Stewardship, Discernment, and Congregational Decision Making

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"Remember! God has entrusted you with your life, your possessions, and the gospel. Will you be faithful with what he has given you? When he returns will he say to you, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' Or will he say, 'You wicked, lazy servant!'" How many sermons have you heard (or even given) where this has been said, either explicitly or implicitly? How often has this exhortation been used in a Bible study, Sunday School class, or stewardship seminar you've attended? The "Parable of the Faithful and Unfaithful Stewards" (Matthew 25:4-28, cf. Luke 19:12-27) is regularly used to urge Christians to examine their giving and to steward their time, talents, and treasure wisely. Most believers want to be faithful servants and try hard to do what they hope is God's will, but sometimes they struggle to discern God's call. How do we follow the example of Jesus who said: "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:28-29, cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 14:24)? What does God want us to do and how can we know it?

The problem is magnified when it comes to congregational decision making. Church leaders often have this parable in mind as they seek to lead congregations in making wise decisions regarding resources and ministry programming. They can feel increased pressure to be "faithful servants," since they steward not only their personal assets, but also those of the church. How can they help others as a body to discern God's will in the midst of many opinions, suggestions, proposals, as well as competing personalities and priorities?

According to the usual interpretation of this parable, the master (Jesus) entrusts his servants (disciples) with riches, gives minimal instructions (his teaching), and goes away to a distant country (Heaven), where he is not available for consultation. The servants are left to their own devices to succeed or fail at their task. The moral of the story seems to be: try hard to be a good steward of your life using your own wisdom, abilities, and resources, lest when Jesus returns (or when you are called home to Heaven), he judges you harshly for your unfaithfulness and lack of productivity. It is up to you to make good decisions.[1]

This common teaching of self-sufficient decision-making is reinforced by American culture's belief in naturalism. Phillip Johnson describes its impact on religious faith: "Naturalism does not explicitly deny the mere existence of God, but it does deny that a supernatural being could in any way influence natural events, such as evolution, or communicate with natural creatures like ourselves."[2] God is uninvolved in the universe, so it is up to humans to control and create their world. In this view, the "master" *is* unreachable, off in a far country, and we *are* left to steward our lives as best we can. Consciously or unconsciously, we begin to believe that all human decisions (including congregational ones) are to be made only by a careful evaluation of the data (including the principles and teaching of Scripture), but without divine experiential guidance.[3] Such prayerless decision making reflects a weak belief in, and minimal sense of, the divine presence.

But in this information-overloaded world, people do not and cannot know all there is to know, and that realization leads to a great deal of anxiety. Much research and study, even in the church, is motivated by a restless search for the magic formula, missing information, or wise advice that will keep life under control and bring with it safety and prosperity. Fortunately, this view of God's "absence" and our sole responsibility in personal and corporate decision making is

contradicted by the teachings of historic orthodox Christianity. As Donald Bridge and David Phypers point out: "Every cardinal Christian doctrine taught in Scripture … implies the intervention of God, the bursting in of the transcendent, the spiritual, the divine—and Christianity cannot be explained or lived if this is forgotten or denied."[4] God has not forsaken his people, therefore the parable was told to promote faithfulness, not to teach self-sufficient decision making. This intention was confirmed by Jesus the night before his crucifixion. He did tell his disciples he would be "going away," but he also promised he would not leave them on their own as "orphans" (John 14:18). Instead, he said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17, NIV). Jesus did not and will not abandon believers to make decisions on their own: he provided the Holy Spirit to guide them.

However, disagreement about knowing and doing God's will has run throughout the church's history to this day, one indication that discerning God's leading is not easy. So the question remains: How *do* believers discover how, where, and when God would have them invest their lives and resources, individually and corporately, as good stewards for his kingdom? For an answer it is helpful to look at three sources of guidance that have been used separately and in combination by God's people throughout history. Christian individuals and communities make better decisions—and are more faithful to their identity as the "body of Christ"—when they use a paradigm of discernment/decision making that combines guidance from (1) wisdom, including insights, teaching, and judgments from a variety of sources; (2) the Holy Spirit, through personal and corporate listening prayer and evaluation; and (3) the church community, even the entire congregation. Combining these elements provides a holistic approach to

discernment and making decisions (Mark 12:29-31; John 15:12-17) as the strengths of each source effectively offset the weaknesses of the others.

Before going further it is important to clarify the meaning of the terms "discernment" and "decision making." Discernment, usually considered to be a crucial part of decision making, is defined as: "(1a) The act of discerning or perceiving by the intellect; intellectual perception or apprehension, (b) The faculty of discerning; discrimination, judgment; keenness of intellectual perception; penetration, insight, (2) The act of distinguishing; a distinction, (3) Perception by the senses; distinguishing by sight, distinct vision."[5] When the Apostle Paul speaks of discernment, there is some variation, according to Luke Timothy Johnson: "Sometimes he uses cognates of *krino*, which have the connotation of judging. Other times he uses cognates of *dokimazo*, which have the connotation of testing. … it appears that Paul regards this capacity of judging, testing, or discerning to be a gift of the Holy Spirit that works in and through human intelligence."[6] "Spiritual" discernment is the process of seeking to understand God's leading through attentive listening prayer, relying on God's presence and involvement as promised in John 14:26.[7] As Valerie Isenhower and Judith Todd assert: "… decision making and planning in the church must be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit opens our hearts and minds to hearing and gives us the wisdom we need to seek God's vision."[8] During times of spiritual discernment, congregants listen for "God's voice, God's call, God's promise" through prayer, Scripture study, group discussion, self-examination, historical recollection, and the evaluation of pertinent information.[9] Natural abilities or common methods of decision making are not excluded, but are supplemented by going beyond them to seek God's presence and will, not a congregation's preferences.

