USING FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY TO EQUIP LEADERS

AND IMPROVE CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH AT

HARRISON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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This project uses Family Systems Theory (FST) to equip leaders and improve congregational health in a mid-sized, suburban United Methodist church. FST is a psychological model used to understand human relationships and the interaction and functioning of individuals within the family system. Since individuals do not act independently of one another, each person influences and impacts the system, such as a church system. Understanding and applying the principles and concepts of FST, the health and functioning of a church may be enhanced, resulting in growth and new ministry opportunities.

Between January and April 2014, selected current and potential church leaders were invited to participate in a small group experience. During each of the gatherings, a concept of FST was introduced, illustrated, defined, shared, and applied. These concepts included homeostasis, over- and under-functioning, anxiety, triangles, and self-differentiation. To accomplish each session's objectives, various teaching methodologies

were used, including the biblical narrative, personal stories and parables, life experience, and multi-media. The group entered into covenant relationship with one another, and all documents of a sensitive nature were secured and limited to the candidate's access only. Participants were also asked to be active in an evaluative process by preparing a family genogram, applying the learning between group meetings, completing a short pre- and post-instructional questionnaire, and scheduling an exit interview. This project focused on developing a process toward on-going church and self-assessment, whereby ultimate long-term outcomes cannot currently be measured. The project demonstrated successful short-term results through the Peck Hall narrative, whereby the project achieved the goal of equipping leaders of HUMC to function at a healthier level, which increased congregational well-being. The candidate, the leadership, and the congregation were all impacted by the project, and the candidate intends to use FST small groups to train and equip leaders in the future. The candidate believes that FST should be an integral part of leadership development.

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INTRODUCTION

Many individuals live in patterns of imbalance in regards to healthy behavioral

practices that prevent maximum benefits in growth. These patterns, originating in

families of origin, may continue to be exhibited in present-day relationships and group

dynamics. Symptoms of these dynamics and related beliefs are addressed in Family

Systems Theory (FST). Churches can become victims of these unhealthy behaviors and

also develop unhealthy behaviors, leading to poor functioning and recycling of issues and

problems within the system.

The narrative of this project addresses the group dynamics of a mid-sized suburban

United Methodist Church congregation who was exhibiting individual and corporate

patterns of dysfunction, based upon the leadership's response to external and internal

environmental circumstances. The related project, which will be explained within this

dissertation, demonstrates a purposeful response to a change in these patterns through

developing recognition of the symptoms, along with incorporation of healthier responses

among developing leaders.

Background to the Problem

Historical Context

Harrison is a suburban community on the southeast side of Chattanooga, Tennessee with a population of 13,711 residents within the zip code of the township proper. Predominately Anglo, the socio-economic landscape ranges from upper class, along the lake front, to middle class starter homes in the subdivisions, to lower income families in the more rural parts of the area. A unique feature of the Harrison community is the lack of unifying organizations and gathering places. Unlike some of the communities surrounding Chattanooga, Harrison does not have an independent local government, but relies on the Hamilton County government for its municipal services. The lack in self-governance and structure is manifest in a lack of community identity and has recently led to the annexation of Harrison businesses and non-profits into the city of Chattanooga for tax purposes. The fractured nature of the Harrison community is further compounded in the lack of businesses, restaurants or other organized places where people gather to form community. While there are some 15 churches along the eight mile Highway 58 corridor through Harrison, these churches act as islands, disconnected from one another, rather than a unifying presence. Harrison United Methodist Church (HUMC) is one of those 15 churches.

Established in 1964, HUMC has served the community for nearly 50 years. After meeting in the masonic lodge and the elementary school, the first church building was completed in 1964. Into the mid 1980's the church grew steadily, with the expansion of the surrounding community. The city of Harrison was identified as one of the fastest growing areas in the Chattanooga area. Under stable, quality pastoral leadership and an

excited faith community, the fellowship at Harrison built the current church building in 1984. The congregation at Harrison thrived with a devoted small group of young leaders in a new building for ministry. The future looked hopeful and bright, so the church rested and celebrated its victory. Life continued and time passed.

Soon, the expansion of Highway 58 from two lanes to four lanes resulted in the road being substantially raised, which placed HUMC beneath the level of the roadway, out of sight. Eventually, the church became known throughout the community as *the church in the hole*. Other municipal improvements included a state drainage easement alongside the church property, which thereby created a drainage field behind the church. When the opportunity to purchase adjacent land arose that would prevent the church from being landlocked, the congregation declined the opportunity, citing a lack of resources and questioning the need for the land. The forward movement paused and then stopped.

By the mid 1990's the population had shifted away from the Harrison area to the community of Ooltewah, seven miles east along Interstate 75. New construction slowed, businesses relocated, and both the Harrison community and church stagnated. At that time, the congregation became increasingly more anxious and turned inward toward survival mode, while watching the surrounding community change. The focus became how to keep the water runoff from the roadway from flooding the old church building, now the fellowship hall.

The Holston Conference leadership intervened at this approximate time, asking several of the United Methodist congregations in the area to become part of a new church plant approximately ten miles north of HUMC in the Snow Hill community. The HUMC fellowship saw the invitation as a veiled attempt to close the doors of their church and

replace them with the new Snow Hill congregation. In a 1999 Congregational

Redevelopment Report, consultant Jerry Hilton observed in his written report:

> The final observation has been placed at the end, not because that is where it ranks in importance but specifically because it is one that underlines a significant stream of apprehension throughout the congregation. The shadow of fear and mistrust of the District and Annual Conference around the proposed establishment of a congregation in the Snow Hill area is very real. It is perceived as a threat to Harrison UMC. Statements in the past about Harrison being the nucleus of the new congregation are seen as a desire to close Harrison. This is an issue that the congregation will have to settle in a positive way before the church is to move ahead with its mission.[1]

Fear and anxiety had replaced the hope and celebration of a decade earlier,

paralyzing the HUMC congregation. The leadership team who had once energized the

congregation to build tried to intercede. They gathered to re-vision, dream and establish

goals of new ministries, a family life center, and a contemporary worship service.

Unfortunately, these plans remained dreams, without an intentional strategic plan to see

them through. Furthermore, negative voices began overpowering the hopeful voices for a

positive future. The church's identity shifted from a growing, dynamic church to a

congregation in decline, taking on nicknames such as "the church in the hole," or worse

yet, "the mistake by the lake." Perception became a reality, and morale and esteem

plummeted.

In the 2000's the leadership team and congregation searched for answers, becoming

increasingly dependent upon the vision and guidance of pastoral leadership to turn the

decline around. Additionally, by this time, many unhealthy behaviors and methods of

functioning, such as gridlock, power struggles, and under-functioning, were becoming

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[1]Jerry M. Hilton, "Mission and Ministry: A Consultation Report Prepared for Congregational Redevelopment in Changing Communities" (Harrison, Tennessee, April 16, 1999, photocopies), 11-12.

codified into the culture of HUMC. Little, if any, planning went into the long-term future of the church, finances were guarded, committees stopped functioning, territories and interests were defended, and a fortress mentality began to take hold. In the retreat for safety, members became increasingly resistant to change and began blaming, withdrawing, and sabotaging. New ideas were met with hostility and were quickly discredited or dismissed to preserve the status quo.

Complicating matters, the Pastor became the center of the hub, responsible for the church but given no authority or power to carry out plans, programs, or ministries. HUMC was becoming an increasingly unhealthy, dysfunctional, pastor-driven church. The expectation at HUMC was that the Pastor should run every committee and ministry, visit every member, *save* everyone, and lead powerful and inspiring worship every Sunday. Since the Pastor was liable for success or failure by this model, responsibility and accountability diminished among the fellowship, thus weakening the entire congregational system. In more recent history, one pastor adopted an authoritative model of leadership which produced rebellion. The next pastor used an empowering, equipping, and encouraging approach which resulted in complacency and self- sabotage by church leadership. Two opposite pastoral approaches both caused tension and increased anxiety. Generally, over the past decade, cooperation has been replaced with criticism, struggling together has become a series of power struggles, and increased fearfulness has led to decreased faithfulness.

That is not to say HUMC has not experienced high points and victories over the last ten years. HUMC has reached out into the community, building a relationship with the elementary school next door and hosting the *Back to School Bash & Splash* community

block party with an average attendance of 500 church neighbors. HUMC's missions and outreach ministries continue to serve thousands of people in need each year in the community, region, and worldwide. People have been touched and lives changed for the glory of God. The unfortunate reality, however, is far too many of these ministries have relied on the vision, coordination, and efforts of the Pastor instead of the laity. The net result is that the Pastor has been over-functioning, while laity have under-functioned.

Modern-Day Context

Most recently, the struggles and relational dynamics within HUMC have been illustrated through two pivotal events. The first occurred when the leadership team decided to launch a new modern worship service. The second was the closure of the church's fellowship space, Peck Hall.

Modern Worship Service

HUMC had already adopted a blended worship style, which combined the traditional Methodist hymns and liturgy with more contemporary expressions of worship, such as praise choruses and multi-media. This experiment had resulted in the growth of young families and younger people, but as the worship became more modern, there was growing anxiety and tension. The older membership feared a loss of tradition, while younger members complained about too much tradition. The leadership team decided to explore two separate services, a traditional one at 11:00 a.m. and a second modern service. No sooner had the HUMC leadership team made this decision, than it was announced that the neighboring congregation at Snow Hill was being disbanded and the church there closed.

