redemptive history...a critically important link in a long chain of legacies stretching to God’s happily ever after.”

Another affirmation from doing this project is that discernment is an ongoing spiritual practice that should never end. It must become a lifestyle of practice. We live in a highly complex society of instant gratification, but one cannot put a timetable on discernment, because it is on God’s time. Even though this project was completed, Disciples Christian Church must continue in its discernment to discover how God is continuing to call it to reach out to the suffering in the world. Will Mancini appropriately names this leadership style as “vision as lifestyle.” I would say that the next pastor needs to have and promote this skill. It should also be developed in other church leaders, starting at seminaries and reinforced and updated by judicatories.

Mancini writes that “when churches discover their collective potential, amazing things happen.” What was most amazing for Disciples Christian Church were the extraordinary acts of kindness and encouragement offered to needy members of the church and soon afterwards, needy families referred by the Boardman Township Schools. I also heard more parishioners talking publicly about this church’s need to reach out. There was a new excitement at all the meetings I attended the last few months I was there, from the Board, Transition Team, and adoption ministry to other committee gatherings. Several groups were working together to

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209 Mancini, *Unique Church*, 74.
210 Mancini, *Unique Church*, xxv.
211 Mancini, *Unique Church*, 93.
segregate and organize their storage, cleaning out old, unused furniture, supplies and equipment. I have found that this desire to “clean up the nest” for the new future is common when churches move on to their new calling. The unexpected appearance of more young families and infants on the scene was bringing a new focus to serving that age group. Another nursery caregiver still needed to be hired and plans were being made to organize events to get the younger parents socializing with each other. In short, engaging in this process of discernment brought renewed vitality to this congregation. In my opinion, it was the teaching and experiencing of discernment that made the most difference for this church and for me. My hope and prayer is that this process will continue to bring renewed vitality to the community of Boardman, which is so beleaguered with addiction issues and broken families. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect also on what concerning this project could be improved.

6.3 Unexpected Consequences and Discoveries

Overall, I thought more time could have been devoted to explaining Sabbath to the congregation before this project began. Perhaps offering sermons and a Bible study would have laid groundwork in that area, which would have increased the involvement and interest of more people. Even though I tried to narrow down the scope of this project, it was huge. Other areas impacted it that I could not control (in a holding environment), such as conflict. And while I encouraged the congregation to celebrate Sabbath, I had to be constantly mindful of my need for it as well. I was putting in 60 hours and more per week between my full-time church work, commuting, and this doctoral project, which clearly was overworking. Now that my health has placed me on a sabbatical, I realize the terrible price my body, mind and spirit paid for the stress
to which I have been subjected over the years. For the benefit of future users, this process may be spread out over time to make it less stressful.

The most upsetting part of the process was the Sunday we oversaw the Spiritual Gifts Inventory and Talents, Passions and Workstyle surveys in worship. It hurt me to see our older members with cognitive issues (due to strokes, hearing problems and aging) struggling with those surveys. For the benefit of future churches, I need to avoid demoralizing this segment with this process. In the past, I have had a good response from doing the surveys in worship; however, I may need to revert to doing them after worship with a meal included. Doing so would allow people who are really struggling a way to gracefully opt out. These folks may not realize they have gifts that can still be used. For example, one of our Elders who used a walker and had many health problems, died in July, 2014. Weeks earlier he was in my Pastor’s Class, sharing his wisdom with the youth! A retired pastor with hearing problems prayed with me after church, after my son nearly died from a severe drug allergy during surgery. Older adults are still capable of great ministry, even with their age and disabilities!

This process may increase the level of conflict in a church or it may distract people from their disagreements. At Disciples Christian Church, the conflict was already in the forefront and very public. It was important to carefully observe the dynamics and educate leadership about their history and family system patterns. Conflict in a church can also emanate from its context in the community and its denomination, as individuals have related to me about the Youngstown, Ohio, area in particular. If there is too much public chaos, it could impede progress with discernment. A Transitional Minister must be able to gauge how much conflict the system can tolerate, in order to attempt the process. In retrospect, I took a big risk in moving forward with
this project; however, the conflict actually helped expose historical issues, which the entire church, with its various streams of origin, needed to understand.

Speaking of values, the next link of my model that needs improvement is the focus on core values. Again, I was recently impressed with Will Mancini’s work in this area. He describes values as “missional motives” that characterize everything an organization does. The values statements of yesterday expressed too many values; said what they were not, instead of what they were; repeated too much doctrine or general ideas; did not show action; and lost their credibility because they did not represent reality. This is how I would describe the core values we uncovered during Story Day. In contrast, the missional motives of today, as described by Mancini, are proactive instead of reactive. They “guard your doctrine and free your values” so that doctrine and unique nuances to your ministry are separated. They also “let your strengths shine through” and “have some personality.” In other words, church values are a unique part of defining a church’s culture.

6.4 Where Does Disciples Christian Church Go From Here?

With this church embarking on another pastoral search effort, there is great anxiety about getting “a good fit” for the next pastor. Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce describe the approach that my project has taken in helping congregations search for “a good pastor-congregation match”:

When churches take stock of their current strengths and challenges, they gain greater insight into the kind of pastor who could best lead them into the future. Their blueprint for what is to come answers three questions: Who are we? (our core values and history); who is our neighbor? (our mission and ministry outreach); and why are we here? (our primary calling in this geographic location.)… if the pastor’s vision for ministry, ministry

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212 Mancini, *Unique Church*, 131.
strengths, and commitment to spiritual growth fit the congregation’s assets and needs, the chances for a good match improve dramatically.”

This project also shows that pastors should be called based on their gifts and strengths to lead a congregation in God’s direction. Many parishioners express what they want or think they need, and that is too often expressed superficially as a praise service or more young people, or someone to take care of their own members. A pastor should be called based on how well he/she can lead the church, with its uniquely, God-given gifts, to renew the community God calls it to serve. We spent much time researching the needs of the Boardman area and interacting with local officials who dealt with the issues on a daily basis. So the next pastor must have a passion for and hopefully some experience dealing with social outcasts and broken families, as well as a willingness to work with agencies that do the same. And of course, the major focus is to help build relationships with God through Christ.

With the influx of young families and reconnecting of young parents to their families attending this church, it is vital that Disciples Christian continue teaching the three questions of discernment suggested by Elizabeth Liebert: 1. Who is Jesus? 2. What did his life mean? 3. How am I to respond? These questions must be at the root of all worship, Bible and topical studies, as well as any spiritual development activities sponsored by the church. In actuality, they are key questions for any Christian.

In addition to broader Christian teaching, discernment requires knowing well one’s particular “family history.” With this church’s multiple generations of Disciples of Christ descendants and many others who were not familiar with Disciples beliefs, this congregation must be reminded of its ties to its historical beliefs and especially, to the importance of

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welcoming all to the communion table. In such an era of brokenness, we Disciples of Christ can encourage the wholeness, forgiveness, and healing of Christ. It is a timeless message that needs to be proclaimed loudly in our words, music, and deeds. In short, this series allowed people to see how their adoption vocation resonated with their larger Disciples heritage. The issue of “the dog’s tail” comes into focus again. Thankfully, going through this project as a congregation put many facility-related issues on hold. The intent was to teach and experience discernment of God’s purpose first. Now that the church has a direction, the next pastor can lead this body of Christ into developing a vision for the future. As Eric Law notes however, “money is not the primary issue in most unsustainable churches. The deeper issue is relationship. If we have a strong currency of relationship - both internal and external - this currency can easily by exchanged for money and other currencies.”  

The personal benefits of building relationships is expressed well in this quote from Margaret Bullitt-Jonas: “I discovered I was most truly myself when I was open to relationships with others, when I knew that I belonged to a community.” My prayer is that people will be changed, as I have, as they build relationships with God, themselves, and others, through reaching out from their church communities.

As I related earlier, through input from agencies with whom this church and I had been working, we discovered one further vision of community relationships, which I carefully named as “an option” for the future. It is called a hub or community center-based model. See Appendix 19 again. The family adoption program could create and nurture the relationships that could help surface the needs in the community to be met by those programs. Offering the church site as a location to meet physical and spiritual needs could help renew Boardman on its journey to find

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God and love neighbor through Christ. But again, developing that vision needs to be the focus of the settled pastor. My task as an Intentional Interim Pastor was to get this church turned around in the right direction...God’s direction. With a new pastor who is passionate about this ministry on board, and a vision for the future, this church will know how best to use all its assets and currencies such as the facility, money, and staff. Then the “dog will be truly wagging its tail,” instead of the other way around.