"Decision making" is coming to "the final and definite result of examining a question; a conclusion, judgment. … The making up of one's mind on any point or on a course of action; a resolution, determination."[10] Congregational decision making is the process by which a church makes a conclusive choice about an issue or proposed action. The methods and sources of guidance used or neglected by a congregation in making decisions speak volumes about its priorities, values, relationships, fears, and true beliefs.[11] As Johnson puts it:

> I think there ought to be some connection between what a group claims to be, and the way it does things. The church claims to be a community of faith; is there any connection between this claim and its actual communal life? This could be tested by looking at several places where churches express their life, but a particularly important and revealing place is the process of reaching decision.[12]

While most churches seek at least a little guidance from each of the three sources, usually one or two are dominant. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, so the following sections will explore the models derived from them.

Guidance from Wisdom

Wisdom (*hokma*) was highly valued in the ancient world. Its Old Testament synonyms are: "*bina*, 'understanding', Job 39:26; Proverbs 23:4; *tebuna*, 'insight', Psalm 136:5; … *sekel*, 'prudence', Proverbs 12:8; 23:9."[13] Raymond Van Leeuwen says: "Biblical wisdom to a large extent has to do with practical knowledge, with a know-how regarding the whole spectrum of human skills and activities, all in tune with the normative patterns and possibilities—and with the concrete givens—of creation."[14] The wise person acknowledges and seeks to live in accord with the world's God-created structure by studying nature, human culture, and Scripture (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17). Biblical wisdom's "centre of interest is the individual with his needs, ambitions and problems, and even when the problems of the

relation of the individual to society are discussed it is human society in general rather than the specific community of Israel to which reference is made."[15] Wise communal decisions are the result and sum of wise individual decisions.

However, due to creaturely limitations, human wisdom is incomplete, and with minds darkened by sin it can be used foolishly in self-sufficient attempts to control the world, others, and God. D. A. Hubbard and F. Derek Kidner note while the Old Testament understands folly as "sometimes plain silliness (*e.g.* Proverbs 10:14; 14:15; 18:13), it is usually culpable: a disdain for God's truth and discipline (Proverbs 1:7)"[16] So also, New Testament wisdom (*sophia*) is "seldom neutral … it is either God-given or God-opposing. If divorced from God's revelation it is impoverished and unproductive at best (1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:4; 2 Corinthians 1:12) and foolish or even devilish at worst (1 Corinthians 1:l9ff; James 3:l5ff)."[17] Worldly advice that disdains or ignores God may promise success and the good life, but ultimately it is destructive and leads to death.

Congregational decision making that primarily relies on "guidance from wisdom" emphasizes insights obtained through the careful study of various sources of wisdom and knowledge: the natural world, pertinent research on the needs, resources, and the norms and values of the congregation and greater community, church history, the Bible, tradition, and theology. General principles are gained through education, practical experience, and reason as time-tested processes and methods are used. Business, sociological, and psychological skills and understanding may promote efficiency, effectiveness, and healthy group dynamics. Guidance from wisdom provides objective standards for discerning between what is wise/good and evil/foolish, and it assumes that the Bible highly values various kinds of wisdom (while noting their limitations), so believers should use them in decision making.

Models based on guidance from wisdom see the church as the gathering of redeemed followers of God's wise instruction, recorded in nature and Scripture and embodied by tradition. Leaders commonly serve as teachers, preachers, exhorters, coaches, problem-solvers, executives, and disciplinarians, deriving authority from their skills, wisdom, expertise, and knowledge. They are often set apart from member students/disciples, who listen, learn, and carry out their plans. Decisions are often made by the pastor/leader, since he/she is assumed to be the wisest and best trained.

Decision making based on "guidance from wisdom" has several strengths. It emphasizes acquisition of wisdom through education and experience (Proverbs 1:1-9:18) and gives clear general guidance for discerning between the good life and the foolish one. It provides great stability as it relies on tradition, principles, and biblical teaching, and it excels in discerning false teaching and practice. It uses practical insights and skills from various disciplines to help congregations become efficient, effective, and successful.

This model also has many weaknesses. Isolated from contemporary guidance from the Holy Spirit, it can be static, legalistic, inflexible, and unable to give timely insight. Although the Spirit's involvement in decision making may be affirmed theologically, often in practice it is not expected due to "cessationist" beliefs or naturalistic unbelief. It can be rationalistic, excluding the experiential and intuitive and seeing the Bible as a "rule book" of moral principles rather than the record of God's interactions with humanity. This model can easily succumb to naturalism and pragmatism, with an emphasis on what "works" rather than what is "right" —leading to conflicts between Scripture's teachings and the "wisdom" of popular culture. It grants authority to the aged and theoretically most learned, while input from the young and less-educated is often restricted or under-appreciated. It can feed a leader's narcissistic ego, promote self-sufficiency,

and lead to minimal accountability for the "wise one" if he/she is seen to be above question. It can also promote anxiety as decision makers search for a quick "magic formula" or special insight to deal with problems.

Wisdom has its limitations, as the writers of Ecclesiastes and other wisdom books knew well (Ecclesiastes 7:11-25); true wisdom comes not by the diligent study of Scripture alone but by revelation from God. As some of Jesus's opponents demonstrated, it is possible to be a scholar of the Bible and completely miss the Savior (John 5:39-40). Nevertheless, insight gained from wisdom is essential for good decision making, and individuals and congregations wishing to love, honor, and serve God need to value, seek, and use it and so find abundant life.