The Snow Hill fellowship was in shock, with questions and rumors surrounding the situation multiplying and spiraling out of control. Several key members of the HUMC leadership team quickly moved to invite these displaced friends to join with HUMC. Since the Snow Hill fellowship was accustomed to contemporary worship, this seemed an opportune time to begin a new service at HUMC to accommodate our new friends and add a new worship service to outreach into the community. Several key leaders from the Snow Hill congregation, including the youth leaders, agreed to join with HUMC to prayerfully seek God's vision in creating a new thing, both for HUMC and the Snow Hill fellowship.

The HUMC Pastor met and negotiated with the Conference and District leadership teams, and a new worship design team was created to prayerfully discern God's direction for the new service. A vision emerged to reach out to a new generation and the under-churched in the community and to focus the service on the radical revolutionary life and message of love that Jesus proclaimed. Using modern music and emergent worship styles, acts of worship were designed to be interactive and engaging experiences to bring worshipers into the presence of God and unleash the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Plans were finalized to use the already equipped Snow Hill worship facility for the launch of the new service. This became an exciting time, as the leadership saw God pour forth blessings to meet the needs for this service and bless the HUMC congregation. HUMC had started planning the new service without a budget, a band or equipment, and with nowhere to host such a service; but God provided.

The modern service at the new campus, named *The Revolution*, began to grow; but the Pastor was assuming too many of the management responsibilities. Despite efforts to

equip, encourage, and empower others, with such a small core group, trying to build momentum was challenging. The Pastor was dealing directly with staffing issues, design and coordination of the worship service (including writing two messages per week), communications and marketing, and arranging and picking up food for the fellowship time. In addition, some of the original HUMC members were becoming suspicious, spreading misinformation and sabotaging the efforts of the Pastor.

The Pastor continued discussions with the Conference and District leadership, and a three year covenant agreement was eventually signed which gave HUMC full use of the Snow Hill property, including 12 acres of cleared flat land, a new building with a modern flexible worship space, A/V equipment, and space for youth and children's ministries. The main campus, as the original HUMC church came to be known, also received a used church van, a portable utility trailer, over 100 padded chairs, and Sunday school resources. These blessings came at no cost to the HUMC fellowship for the first two years and a third year rental agreement of $400 per month to cover utilities. The leadership team was asked to reflect on how HUMC might utilize the Snow Hill property in the future.

Several ministry possibilities were suggested by the Pastor for consideration, including using the space for youth and other groups in the church, using the property as a second site for new ministries in the Snow Hill community, and a long-term plan to consider moving the church in the future. Resistance and inaction were the immediate result from both the leadership team and the congregation. "It's too far to travel," "That's not worship," and "Why would we need to move?" were a few of the typical responses to these potential opportunities. During each church Council meeting, the

property topic was reintroduced with the pros and cons discussed. However, most discussions were simply facts, updates, and requests put forth by the Pastor. Additionally, misinformation was frequently addressed because of the inaction of the leadership team. The void in positive communications was quickly filled with negativity and rumors. Anxiety, fear, and apprehension overwhelmed the church system, already struggling to maintain the status quo.

By year three of the covenant, grief and loss dominated the mood at HUMC. Life stage transitions, health issues and death, the end of *The Revolution* service, termination of the covenant, and surrendering all rights to the Snow Hill property contributed to feelings of confusion, frustration, anger, and grief. Based on these emotional dynamics, chronic anxiety had seized the congregation, the leadership team, and the Pastor.

Closure of the Fellowship Hall

The second event which helps to understand the relational system and accentuates the emotional dynamics of HUMC is the closure of the fellowship hall, known as Peck Hall. There was growing concern from the United Methodist Women's (UMW) group concerning the condition of the floor in Peck Hall. The square linoleum floor tiles were stripped of their protective coating and some of the tiles had cracked, trapping unsightly dirt and debris. The result was a darkening floor with spider vein cracks and an increasing number of holes where the tile had broken free to expose the sub-floor. There was also concern about the sub-floor structure itself, which had buckled and fallen in some places. This concern went unaddressed for several years, occasionally mentioned but usually quickly dismissed. At first, blame was placed on the custodian for lack of

care; then groups using the church became the target for abusing the floor; and then there was the consistently reliable excuse of a shortage of money for repairs. The Pastor talked with the Trustees Chair, but the Trustees rarely met, as the chairperson usually dealt with emergency needs and minor repairs at the church personally or with the help of a close friend on the committee. The Pastor, realizing that the floor was not the only issue with Peck Hall, began talking with the church leadership to seek input on ways to address the needs of the congregation and the community. Within the church, there was a growing need for usable educational space, especially for the senior adults and youth, the desire for a separate choir room, updating of the kitchen, remodeling of existing restrooms in Peck Hall, a handicap accessible restroom, and additional storage space. The Scouting programs, Alcoholics Anonymous, and Girls Inc. (an afterschool program), along with several of the church's other outreach ministries, would also benefit from either remodeled or new facilities. The Pastor contacted several contractors to explore possibilities of connecting the church and fellowship hall or adding onto the existing structure. The Chair of the Trustees was invited to several of the meetings; however, since the members of the Trustees committee continued to be uninformed and uninvolved, all of these prospects remained nothing more than possibilities.

Following the appointment of a new Trustees Chair, the issues with Peck Hall were revisited with greater resolve. The new urgency developed after the church received two water bills totaling over $1,000.00, leading to the discovery that a water line supplying an outside spigot had ruptured as the result of the structure settling over 6 inches. This got the attention of the entire Trustees committee and, once the water line was repaired,

several more contractors were contacted and asked to develop formal proposals for the renovation of Peck Hall.

The Trustees committee considered and debated the proposals, ranging from $200,000 to $300,000. Two opposing camps quickly formed, one in support of minimal renovations and the other in support of exploring possibilities for an entirely new structure. Gridlock within the committee forced the decision before the church Council, where the same debate unfolded. For several meetings the issue was tabled, until a majority of the Council agreed to research the cost of a new building. The Council voted to hire an architect to develop plans for a new family life center with multiple options, including plans for a one story structure, a two story half gym structure, and a two story full gym structure. After several months, the architect's plans were complete and brought directly before the church Council for consideration. While there was excitement about these potentials, once the cost was revealed, there was a feeling of air being sucked out of the room. It was obvious that HUMC was not prepared to finance the project. The cost of the full gym was $2.5 million and the half gym was $1.2 million. A few members of the Council voiced support, despite the cost; but with no reserves or a building fund to draw upon, the blueprints were filed away.

Of course, this did not resolve the issues with Peck Hall, which continued to deteriorate both structurally and in appearance over the next several years. Failing to address the problem, along with a building resistance toward long-range planning, led to an emergency crisis response strategy. The church dealt with the critical issues, finding solutions and raising the money as needed. One spring, the sump pump in the basement failed, flooding the youth space and lower level. Visual cracks at the top of bricks in the

support pillars brought occasional concern. Periodically, someone would complain about the condition of the floor, the lack of heat and air in the restrooms, or limited storage space. With anxiety of the congregation growing and pressure mounting, an unofficial task force consisting of the Pastor, Trustees Chair, and several interested parties came together to explore possibilities of yet another renovation plan. Once again, the proposals were considered too costly.

Over the next several years, a number of significant events and shifts occurred, leading up to the year 2012. First, leadership of the Trustees committee transitioned twice within three years. The first chairperson served through 2012 before accepting the invitation to lead the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC). To fill the leadership void in the Trustees, two new leaders were identified and agreed to serve as co-chairs beginning in 2013. The youth area in the lower level of Peck Hall was remodeled as leadership transitioned, but that area flooded when the sump pump failed for a second time.

Secondly, there was a shift in pastoral leadership style. The Pastor realized he had been over-functioning, being overly involved and taking too much responsibility for the decisions within the church's committees and ministries. Rather than continuing with a focus on influencing ministry outcomes, the Pastor adopted an Ephesians 4:12 leadership approach, now focused on equipping, encouraging and empowering the leadership team to mature and grow in leadership and in the faith, so that the leadership might make God-honoring decisions to build up the Body of Christ.

Thirdly, there was a lack of mature leadership in the Trustees. The committee was under-functioning, and neither of the Trustees co-chairs were available for Council

meetings. To address this issue, guidance was provided by the Pastor concerning the duties and responsibilities of the Trustees. The Pastor had also met with the co-chairs to discuss leadership expectations and facility needs. Additionally, the previous Trustees Chair had continued as a member of the committee to provide consistency and to act as a mentor. However, these strategies failed to resolve the leadership void. Consequently, the church Council began to address the responsibilities of the committee, essentially acting as the Trustees.