Finally, I reflect on Bishop Temple’s words earlier in this paper that infallible direction is not totally possible in community with God. Discernment is the attempt to sort through myriad voices that compete with God’s. These voices present themselves as idols that can easily distract, tempt and dissuade any Christian. So with this humble thought in mind, I pray that this formerly lost body of Christ has indeed been found, has truly grown closer to God in Christ and that they will continue to keep themselves open to the promptings of the Spirit. As I described earlier, God used my gifts to plant seeds to open the people’s hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. Some seeds could have fallen on rocks, while others may be choked by weeds. But hopefully, enough seeds landed in fertile soil to generate a vibrant future for this congregation that will focus it on renewing its community according to God’s plans.

6.5 How This Model Could Be Used

This model can be effectively utilized in several settings, which I will describe in more detail below: 1) Intentional Interim assignments 2) Transitional Ministry with a settled pastor 3) In clusters at judicatory or community levels 4) in para-church and other faith-based organizations 5) by ministry teams within these organizations, such as preschools, Christian Ed, outreach, etc. and 6) by consultants. The leader in any of these settings must be trained at a
minimum in Appreciative Inquiry, family systems theory, and St. Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*: must have a personality that works to build trust; and must have good follow-up and organizational management skills, and lots of energy. In all settings, I highly recommend empowering a Transition Team to assist in the process. Neither the minister, judicatory official, nor consultant can move this process forward without the strong support of an open-minded lay leadership team.

The model discussed in this project primarily concentrates on the Discovery and Dream phases of Appreciative Inquiry, because that is where Intentional Interim Ministers mainly concentrate, due to the short length of their assignments. It educates churches about spiritual discernment and it helps turn churches around towards God’s directing. Getting to the mission and vision statement are part of the Design phase and can be done by the Intentional Interim Minister or the next pastor. Designing and implementing the program is not often done by Intentional Interim Ministers, but one should be prepared to continue leading motivated and inspired churches forward until the settled pastor arrives. Transitional pastors, who can remain with congregations for longer periods, can use this model for all four Appreciative Inquiry phases, if they have been trained and have learned how to use different tools in assessing and leading congregations in transformational change.

The Northeast Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) is developing a similar approach to mine to help churches discover their calling from God. It is known as “Journey Forward,” according to one of the first spiritual directors involved, Charlotte Glasgo. Three important tenets of this approach are: 1) spiritual directors are training interested church leaders about spiritual practices, including the St. Ignatian practices of self examen and discernment. 2) They are doing this in cluster groups of ELCA churches located geographically
near to each other, and 3) these cluster teams seek to agree on values that undergird their community. The objective is to work together to discern where God is moving in the community and how their churches can be involved. I can see this cluster approach adopted along with my model, not only for denominations, but for a group of churches in a particular area, as interdenominational clusters. Intentional Interim Ministers or other trained Transitional Ministers could be leveraged in teaching and leading this process interdenominationally or geographically. Para-churches and other faith-based organizations could benefit from using this approach, if their intent is to discern God’s will. I have already used Appreciative Inquiry with a Christian Education team, so I know this approach can work for ministry teams within a larger church or organization. Finally, consultants could use this approach, though I can see it taking more time than with a trained pastor who has already joined the family system.

6.6 Where Do I Go From Here?

One of my options as this point is to work as a speaker, teacher, mentor, or consultant to other Transitional Ministers. I have already been doing all of the above on a limited basis within my state, denomination, and the Interim Ministry Network. In fact, I have been serving as the Disciples of Christ representative on the Board of The Interim Ministry Network for two years now. Many of my older peers who have retired have also gone into this mode, because of their passion for Transitional Ministry. I might also consider publishing my learnings at a later date. Nevertheless, my new reality of MCS is opening a new door for utilizing my God-given gifts at any or all of the five levels of stewardship. As the Interim Ministry Network Board President reminded me, this situation is yet another example of a Transitional Ministry, for those dealing with the wilderness time between what was and what is to come. And finally, I must remember
that “with God anything is possible” (Matthew 19:26). A complete healing and a cure for MCS are within the limitless possibilities of faith in God. With these hopes in my prayers, I will remain in discernment about the timing and type of transitional ministry God would lead me to do next.

6.7 Up to the Balcony Again

It is important to maintain our perspective “from the balcony,” as Heifetz says about adaptive leadership. Edwin Friedman writes “It’s time to make decisions when the same question brings no new information.” Again, the questions posed in this model do bring new information into the heads of parishioners, if they are truly listening for God’s call. Who are we? Who is our community and what are its needs? Knowing this, what is God calling us to do to renew that community spiritually and physically? We must also remember that we are not God; but we are doing small tasks among God’s greater work to bring the Kingdom of heaven to earth. Christine Pohl relates that “part of our ability to sustain hospitality in the midst of an unjust and disordered world comes from putting our small efforts into a larger context. God is at work in the world, and our little but significant moves participate in that work.” She further states that small acts of hospitality are sometimes offered in the middle of “enormous and unrelenting need.” We were already warned through the community forum panelists that the church would likely be overwhelmed with the need when the adoption program picked up. We

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218 Friedman, Failure of Nerve, 245.
220 Pohl, Recovering Hospitality, 184.
must keep Pohl’s next words of advice in mind: “To survive in such settings, we must recognize the value of each person and acknowledge that God is already at work in their lives.”

6.8 Not the End, But a Beginning...

“Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow.” Like the author of this quote, Anthony J. D’Angelo, I sense that I am not growing if I am not learning. As a minister and particularly a Transitional Minister, I am not growing myself, nor the churches I serve, unless I am learning, teaching and applying new ways to help churches and their members who are in transition. This project has enabled me to research and experiment with a powerful discipline for decision-making, one that uses both the rational and the spiritual. I have been able to plant seeds and am already seeing some of the fruits of that harvest in my latest interim assignment and most recently in my own life. As Carolyn Gratton wrote, “Anticipate as yet invisible”...the unimaginable goodness of our Lord. St. Ignatius described what we are initially observing at Disciples Christian Church as “signs of God” because they bring joy and consolation to the heart. I highly recommend this model for the practice of Transitional Ministry, as it is a transformative tool practice that addresses the most daunting and destructive adaptive challenge facing so many “lost” churches these days - the need to find God and seek God’s direction.

I close with a wonderful poem by my inspiring friend and former parishioner, Stewart Jones, a 31-year survivor of a traumatic brain injury, sustained in a car crash:

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221 Pohl, Recovering Hospitality, 185.
223 Gratton, Art of Spiritual Guidance, 64.
Power
The power of God is awesome
It can change everything
Because of how it changes lives

When the power of God is involved
The world can be changed in an instant\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{224} Stewart Jones, \textit{Inner Reflections, Volumes One and Two} (Medina, OH: self-published), 2014, 20. Permission was granted to use his poem in this paper.
Appendix 1
The Transition Team

Purpose of the team:
Assist the Intentional Interim Minister (IIM) with accomplishing the plan, approved by church leadership, for redefining the church’s sense of purpose and direction and preparing the church for its new future.

Qualifications:
Five to eight people (age high school and above) who are trusted and respected by the congregation, are open-minded, positive influences, team players, and who represent different ages, sexes, and interests within the church. Must be able to read, be willing to speak in front of the congregation, and help with exercises and events scheduled in support of the plan. Having access to email will be helpful, but should not prevent one who is truly needed on the team from serving.

The term of service is at least six months, but may be a year or more, depending on the circumstances facing the church.

Responsibilities:

1. Meet about twice a month (except for December and Holy Week) with the IIM at times deemed suitable for all team members. Usually meetings will continue, even when illness, work or other problem prevents a member from attending. Meetings may be cancelled due to inclement weather, when the IIM or most of the team are unable to meet, or when a meeting is not needed.
2. Give feedback and present ideas concerning how best to implement the plan in this congregation.
3. Help the IIM understand specific issues, people, and resistances in the congregation.
4. Help the IIM gather and analyze information collected from a variety of sources about the congregation, the community and county. Help present the info to the congregation in various media and town hall meetings.
5. Bring concerns and questions raised by individuals, so that these can be addressed.
6. At least one or two members of this team should serve on the Pulpit Committee so that findings from this process are included in the church profile and Search and Call process. The Pulpit Committee will not be formed until after the congregation completes the study and discernment process, which will be lead by the IIM. Once the congregation understands its calling from God, it will be in a better position to attract and call a pastor who has similar passion and skills for that calling.