Guidance from the Holy Spirit

It is one thing to make wise decisions concerning the details of everyday life, it is another to know and do the will of God. Finite humans cannot probe God's mind and know his purposes apart from revelation. True wisdom "is inscrutable (Job 28:12-21): God in his grace must reveal it if man is going to grasp it at all (Job 28:23, 28). Even wisdom derived from natural abilities or distilled from experience is a gracious gift, because God's creative activity makes such wisdom possible."[18] The ancient world had many augurs, soothsayers, astrologers, wizards, and priests trying to "divine" through various techniques the correct courses of action for individuals and their communities. They were held in high esteem, for "of all the voices of antiquity, none had more power or authority than those who could speak for God or, in a pagan culture, for the gods."[19] Although common in the surrounding cultures, divination was generally condemned in Israel (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:9-15; 1 Samuel 28:3-20; Isaiah 47:9-13).[20] Ben Witherington III describes divination as "a human attempt to obtain an answer from

God, presumably at a time when there is no spontaneous revelation from the deity about the matter."[21] While both divination and prophecy were "supernatural" communication, they differed significantly, for "Israel was called to a higher and more intimate relationship with God through prophets and intermediaries (e.g., Moses). Seeking after mediums was taken as a clear sign of a spiritual breakdown in that intimate relationship."[22]

From a biblical perspective, true wisdom comes by the illumination of the Holy Spirit who gives gifts of knowledge and prophetic insight. A prophet "received a revelation from God by dream, vision, or verbal communication. He [she] then declared that revelation as a messenger in the special service of God. What the Lord put in his [her] mouth he [she] spoke."[23] God's Old Covenant people looked forward to a day when the world would "be filled with the knowledge of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:9) and all believers would prophesy and have dreams and visions (Joel 2:28-32).

> Whereas the gift of God's spirit had previously been restricted to chosen leaders like Gideon (Judges 6:34), the early kings, Saul and David (1 Samuel 10:6; 16:13), and the prophet Micah (Micah 3:8), now all God's people will become prophets, and Moses' wish will be fulfilled. … *All flesh* is defined as comprehensively as possible: sons and daughters, old people (cf. 1:2, 14; 2: 16) and young men (lit. "choice men;" cf. Deuteronomy 32:25; Jeremiah 31:13), servants and handmaids. No exclusion will be made on the basis of gender, age or social station (cf. Paul's glorious expansion of this openness in Galatians 3:28). … superficial distinctions are set aside and even outcasts become core members of God's new fellowship (Ezekiel 39:29).[24]

In the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:23-34), the LORD promised to write his law on people's hearts. "The result of this process of changing the manner in which, and the degree to which, God's people will know God is that all of God's people, without regard to social status or standing or educational background, will know God intimately and He will truly be their God. This, in effect, would put priests, prophets, diviners, teachers, and other mediators out of business."[25]

Jesus modeled for his disciples what it meant to pray, be filled, and follow the guidance of the Spirit (Matthew 11:4-6; Luke 3:16; 4:18-19; 10:21; John 1:33), promising the Spirit would guide them "into all truth," tell them "what is yet to come" (John 15:12-13), and comfort, teach, and empower them for ministry (John 7:37-39; 14:15-31; 15:26-27; 16:5-16; 20:22-23). The fulfillment of these promises on Pentecost (Acts 2) is the basis for the New Testament's emphasis on living by the Spirit. Gordon Fee notes that for Paul, "the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the absolutely crucial matter for Christian life, from beginning to end."[26] Paul urged believers to "walk by the Spirit," be "led by the Spirit," and "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16, 18, 25). As part of Christ's eschatological triumph (Colossians 1:13) the Spirit poured out gifts of prophecy, knowledge, wisdom, discernment, and more on believers (1 Corinthians 12-14; 4:7-16) to guide, aid, and equip them for service as they grew in maturity and unity until Jesus's return (Ephesians 4:7-13; Colossians 1:27-28).[27] Early Christians expected God to directly and specifically communicate with them through the exercising of the Spirit's gifts, and his guidance would enable them "to do good works, which God prepared in advance for [them] to do" (Ephesians. 2: 10; Zechariah 4:6; John 14:12-17; 15:26).

Decision making based primarily on "guidance from the Holy Spirit" commonly sees the church as the gathering of those led, called, gifted, and empowered by the Spirit. At its most extreme, this model claims that the "Spirit" dictates the decisions of individuals and communities, with compliance expected. Decision making authority comes from belief that God's will is revealed to the congregation through supernatural guidance, and leaders are chosen on the basis of their perceived anointing by the Spirit and evidence charismatic gifts. Congregants are to follow the personal "leadings" of the Spirit, "test the spirits," and trust guidance given to their leaders. Questions affecting the congregation can be brought to meetings

to prayerfully seek the Spirit's voice, and insight also comes during worship services. Day-to-day decisions are often either "discerned to death" or handled pragmatically with the assumption that no guidance is needed.

"Guidance from the Holy Spirit" brings personal and communal experiences of God and God's purposes to the process of discernment and decision making. The strengths of this model are its conviction of the supernatural world's reality and its affirmation that God is able and willing to give specific supernatural, creative, and unexpected guidance for a particular situation that goes beyond human wisdom. It encourages the experiential openness to divine leading (countering rationalism), and dependence and waiting on God (which tempers American culture's restless impatience) as one cannot hurry or "force" God to speak. It takes seriously New Covenant promises that God would pour out his Spirit on all his people so they could intimately know him and his will. This lessens the pressure on leaders to comprehend everything, for all can hear from God and provide insight.