The Council's first order of business, in acting as the Trustees committee, was to address the growing concern with the floor in Peck Hall. The Lay Leader volunteered to explore the possibility of commercial carpet tiles which, even before a cost analysis could be completed, started the debate about durability, maintenance, and the wisdom of carpet in an area where food would be served and spills could stain the carpet. Nevertheless, there was enough support for a sub-committee to be appointed by the Council and arrangements made to meet with a carpeting contractor to provide an estimate. The sub-committee consisted of the Trustees co-chairs, two members of the Trustees who also served in leadership roles on the Council, the Lay Leader, and an At-Large member. Mr. G, the At-Large member, was a new member to HUMC, transitioned from the Snow Hill closure. A former businessman and consultant, he was semi-retired after being diagnosed with esophageal cancer. While the cancer was no longer active in his throat, the cancer metastasized to his lungs, and eventually moved to his brain. Despite these struggles, Mr. G would devote many hours contacting, meeting, and overseeing various contractors, preparing reports, and attending and presenting before the church Council. Because of his service and devotion to the church, he became an inspiration for many others who

were struggling or battling cancer. Mr. G quickly emerged as the unofficial leader of the sub-committee.

The fellowship hall was cleaned and organized, revealing cracked, broken, and loose tiles. Furthermore, it was discovered that one of the doors leading to the choir storage area could not be fully opened due to the buckling of the floor. The condition of the floor, as well as the concerns mentioned by the Council, were discussed with the carpeting contractor. As the sub-committee further inspected the building, this led to discussions of why the floor had buckled and become un-level, leading to concerns about the structural integrity of the floor and the building. In the fall of 2012, the sub-committee determined the next course of action should be to consult a flooring contractor to inspect the condition of the underlying structure. During the inspection, the contractor examined the crawl space beneath Peck Hall and the flooring system beneath the choir storage room, discovering excessive moisture and termite damage on one of the floor joists. The previous termite damage had caused the floor joist to collapse. The contractor's recommendations were to resolve the moisture issue, install new footers to raise the building back into level using floor jacks and supports, then to repair the floor joist. Additionally, after an inspection of the interior of the building, the contractor voiced concern about the cracks on the brick support pillars. His concern was that, if the process to raise the building was done too quickly, the entire building could collapse.

In early 2013, during the church Council meeting, the Lay Leader presented the estimate from the carpeting contractor of $6,000 to $7,000. Concerns of durability, maintenance, and cleaning once again surfaced, but were interrupted to hear the findings from the sub-committee concerning the structural integrity of Peck Hall. Mr. G led the

discussion, providing pictures to communicate the findings, along with rough estimates from the various contractors and his own research. He further suggested that, due to the recent flooding in the basement of Peck Hall and in light of the general contractor's finding of moisture in the crawl space, more extensive research should be conducted in regards to improving drainage. Many on the church Council already realized that the fellowship hall was in need of repair, thereby supporting an in-depth assessment to determine if Peck Hall was structurally sound and worth the investment of necessary repairs. Specifically, there was concern about the cracks on the brick pillars supporting the roofing system. A motion was made to seek a professional assessment from a structural engineer. Mr. G agreed to contact a highly recommended and well-respected engineer in the area to explore costs for the engineering report. The motion was approved and, by the next Council meeting, an estimate of $1,700 to $1,900 was provided to secure the services of the Engineer. The structural engineer was hired, with Mr. G acting as the liaison for the church.

As the Engineer assessed the structural integrity of the fellowship hall, Mr. G began to research the drainage issues. The lower level of Peck Hall began flooding when the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) expanded Highway 58 from two lanes to four lanes, significantly raising the level of the road directly in front of the church. At that time, a clay tile drainage system was installed to redirect water around the church, and a sump pump added in the crawl space of Peck Hall to deal with any water seeping through the foundation. Mr. G contacted several drainage contractors to offer their assessments of the current drainage system. As the estimates were being prepared, Mr. G and a friend, also a member of the Trustees committee, worked to improve the existing

system. The PVC drainage line on the sump pump was lengthened to carry the water further from the foundation, gutters were cleaned, and it was discovered that a basketball had clogged one of the drainage pipes. Mr. G also installed a water gauge on the end of the sump pump drainage line to calculate and monitor the water flow entering and exiting the fellowship hall. After a substantial rain event, it was revealed that over 57,000 gallons of water had been discharged over a four day period. With this information, Mr. G contacted TDOT concerning the water run-off from the highway and explained the situation. The State agreed to deliver over one hundred feet of fifteen inch diameter galvanized drainage pipe, fittings and connections so that water could be more effectively diverted around the structure. About the same time, the drainage contractors offered their assessment and recommendations, including improved drainage, gutter improvements, and earth moving to re-slope the ground away from the building. Eventually, the Council approved funds to hire a contractor to assist with the installation of the pipe and complete the other necessary drainage improvements.

At the April 2013 church Council meeting, the findings from the structural engineer's report were presented. The report stated that the current condition of the roofing system capacity was presently rated at the weight of the trusses/materials (dead load) plus 2psf (pounds per square foot). According to the report, building code required that the roofing system support 40psf in addition to the dead load. Specifically, the Engineer examined the trusses supporting the roof and concluded the design was insufficient for the load, causing the roofing system to spread over time. The spreading of the trusses resulted in the cracks on the brick pillars supporting the roofing system. Further examining the trusses, the Engineer also noted the bolts used in the construction

were showing signs of stress, stating this could result in a catastrophic failure. The report included several options to remedy the issue and bring the building up to code. Two options were proposed, one being reinforcement of the individual trusses, or the other involving an I-beam and supports to help bear the load of the roofing system. The report further cited inadequate ventilation throughout the building, but notably throughout the lower level. The lack of proper ventilation was further compounded by water and drainage issues which contributed to excessive moisture within the soil beneath the fellowship building. With the building determined to be well under code, the attention of the Council turned to safety concerns and how to proceed. The legal obligations and liability were acknowledged, with the conditions of the roofing and ventilation systems now fully disclosed. It was agreed that the Council should make every effort to protect the congregation and the community groups using the facility. A suggestion was further made that Peck Hall be temporarily closed until the building could be brought up to code. Several members of the Council questioned whether the decision to close Peck Hall was too drastic, citing that warning those using the facility and having an inclement weather plan met the legal requirement of due diligence. The Pastor, who had remained silent to this point, challenged the Council members to consider the situation in light of the ethical and moral responsibilities as the Body of Christ and the church's witness to the community. Eventually, a motion was made and passed to temporarily close Peck Hall until repairs could be completed, restoring the building to code. The Lay Leader was tasked to write a letter to the congregation to be placed in the bulletin and newsletter. Phone calls were to be made to the community groups who used Peck Hall to explain the situation, and alternative spaces were made available.

Ripples of anxiety spread throughout the congregation, despite the attempts of the Council to communicate details surrounding the decision. Council leaders were questioned, the Pastor was approached, and Mr. G was invited to explain the situation to the UMW. Following the program, the UMW felt confident that the building was safe for use and meetings and voted to resume use of the facility. Two days later, the Trustees committee had a rare meeting to review and discuss the Engineer's report. Since members of the committee could find nowhere in the report that explicitly stated the building was unsafe, they too concluded that the building was safe for use. However, an attorney on the committee was asked to explore the church's liability and develop a policy letter for facility use.

The Pastor, who was out of town at the time, was notified of these decisions by email; so when the Pastor returned, he called one of the co-chairs of the Trustees who presided over the meeting. Two specific concerns were raised by the Pastor. First, the Pastor explained that, according to the Church's law book, the Book of Discipline, neither the UMW nor the Trustees had the authority to overturn the Council decision concerning the use of Peck Hall. Secondly, the Pastor offered an analysis of the Engineer's assessment, stating that while the report did not explicitly mention the building as unsafe, since the roofing system was well under building code and recommendations for repairs had been made, there was an implicit safety concern, rendering the building unsafe for occupancy. The Pastor continued to express concern for the safety of all who might use the building. Furthermore, the Pastor reviewed the church Council's acknowledgment that the building did not meet building code, expressing that more important than legal liability in the event of injury or death was the

ethical/moral responsibility in this decision to do everything in the church's power to ensure the safety and well-being of church members and guests. The Pastor reiterated his concern and informed the co-chair that the District Superintendent would need to be apprised of the Trustees' recommendation to overturn the Council's decision.

Still disturbed by the recent developments, the Pastor contacted Mr. G to get his perspective on the meetings that had led to such decisions. Once again, the Pastor stated his primary concern of safety and the ethical/moral responsibility of the church in exercising judgment beyond due diligence and legal concerns. The Pastor then directly asked Mr. G if he believed the building was safe to occupy. Mr. G stated he believed the fellowship hall was safe. He explained that he had independently contacted four contractors concerning the Engineer's report, and each contractor questioned the findings based on a visual inspection of the roof. Furthermore, Mr. G explained that the building had withstood significant weather events in the past, including record snowfalls and most recently two tornadoes in the area. The Pastor restated his concerns and belief that there was sufficient risk to warrant the suspension of all activities and use of the fellowship hall. Mr. G had the last word, stating, "I've had thirty-five years of experience in dealing with contracts, contractors, engineers and attorneys. It's best to leave this matter to the experts." Though the Pastor had a certain level of construction knowledge and experience, he chose not to argue the point. However, the Pastor was confused, since the conversation with Mr. G conflicted with his earlier opinion and his vote at the Council meeting.