Note:

It is an honor to be nominated for this team! Nominees should pray about whether God is calling them to share their gifts and talents to serve during such an important time as this transition.
# Appendix 2: DCC Boardman Intentional Interim Plan (approved by Board on August 13, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TO DO</th>
<th>JULY - AUG</th>
<th>SEPT</th>
<th>OCT</th>
<th>NOV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOCUS</strong></td>
<td>Getting to know us; consensus on plan</td>
<td>Getting to know us &amp; our communities</td>
<td>How to discern God’s wishes</td>
<td>Discerning God’s wishes for this church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TASKS</strong></td>
<td>Meetings w pastor; Form Transition Team; briefings on Appreciative Inquiry; Gather what has already been done; Elders &amp; Board approve the plan for moving forward</td>
<td>Study latest demographics; gather current data on community / county needs &amp; current agencies meeting needs &amp; their plans for serving the needy; area development plans</td>
<td>Training on how individuals can use discernment to help them make decisions; Training on group discernment. (Note: both are part of Pastor Sharon’s doctoral project.)</td>
<td>Any delays to the plan would move uncompleted tasks into this month. Main task - congregational discernment of what God is calling DCC to be and do in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXERCISES /TRAINING</strong></td>
<td>Membership pin map, timeline / history, values, spiritual gifts/ passions/ talents exercises; conflict management style exercise for leadership &amp; what is Appreciative Inquiry?</td>
<td>Where do we live, work, are retired and have kids? What do our neighborhoods need? What adaptive challenges (attitudes &amp; beliefs) are holding us back from growing?</td>
<td>Training on individual &amp; group discernment. Evaluating current &amp; future dream alternatives for missions to which God may be calling DCC (using Appreciative Inquiry).</td>
<td>Congregational discernment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EVENTS</strong></td>
<td>VBS: commission the Transition Team during worship</td>
<td>September 8 - Pastor to brief the plan during worship</td>
<td></td>
<td>Annual meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOWN HALLS AND/OR ARTICLES TO INFORM CONGREGATION</strong></td>
<td>What is Intentional Interim Ministry and what is the general plan forward?</td>
<td>Who is DCC now? What are our communities’ unmet needs and our adaptive challenges?</td>
<td>After analysis of data, list &amp; evaluate top alternative directions possible for the future</td>
<td>Results of church-level discernment briefed at the annual meeting</td>
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Copyright © 2015 Sharon L. Kiesel
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<tr>
<th>TO DO</th>
<th>DEC</th>
<th>JAN</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS</td>
<td>Get through the holidays!</td>
<td>Mission / Vision; Annual Report - try a modern format or another media?</td>
<td>How to reach new people; structuring the church for its future</td>
<td>Begin search for next pastor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TASKS</td>
<td>No Transition Team meetings</td>
<td>Revisit mission / vision; when done form Pulpit Committee &amp; start church profile; assess existing ministries for retainment</td>
<td>Learn about evangelism; put a New Member’s Class into place; begin to look at options for restructuring in all areas</td>
<td>Finalize the church profile; begin pastoral search process</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXERCISES / TRAINING</td>
<td>Mission / vision statements; Developing an appealing Church Profile</td>
<td>10-week “Unbinding the Gospel” study begins for leadership &amp; others interested</td>
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<tr>
<td>EVENTS</td>
<td>Advent</td>
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<td>Lent starts March 5; Start 12-week Pastor’s Class 2nd week of March with baptisms on Pentecost, June 8.</td>
<td>Easter April 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>INFORM CHURCH</td>
<td>Mission / Vision</td>
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Copyright ©2015 Sharon L. Kiesel
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date or Timeframe</th>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>How Conducted</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Appreciative Inquiry Phase</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First TT (Transition Team) meeting August 27</td>
<td>Responsibilities &amp; timeline, working in teams and as a team</td>
<td>Handouts &amp; Conflict management survey</td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept 8 Congregational Sabbath begins</td>
<td>Pin map where people live; Commission TT; Sharon to explain plan during sermon</td>
<td>Board near sanctuary; the plan during sermon and commissioning during worship</td>
<td>“Who are we?” Team does pin map.</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 15</td>
<td>Spiritual Gifts, Passions &amp; Talents Inventories</td>
<td>During worship sermon time</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; “Who are we?” Team</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 6 Story Day</td>
<td>Timeline / History / Strengths / Values / Adaptive Challenges</td>
<td>After worship with light meal</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; both teams</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September - October 18</td>
<td>Membership statistics / Facility usage data / Outreach</td>
<td>Gather from church secretary</td>
<td>“Who are we?” Team</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September - October 18</td>
<td>Demographic report</td>
<td>Analyze Jan 2013 Missioninsite report</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; “Who is our community?” Team</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>September - October 18</td>
<td>County &amp; communities development plans</td>
<td>Gather and analyze</td>
<td>“Who is our community?” Team</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date or Timeframe</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>How Conducted</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>September - October 18</td>
<td>Info on county needs &amp; agencies meeting needs</td>
<td>Gather &amp; look for unmet needs</td>
<td>Who is our community? Team</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19</td>
<td>Evaluate &amp; develop most favorable ministry options where church passions and strengths meet unmet needs</td>
<td>TT retreat offsite</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; entire TT</td>
<td>Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 20</td>
<td>How can individuals seek to discern God’s will?</td>
<td>Sermon &amp; individuals try it themselves on a decision to be made</td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Instruction on individual discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week of Oct 20</td>
<td>Prepare for congregational retreat on Oct 27</td>
<td>Logistics, meal, retreat handouts &amp; supplies</td>
<td>TT - (Sharon on vacation)</td>
<td>Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 27, Celebration Sunday (pledges for stewardship campaign)</td>
<td>How church can discern God’s will; congregational retreat to discuss more specifically about the options, in teams designated for each option</td>
<td>Sermon to teach how to discern God’s will as a group; retreat after worship (3-4 hrs); includes a light meal</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; TT; opportunity map with theme is finished by Nov 2</td>
<td>Instruction on congregational discernment; Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date or Timeframe</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>How Conducted</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov 3</td>
<td>Creative discernment exercise; opportunity map on display</td>
<td>Exercise after worship; artwork adorns the opportunity map</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; TT</td>
<td>Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 3 through 10 Discernment Week</td>
<td>Congregation &quot;votes with feet&quot; on the options for the future; displayed on an opportunity map</td>
<td>Explained during worship and in newsletter; Thanksgiving dinner - Nov 10 to celebrate the discernment</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; TT</td>
<td>Discernment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>Brief the results of congregational discernment</td>
<td>Annual congregational meeting</td>
<td>Sharon &amp; TT</td>
<td>End of this part of the Dream phase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Spiritual Giftabilities

The Bible tells us that every believer is given a spiritual gift for the purpose of building up God’s church (I Corinthians 12:7). This is exciting news! God has given each of us a special gift. As disciples our responsibility is to discern, experiment with, and use our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are special abilities, talents, or yearnings that God gives to every disciple, for the purpose of building up the church.

THIS IS NOT A TEST. There are no right or wrong answers. Each statement has a value as it pertains to you. These one hundred questions will help you begin to discover what your spiritual giftabilities might be. And by completing this survey, the information it yields will help you and the church more clearly identify your ministry in life.

The gifts that Christ gave were...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Ephesians 4: 11-12

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Romans 12: 6-8

One Hundred Questions That Reveal My Spiritual Giftabilities

Instructions: To obtain your spiritual giftability scores, answer these one hundred questions and write the answers in the appropriate column (A, B, C, D) on the sheet entitled “My Spiritual Giftability Profile.” Score yourself 0 if you do not experience the statement in your own life. Score yourself as high as 5 if the statement represents a high degree of intensity or frequency in your personal experience. If it is a lower degree of intensity or frequency, score yourself with a 1,2,3, or 4, accordingly.

Column A
1. God frequently gives me a clear picture of what will happen in the future.
2. I try to keep rooms tidy and comfortable by properly arranging tables, chairs, etc.
3. I often carry out special assignments for other people.
4. When I teach, people seem to enjoy learning.
5. I can persuade others toward self-improvement even if they are at first reluctant.
6. I give significant amounts of money to special causes.
7. People seek my advice and follow my suggestions.
8. I often think of ways to help people in physical distress or bereavement.
9. People under my influence grow spiritually.
Column A continued
10. I have been elected or appointed to serve the church on district or general levels.
11. I can readily adjust to the “differences” in other cultures without making negative judgments.
12. I can explain clearly to non-Christians the biblical meaning of salvation.
13. I can usually select a course of action that benefits the other people in my group.
14. I can easily remember ideas and facts.
15. The people I vote for in organizations usually make good officers.
16. I have prayed for the physical healing of another person, and healing has resulted.
17. In the name of the Lord, I have done the otherwise impossible.
18. Because of my faith in God’s power, I can overcome challenging problems in ways that seem to defy the laws of reason.
19. I can easily see when and how to delegate important responsibilities and to whom I should delegate them.
20. I can provide food and/or lodging in a manner that guests appreciate.
21. I have played one or more musical instruments in public performances.
22. I have utilized my vocal-music ability in public performances.
23. I have used my writing ability in business, churches, or other organizations.
24. I have employed my artistic ability in business, churches, or other organizations.
25. I have the ability to design, construct, or repair buildings, equipment, or property.