The weaknesses of this model, however, are many. Often it does not value the wisdom and insight gained through education, theology, tradition, and, at times, even Scripture, preventing holistic decision making. The "voice of the Spirit" can be confused with other voices (one's own thoughts and preferences, the demonic, pressure from others), and an unwillingness or inability to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1-3) can lead to poor or disastrous decision making.[28] Triumphalism may surface if it is not understood that God's kingdom has been inaugurated but is not here yet in its fullness. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they still "see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" and only "know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Also, there can be a lack of personal and communal responsibility for decisions with the claim: "We were just doing what God told us to do." Individualism can run rampant as "anointed" ones compete with each other

for leadership and act as "guardians" for those in the congregation who have not been as "richly gifted" by the Spirit. Congregants can idolize charismatic leaders and give them too much authority, resulting in cult-like structures and behavior (mystical spirituality run amuck). Commonly an anti-institutional bent and a dislike of tradition can lead churches to operate independently or in loose associations. In spite of these serious shortcomings, a congregation should not abandon "guidance from the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3; 14:1-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:20) but follow the biblical injunction to "test the spirits" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1-3) and humbly temper "leadings" with guidance from other sources.

Guidance from the Community

While gifts from the Spirit are given individually, they operate communally in and through God's new covenant people. This new kind of community is rooted in the image of the Trinity (Genesis 1:26-28). Darrell W. Johnson remarks: "God does not exist alone; and neither do we who are created in God's image. Thus God says of Adam in the garden, 'it is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). … 'Adam alone' is not Adam in the image of God. God is not a solitary God. Adam does not reflect who God is until Adam shares life with Eve."[29] Humans were made to be in relationship with each other and God. Their societies develop organizational structures and processes, including decision making methods, to facilitate interactions and the accomplishment of tasks. In and of themselves these are not bad, for as Christopher J. H. Wright notes, "the proper and harmonious ordering of relationships between individuals and communities, locally and internationally, is part of human accountability to God as creator of all. The political task of maintaining a morally acceptable social order is a human duty under God."[30] Unfortunately, due to our fallen nature, humans are too often unable and

unwilling to live in loving fellowship, and our unredeemed societies reflect relational dysfunction rather than our Triune God.

Thankfully, God in loving-kindness did not give up his intentions for human community and has worked throughout history, calling men and women from all nations to be part of his redeemed people who love and serve God, each other, and the rest of creation. In contrast to a popular view of the church as a religious organization that gathers to do "spiritual things," to lobby, and vote for preferred courses of actions, the church is "a living organism. It is a body whose Head is Christ and whose members are individual Christians. Indeed it is a supernatural body for, unlike natural organisms, it is not subject to death. Its Head, Christ, is alive for evermore (Revelation 1:18), and its members too through their faith in the Head will never die (John 11:26)."[31] All believers are "baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13) and called to maintain a common experience of God's grace (Matthew 12:25; John 17:1-26; Ephesians 4:3, 25-31; 5:18-6:9; Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 4:13). Yet, they are also given different gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7), and variety in the body of Christ is created and sustained by the Spirit. Diversity among believers, rather than being a problem to be solved, is a God-created and Spirit-endowed blessing to be affirmed. Differences in gifting, opinions, experiences, talents, and perspectives enrich and enlarge congregational understanding and enable the body of Christ to make broader-based decisions in a more inclusive and healthy manner. All believers have access to "the mind of Christ" (Romans 15:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5) and the Spirit can, and sometimes does, speak through all. In theory, all can and should contribute in congregational matters, not just those with natural ability and wisdom (although these too are gifts from God) or designated leadership positions.[32] Importantly, and in contrast to the corporate business model of the pastor/leader as "head," or C.E.O., Christ is the

"head/source" of the church who gives the vision and sets the agenda for each congregation with leaders as the servants. Historically, this understanding has been reflected in the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). This approach affirms the fundamental equality of congregants, weakens individualism and information overload, encourages ownership of decisions, and diffuses conflict as people are "heard." As all members humbly live by the Spirit (aware of their limitations and failings) and cooperatively share their various gifts, abilities, feelings, insights, and experiences, unity is promoted, spirituality is tested, and communally the will of God is discerned, decided, and done.

Decision making based on "guidance from the community" assumes the church is not just a group of individuals joining together to be "religious" but actually is the "body of Christ," the people of God created in his image with reasoning abilities for exercising dominion, empowered and gifted by the Holy Spirit for discernment and ministry. However, the "guidance from the community" model commonly found in American churches, while rooted in the "body of Christ" and "priesthood of all believers" metaphors, primarily uses British parliamentary or American democratic decision making processes based on the governmental systems of ancient Greece, the Roman Republic, and the Israelite popular assembly. It typically relies on *Robert's Rules of Order* rather than the exercise of spiritual gifts to guide meetings. Decision-making authority derives from the "will of the people" (or more accurately the will of the majority voting) or the achievement of consensus, rather than the communal discernment of God's will. The church is seen as a group of believing individuals coming together for encouragement and support in the pursuit of mutually decided-upon goals. Its leaders are organizers, process initiators, facilitators, and guides who may promote debate and negotiate between conflicting parties, but members are responsible to own and finalize decisions through vote or consensus.

This model's strengths are its affirmation of the equality of all members and thus its opportunities for participation. Members take responsibility for decisions made at a variety of levels which increases commitment to the group. It also values the diversity of opinions, insights, and perspectives of members and promotes discussion and debate, discouraging groupthink. Its main weakness is that God's will can be neglected or undetermined due to a focus on "the will of the people." With little input from wisdom sources, decision making can deteriorate into a sharing of ignorance or prejudice with conflicts developing between biblical teaching and popular consensus. The voting process assumes there will be conflicting goals and points of view, and that losers in a vote must bend to the will of the majority. This process can foster disunity over frustrations about losing, not being heard, and differences that are not resolved.[33] Voters may be misinformed and manipulated to gain voting blocs, with strong pressure to conform. If a consensus process is used, joint decisions may be reached through negotiation. In neither method is there clarity that God's will has been discerned over the collective desires of the people. In spite of these weaknesses, a "guidance from the community" approach, with its emphasis on the variety in Christ's body and God's ability to speak to and through all, should not be neglected.