By the following Sunday, the Trustees' decision to reopen Peck Hall had circulated throughout the church fellowship; so following the worship service, the Pastor met with

the Council Chair, Mrs. J, to discuss the matter. Mrs. J was unaware of the decisions made by either the UMW or the Trustees, but did say she had received a message from a concerned member of the UMW. She had not returned the phone call. The Pastor repeated his trepidations that both groups had not followed the Church Discipline, as well as concerns regarding the legal/ethical/moral responsibilities of the church to ensure the safety and well-being of members and guests. Mrs. J was further informed that the Pastor had not yet apprised the District Superintendent of the situation, hoping that the Council and Trustees would continue to work toward resolution of the matter. If the Trustees' decision prevailed, the Pastor would be left with no choice but to contact the District Superintendent to acquaint him with the situation. Mrs. J agreed that the District Superintendent should be informed, but expressed her preference for this to wait until after the upcoming Council meeting.

The Pastor, in need of clarification, searched the Book of Disciple and sought the counsel of colleagues to ensure the Council had final authority to rule and set policy in such matters as the Peck Hall situation. Unable to find the answer, and following the suggestion of one of his colleagues, the Pastor contacted the District Superintendent. At first, the Pastor was careful to frame the question in such a way as not to reveal the details of the situation; but as the conversation continued, the District Superintendent asked for more specifics. The Pastor explained the details highlighting the disagreement over the interpretation of the Engineer's report. The District Superintendent confirmed the authority of the church Council and recommended that the Pastor call the Engineer directly to obtain clarification.

When the Pastor spoke to the Engineer, he explained the confusion of some members in interpreting the report's findings, specifically that the report did not explicitly state whether the building was unsafe. The Engineer explained that, with the roofing system well under code, there were safety concerns, and he would be willing to meet with the leaders of the church, if needed, to further explain the report. The Pastor confirmed that the Council would be meeting that night, so he would mention the possibility of another meeting; however, before doing so, he sought the direct opinion of the Engineer regarding whether the building was safe for use in its current condition. Carefully choosing his words, the Engineer responded, "I would not let my grandchildren in the building."

That evening, following the formalities and necessary business, the church Council turned its attention to Peck Hall. Attendance at the meeting was larger than usual, given the anxiety and anticipation to resolve the issue. The Trustees' co-chair opened the discussion, requesting the policy concerning the use of Peck Hall be re-examined. The co-chair summarized the thoughts of the Trustees committee, citing that the Engineer's report did not state the building was unsafe and suggesting a weather radio be placed in the fellowship hall to provide for warning in case of an extreme weather event to ensure the safety of the occupants. He further noted that an attorney serving on the Trustees committee was researching the specific requirements concerning liability and due diligence. Other leaders, including Mr. G, began offering opinions in support for the proposal to continuing building use. The Pastor was growing concerned that this recommendation was being made to relieve the anxiety of the church leadership team by appeasing those who wanted to use the fellowship hall. The Pastor also hoped that the

ethical and moral rationale responsible for shaping the earlier decision of closure would

be readdressed through the church's Council chairperson, Mrs. J. She remained silent.

Because no one else was addressing the earlier decision of the building closure, the

Pastor stated sternly and forcibly, "What about the portion of the Engineer's report that

states the roofing system is well below code, rated at a 2psf, with 40psf as the standard? I

personally spoke with the Engineer today to discuss the interpretation of the report and

the safety considerations in using the building. The Engineer reiterated that the building

was under code, and that he would not be comfortable with his own family in the

building. He also said he would come out and personally review his findings with us.

Since we have an official engineer's report, we have a legal obligation because we now

know the building is under code. But beyond the legalities, we have an ethical and moral

responsibility to do everything in our power to care for and ensure the safety of those at

this church. We are the Church, called to a higher standard! To reopen Peck Hall

without addressing these issues would be unethical and immoral."

"Unethical!" Mr. G burst in. "You are the one who has been running up and down

the hallway telling everyone that Peck Hall isn't safe. You are the last one to be talking

about ethics! I have thirty-five years of experience in business and know how these

things work. The Engineer is just covering his tail, so he's not liable if anything were to

happen. I'm disappointed in you, Pastor. I thought you were better than this."

The Lay Delegate to Annual Conference was next to challenge the Pastor's remarks.

His tone suggested that he, too, had taken offense. "To call people unethical or immoral

is unnecessary. We have the Engineer's report that does not say the building is unsafe. If

I make the decision to change the policy, that doesn't make me an unethical person."

"Let me be clear," responded the Pastor. "I am not accusing anyone of being personally unethical or immoral. I am saying the decision about using Peck Hall should be made on ethical and moral grounds."

The Lay Leader interrupted, trying to diffuse and redirect the debate. "So, we have the Engineer's report that we do not agree with. Do we seek another opinion?" With a new consideration before the Council, debate ensued and eventually the decision was made to keep the current non-use policy in place and arrange to meet with the original engineer for clarification. Emotions had run high during the meeting, leaving the Pastor feeling confused and wounded, and several attendees of the church Council meeting left hurt and offended.

The next week the members of the Trustees, the Council, the Pastor, and the Engineer sat down for a meeting. Ironically, the meeting was held in Peck Hall. The tension was high as the Engineer began to explain his report and offer another beam option alternative to resolve the structural issues and bring the building up to code. The Engineer did not explicitly say the building was unsafe, explaining that was beyond the scope of his report; however, he continued to emphasize that the roofing system was well below code. He went on to say that the roofing system could experience "a catastrophic failure at any time," with extreme weather conditions drastically increasing the probability of failure. One of the members suggested that, if the building was indeed unsafe, then the only option was to put locks on the door to guarantee the building remained vacant until repairs could be completed. This sparked further debate on the Trustees' recommended policy of limited use and a weather radio. Mr. G sarcastically offered that he wanted to do what was ethically and morally right. He was met with a

quick rebuke by the Pastor. "Mr. G, let's not try to deflect the conversation away from the purpose of this meeting. We are simply here to get clarification about the safety of the building."

The Pastor then addressed the Engineer. "You had mentioned, when we talked on the phone, that if your family went to this church, you would not be comfortable allowing your grandchildren in this building. Is that correct?" After the Engineer agreed he had said that, the Pastor continued, "So, I want to make sure we are all clear about what you are saying. If I hear you correctly today, you are saying that, because the roofing system is below current building code, you are of the opinion that the building is unsafe to occupy at this time?"

"Yes, but there are several ways to resolve the issue," the Engineer continued. "I have attached a number of beam designs to restore the building to code."

Thanking the Engineer for his time and talents, the Pastor asked that the attendees turn the focus of the meeting toward the next step. Since the Trustees' and Council members were present, those members moved that locks be placed on the doors of the fellowship hall and a second letter be sent to all groups using the facility with an update on the situation. Preparations would be made to accommodate the needs of the community groups by using the church building facilities, with an events schedule posted on all rooms within the church to maximize and communicate available use. A plan to move forward would be addressed at the next Trustees meeting and then through the church Council. Within days of the meeting, the Trustees' co-chair resigned.

Statement of the Problem

These latter events are recent and dramatic examples of HUMC's pattern of unhealthy behaviors and practices which has left the church overwhelmed by fear and anxiety and unable to experience individual and corporate growth. In the fifty-year history of HUMC, there is evidence of recycled issues and repeated problems. Typically, HUMC has looked for solutions in personalities (i.e., pastoral leadership), programs (i.e., quick fixes), or principles (i.e., business models). The candidate posits that Family Systems Theory addresses the root cause of these problems, rather than just the symptoms, providing for healthier functioning.

The stories of the *Revolution* service and the closure of Peck Hall illustrate core principles within FST. HUMC has been a church system resisting change in order to maintain the status quo, exhibiting symptoms of rebellion, blaming, sabotage, and emotional distancing; experiencing chronic levels of anxiety, subject to over- and under-functioning; and showing a lack of well-defined leadership and self-differentiation. The goal of this project was, through small group work in Family Systems Theory with current and potential leaders in the congregation, for HUMC to not only be able to survive beyond unhealthy behavioral patterns, but to thrive through the recognition and incorporation of principles related to such personal, family, and organizational dynamics.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

Living organisms strive to maintain balance, order and stability (i.e., *homeostasis*). An organism lives in the tension between balance and imbalance as threats and outside influences interact with the organism. The wellness of an organism is determined by its ability to respond to these pressures in such a way which both restores and promotes optimal health. In the same way, family and church systems are confronted by external challenges and pressures which disrupt the system's homeostasis and must be managed. Just as with an established family, Family Systems Theory (FST) may be applied within a church organization to which the membership is often referred as a larger family unit and proclaims to incorporate biblical principles toward desired spiritual growth. This chapter addresses both theoretical and theological principles associated with this project.

Rationale of the Study

Theoretical Rationale

Murray Bowen's development of FST in the mid-twentieth century was considered ground-breaking in the field of family theory and in understanding the emotional and relational complexity of family systems. Bowen's theory noted that the dysfunction within a family system resulted from the emotional responses of the members within the

system which were being controlled by the most anxious and dependent member of the system. Bowen also observed that this relational dynamic created a highly charged emotional environment which intensified the anxiety within the system.[1] When the focus shifted away from the identified patient to the emotional responses of each individual family member becoming responsible for one's own reactions and behaviors, these families experienced improved health and function.