Column B
1. I find satisfaction in telling a group what I feel is God’s will.
2. I enjoy helping others feel comfortable at meetings and events.
3. I like to run errands for other people.
4. I enjoy learning and teaching new ideas and facts.
5. I enjoy encouraging other people to put forth their best efforts.
6. I like to give significant financial gifts that help worthy organizations accomplish what they could not otherwise do.
7. I enjoy seeing others follow my guidance.
8. I enjoy doing little things for people who are unable to take care of themselves.
9. I enjoy helping people grow spiritually.

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Column B continued

10. I feel comfortable taking responsibility for the spiritual growth of large numbers of people in various communities.

11. I feel at ease when relating to people from other cultures.

12. I enjoy seeking out unbelievers in order to witness to them regarding my faith in Christ.

13. I enjoy seeking and applying ideas that help solve specific problems.

14. I enjoy collecting, analyzing, and utilizing complex information to improve the effectiveness of organizations.

15. I can easily see the hidden reasons behind the statements and actions of other people.

16. I enjoy praying for the healing of sick persons.

17. I feel that spiritual forces can alter the laws of nature.

18. I find it easy to trust in God in difficult circumstances, and that faith is usually rewarded.

19. I have a knack for organizing ideas, people, and resources to effectively achieve goals.

20. I enjoy making strangers and/or persons in need feel at home.

21. I enjoy playing one or more musical instruments in public performances.

22. I like to use my vocal-music ability in public performances.

23. I find projects that require writing skill enjoyable.

24. I derive satisfaction from projects that require skill in art.

25. I enjoy projects that require designing, constructing, or repairing buildings, equipment, or property.

Column C

1. When I tell people what I feel is God’s will, they seem willing to follow.

2. People thank me for my careful attention to details.

3. People appreciate the skill I use in helping them achieve their goals.

4. People seem to like my style of giving them information, ideas, and insights.

5. People tell me that I have been a big help when they were depressed, lonely, or trying to make a big decision.

6. Christian colleges, churches, or charities appreciate the large sums I am able to contribute.

7. People in organizations and groups appreciate my opinions and often follow my suggestions.

8. Persons with special needs, such as the elderly or handicapped, appreciate my visits.

9. People express appreciation for the spiritual help they receive through friendship with me.

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Column C continued
10. Local church leaders respond well to my guidance in matters such as theological beliefs and establishing new congregation.

11. People of other cultures trust and react pleasantly to me.

12. People respond to my witnessing conversations with them by deciding to become Christians or join the church.

13. People seem inclined to accept my advice and act upon it.

14. People appreciate my ability to analyze complex information and to apply it in simple, practical ways.

15. My friends often seem surprised at how easily I can analyze the motives behind the behaviors of others.

16. Friends seem amazed at my sense of confidence that my prayers will help sick or injured people recover.

17. People have told me that I have more faith in the possibility of miracles than they do.

18. People notice how much I seem to trust in God.

19. People comment about the effective and efficient ways I help an organization accomplish its goals.

20. People often want to stay in my home.

21. People compliment me on my ability to play a musical instrument.

22. People seem to like my singing.

23. Friends and other people seem impressed with my writing.

24. People seem to appreciate my ability in art.

25. People comment on my ability to design, construct, or repair things.

Column D
1. In group situations, people ask me to give my opinion regarding God’s will.

2. People ask me to take responsibility for matters that require careful attention to details.

3. People in authority often ask me to help them prepare for special meetings or projects.

4. People invite me to fill roles that require teaching skills.

5. People seek my advice when they are depressed or facing a tough decision.

6. Leaders of various charitable organizations often bring special financial needs to my attention, knowing that I can draw upon reserve funds to meet those needs.

7. Groups elect or appoint me to leadership positions involving decision making.

8. Because they sense that I will know what kind of help we should extend, people often tell me of another’s misfortune.

9. People often seek my counsel in personal spiritual matters.

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**Column D continued**

10. People seek my opinions regarding biblical, denominational, and local church traditions.

11. People ask me to help with projects involving persons of other nationalities.

12. Church leaders invite me to help with evangelistic reach-out activities.

13. People ask for my help in deciding moral, ethical, and other life issues.

14. Because I often bring fresh insights to complex issues, people ask me to help them find solutions.

15. People in authority ask my opinion about giving certain jobs to certain people.

16. Because God often answers my prayers for healing in a way visible to others, sick people ask me to pray for them.

17. People often ask me to assume difficult tasks because they know that the miracles I believe will happen often do.

18. When people work with me on challenging projects, they seem to gain confidence from my faith in God’s providence.

19. People seem to appreciate my organizational abilities.

20. Because I enjoy entertaining guests, organizations in which I participate invite me to provide hospitality skills.

21. I am employed or have been employed in using my instrumental-music talent professionally.

22. I am employed or have been employed in using my vocal-instrument talent professionally.

23. I am employed or have been employed in using my writing skills professionally.

24. I am employed or have been employed in using my art ability professionally.

25. I am employed or have been employed in using my design, building, or repair craftsmanship professionally.
Appendix 4A – Spiritual Giftabilities Answer Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Total Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. PROPHET</td>
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<td>2. SERVING</td>
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<td>3. HELPING</td>
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<td>4. TEACHING</td>
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<td>5. ENCOURAGING</td>
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<td>6. GIVING</td>
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<td>7. LEADERSHIP</td>
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<td>15. DISCERNMENT OF SPIRIT</td>
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<td>22. VOCAL MUSIC</td>
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<td>23. WRITING</td>
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<td>24. ARTISTRY</td>
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<td>25. CRAFTSMANSHIP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Instructions: Write answers here from the sheets titled “One Hundred Questions That Reveal My Spiritual Giftabilities.” Score yourself 0 if you do not experience the statement in your own life. Score yourself as high as 5 if the statement represents a high degree of intensity or frequency in your personal experience. If it is a lower degree of intensity or frequency, score yourself with a 1, 2, 3, or 4, accordingly.

After completing the first twenty-five answers (column A), cover those and subsequent answers with a sheet of paper to avoid distorting your other answers.
Appendix 5. DESCRIPTION OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1. PROPHECY – 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28

   The divine enablement to reveal truth and proclaim it in a timely and relevant manner for understanding, correction, repentance, or edification. There may be immediate or future implications. People with this gift: expose sin or deception in others for the purpose of reconciliation; speak a timely word from God causing conviction, repentance, and edification; see truth that others often fail to see and challenge them to respond; warn of God’s immediate or future judgment if there is no repentance; understand God’s heart and mind through experiences God takes them through.


   This gift enables Christians to recognize where their participation is needed within a group or organization and ensure that the most urgent jobs are done.

3. HELPING – 1 Corinthians 12: 28

   The divine enablement to care for people by providing fellowship, food, and shelter. People with this gift: provide an environment where people feel valued and cared for; meet new people and help them to feel welcomed; create a safe and comfortable setting where relationships can develop; seek ways to connect people together into meaningful relationships; set people at ease in unfamiliar surroundings.

4. TEACHING – Romans 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12: 28-29

   The divine enablement to understand, clearly explain, and apply the word of God causing greater Christ likeness in the lives of listeners. People with this gift: communicate biblical truth that inspires greater obedience to the word; challenge listeners simply and practically with the truths of Scripture; present the whole counsel of God for maximum life change; give attention to detail and accuracy; prepare through extended times of study and reflection.

5. ENCOURAGING – Romans 12: 8

   The divine enablement to present truth so as to strengthen, comfort, or urge to action those who are discouraged or waver in their faith. People with this gift: come to the side of those who are discouraged to strengthen and reassure them; challenge, comfort, or confront others to trust and hope in the promises of God; urge others to action by applying biblical truth; motivate others to grow; emphasize God’s promises and to have confidence in God’s will.

6. GIVING – Romans 12: 8

   The divine enablement to contribute money and resources to the work of the Lord with cheerfulness and liberality. It does not ask, “How much money do I give to God?” but, “How much of God’s money do I keep?” People with this gift: manage their finances and limit their lifestyle in order to give as much of their resources as possible; support the work of ministry with sacrificial gifts to advance the Kingdom; meet tangible needs that enable spiritual growth to occur; provide resources, generously and cheerfully, trusting God for provision; may have a special ability to make money so that they may use it to further God’s work.

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225 Unless otherwise indicated, the definitions for most of these spiritual gifts are from Network: The Right People... in the Right Places... for the Right Reasons (Leader’s guide) by Bugbee, Bruce; Cousins, Don & Hybels, Bill. Willow Creek Community Church, 1994 (Zondervan Publishing), pp. 114 – 120.