Putting the Three Sources of Guidance Together

As noted earlier, the three different sources of guidance (from wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and the community) have been used separately and in combination from biblical times to the present by God's people seeking to make God-honoring decisions that accomplish his will. Most congregations primarily use one or two of these sources, but it has been rare for a church to fully use all three simultaneously as modeled by the early church in the book of Acts.

In Acts 6 a potentially explosive problem arose: Hellenistic Jewish believers in Jerusalem complained that their widows were being neglected. The Apostles, as congregational leaders, called an assembly of all local believers and asked them to choose men to take over that ministry. The assembly selected seven to be brought to the Apostles, "who prayed and laid their hands on them" (v. 6). In this incident the leaders and people shared in problem solving according to a process very similar to that used in synagogue elections. It is noteworthy that those selected were "known to be full of the Spirit *and* wisdom" (v. 3). Stephen, in particular, is singled out as being "full of God's grace and power" *and* a wise powerful speaker (v. 10).

Acts 13:2-3 records a worship time when the Antioch Church heard the Spirit clearly and directly tell them to commission two leaders for service (probably through prophecy): "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Before laying hands on them, the church members prayed and fasted. Then Paul and Barnabas were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit" (v. 4). Returning from their missionary journey, they shared with the church how God had used them to bring Gentiles to faith in Jesus. These conversions raised many issues and drew out numerous opinions regarding the incorporation of non-Jews into an ethnically Jewish church. The resulting conflict had the potential to divide the fledgling church in two—Jewish and Gentile. Nelson Kraybill helpfully outlines the process the church went through in Acts 15 to resolve it and maintain the Spirit-given unity with diversity:

1. *There was a big argument:* "Certain individuals" differed with Paul and Barnabas on the question of circumcision, and "no small dissension and debate" arose (Acts 15:1-2).
2. *The church sought out a forum in which all parties could be heard:* The local faith community took action, and appointed "Paul and Barnabas and some of the others to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders" (Acts 15:2).
3. *People in conflict had opportunity to tell their stories:* The delegation of disputants arrived at Jerusalem and "reported all that God had done with them" (Acts 15:4).
4. *There was enough time to air convictions, feelings and perspective:* There was "much debate" (Acts 15:7).

5. *Leaders, after careful listening, proposed a way forward that took into account concerns raised by both sides on this issue:* "After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers ... I have reached the decision that we should not trouble [with circumcision] those Gentiles who are turning to God ... but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication ...'" (Acts 15:13-21).
6. *The proposed solution was ratified by consensus:* With the "consent of the whole church" the leaders at Jerusalem sent a delegation to Antioch to convey the agreements reached (Acts 15:22, 25).
7. *The entire decision making process was handled with sensitivity to all participants, under Holy Spirit guidance:* The end result "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).[34]

Communal discernment, relying on input from wisdom sources, the Holy Spirit, and church members and leaders, resulted in the church's decision that God was indeed at work in the conversion of the Gentiles and it needed to join in that work by accepting them as full brothers and sisters in the faith. They took seriously Jesus's teaching that his people's witness to the world depended on their unity and love (John 13:34-35) and used decision-making practices that fostered that love rather than destroyed it.

Recovering Historical Models of Congregational Discernment and Decision Making

In the last thirty years the topic of communal discernment and decision making has bubbled to the surface in various denominations and parachurch organizations. Churches disenchanted with business models of governance and frustrated by contentious congregational meetings have sought other ways of making decisions consistent with their renewed interest in experiential spirituality. New patterns and processes have been proposed and experimented with, but generally most congregations continue to do "business as usual." They have not *experienced* a paradigm that incorporates guidance from wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and the community, and are unaware that there is a "better way."

However, some have searched Scripture, re-examined their own heritages, and reached back into the traditions of the broader church to recover practices and processes to help develop more holistic processes of congregational discernment and decision making. These new methods use all three key sources, but bring unique insights and place special emphasis on guidance from wisdom, the Holy Spirit, or the congregation due to their different backgrounds. Let us look at three examples more closely: Ignatian, Quaker, and Methodist.

Ignatian discernment and decision making. During Lent, 1539, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus, and his companions spent several weeks in concerted prayer and discussion concerning their future together. Should they remain a loose association of priests or become a religious order with a superior and a set rule? The record of their discernment process is known as "The Deliberation" and the "Ignatian" method of communal decision making is based on it, rather than Jesuit constitutional structure.[35] In the 1970s, after Vatican II, the Jesuits began to re-explore corporate spiritual discernment and decision making; the model that John Carroll Futrell proposed after studying the "Deliberation" is now widely accepted.[36] Its process includes the three essential sources of guidance (wisdom, the Holy Spirit, and the congregation):

1. *Prayer:* Begin with prayer for light from the Holy Spirit, perhaps including an invitation to shared spontaneous prayer for a few moments. It might be well to situate the prayer by reading from the Scriptures, writings of the founder, or other documents expressing the spirit of the community.
2. *Sharing Cons:* Each person reports from his [her] own individual discernment the reasons[s/]he has seen which militate against the proposed choice. These are recorded.
3. *Prayer:* At least a brief break. This must be long enough for each one prayerfully to reflect upon the results of step 2.
4. *Sharing Pros and Checking Consensus:* Each person reports from his [her] own individual discernment the reasons [s/]he has seen which favor the proposed choice. These are recorded. At the end of this step find out whether it is already immediately

clear to everyone from the recorded con and pro reasons what the election should be. If so, go immediately to step 7. If not, proceed to step 5.

5. *Prayer:* A break period for each one prayerfully to reflect upon the results of step 4 in the light of those of step 2.