Counselors and therapists began to hear reports from clients of how the principles and concepts of FST could be effectively applied at work and in other group settings.[2] Edwin Friedman recognized the same relational and emotional dynamics within synagogue and church systems, compiling this influential work in *Generation to Generation*. He further observed the most dysfunctional members within a faith community typically had the most influence and the greatest impact on the health and functioning of the community.[3] In Friedman's later work, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix,* he noted that the application of FST empowers and equips religious leaders to address problems and issues from a position of personal strength, rather than from the weakest parts of a congregation.[4] This shift helped leaders recognize the emotional processes and rational dynamics at work within a group and instilled leaders with greater self-awareness. The reaction or non-reaction of the leader

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[1]Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 17.

[2]Ronald W. Richardson*, Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 22.

[3]Gary Emanuel and Mickie Crimone, forward *to Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Gilford Press, 2011), x.

[4]Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 77.

could influence and calm the system to reduce anxiety, resulting in healthier, stronger functioning faith communities.

Definitions and Operating Terms

Family Systems Theory: First introduced by Dr. Murray Bowen, who posited that individuals cannot be fully understood in isolation, but in relationship to the family system. Within each family system, individuals are interconnected and interdependent.

Anxiety: The basic definition is an individual's or system's reaction to a real or perceived threat. Anxiety is an ever present reality and can be beneficial. However, when anxiety levels shift from acute (temporary) to chronic (constant), individuals and systems are negatively impacted.

Homeostasis: Defined as a system's desire to stay the same and maintain balance. Systems are under constant pressure but tend to resist change, even when change is positive.

Over-functioning: Occurs when an individual assumes too much responsibility for the thinking, action, or feelings for another individual or within a system.

Under-functioning: Occurs when an individual assumes none or too little responsibility for oneself or within a system.

Triangulation/Threesome/Triad: The basic relational unit of Family Systems Theory. Triangles are often unbalanced with one side in conflict and two sides in harmony, contributing to issues within and throughout the system. However, a healthy triangle (usually referred to as a threesome or triad) exists when all sides are balanced, with any two sides in harmony without creating conflict with the third side.

Self-Differentiation: An individual's ability to retain one's own identity and act from a principled position within a system while remaining emotionally connected with the other members**.**

Theological Rationale

If asked the question directly, "Is Family Systems Theory in the Bible?" the answer would be both no and yes. *No* is the explicit answer because FST is a modern therapeutic/counseling method developed by Bowen in the 1950's to understand family system health and functioning. However, the answer is also a *yes* because the concepts and principles of FST can be successfully applied as a hermeneutical and exegetical resource. Through the lens of FST, valuable insights can be gained into the human condition and divine/human relationship which illuminate Jesus' words from John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (NIV).

The concepts of FST can be applied to the scriptures, both in general and to specific biblical texts. Early in the Old Testament, the story of the first family – Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel – demonstrates the anxious reactivity patterns of rebellion, power struggles, blaming, and accusations. Kamila Blessing, in her work, *Families of the Bible: A New Perceptive,*[5] has used FST to construct a genogram of the family of Abraham and Sarah to examine connections, conflicts, and cutoffs. Blessing has further examined the triangulation of individuals including Abraham, Sarah, and God; Abraham, Sarah and

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[5]Kamila Blessing, *Families of the Bible: A New Perspective* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 72.

Hagar; and triangles involving both Ishmael and Isaac, to mention a few examples. The

family tree from Abraham and Sarah through Joseph is filled with examples of

brokenness and dysfunction, passed from generation to generation.

While there are fewer stories of families of origin in the New Testament, Blessing

also applied the FST hermeneutic to the New Testament, examining Jesus and his

disciples, the story of the Prodigal Son, and Paul's letters. Familial language is

introduced by Jesus in Mark's gospel, "For whosoever does the will of God, he is my

brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35, NIV). This verse redefined family bonds

beyond flesh and blood to encompass all believers of Jesus Christ. Later from the cross,

Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is

your mother" (John 19:26c-27, NIV). Not only is this a loving act to ensure his mother's

care, but Jesus' words also affirm the concept of God's extended family.

Beyond the gospels, the epistles of Paul and other writers refer to believers as part of

the family of God (Gal 6:10, 1 Thes 4:10, Heb 2:11, 1 Pet 2:17, 1 Pet 5:9), and call the

followers of Jesus brothers and sisters, with such language appearing over one hundred

times throughout the New Testament. We might also consider the references to those

who follow Jesus as the children of God, or Paul's expanded understanding in his letter to

the Romans where he writes, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God

and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also

share in his glory" (Rom 8:17, NIV). Furthermore, early church leaders are referred to

using paternal and maternal designations (1 Cor 4:15 and Gal 4:19). Finally, the family

structure was also reflected in the early church through the meeting together in homes of

the believers. As Laundale Munroe notes in his article, *Family Systems in*

Congregational Settings, these household churches were "similar to the natural family cohesiveness and fellowship experienced by literal and functional families."[6] These first house churches had their own rules as in the household codes (Eph 5:22-6:5, Col 3:18-4:1, Tit 2:1-10, and 1 Pet 3:1-9), and rituals such as baptism (Acts 10:1-11, Acts 1613-15, Acts 16:16-34, Acts 18:1,4-8, and 1 Cor 1:11-16) and communion (Mark 14:22-25, Matt 26:26-28, Luke 22:14-20, Acts 2:42, and 1 Cor 11:23-29), which shaped the identity of participants.

Beyond specific family references in the scriptures, Peter Steinke provides an excellent rationale for a FST hermeneutic in the preface of his book, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, addressing church systems and congregational health. Turning to the biblical text, Steinke applies the organic perspective to church systems through the New Testament understanding as the *body of Christ*. Mentioned thirty seven times, the body of Christ metaphor is most fully illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12.[7] The Apostle Paul's description of the Church as being many parts united in one body or system emphasizes how individuals or groups within a church impact the health and well-being of the entire church system. Further study of the Epistles in the New Testament illustrates what happens when church systems develop unhealthy patterns of dealing with controversy and conflict.

For instance, in Paul's letter to the Galatians, Paul was dealing with a group of rivals who were, in his words, confusing the fellowship with false teaching and perverting the

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[6]Laundale Munroe, "Family Systems in Congregational Settings," *Ministry International Journal for Pastors*, 81, no.5 (June 2009): 18.

[7]Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1996), xii.

gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:7). The crux of the matter was, "What is required to be a part of the Christian community?" Were new Gentile believers required to follow the requirements of the Law? The controversy had upset the already delicate homeostasis of a new community in the midst of defining identity. Elements of FST can be applied to help understand the complexity of such issues and struggles in both individuals and church systems.

The reader of Paul's response should consider the multiple triangles that were present and influencing the debate among the Galatians. The opening remarks of the letter triangulate Paul, the false teachers, and the church at Galatia. In Galatians 2, Paul is triangulated with the Gentiles and Cephas while debating dietary law. The Gentiles and Jews were triangulated with either Paul or Peter, causing turmoil, division and anxiety. In fact, the anxiety of the fellowship was so great that Paul intervened. To manage the anxiety and conflict and to facilitate well-being, Paul reminded the Galatians who they were and reinforced the group's identity, through and in Jesus Christ. His approach exemplifies another component, perhaps the most important concept of FST, self-differentiation. In Galatians 5, Paul spoke of freedom through Christ who gave all a new way to be defined by practicing a radical ethic of love and living by the Spirit. Paul continued his teaching, contrasting works of the flesh with fruits of the Spirit. In other words, Paul's entire argument throughout the letter can be summed up as, "This is who you (we) are; this is what you (we) are not."

These are but some examples of how FST might be applied as a hermeneutic tool. Throughout the Old and New Testaments are stories which illuminate specific concepts and principles of FST. The following sections focus on key concepts of FST, providing

one example from the Old Testament and one example from the New Testament. By no means are the provided examples meant to represent an exhaustive list, nor do these examples only demonstrate one concept of FST. The passages and stories simply illustrate the possibilities.

<div align="center">*Anxiety*</div>

In his work, *Biblical Themes for Pastoral Care*, William Oglesby contrasts fear or anxiety with a movement toward faith as a major Biblical theme. Oglesby observes that anxiety results in "the tearing, agonizing, paralyzing fear that causes persons to hide, to seek darkness, to cut themselves off from the life giving relationships so essential for their being"[8] The presence of acute and chronic anxiety appears early in the scriptures.