226 Schwarz, Christian A. The 3 Colors of Ministry: A Trinitarian Approach to Identifying and Developing your Spiritual Gifts. (ChurchSmart Resources) 2001, p. 120.
7. LEADERSHIP – Romans 12:8
The divine enablement to cast vision, motivate, and direct people to harmoniously accomplish the purposes of God. People with this gift: provide direction for God’s people or ministry; motivate others to perform to the best of their abilities; present the “big picture” for others to see; model the values of the ministry; take responsibility and establish goals.

8. MERCY – Romans 12: 8
The divine enablement to cheerfully and practically help those who are suffering or are in need, compassion moved to action. People with this gift: focus upon alleviating the sources of pain or discomfort in suffering people; address the needs of the lonely and forgotten; express love, grace, and dignity to those facing hardships and crisis; serve in difficult or unsightly circumstances and do so cheerfully; concern themselves with individual or social issues that oppress people.

9. PASTOR (Also known as Shepherding) – Ephesians 4: 11-12
The divine enablement to nurture, care for, and guide people toward on-going spiritual maturity and becoming like Christ. People with this gift: take responsibility to nurture the whole person in their walk with God; provide guidance and oversight to a group of God’s people; model with their life what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus; establish trust and confidence through long-term relationships; lead and protect those within their span of care.

10. APOSTLE – 1 Corinthians 12: 28-29
The divine ability to start and oversee the development of new churches or ministry structures. People with this gift: pioneer and establish new ministries or churches; adapt to different surroundings by being culturally sensitive and aware; desire to minister to unreached people in other communities or countries; have responsibilities to oversee ministries or groups of churches; demonstrate authority and vision for the mission of the church.

11. MISSIONARY – 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23
This gift enables Christians to utilize their gifts in another culture or social group.227

12. EVANGELIST – Ephesians 4: 11
The divine enablement to effectively communicate the gospel to unbelievers so they respond in faith and move toward discipleship. People with this gift: communicate the message of Christ with clarity and conviction; seek out opportunities to talk to unbelievers about spiritual matters; challenge unbelievers to faith and to become fully devoted followers of Christ; adapt their presentation of the gospel to connect with the individual’s needs; seek opportunities to build relationships with unbelievers.

13. WISDOM – 1 Corinthians 12: 8
The divine enablement to apply spiritual truth effectively to meet a need in a specific situation. People with this gift: focus on the unseen consequences in determining the next steps to take; receive an understanding of what is necessary to meet the needs of the body; provide divinely given solutions in the midst of conflict and confusion; hear the Spirit provide direction for God’s best in a given situation; apply spiritual truth in specific and practical ways.

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227 Schwarz, 3 Colors of Ministry, 119.
14. KNOWLEDGE – 1 Corinthians 12: 8
The divine enablement to bring truth to the body through a revelation or biblical insight. People with this gift: receive truth which enables them to better serve the body; search the scriptures for insight, understanding, and truth; gain knowledge which at times was not attained by natural means; have an unusual insight or understanding that serves the church; organize information for teaching and practical use.

15. DISCERNMENT OF SPIRIT – 1 Corinthians 12: 10
The divine enablement to distinguish between truth and error, to discern the spirits, differentiating between good and evil, right and wrong. People with this gift: distinguish truth from error, right from wrong, pure motives from impure; identify deception in others with accuracy and appropriateness; determine whether a word attributed to God is authentic; recognize inconsistencies in a teaching, prophetic message, or interpretation; are able to sense the presence of evil. They may also have these other related discernment gifts:

a. INTERCESSION – Romans 8: 26-27
The divine enablement to consistently pray on behalf of and for others, seeing frequent and specific results. People with this gift: feel compelled to earnestly pray on behalf of someone or some cause; have daily awareness of the spiritual battles being waged and pray; are convinced God moves in direct response to prayer; pray in response to the leading of the spirit, whether they understand it or not; exercise authority and power for the protection of others and the equipping of them to serve.

b. SPEAKING IN TONGUES – 1 Corinthians 12: 10
The divine enablement to speak, worship, or pray in a language unknown to the speaker. People with this gift may receive a spontaneous message from God which is made known to the body (the church) through the gift of interpretation. People with this gift: express with an interpretation a word by the Spirit which edifies the body; communicate a message given by God for the church; speak in a language they have never learned and do not understand; worship the Lord with unknown words too deep for the mind to comprehend; experience an intimacy with God which inspires them to serve and edify others.

c. INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES – 1 Corinthians 12: 10
The divine enablement to make known to the body of Christ the message of one who is speaking in tongues. People with this gift: respond to a message spoken in tongues by giving an interpretation; glorify God and demonstrate God’s power through this miraculous manifestation; deify the body by interpreting a timely message from God; understand an unlearned language and communicate that message to the body of Christ; are sometimes prophetic when exercising an interpretation of tongues for the church.

16. HEALING - 1 Corinthians 12: 9
The divine enablement to be God’s means for restoring people to wholeness. People with this gift: demonstrate the power of God; bring restoration to the sick and diseased; authenticate a message from God through healing; use it as an opportunity to communicate a biblical truth and to see God glorified; pray, touch, or speak words that miraculously bring healing to one’s body.
17. MIRACLES - 1 Corinthians 12: 10, 28-29
The divine enablement to authenticate the ministry and message of God through supernatural interventions which glorify God. People with this gift: speak God’s truth and have it authenticated by an accompanying miracle; express confidence in God’s faithfulness and ability to manifest God’s presence; bring the ministry and message of Jesus Christ with power; claim God to be the source of the miracle and glorify God; represent Christ, and through the gift point people to a relationship with Christ.

18. FAITH - 1 Corinthians 12: 9
The divine enablement to act on God’s promises with confidence and unwavering belief in God’s ability to fulfill God’s purposes. People with this gift: believe the promises of God and inspire others to do the same; act in complete confidence of God’s ability to overcome obstacles; demonstrate an attitude of trust in God’s will and God’s promises; advance the cause of Christ because they go forward when others will not; ask God for what is needed and trust in God’s provision.

19. ADMINISTRATION -1 Corinthians 12: 28
The divine enablement to understand what makes an organization function, and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that accomplish the goals of the ministry. People with this gift: develop strategies or plans to reach identified goals; assist ministries to become more effective and efficient; create order out of organizational chaos; manage or coordinate a variety of responsibilities to accomplish a task; organize people, tasks, or events.

20. HOSPITALITY - 1 Corinthians 12: 13
The divine enablement to accomplish practical and necessary tasks which free-up, support, and meet the needs of others. People with this gift: serve behind the scenes wherever needed to support the gifts and ministries of others; see the tangible and practical things to be done and enjoy doing them; sense God’s purpose and pleasure in meeting everyday responsibilities; attach spiritual value to practical service; enjoy knowing that they are freeing up others to do what God has called them to do.

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION – Mark 4: 33, Psalm 150: 3-5
The divine enablement to communicate God’s truth through a variety of art forms. People with this gift: use the arts to communicate God’s truth; develop and use artistic skills such as drama, writing, art, music, dance, etc.; use variety and creativity to captivate people and cause them to consider Christ’s message; challenge people’s perspective of God through various forms of the arts; demonstrate fresh ways to express the Lord’s ministry and message. Note: this category includes the art forms listed below.

21. INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC
22. VOCAL MUSIC
23. WRITING
24. ARTISTRY

25. CRAFTSMANSHIP – Exodus 31: 3-5
The divine enablement to creatively design and/or construct items to be used for ministry. People with this gift: work with wood, cloth, paints, metal, glass, and other raw materials; make things which increase the effectiveness of others’ ministries; enjoy serving with their hands to meet tangible needs; design and build tangible items and resources for ministry use; work with different kinds of tools and are skilled with their hands.
Appendix 6. Talents, Work Style, and Passions Worksheet

Name _______________________________ Age ________ Date prepared_______

Talents
What kind of work do you enjoy doing with your hands or other parts of your body?

With your brain?

With your mouth?

Work Style Preference
Do you prefer to work alone or with others? (Circle those that apply.)

Your Passions
About which segments of the population are you most passionate? In other words, working with what type of people energizes you? (Check those that apply and number them in order of importance, if you can, starting with “1” being the most important.)

Pregnant moms____
Unwed mothers___
Young moms with kids____
Adopting parents____
Foster parents____
Working moms____
Battered mothers____
Young families with kids____
Infants, wellness____
Infants in crisis nursery____
Children with disabilities (be specific below about the kind and age)____
People with disabilities (be specific below about the kind and age)____
Types of disabilities (Check them: physical__, mental__, social__)
(Be more specific about disabilities______________________________________)
Toddlers, age 1 to 2___
Preschool children____
Elementary age kids____
Middle school youth____
High school youth____
Camp or sports programs (specify type)_______________________________
Children from foreign nations ____
Immigrant families____ Any ethnic preference?______________________________
Migrant workers____

(PLEASE TURN THIS SHEET OVER.)