6. *Evaluation and Discovery:* The effort is made now to evaluate the weight of the reasons con and pro recorded and then, in the light of this evidence, communally to discern the choice to which the community is called by God. If the Holy Spirit is working through the second and time of election, and if the conditions of authentic communal discernment have been fulfilled, the decision finally should be clear, and confirmation should be experienced unanimously through shared deep peace—finding God together.

7. *Prayer:* The deliberation session should end with a prayer of thanksgiving and of offering the election to the Father with a reaffirmation of corporate commitment to carry out the decision. Perhaps this could include an invitation to spontaneous shared prayer.[37]

Quaker discernment and decision making. George Fox (1624–1691), the founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), encouraged: "All Friends everywhere, meet together, and in the measure of God's spirit wait, that with it all your minds may be guided up to God and to receive wisdom from God."[38] Preacher Edward Burrough (1634-1663) elaborated, asking Friends to decide their business, "not in the way of the world as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to out-speak and overreach one another in discourse, as if it were … two sides violently striving for dominion in the way of caring on some worldly interests for self-advantage."[39] Instead he admonished them to act "in the wisdom, love, and fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting to one another in lowliness of heart and in the Holy Spirit."[40] Quaker discernment and decision making includes the three guidance elements (wisdom, the Holy Spirit, the congregation) and has remained essentially unchanged over the centuries.[41] George A. Selleck briefly describes the process:

> a meeting for the transaction of business is conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the meeting for worship. It is presided over by a clerk, who after a beginning period of worship, brings before the meeting such business as is right to consider on any particular occasion. Time is permitted for careful and deliberate consideration, all members present who feel a concern to speak being heard. When it appears to the clerk that the meeting has reached a decision, he or she states clearly what

appears to be the sense of the meeting. If the members then give approval to the clerk's statement, a minute is written incorporating it and read before the conclusion of the meeting. No vote is taken. There is no decision made by a majority that overrides opposition. Action is taken only when the group can proceed in substantial unity. Should the clerk sense times of unproductive argumentation, he or she may call for quiet waiting or for postponement.[42]

Wesleyan quadrilateral discernment and decision making. To guide decision making, John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, retained the "Anglican triad" of Scripture, reason, and antiquity, but added the inner witness of the Spirit, resulting in what is now known as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral."[43] Wesley knew what it meant to believe in the gospel intellectually but have no personal, experiential sense of the work of God in one's life. While affirming the role of emotions and experience, he stressed the need to recognize one's tendency towards prideful self–deception, and to be self-aware, humbly accepting correction from others. To guide theological discernment, Wesley relied first on Scripture, then on reason and insight from the example and creeds of the early church.

Like Ignatian discernment and decision making, the Wesleyan model is not taken from historic Methodist practice but from a creative adaptation of the "quadrilateral" that seeks to be faithful to the heritage. In 1998 Garrie Stevens, Pamela Lardear, and Sharon Duger published *Seeking & Doing God's Will: Discernment for the Community of Faith.*[44] Their model goes beyond theological reflection and applies the quadrilateral to all kinds of congregational discernment. It follows the pattern of: (1) gathering for prayer and explaining the process and the focal question; (2) exploring the congregation's history and traditions/insights from Church history; (3) studying/discussing relevant scriptural passages; (4) spending an extended time in silent prayer/reflection on the focal question; (5) inventorying the congregation's and greater community's gifts, resources and needs, suggesting ideas and options, and making proposals that

answer the focal question in order to develop consensus; and (6) closing the process with a time of sharing, prayer and commitment.

Conclusion

Each of the examples discussed includes in some measure all three elements of the proposed paradigm. These models have unique insights and emphases but also much in common. They all recognize the importance of defining the issue to be discerned/decided, the process to be used (including behavioral covenants), and the persons who should be involved (the leaders, a larger group, the whole congregation). They also stress that participants should individually prepare themselves for the time of discernment/decision making by first collecting, distributing, and reviewing as much relevant wisdom/information as possible (Scripture, pertinent research, information on resources available, church or congregational history and traditions, etc.), and second, prayerfully reflecting on it and examining their own hearts, seeking to come to a place of "indifference," and humbly desiring God's will over their own preferences. These models allow ample time during the decision-making meeting for worship, reflection, and prayer along with providing opportunities for all to share insights, experiences, and concerns. Everyone participates in clarifying and discussing the sources of wisdom, and everyone evaluates the cons and pros of proposed solutions. Leaders serve the group as they listen to God and the participants, guide the process, contribute their insights as appropriate, and seek to summarize solutions or courses of action as they become apparent in the discussion. Agreement is reached in these models when all participants reach consensus and are willing to support the decision (or at least do not have any objections to the group moving forward). The goal is for all participants to be able to say, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). If consensus cannot be reached, a

decision is often postponed to allow more time for individual and corporate discernment, giving high value to the unity of the body and the honor due each member.

Depending on a particular congregation's strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and struggles, one particular model may be more helpful than another. When seeking a new way of discernment/decision-making, it may want to choose a model closest to its own tradition to ease concerns about change. Or, it may explore one that challenges that tradition to promote new thinking and practices. It may even draw on its own heritage and congregational history to create new processes that aid communal sharing of wisdom, experience, knowledge, and insights from the Holy Spirit to develop solutions for current problems and vision for the future.