Genesis 3, the Story of the Fall, when viewed through the lens of FST, shows that anxiety is a natural part of the human experience. The serpent represented the forces against God's will, in a power struggle for the hearts and minds of humanity. Hoping to raise Eve's anxiety, the serpent twisted the words spoken by the Creator, planting a seed of doubt that God was holding something back. Eve's anxiety led her to respond with rebellion, eating the forbidden fruit and giving some to Adam. Fearing he may be cut off from relationship with his wife, Adam reacted with compliance. When this couple's eyes were opened to the reality of what they had done, they realized they were naked and vulnerable, so they tried to hide from God. Their shame and guilt drove their emotional reaction to distance themselves from God, but God sought them out by asking, "Where are you?" Confronted with their disobedience, both Eve and Adam responded with

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[8]William B. Oglesby, Jr., *Biblical Themes for Pastoral Care* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1980), 79.

accusations, blame, and fault, trying to deflect the responsibility from their own actions. Eve accused the serpent of deceit, and Adam blamed his wife. But despite the shortcomings of the first couple, God reached out in love, cared for them in their failure, and extended grace. God did not protect them from the consequences of their actions, but he stayed connected with them through their fear and anxiety. Anxiety often paralyzed God's people throughout the Old Testament, as the various stories show how individuals and even generations struggled to learn to trust in the goodness and promises of God.

The struggle of God's people to manage their own anxiety continued through the New Testament. Even the disciples, when seized by fear or uncertainty, showed patterns of anxious reactivity. Judas demonstrated both compliance and rebellion, anxious for the Messiah to rise up and rescue God's people from Roman oppression. James and John, chasing after greatness and influence, argued over who was the greatest and became locked in a power struggle. Then there are Peter and Thomas, so devoted that, when Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified, they could not deal with the pain of the loss. They emotionally distanced themselves. Peter hid in the shadows and denied Christ. Thomas separated himself and refused to believe the reports that Jesus had risen until he saw and touched the wounds himself. But again, just as God had not given up on Adam and Eve, Jesus did not give up on his disciples. He loved them and stayed connected, even washing the feet of the one who would betray him. He appeared to Peter on the beach after the Resurrection, to forgive and restore him. On Pentecost, when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were empowered to move from beyond their fears. They came to understand themselves in light of God's love through Jesus Christ, which allowed them to move from fear to faith.

Homeostasis

All systems are resistant to change, striving to maintain the balance or status quo. This principle of homeostasis is a powerful force that prevents God's people from realizing the freedom and new life God offers to the world.

In the Old Testament, in the Book of Exodus, God raised up Moses to deliver the Hebrew nation from Egyptian bondage. The people had witnessed God's strength and power through the ten plagues. Trapped between the chariots of Egypt and the Red Sea, the Israelites witnessed Moses parting the waters as they crossed on dry land, and then watched as God destroyed Pharaoh's army. God's presence was with them as a cloud during the day and as a pillar of fire during the night. Manna was their food, and water flowed from rocks. Yet, when the Israelites faced a crisis, the people cried out, "Why?" In Exodus 16:3 the cry became, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." Bishop James Swanson of the United Methodist Church, when once preaching this text in South Sudan, pointed out that, even when the change was for the better, God's people were trapped in a refugee mentality. They were used to being told what to do and not used to thinking or doing for themselves. The homeostatic forces were so great that, even with the possibility for freedom and new life before them, the Israelites complained and rebelled against God and their leader, Moses.

The same can be said in the life and ministry of Jesus, who was constantly challenging the status quo. There are a number of accounts throughout the gospels where

the Pharisees were threatened by the presence, actions and teachings of Jesus. The

Pharisees, through the misuse of rules and rituals, were able to exercise power over the

people and control the religious establishment. In Mark's gospel, the Pharisees

confronted Jesus for allowing his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-28) and

for the healing of a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath (Mk 3:1-6). The Pharisees

were justified in their commitment by the letter of the Law. The Ten Commandments

were clear that God's people were to keep the Sabbath holy; however, because of their

closed and rigid interpretation, the Pharisees missed the spirit of the Law. Jesus

explained that the Sabbath was not meant to be observed to earn God's favor, but because

of God's favor on humanity. The Sabbath is meant to be a reminder of our belonging to

God and of God caring for God's people. More specific to Jesus healing on the Sabbath,

Jesus emphasized that God cares more about relationships than rules. The Pharisees,

blinded by legalism, perceived Jesus as a threat to the status quo of the religious system;

so as the pericope ends, they plotted to kill him. Just like Moses in the Old Testament,

Jesus, who came to offer freedom from the Law and new life, fell victim to the

homeostasis that led to bondage and death.

Over-Functioning and Under-Functioning

In life, some people take on too much responsibility for others, while some people

refuse to take responsibility for themselves. The story of Moses as a young leader in

Exodus 18:13-26 is a story of over-functioning.

In his role as the leader of God's people, Moses failed to delegate responsibility,

feeling obligated to hear and judge every dispute among the people. His father-in-law,

Jethro, realized that was not good, that Moses was working too hard and would

eventually burn out under the pressure. Moses' over-functioning demonstrates two key

principles of over-functioning. First, over-functioning perpetuates immaturity. As long

as Moses accepted the responsibility for hearing all of the disputes, he was limiting his

own development as a leader, while preventing others from maturing and growing.

Secondly, over-functioning destroys community because, when a group looks to one

person to provide for the people's needs and resolve their conflicts, a sense of community

is lost. The group's sense of identity becomes fused with that one person. The group

relies on the leader for their sense of emotional well-being, safety and security, instead of

assuming responsibility and caring for one another.

Fortunately, Moses accepted the advice of his father-in-law, equipping and

empowering others to hear the concerns of the people. This change in the way Moses

functioned as a leader allowed others to assume anxiety within the system and offered the

possibility for others in the community to manage and resolve conflicts. But for the new

way of functioning to have a lasting impact, Moses had to learn to become comfortable

with anxiety and conflict among the people, and even the failures of the newly appointed

judges. The people were already quick to complain and criticize, and there is little doubt

that they expressed their frustrations when things changed, maybe even questioning if

Moses still cared for them.

Turning to an example of over-functioning in the New Testament, there is the story

of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:28-42. Martha was overly concerned with getting

everything just right, so her worry and stress were robbing her of her joy. Her anxiety

caused her to over-function which distracted her from realizing the most important thing, having Jesus as her guest. Her behavior illustrates several principles of over-functioning:

- over-functioning disguises itself as caring;

- over-functioning is *other* focused rather than self-focused; and

- over-functioning erodes one's spiritual life.[9]

Martha, wanting to impress Jesus by showing him how much she cared, was disturbed with what her sister, Mary, was not doing. In her focus on doing and in her frustration, she missed the opportunity of a spiritual blessing in spending time with the Lord. Typical of over-functioning, Martha's motives were pure and good, wanting to show her love for Jesus. However, her gift of love quickly turned unpleasant, as the gift became an obligation. The shift from love to duty caused Martha to feel used, under-valued, and unappreciated. As her frustration built, she lashed out in anger at her sister. Trying to motivate and change Mary's behavior only resulted in Martha having more resentment toward her sister. Jesus saw clearly that Martha was "…worried and upset about many things…" but absorbed by the wrong thing.

Triangles

It may seem logical to define a basic relationship as consisting of only two people, or a dyad; but within FST, the triangle or triad, designating three people, groups or issues, is the basic relational unit. Blessing shows the progression of triangles in the family of Abraham.[10] A healthy triangle (threesome/triad) between God, Abraham, and Sarah

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[9]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 210-212.

[10]Blessing, 68-77.

begins in Genesis 12, with God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. The only problem was that Abraham and Sarah were past child-bearing age. Anxiety over the promise being fulfilled pressed Sarah to offer her servant, Hagar, to sleep with Abraham in hopes of bearing a son. Indeed a son, Ishmael, was born, which negatively impacted the relationship. The triangle of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar was now wrought with jealousy and conflict taking place between Sarah and Hagar. The anxiety forced Sarah out and cut her off because of the relational triangle between Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael. When God spoke to Abraham once again, telling him Sarah would bear a son, and Sarah became pregnant with Isaac, another shift occurred with a new triangle of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac. This time Hagar was forced to the outside. A healthier triangle once again emerged between God, Abraham, and Sarah after the angel appeared to Hagar in Genesis 21:17. As Blessing explains, even though Sarah ordered Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away, with the appearance of the angel, Hagar was no longer separated from Sarah, but was connected to a new purpose given by God.[11]

Turning to the New Testament, Blessing also explores and illustrates the triangles within the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-3. Similar to the triangles in the family of Abraham, the story moves from a healthy, functioning threesome to a series of dysfunctional triangles characterized by emotional distancing within the relationships. This first occurred with the youngest son (the Prodigal), but ended with the older son. Blessing visually demonstrates the relational dynamics with different shaped triangles.[12]

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[11]Blessing, 77.

[12]Ibid., 114-116.

The first triangle is an equilateral triangle with father, oldest son, and youngest son, which morphs into an elongated right angle triangle when the youngest son distanced himself from the father and his older brother after the younger brother requested his inheritance and left. As the story unfolded, the younger son found himself destitute in a pig sty, certainly no acceptable place for a Jewish boy. In this instance, an interesting triangle developed between the Prodigal, his Jewish culture, and Gentile culture. Where his life in the Gentile world clashed with his Jewish upbringing, an elongated right angle triangle is produced, with the Jewish culture on the distant side. When the younger son finally came to his senses and returned home, the triangles shifted once again. The gospel writer, Luke, explains that the Father ran to meet his lost son and threw a party to celebrate his return, which greatly upset the older son, who then chose to distance himself. The triangle now has father, younger son, and older son in an elongated right angle triangle with the oldest son represented on the distant side.