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Illiterate people
Before-school programs for kids
After-school programs for kids
After-high school youth
College students
Young singles
Middle age singles / widows / widowers
Young divorcees
Young widows/widowers
Homeless people (specify ages or if families)
People living below the poverty level
Divorcees
People with addictions
Jailed or prisoners
Families of those with addictions
Pre-retired people, age 50-60
Empty-nesters
Retired people of all ages
Retirees, age 60-70
Retirees, age 71-80
Retirees, age 81 and above
Nursing home residents
Elders who have been abused
Hospice patients
Families of hospice patients
People who are hospitalized
Animals
Caring for the environment (Be specific)
Those needing financial management advice
Those needing retirement advice
Caring for older parents / dementia (specify)
Suicide victims & families
Homicide victims or families
Military
Military families
Police/Fire/EMS & other civil servants
Families of civil servants
People of other denominations or religions
Human sexuality issues
Issues of social justice (be specific)

Additional space for areas not noted above or other specific persons or circumstances that energize you, when you work with them:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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Devotion - Sharon
Prayer for a Church in Transition – All
“Check-in” Time : observations, feelings, concerns, questions before we start – 
discussion, All
A Primer on Discernment - teaching, Sharon
Types of Churches, Levels of Stewardship, and What Experts are Saying (see below) 
– teaching, Sharon
Morning Break
Findings of the “Who Are We?” Team - read & give insights
Values / Strengths / Adaptive Challenges - discuss & revise
Findings of the “Who is our Community?” Team - read & give insights
What about our community “breaks the hearts” of our church members? - discuss
Noon Break
Dream options for future ministries - All
Weigh the options based on the congregational values & choose the most favorable 
one - All
Discern as a group if these are the ones to go forward - discussion & silent time, All
Offer the list up to God with praise and thanksgiving
Brainstorm a theme or metaphor for the retreat October 27th and the opportunity map
Sending prayer - Doug?
Clean-up and depart
Types of Churches by their focus (usually based on their gifts, passions and strengths):
Service - spread their faith by serving others who are needy & networking with similar agencies (ex: feed the hungry)
Teaching - focuses on Biblical teachings & growing disciples
Spiritual - programs on spiritual practices
Evangelism - spreading the word of Christ
Relationships - spreading the word of Christ to a particular group of unbelievers or new believers (ex: seeker churches, house churches, small groups in neighborhoods)
Social Justice - deal with a social justice issue (ex: welcoming all people, addicts, gangs, homeless, prostitutes) May become involved at the political level with the issue
New church plant - developing / supporting a new church in a new area
Arts - using the fine arts to glorify God and spread the Gospel (ex: music, art, poetry, drama, dance)
Multi-cultural or multi-generational
Combinations of any of the above
Other models yet to be discovered

Based on the talents, passions and values of DCC, what kind of church do you think we are?...God is calling us to be?

Levels of Stewardship:
1. The church or a group giving money or donations to a cause
2. Individuals giving money or donations of items or time to a cause (ex: give items to a food pantry, volunteering)
3. Developing a relationship with the needy (ex: know them by name & their stories)
4. Teaching people to help themselves (ex: help former prostitutes restore their self-esteem & find better work)
5. Deal with the cause for the issue, as a social justice issue (ex: strengthening families so children don’t run away & don’t fall into human traffickers’ hands; work with other agencies doing the same)

Experts are saying that the churches of the future must be non-hierarchical and highly relational. Institutions are dying out. Small churches can be vibrant if they have a sustainable mission that seeks God’s calling for the gifts, strengths, and passions of the church and keeps circulating the churches resources, including its people.
Appendix 7: Discernment Sermons
October - November 2013
@ - Sharon does children’s moment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title / Scriptures</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct 20</td>
<td>&quot;God, What on Earth Are You Up To?&quot;</td>
<td>Teaching sermon on personal discernment and why we are learning this now. (As a Keynote presentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psalm 34: 1-8, 15-22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romans 12: 1-2, 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 27</td>
<td>&quot;God is Searching for Us!&quot;</td>
<td>We are like lost sheep for whom God is searching. We want to find other lost sheep, whose issues break our hearts, and for whom our passions and ministry could address. (Group discernment taught via Keynote presentation.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congreg Ezekiel 34: 11-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retreat Luke 15: 1-7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afterwards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@Nov 3</td>
<td>&quot;Stop...and Listen&quot;</td>
<td>Stop and listen for God’s voice, calling out to us as a church to join in God’s purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service of</td>
<td>Psalm 131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembrance</td>
<td>John 10: 1-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Followed by creative discernment exercise, “What are the cloud of witnesses calling us to focus on in the future?” This exercise started Discernment Week.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 10</td>
<td>&quot;Living into the Future&quot;</td>
<td>Let’s pursue hope at all costs!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>Isaiah 43: 16-21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Philippians 3: 4b-14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(End of Discernment Week - voting was extended for one more week)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov 17</td>
<td>&quot;The Time Capsule&quot;</td>
<td>What would our church’s time capsule tell our descendants about our faith and our struggles? What legacies will we leave them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Deut 11: 18-21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>1 Cor 15: 1-11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8. Individual Discernment Card

FRONT OF CARD

LISTENING FOR GOD WHEN MAKING A DECISION*

1. What is the issue or decision?
2. Prepare to be in God’s presence by being still.
3. Pray for God to move you in the way pleasing to God.

MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.  

Thomas Merton

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LISTENING FOR GOD WHEN MAKING A DECISION*

4. Gather information, ideas and options.
5. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the options, based on what you value.
6. Which choice is most reasonable?
7. Sit with this decision and notice the feelings it produces in you (consolation or desolation, see below).
8. Make your decision based on the one that gives you feelings of consolation.
   Offer it to God.

SIGNS OF GOD

1. Spiritual consolation: an increase in faith, hope, joy, love and peace.
2. A surge of energy.
3. Persistence of the same message coming from different sources.
4. Thinking that comes together and makes sense.
5. An increase in productiveness.

Spiritual desolation: negative thoughts like despair, selfishness, rebelliousness, confusion and feeling that God has left you.


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Appendix 9. Guidelines for Group Discernment

FRONT OF CARD

Guidelines for Group Discernment*

Listening during Group Discernment

The goal of spiritual discernment is to receive God’s guidance.

1. Take time to become settled in God’s presence.
2. Listen to others with your entire self (senses, feelings, intuition, imagination, and rational faculties).
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.
5. Do not formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking.
6. Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, referring to your own experiences. Avoid being hypothetical. Steer away from broad generalizations.
7. Do not challenge what others say.
8. Listen to the group as a whole – to those who have not spoken aloud, as well as to those who have.
9. Generally, leave space for anyone who may want to speak a first time before speaking a second time yourself.
10. Hold your desires and opinions – even your convictions – lightly.

Suggestions for Working Toward Consensus

Spiritual consensus is that place of unity to which the Holy Spirit has led a group. It may or may not include a decision. Christian spiritual consensus implies not merely assent, but a sense of Christ’s presence among those assembled.

1. State the issue clearly; perhaps propose a solution.
2. Proceed with sensitivity to the needs of all, including their fears and insecurities.
3. Remember that, on a given issue, some people may get out ahead while others are just awakening.
4. Sense from what experience a person may be speaking and respond accordingly.
5. Be aware that a controversial situation may touch off grieving in some people and that they may need time to work through it.
6. If clarity is not coming, take comfort that now everyone is at least wrestling with the issue. Simply stating this as an observation can, on occasion, release the meeting to move forward.

*Based on Appendices 1, 5, and 8 of Farnham, Hull & McLean, Grounded in God (revised edition): Listening Hearts Discernment for Group Deliberations.

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Appendix 9

BACK OF CARD

7. Keep in mind that God may speak through those in the minority, as well as those in the majority.
8. Always look for ways to bring together strands from differing views.
9. On occasion, it can help to check out where the group is at that moment by asking, “Where do you think we are now?”
10. Be ready to work with the pressure of deadlines, but also be open to delaying action.
11. As an issue is considered, it may become clear that it involves several components, each of which ought to be considered separately.
12. If consensus seems to be emerging, you can ask the group to either affirm or modify your understanding (for instance, “Are we in consensus that…?”), and listen to the response for clarity.
13. If there is apparent dissent, but a strong desire or need to take action, ask if the reservations are sufficiently strong to prevent action.

Elements Important to Discernment Around an Issue

Like personal discernment, the movement or flow goes from the rational to the spiritual.