Evangelical Covenant churches have a rich legacy from Lutheran Pietism, Swedish revivalism, American congregationalism, and a growing interest in contemplative practices and spiritual direction.[45] Historically they have valued education and the wise counsel of Scripture ("Where is it written?") as they have affirmed "a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit" (Fifth Covenant Affirmation). The denomination's roots in the Swedish renewal drew from lay ministry, and its current polity affirms the value of each member of Christ's body. ECC congregations could be prime candidates for mining this heritage (that includes denominational writings such as *Covenant Affirmations*) together with their particular cultural traditions and so creatively develop holistic models of congregational discernment and decision making. These new models will help them better discern God's will, maintain their Spirit-given unity and diversity, and steward well the lives, resources, and spiritual gifts entrusted to them. Perhaps they will want to join the growing number of Christian congregations and groups who have discovered it *is* possible to make decisions *together* that are *full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit*.[46]

Recommended Reading

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012; also "Becoming a Community that Practices Corporate Leadership Discernment," Transforming Center: Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership, http://www.transformingcenter.org/ (accessed December 27, 2012).

Curtiss, Victoria G. *Guidelines for Communal Discernment*. Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., http://www.hudrivpres.org/upload/docs/curtiss_discernment.pdf (accessed August 13, 2013).

Dougherty, Rose Mary. *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment.* New York: Paulist Press, 1995; also, Dougherty, Rose Mary, Monica Maxon, and Lynne Smith. *The Lived Experience of Group Spiritual Direction*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003.

Fendall, Lon, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop. *Practicing Discernment Together─Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*. Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007.

Isenhower, Valerie K., and Judith A. Todd. *Listen for God's Leading: A Workbook for Corporate Spiritual Discernment*. Nashville: Upper Room, 2009.

MacMullen, Ramsay. *Voting about God in Early Church Councils*. New Haven, CT and London, UK: Yale University Press, 2006.

Morris, Danny E. and Charles M. Olsen. *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church.* Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2012.

Oswald, Roy M. *Discerning Your Congregation's Future: A Strategic and Spiritual Approach*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 1996.

Robison, Stephen Daryl. *God at Our Planning Table: Spiritual Discernment as a Viable Alternative for Church Planning and Programming*. D. Min. Thesis. Wesley Theological Seminary, 1989.

Stevens, Garrie, Pamela Lardear, and Sharon Duger. *Seeking & Doing God's Will: Discernment for the Community of Faith.* Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998.

Sheeran, Michael J. *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1983.

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod. "Meeting Procedures and Consensus Decision Making," http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/synod-meeting/2011/meeting-procedures-and-consensus-decision-making/ (accessed August 12, 2013); *Manual for Meeting* http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/assets/637/Manual_for_Meetings.pdf (accessed August 12, 2013).

Endnotes

[1] See Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 519-43, especially 529.

[2] Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 20th anniversary edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991, 2010), 145.

[3] See Ronald Rolheiser, *The Shattered Lantern: Rediscovering a Felt Presence of God* (New York: Crossroads, 2001), 55-56.

[4] Donald Bridge and David Phypers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 17.

[5] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s. v. "discernment," http://0-www.oed.com.catalog. georgefox.edu/view/Entry/53694?redirectedFrom=discernment#eid (accessed December 15, 2012).

[6] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 109. He says further: "The key element in decision making as a theological process—that is, as an articulation of the church's faith in the Living God—is discernment. It is an essential component at every stage. Discernment enables humans to perceive their characteristically ambiguous experience as revelatory and to articulate such experiences in a narrative of faith. Discernment enables others to hear such narratives as the articulation of faith and as having revelatory significance. Discernment enables communities to listen to such gathering narratives for the word of God that they might express. Discernment enables communities, finally, to decide for God." See also 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14: 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20.

[7] Valerie K. Isenhower and Judith Todd, *Listen for God's Leading: A Workbook for Corporate Spiritual Discernment* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2009), 11.

[8] Ibid., 16. See also John 14:15-21; 16:12-15.

[9] Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2012), 121.

[10] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s. v. "decision," http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.georgefox. edu/view/Entry/48221?redirectedFrom=Decision#eid116310597 (accessed December 15, 2012).

[11] Carl S. Dudley, "Process: Dynamics of Congregational Life," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley and William McKinney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 111.

[12] Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment*, 10. He says further on 15-16, "The process by which decision is reached tells of the nature of the group in a way other forms of ritual sometimes miss. Perhaps a community loudly proclaims its democratic lifestyle—and at work, rest, and meals, the members hold all things equally. But if the community's decisions are made by executive decree, the claim to equality is empty; the group actually has an authoritarian structure. Conversely, if decisions on entrance and advancement, leadership and responsibility are made by a genuinely popular vote, that process reveals the group to be democratic in a way that propaganda never could. … Property, gender, or age qualifications for voting give specific shading to the kind of democracy this is. The fact that we vote to make decisions tells us that we are a democracy. The fact that not all of us who are members of the group can vote tells us that this democracy is not absolute but relative. If it is possible for a member to lose a vote, that tells us how seriously we take responsibility or deviance. And if members of a group have the vote but do not use it, we learn of a profound alienation of the members from the life of the group."

[13] D. A. Hubbard, s. v. "Wisdom," in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (IBD),* vol. 3, org. ed. of *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas; rev. ed. N. Hillyer (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1980), 1650.

[14] Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Building God's House: An Exploration in Wisdom," in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven K. Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 205-6.

[15] R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9*, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 45 (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1965), 14.

[16] D. A. Hubbard, and F. D. Kidner, s. v. "Folly," in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (IBD),* vol. 1, 512-13.

[17] Hubbard, "Wisdom," *IBD*, 1651.

[18] Ibid*.,* 1650.

[19] Ben Witherington, III, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 8.

[20] Also Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; Isaiah 8:19; 44:25; Jeremiah14:14; 27:9-10; 29:8-9; Ezekiel 12:21-24; 13:6-7; Micah 3:6-7, 11; Zechariah 10:2. See J. S. Wright, s. v. "Divination", *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (IBD),* vol. 1, 391.

[21] Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 6-7.

[22] Ibid., 61. See also. J. G. S. S. Thompson and J. S. Wright, s. v. "Dreams," *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (IBD)*, vol. 1, 394. See also Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 34: 10.