Self-Differentiation

Self-differentiation is one's ability to manage conflict and anxiety while staying connected with others. To be self-differentiated requires self-awareness and emotional maturity, so that decisions are based on a person's core beliefs and convictions. The story of Daniel in the Old Testament provides one scriptural opportunity to explore self-differentiation.

The opening of the Book of Daniel explains that God's people were living in exile under the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. The king had a plan to gather and train the brightest and best from among those he had captured in war. He would teach these

trainees the ways of the Babylonians, so that they could be part of his group of advisors. Daniel and three others were chosen from the nation of Israel. Not only would these four receive the best education, but they would enjoy the privilege of eating from the king's table. Some of the royal foods were forbidden to be eaten by the Hebrews, however. Daniel thereby stood by his dietary convictions, declining the king's invitation, thus risking punishment or possible death.

This was not the only instance in which Daniel would be forced to choose between honoring God and his religious convictions versus respecting the decrees of the Babylonians. Over time, Daniel rose to a place of honor in the king's court, fanning the jealously of Babylonian administrators and satraps, who conspired to bring charges against Daniel. A decree went out "that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to [the king] shall be thrown into the lions' den" (Dan 6:7, NIV). Daniel could not obey such a decree and honor God. As a result, he was thrown to the lions. Again, Daniel was willing to stand on faith and his core beliefs, not reacting anxiously to the situation but reflecting on his belief that God would protect him.

In the New Testament, Acts 15 provides an opportunity to observe self-differentiated leadership, as demonstrated by the Apostle Paul. The early Church was struggling with the tension between following the precepts of Jewish Law for the new Gentile converts. The overriding question was, "What parts of the Law do new converts need to follow in order to join the new Christian fellowship?" Paul confronted the church leaders in Jerusalem and explained that God had done something new and unexpected through Jesus, who had fulfilled the requirements of the Law, and that God had called him to

evangelize to the Gentiles. The Jewish leadership was insistent that all Gentiles become Jews (through circumcision). Paul tried to reach a compromise, stating:

> It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For the Law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath. (Acts 15:19-21, NIV)

Some of the leadership still rejected Paul, arguing that he was wrong (and possibly immoral). Yet Paul honored his calling from God, traveling throughout the Gentile world without the full support and understanding of the church leaders. Moreover, Paul continued the mission while staying connected to the church in Jerusalem, not allowing the significant disagreement between each side to get in the way of his sense of connection with them. In fact, later in his letters to the Gentile churches (1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; Rom 15:14–32), readers discover that Paul was taking up offerings to support the church in Jerusalem.

Paul might easily have reacted to this conflict within the Church with anger, self-justification, and bitterness, thereby cutting himself off from the Church. However, Paul remained true to his solid self while staying connected and supportive. Furthermore, since Paul continued to be obedient to God's calling to the Gentiles, the Church eventually joined him in the new mission.

Summary

Within the biblical narrative, there are many stories with multiple ways of interpreting their importance and meaning. The scriptures need to be approached both

humbly and prayerfully to prevent the desired imposition of one's own beliefs and values upon the text, but to also allow the text to speak to the reader toward transformation. With that being said, this brief overview on each of the concepts of FST has described how a Family Systems hermeneutic can be applied to reveal important insights which may lead to deeper understanding of self and healthier functioning of church systems.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to enhance the well-being and functioning of the

overall church system by equipping, encouraging, and empowering leaders within the

Harrison congregation. With that purpose in mind, there were two components of

leadership participation that needed to be addressed. The first was to develop a Lay

Advisory Team made up of identified major stakeholders who could recognize the gain

from a successful project. The second component was the development of a small group,

comprised of course participants who would be trained in Family Systems Theory (FST).

These individuals were identified based upon current leadership activities or because they

had been identified as having the potential to hold a leadership position in the church.

The methodology for these selections is more specifically addressed in this chapter, to

include session explanations.

Methodology

The Lay Advisory Team

Team Selection

The first criterion, by priority, was to identify the major stakeholders who had the

most to gain from a successful project. The recruitment process for the Lay Advisory

Team (LAT) began in September 2013, following the development of the project

Prospectus. The persons selected for inclusion in this group were identified as having a

history of leadership and of being fully invested in the life of the church. Team members

needed to be influencers or leaders who could become champions for the project. Everett

Rogers, through the innovation adoption curve, identified these people as the 16.0% of a

system made up of innovators (2.5%) and early adopters (13.5%).[1] For the congregation

to most fully benefit from the project, these leaders would need to understand the

project's value, communicate the need for the project, and inspire the necessary

transformative actions for improved health and functioning of the church.

The second criterion focused on the need for communication and articulation of the

project beyond the church's leadership team to the congregation. As such, the

composition of the LAT needed to be reflective of the entire church system. Certain

members were invited to participate on the LAT based upon involvement and leadership

in specific ministry areas of the church. A representative from youth, young adult, and

senior ministry areas were asked to participate, along with the Council chairperson, the

Lay Leader, and the Lay Delegate to Annual Conference. (Within the United Methodist

Church, these last three leadership positions are the most influential offices in the local

church, serving as ex officio members on the administrative committees of Finance,

Trustees, Nominations, and Staff Parish Relations. They are also responsible for

discerning, developing, and disseminating the vision and direction of the church.) The

LAT also needed to have a balance of male and female participants reflective of the

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[1]Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003), 281.

congregation demographics. Of the twelve people approached to be team members, five were male and seven were female.

The third and final criterion for selection surrounded the need for certain experts. The first expert was actively pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership and could offer instructional and methodological insights specific to developing the project. To realize the potential of any endeavor requires careful refection, asking the right questions, and developing the appropriate tools to measure and assess the outcomes. While this was the function of the entire Lay Advisory Team, having an expert in this area was a valuable asset. The other subject matter expert for the team was a certified pastoral counselor who specialized in Family Systems Theory. Since most people on the LAT had little or no knowledge of FST, this content expert was able to provide a unique skill set to facilitate learning, understanding, and reinforcement of these basic concepts and principles. The expertise of this member also served as a valuable resource when offering guidance on evaluating the purpose, scope, and methodology of the project.

From this set of criteria, meetings were arranged in September 2013 with potential team members to provide an overview of the responsibilities and expectations for participation on the LAT. Concurrently, informal conversations about team participation continued, while a letter was drafted and sent to the church Council and others in related leadership positions to introduce the project. The letter, located in Appendix A, included a synopsis of FST and the project methodology. The letter was discussed during the Council meeting in late October 2013. Table 3.1 contains the list of invited LAT members, along with those accepting the invitation to participate.

Table 3.1   Development of the Lay Advisory Team

Lay Advisory Invitations	Lay Advisory Acceptance Roster
Church Council Chair	Church Council Chair
Staff Parish Relations Chair	
Finance Chair	
Church Council Secretary	Church Council Secretary
Church Council Co-Secretary	
Lay Delegate to Annual Conference	Lay Delegate to Annual Conference
Lay Leader of church	Lay Leader of church
United Methodist Women's President	
United Methodist Men's President	
Youth Director (staff representative)	
New Member to Harrison Church	New Member to Harrison Church
Project Design Expert	Project Design Expert
Certified Pastoral Counselor Expert	Certified Pastoral Counselor Expert

Lay Advisory Team Meetings

First LAT Meeting

With the team in place, the first introductory meeting was scheduled for December 1, 2013 and communicated via group email and personalized letters. The agenda included a detailed synopsis of the project as outlined in the Prospectus; an explanation of the benefits and advantages of the project for individuals, families, and the church system; an overview of Family Systems Theory; expectations and guidelines for the Lay Advisory Team; and an introduction to the evaluation process. The first meeting focused on providing a basic understanding of FST to provide a foundation for the evaluation process. The objective of this initial meeting was to answer the questions "What is this project about?" and "Why does this project matter?"

To explore the answers to these questions and facilitate learning, each LAT member was provided with a three ring binder of important documents and handouts pertaining to our first gathering and to be used for future reference. (Additional materials would be

added for future meetings.) The first document, the Project Prospectus, provided the

most comprehensive synopsis of the project and acted as the guide for the discussion.