1. Formulate the question for discernment.
2. Gather information and ideas.
3. Explore practical considerations.
4. Evaluate the data.
5. Become still and centered in God’s presence and let prayerful silence pervade.
6. Pose questions, tapping into images and scripture that may come to mind.
7. Provide opportunity for reflective responses.
8. Look for signs of God (see below).
10. Develop plan of action.

Signs of God: God’s peace, joy, faith, hope, love and/or surge of energy; persistence of the same message coming in different ways and places; convergence of thinking that suddenly comes together and makes sense; an increase in productivity.

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Appendix 10: PhoneTree Messages

The Wednesday before October 27, to promote the congregational retreat:

“This is Pastor Sharon calling. If you truly care about the future of this church, you will want to join us the next three Sundays. This coming Sunday after worship we will be holding a congregational retreat, lunch included, to explore exciting ministries for the future focus of this church. We hope you will make it a priority to attend, as we need your input.”

The Wednesday before November 3, to promote unveiling the opportunity map, the start of discernment, and the Service of Remembrance for loved ones who died:

“This is Pastor Sharon calling. Thanks to the many who attended worship and the church retreat Sunday. This Sunday, in addition to the Service of Remembrance, we will reveal the exciting paths where we feel God may be leading this church. You will have a week to pray and vote what you discern as God’s calling for the church’s future. I hope you will join us!”

The Wednesday before November 10, to finish discernment and celebrate with a Thanksgiving dinner:

“This is Pastor Sharon calling. This coming Sunday is Thanksgiving Sunday, with a scrumptious turkey dinner following worship. Hopefully you have been praying and discerning God’s desires for the future of this church. An exquisite opportunity map, graced with your lovely artwork and poetry, contains two exciting approaches awaiting your vote. Come join us as we celebrate what the future may hold!”
What can you expect from this exercise?

Your role
1. Contribute your best ideas
2. Be energetic and optimistic
3. Each group will manage itself
4. Focus on the future that you want to create and would support with your time, talents, treasure, energy and prayers

Ground rules
1. Focus on the positive. Complaints are not allowed here!
2. Everyone participates
3. All ideas are valid
4. Everything is written on flip charts
5. Listen to each other
6. Observe time frames
7. Seek higher ground, where differences are acknowledged, but don’t have to be worked out
8. Think of ideas that inspire you and would encourage others to get involved

Leadership roles
DISCUSSION LEADER – From the Transition Team. Assures that each person who wants to speak is heard. Keeps group on track to finish on time.
TIMEKEEPER – Keeps group aware of time left. Periodically reports time remaining to the Discussion leader.
RECORDER – Writes people’s ideas on flip charts, using the speakers’ words. Asks people to restate long ideas briefly.
REPORTER – Presents the team’s report to the large group

Song: “Spirit of the Living God” (when your small group goes to its specific area)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Engaging in envisioning provides an opportunity to listen carefully to God’s call and the call of our times. It is an opportunity to push the creative edges, to do new things, and to wonder and pray about our ministry’s greatest potentials—both internally as a church and externally in our ministry in the world.

Let’s assume that today, after meeting here, we go into a sound sleep and when we awaken, the year is 2018. While we were asleep, many exceptional things happened—miracles happened!—and Disciples Christian Church became something you would most like to see for yourself, friends, children, community, and for the world. Now you awaken. You walk into a place where you get a panoramic view of the primary mission of this church, which concerns one of the following areas: Families in Crisis, Families in Need, Elderly/Homebound/Hospitalized, Drama Ministry, or Any Other Ideas. You are moved and proud in a heartfelt way! It’s the kind of church community you most want to be part of, one that is living God’s call in fresh, vibrant, meaningful, and powerful ways in the community! Please choose the area that excites you the most and join that small group. Be prepared to share some highlights of what you see in this area for your vision in 2018.

Song: “They’ll Know We Are Christians” (when you return to the large group)

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity may one day be restored:
And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.

Al Dream Phase InstructionsBoardman.doc
Appendix 12 Voting Instructions

ON WHICH PATH IS GOD CALLING US?

“The place God calls you to is the place
where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”
Frederick Buechner

The beautiful opportunity map, designed and created by Matt Kluchar, displays a guiding image of two possible options on which to focus this church for the next five years. These options evolved out of our extensive research on this church - its gifts and passions and matching them with the needs of the Boardman area. From your enthusiastic involvement during the congregational retreat on October 27th, we condensed your ideas down into the two starting options below, which can later incorporate many of your ideas. Both options provide companionship, connectiveness, and communication for those in need, both on a short-term crisis and long-term basis:

1. **free community meals** with programs, classes, religious training, and services for the needy

   “For I was hungry and you gave me food,
   I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
   I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25: 35

   This is a model currently used by the Salvation Army. Ideas for future programs based around the meal could include food, clothing, and other needed items given out, “Cooking on a Budget” classes, financial management counseling or classes, worship, prayer or Bible study groups, sewing groups or classes, a neighborhood garden in our back yard, weekly Vacation Bible School for children, connecting families to other helping agencies, drama presentations or puppet ministry, help with job search and resumes, health and wellness fairs, and providing transportation and referrals to other helping agencies. To our knowledge, there is no agency that provides this type of services to the needy within five miles of this church. Disciples Christian Church could be known as (per Doug Gaier) the people who “stand in the gap when there is no where else to turn.”

2. **adoption programs** for directly assisting and mentoring individuals or groups in need.

   “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
   but you have received a spirit of adoption.” Romans 8: 15

   Examples include “Adopt-a-Family” over holidays or longer, “Adopt-a-Grandma or Grandpa” in a nursing home, “Adopt-a-Nursing Home,” or “Adopt-a-School.” Visit these people, develop lasting relationships, provide assistance, mentoring and encouragement. Invite them to special classes or host events like a health fair for them. People or groups in need could be determined by partnering with schools, Job and Family Services or other agencies that would know of
specific needs. Disciples Christian Church could be known as the church that is “The Adoption Center.” To our knowledge, no other church in the area does an extensive ministry of adoptions.

Discerning for the Church

Using the steps for discernment on your white, laminated card, be sure to weigh the pro’s and con’s of each option, for the whole church, not just for yourself. We are searching for an intergenerational, sustainable mission over the long-term, on which to base other ministries in the future. Important note: Decisions as to location, time, finances, staffing, restructuring the church governance, etc. would be made based on what the congregation discerns as God’s purpose or calling. In later years, ideas from either option can be explored and added, provided the congregation does an efficient job of establishing either option as a successful ministry first.

“Voting” Instructions

You will have a week to discern on which path you think God is calling this church, from November 3 -10th. You may cast your “vote” by signing your name to a list (which either the Transition Team has on Sundays or the Office will have during the week) and applying the sticker given to you to your chosen area on the opportunity map. Stickers will be colored to represent different age groups in the church.

What Happens After the “Vote”? 

The Transition Team will carefully evaluate and publish the results. They (or another ad-hoc team) will need to contact other agencies and do more research in the community, in order to determine how to set up the ministry. This will require much planning and more discernment. Knowing the direction this church has discerned for its future will help you attract and call your next minister, who should have similar passions for this ministry.

Thank you so much for taking the discernment of the future of this church so seriously!

Your Transition Team,

(Members’ names were listed.)
Helping people who are needy
The building used seven days a week or a minimum three days for feeding and sheltering needy in the community
Ministry on Sunday offers me something for my week ahead
A relational ministry would excite me.
A safe-haven for latchkey kids
A spiritually uplifting service that’s not boring and rigid
70% capacity in the seats at worship and growth in numbers
More relational, hands-on
More overt love for each other every week
Everyone feels welcome and conflict is managed
Pastor as a strong administrative leader who is charismatic
90% of budget spent on Outreach and Ministry
Using the building to help people
Get the kitchen up to code so we can feed the hungry
an emergency shelter for transient families
an education center with classes on parenting, living within a budget, healthy eating, teaching a trade (partner with agencies)
religious, spiritual classes after school for latchkey (use Vacation Bible School model)
Ministry to the whole family with evening programs, adopt-a-family, helping families with parents addicted or in jail
“Standing in the gap when the need is great and they have no where to go.”
Mission trip every year
Families in need everywhere
Kids who are bullied
Use the building for community forums on issues with panelists or bring in guest speakers
Shut-ins, elderly, hospitalized mid-week Bible study and Sunday worship
SAIL (Summer Adventures in Learning) disabilities program for kids in summer, which was given up by the Junior League.
Merge with another church that shares our passions and values
Expand our drama ministry ex: Journey to the Cross at Easter
a more active youth group and more involvement with Camp Christian
“We are here to grow spiritually and help others to grow also.”
Appendix 16
Ideas Brainstormed by the Congregational Teams on October 27, 2013
(* means a key, important idea of that team)

Families in Crisis Ideas
Classes to help families in crisis find a job
Transportation to get to doctor, appointments, job interview, counselor, etc.
Provide a meal for anyone coming to the door hungry
Safe place for children
Secret Santa - partner with schools to assist children in crisis year-round
Provide warm clothes
Take care of short-term needs and partner with school agency to meet needs
Make one thing better - don’t do it all.
Hot meal once a week or short-term for transients
Get a family and support them all year
Be a storage facility for families in need for food, clothing, personal items, etc.