[23] Leslie B. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit: Which Do You Have? Are You Using Them?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, SP Publications, Inc., 1981), 49.

[24] David Allan Hubbard, *Joel & Amos: An Introduction & Commentary*, vol. 22b of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 70. See also Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25; Acts 2:17-21, 39; 21:9; 22:16; Romans 10:13; Titus 3:6; Revelation 6:12.

[25] Witherington, *Jesus the Seer,* 140. See also Isaiah 54:13; Jeremiah 9:23-24; 24:4-7; Ezekiel 28: 25-26; 34:30; Joel 3:17; Zephaniah 3:9-13.

[26] Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 1.

[27] See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 893, who in response to questions about Paul's expectations of the *charismata* ceasing after his lifetime says, "This particular 'answer' to the issue is raised not on the basis of reading the biblical text, but from the greater concern as to their 'legitimacy' today. But this is a hermeneutical question, pure and simple, and one that Paul could not have understood. His answer is plain: 'Of course they will continue as long as we await the final consummation.'"

[28] Dennis J. Horton, "Discerning Spiritual Discernment: Assessing Current Approaches for Understanding God's Will," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 7-31. On page 27, he notes: "Strong advocates of the biblical wisdom approach often speak disparagingly about the ones who depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Stuart W. Scott, for example, refers to intuitive discernment as being inferior due to its subjectivity. He naively refers to his the biblical wisdom approach as objective and thereby preferable to other methods. Because 'intrinsic' approaches, according to Scott, depend on personal experience, 'anything goes, inconsistency is tolerated, and confusion often results' ([*A Study of Decision Making God's Way*, Doctoral dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary,] 1996, 33). At one point, Scott even discourages the use of prayer as a means of guidance due to its potential for subjectivity (1996, 82)."

[29] Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2002), 52. He refers to what is known as the "social" analogy of the Trinity.

[30] Christopher J. H Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 213. The Apostle Paul commends the Colossians for their orderliness (Colossians 2:5) and warns the Corinthians about their chaotic worship for "God is not a God of disorder, but of peace" (1Corinthians 14:33). God himself has created "thrones," "powers," "rulers," and "authorities" (Colossians 1:16).

[31] Bridge and Phypers, *Spiritual Gifts and the Church*, 15. See Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:29; 12:12-27; Colossians 1:18; 3:15; Ephesians 1:23; 2:16; 4:3-16; 5:23.

[32] See the classic book on the participation of lay persons in the congregation and its ministry: Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Vancouver, BC; Regent College Publishing, 1958, 1988).

[33] Norman Nideng, "There's a Better Way than Voting!!," *Searching Together* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1984): 17, says, "Voting can be disastrous to God's work. We are equating the voice of the people with the voice of God. Finding easy access to our lower natures, Satan uses our fondness for democratic methods to divide and lay waste the work of Christ among us."

[34] Nelson Kraybill, "At 11: Conflict and Church Decision Making: Be Clear about Process and Let Everyone Be Heard," *Anabaptism Today*, Issue 11, February 1996, http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/ book/export/html/166 (accessed June 8, 2011).

[35] For a full text of "*deliberatto primorum partum*" or *The Deliberation* see Dominic W. Maruca, Joannes Codurius, and Petrus Faber, *The Deliberation of Our First Fathers: Woodstock Letters (July 1966)* (Jersey City, NJ: Program to Adapt the Spiritual Exercises), 1966.

[36] John Carroll Futrell, "Communal Discernment: Reflections on Experience," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 4, no. 5 (November, 1972):159-92.

[37] Futrell, "Communal Discernment," 172-73.

[38] George Fox, "Epistle 149," *Quaker Spirituality, Selected Writings*, ed. by Douglas Steere (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 131.

[39] Quoted by Elton Trueblood, "The Quaker Method of Reaching Decisions," in *Beyond Dilemmas: Quakers Look at Life*, ed. Sceva Bright Laughlin, 104-24 (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1937), 123-24.

[40] Michael L. Birkel, *Silence and Witness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 67-68.

[41] See Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1983.

[42] George A. Selleck, *Principles of the Quaker Business Meeting* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1977), 1-2.

[43] The term "Wesleyan quadrilateral" was coined by the twentieth-century American Methodist historian and scholar Albert C. Outler in his book *John Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[44] Garrie Stevens, Pamela Lardear, and Sharon Duger, *Seeking & Doing God's Will: Discernment for the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998), 9.

[45] See Pamela Hubbard, "Hearing the Holy Spirit in Spiritual Direction: Helps from Covenant Resources" *The Covenant Quarterly* 70, nos.1-2 (February/May 2012): 100-8.

[46] For congregational examples see, Stephen Daryl Robison, *God at Our Planning Table: Spiritual Discernment as a Viable Alternative for Church Planning and Programming* (D. Min. Thesis, Wesley Theological Seminary, 1989); and Charles M. Orwiler, *A Discernment-Based Model of Church Decision-Making* (D. Min. Thesis, George Fox University, 2003). For denominational and ecumenical examples see The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod, "Meeting Procedures and Consensus Decision Making," http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/synod-meeting/2011/meeting-procedures-and-consensus-decision-making/ (accessed August 12, 2013); *Manual for Meeting,* http://wr.victas.uca.org.au/assets/637/ Manual_for_Meetings.pdf (accessed August 12, 2013); and World Council of Churches, "Guidelines for the Conduct of Meetings of the World Council of Churches" (February 14, 2006), http://www.oikoumene.org/en/ resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/guidelines-for-the-conduct-of-meetings-of-the-wcc.html?print =1%2522onfocus %253D%2522blurLink%2528this%2529%253B%2522onfocus%25 (accessed August 29, 2012).