Families in Need Ideas
Monitor what we are doing as God’s calling
Provide educational tools for families to achieve self-sufficiency
Positive reinforcement (seniors help families and families help seniors)
Gardening ministry - give residents plots
Help themselves but in turn help someone else
Mentoring - finances, nutrition, also offer Bible study
Develop relationships
Dysfunctional family support
Reward system - accountability
Link needs to where they need to go for help
Support system for teachers who see the needs
Collection ministry to help schools / families
Adopt-a-school - provide awards / rewards
Start small-focused-managable *
Invite teachers to request for families when they see a need
Deal with drug problem...addiction
Latchkey program / “safe house”
Find families in need by offering assistance and draw them into education programs with incentives
Provide spiritual guidance for families
Programs with biblical / spiritual base
Lead by example
Focus on “little kids want to be helpful” (setting the lifelong foundation)
Community Bible study
Match gifts of skilled trades to provide support in community
Mentoring to find skills in the community and “pay it forward”
Teach people not to throw things away (consumables vs renewables)
When providing assistance, provide anonymous invitation to come for more assistance / support
Accept that if God is calling us to do this, we do it even if some take advantage

Elderly / Homebound / Hospitalized Ideas
Talk to someone on phone or in person (Senior Phone Buddy)
Youth visits to nursing homes, gifts, cards
Numerous nursing homes / assisted living residents in need
Adopt a grandparents / visit, cards, phone call, lunch
Visit / listen to elderly
Send veterans’ cards / thank you / appreciation
Offer home maintenance / errands / visits / fellowship
PASSPORT program / information fair / services available: library, agency on aging, senior citizen centers, Meals on Wheels / senior advocates / ombudsmen
Medical volunteers
Senior dinners / speakers / senior groups & activities / computer classes / crafts / music / dancing
Involves elderly to help others
Logo shirts - church identification / awareness / dedication
Caregiving / respite care
Sit with family / respite for ill in hospital surgery or out-patient
Notes / calls of encouragement for family members
An area set up for cards to be signed, ask for card donations
Improve communication among all!
Prayer blanket / shawls / prayer bears
* People not in hospice / skilled nursing
Phone in a prayer
Homebound mission group

Drama Ministry / Fine Arts Ideas
Both internal and external uses example: nursing home
Teenage acting group
* Puppet ministry
Dance
Mime
Easter drama presentation
Walk-through dramas of Bible stories
Daycare visits of puppet shows
Ongoing children’s choir
Bell choir
Arts / crafts workshops and shows
Offer music lessons
Kitchen band
Christian concert
Flagging (movement of banners and streamers)
Traveling venues (ex: bell choir, BHS Chorale)
Magic team
Comedy cooking show for teaching families to cook
Coupon clipping economics
Drama
Internet videos

Any Other Ideas
Use play as a vehicle to bring people in
Do PSA’s (public service announcements) for church functions
Provide transportation to bring people in
Reduce number of committees
Create bagfuls of water for businesses to order
Offer Twelve-Step Programs like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous)
Use Pastor Sharon’s talents and ideas
We need minister who uses Bible to convey personal ideas
Someone needs to be on fire! (referring to minister)
Risk assessment
Things need to be done internally
Appendix 17  
Voices of Our Valley  
Notes from the Community Panel  
Sunday, March 23, 2014

Pastor Sharon Kiesel opened the meeting with prayer. A Transition Team leader explained the purpose, rules & schedule of the panel and asked each member to introduce themselves and discuss some problematic areas they experience in our community. These will be documented in the table below. Panel members included:

- Mahoning County Common Pleas Judge
- Executive Director of Hands On Volunteer Network
- Social Worker/Drug Prevention for the Boardman Schoo
- Police Chief, Boardman Police Department
- Program Director, Doris Burdman Home, Compass Community & Family Services

What social, economic, and spiritual trends do you currently see in Boardman and the Mahoning Valley?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Member</th>
<th>Trend/Problem</th>
<th>Action/Possible Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Employment -</td>
<td>Driver’s license + negative drug test = Employment Education (at least a GED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drugs (heroin) will get worse in the next 5 years.</td>
<td>Sponsor a drug program (AA) Anger management counseling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>“Say NO to drugs, say YES to something else. Drug testing for sports using hair. Positive = mandatory treatment to participate in sports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change in Family Dynamics</td>
<td>Parenting programs. Mentoring life skills, ex.bookkeeping One on one involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Chief</td>
<td>Hunger</td>
<td>Lunch for kids during summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health

Mental health problem are those who are not being treated.

Encourage counseling at MH agencies (Parkview, Compass, D&E (children). Help reduce stigma of MH. Better understanding of how the brain works will help with drugs & mental Illness. “Get better at connecting the dots.”

What do you think Boardman and Mahoning County will look like in ten (10) to twenty (20) YEARS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel Member</th>
<th>Trend/Problem</th>
<th>Action/Possible Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Network</td>
<td>Boardman will be a vibrant community with problems to overcome.</td>
<td>Reason for Police Chief's concern (as Police Chief)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Chief</td>
<td>Population will decline. Oil &amp; gas drilling will improve the economy.</td>
<td>To increase safety/reduce drug activity we need to be willing to pay to operate at 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crime increase - Can’t afford to staff prison/jails at 100% capacity.</td>
<td>Family Life programs/Life style classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage/Divorce problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Will be known as a technology center, but we are losing the war on drugs.</td>
<td>Education. Start with children educating on the dangers. What makes them turn to drugs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                                                                                                                               | Mahoning County has 2 programs: Drug Court – 1 year – charges dropped if they complete the course. Mental Health Court |
</code></pre>
11. Mental health clients are ill-equipped to live independently. Recommended agencies that would provide treatment at low or no cost would be Turning Point, Compass & Intension Treatment, D & E (children).

12. Losing the war on drugs. Drug education for all ages.

What services or ministries could Disciples Christian Church offer to help with the needs and challenges for the present and future?

7. Family Life Programs/ Life Style classes.
8. School rep volunteered to do a Parenting class.
9. Chief recommended the “Bridges Out of Poverty” program. Network volunteer rep stated that MYCAP currently has the license for this program.
10. Network volunteer rep stated that paperwork is very difficult for people to needing benefits. Assistance in completing the paperwork and making sure they are doing the right thing would be beneficial.
11. When we decide on a mission, Chief said he would have this included on the Township website. Network volunteer rep volunteered her agency’s assistance in helping us set up and stated it would take about 7 months.
12. Schools are not the fix today - need to look to the community. Some practitioners are giving mental health patients illegal drugs – they end up with substance abuse problems.
Appendix 18
Igniting Hope: Family by Family Volunteer Guidelines

Confidentiality - All participants in this program are advised of the need for extreme confidentiality when dealing with the personal issues of the adopted families. All matters concerning these needs should remain confidential between the designated congregational liaison, the congregational director of the adopt a family program and the pastor. The director and pastor will involve other parties as necessary.

Scope of Assistance – We will work with families to obtain or provide items that meet their basic needs, along with assisting them at special times of the year such as holidays when they cannot provide for themselves. As a general guideline these needs include, but are not necessarily limited to, items such as – food, clothing, transportation to and from employment and medical appointments, school supplies and gifts for school age children.

At all times we must be aware that we are NOT trained professional counselors nor are we to suggest to anyone that they should seek professional assistance in that area. Our role is to provide a list of available resources to an individual or family that expresses to us a specific need or desire to obtain this type of assistance.

It is important to remember that every person’s problem is a crisis to him or her. It is not for us to judge the severity of the need or situation but to treat them with the kindness and respect that God would have us show the world. We will model our faith through action and word and be open to sharing our beliefs when asked. While everyone should be treated with tact and sensitivity we must remember that their problems are not our fault or responsibility. Some problems will fall well out of the scope of our responsibility. Discernment and objectivity should be employed at all times and involving either the pastor and/or director as needed to obtain a detached opinion and perspective can bring things into focus when they become clouded by the heart.

Safety and Security – At no time should you ever expose yourself to potential danger or harm during the course of your activities. Nor should you ever let yourself be in a position of being alone with a member of the opposite sex, especially if they are under the age of 18.

June 17, 2014
Appendix 19. Igniting Hope Family by Family Hub Diagram
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