The team was encouraged to read and reflect on the Prospectus between meetings to

develop questions and provide constructive feedback. However, for this meeting, the

focus was to provide clarity to the scope of the project as stated in the candidate's

Prospectus:

> A learning cohort, consisting of no more than eight current and potential
> leaders, will be invited to participate in an *Introduction to Family Systems* small
> group. The group will meet for seven sessions between January and April 2014.
> There will be four phases to the project: an Introduction to Family Systems Theory,
> Exploration of Family Systems Concepts, Application, and Evaluation. The
> Introduction will focus on an overview of Family Systems Theory. In the
> Exploratory phase the participants will examine one relevant concept of Family
> Systems Theory for five sessions and seek to enter into conversation with the
> biblical text, share individual stories and experiences, and/or examine current affairs
> and artifacts from the church which apply to the topic. The final session will focus
> on Application, asking how the use of Family Systems Theory can be applied in the
> future to increase and improve the health and well-being of the individual, one's own
> family system, and the church. The last phase, Evaluation, involves an exit
> interview with each small group member. The project is intended to be an
> introduction to Family Systems Theory which will encourage further study,
> exploration, and application to improve overall congregational functioning and
> health.[2]

The LAT discussion continued with the research candidate asking a series of

targeted questions to provide the project rationale. "Have you ever wondered why you

can remain calm in some areas of your life, while in other areas, you can't seem to think

and over react?" "Have you ever wondered why families or churches seem to struggle

with the same issues day after day, year after year, stuck in an endless cycle of anxiety,

helplessness and inactivity?" With the group's curiosity piqued, the candidate, acting as

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[2]Thomas E. Hancock, "DMin Prospectus - Project Outline," (DMin 980-001, Drew University, 2013), 1.

group leader, proposed that FST could help explain these occasional irrational behaviors and improve the well-being and functioning within both families and the HUMC fellowship. These objectives would be accomplished by equipping, encouraging, and empowering current and new leaders within the Harrison congregation, so that a new paradigm could emerge.

Next, the group's attention was directed to a second handout, *This is Your Brain on Fear*, an infographic, developed for Entrepreneur Magazine, of the emotional response system of the human brain to a threat.[3] The candidate explained the emotional reaction, commonly known as the flight or fight response, as a basic, automatic survival response to any threat. In times of crisis, this response can short circuit the more rational part of the brain, resulting in an emotional reaction, rather than a reflective, thoughtful response. The principle illustrated was anxiety's capacity to affect a person's reasoning and function. Anxiety has a paralyzing effect which decreases one's ability to concentrate, learn, and problem solve; with a concurrent increase in defensiveness, sense of helplessness, and self-doubt, thereby intensifying the desire for a quick fix to ease the anxiety or eliminate the threat.[4] Since stress and anxiety are a part of the human condition, the key to greater well-being and functioning requires the ability to manage reactions to anxiety and perceived threats by becoming engaged in reflective thinking.

The discussion on reactive versus reflective thinking transitioned to the next handout which contrasted linear thinking, multiple causation, and systematic thinking. This

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[3]Entrepreneur Magazine, *This is Your Brain on Fear* (Infographic), October 31, 2012, http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/224772 (accessed February 15, 2015).

[4]Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1996), 7-8.

resource was used to introduce systems thinking and, more specifically, FST to deepen the group's understanding that individuals do not act in isolation; rather they influence and are influenced by other individuals and systems. Carl Savage and William Presnell, in *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities,* stated it as, "Each part of a family or social/institutional relationship system acts upon and is acted upon by all of the other parts. Each part influences the whole, as in the variable patterns observed in a kaleidoscope when it is moved."[5] In the same sense, problems are not solved in isolation, but the solution is dependent upon the responses and interactions of each individual within the system. In summary, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Consequently, as Friedman explained, systems theory employs different strategies for effecting change. Instead of focusing on efforts to eliminate or fix what is perceived to be broken or wrong, new ways of improved functioning are introduced and encouraged so that the system functions in a new way.[6] The unique contribution of FST is that the recognition of outward visible symptoms, manifest in dysfunction, need to be addressed from the perspective of the deep emotional dynamics at work within the system.

Building upon this thought, the researcher offered a teaching block on FST, explaining that the family is the first and most influential system in a person's life. This impacts a person's emotional development and provides the foundation for relationships with others throughout life. One of the basic tenets of FST rests on the premise that the

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[5]Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Indian University Press, 2008), 114.

[6]Edwin H. Freidman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 17-18.

only person one can change in a system is oneself. Therefore, developing self-awareness

and emotional intelligence are paramount to effecting change within any system. The

LAT was introduced to the basic concepts and principles of FST: homeostasis, over- and

under-functioning, anxiety, triangulation, and self-differentiation. The candidate

explained that the small group learning cohort would concentrate on learning and

personally applying these concepts and principles, while reflecting on how these

principles could be observed in daily life and in the Harrison congregation. To facilitate

learning and begin the journey toward greater self-awareness, the project participants

would be asked to construct a genogram, a visual diagram of a family's relational

dynamics. Genograms contain genealogical and biographical information, with specific

symbols to communicate the relational dynamics within a family. The LAT was

provided with both a sample genogram and a legend to interpret sample data (Appendix

B). Friedman noted that the genogram was a valuable tool to discover the emotional

processes at work in one's family of origin. Discovering and reflecting on these

emotional processes can help people modify personal responses and aid in resolving the

emotional issues within one's family, as well as the leadership problems in a church.[7]

The LAT was then guided through the construction of a genogram using the

researcher's family of origin as a template. Special attention was given to identifying

generational patterns within the family system, noted patterns of separation (e.g.,

divorce), emotional trauma, conflict, and addiction. To reflect and interpret the

emotional processes connected with these significant life events, several questions were

used to guide the group, as follows:

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[7]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 31.

- What were the significant emotional responses and what coping mechanisms emerged?

- How did these events affect the relationships within the system?

- What emotional and relational tendencies emerged from these experiences that continue to shape or govern the responses in times of present day conflict, anxiety and stress?

Exploring these questions provides insight and increases self-awareness, thus enhancing coping skills to create the possibility for different choices and reactions. The instructional goal was the understanding of how individuals function within families of origin, and how this influences roles and functioning in other systems, such as work and church.

Applying the concepts of a family genogram construction, the LAT looked at a fictional church case study to construct a church genogram. The objective was to explore how families of origin, extended interpersonal relationships, and the emotional responses of individuals within the church collide or cooperate with others to create problems or find solutions. The following fictitious scenario was proposed and illustrated on the classroom blackboard:

> The Church Council at First Church is considering a proposal to start a new ministry to the homeless in their area. There has been much debate and controversy surrounding the idea, mostly because First Church has a declining membership, mainly through the deaths of some prominent members. Anxiety is increasing as both attendance and financial resources are diminishing. The leadership has stepped back and expects the pastor to turn the church around. Including the pastor, the Council consists of 8 voting members:
>
> Pastor Greg, 42, married, theologically liberal, strong on social justice, outreach and mission. Pastor Greg is in his fourth year of ministry at First Church, struggling against a mainly conservative, inwardly survival-focused congregation.

Annabel Barnes, 82, widowed, retired teacher, Women's Organization President, the matriarch of the church, theologically conservative. Outwards, she has pledged her support for the Pastor; but during the monthly women's meetings, her allegiance is to the previous pastor. The previous pastor took care of the members.

Sam Young, 53, single/divorced, construction manager, Trustees Chair, active alcoholic, bitter/anger issues/bully, believes "might makes right," ultra-conservative. Sam has tried several times to pursue a relationship with Nancy Tabor. Disagrees with anything Pastor Greg says or does.

Nancy Tabor, 46, struggling, single mother/divorced, fast food manager, Missions Chair, abuse survivor, alcoholic ex-husband. Nancy is afraid of Sam and cowers when he argues with others.

Al Brown, 72, married, military veteran, accountant, looking to retire, Finance Chair, theologically conservative, uses finances and his position to control others, strong work ethic. Believes people should work for what they get or go without. Favorite phrase: "We ain't got the money."

Susan Haynes, 57, married, nurse with MSN, theologically liberal, volunteers at the free health clinic in town. Susan has recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is struggling with God.

Fred Prospect, 50, in a strained marriage, businessman, workaholic, Staff/Parish Relations Chair, theologically moderate. There's bad blood between Fred and Sam, and they have frequent public arguments about Pastor Greg's leadership.

Margaret Johnson, 38, married, school teacher, Education Chair, theologically moderate. Margaret has only been a member of First Church for five years; some people consider her an outsider. Her response has been to passively/aggressively rebel against the popular opinion of the Council, even if she believes something is best for the church.[8]

The variety of life situations, personal struggles, and theological viewpoints has the potential of creating an emotional soup that fuses people together in alliances and fuels conflict within the leadership team. The LAT looked at a worse-case scenario, where each person fell victim to anxious reactivity. The church Council genogram that emerged from this situation revealed multiple layers of emotional and relational forces at work

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[8]Thomas E. Hancock, "Church Case Study for Genogram Construction," Lecture, Lay Advisory Team Meeting, Harrison, TN, December 1, 2013.

below the surface. This exercise, illustrating the decision to begin the homeless ministry at First Church, was more complex than simply determining the validity of the ministry; it encompassed the emotional processes of each individual on the Council. If allowed to continue to operate in this manner, the hijacking and sabotage by certain members of the Council will lead to gridlock, and the church will remain stuck in unhealthy or dysfunctional ways of operating.

The LAT asked the obvious question, "How can the system change to break through the gridlock?" Breaking through requires for someone in the system to change personal behavior by becoming more self-differentiated. One leader in the system, refusing to yield to the emotional and relational status quo, must take responsibility for that person's own response and actions. Taking a stand and acting responsibly based on one's core beliefs and values, instead of yielding or trying to control others, will create a system that addresses issues, anxiety, and conflict in a healthier way. Such action may manifest as the imaginary Annabel Barnes no longer sabotaging the pastor, or worrying less about her own needs being met and concerning herself with the greater good of others and the church. The make-believe Sam Young could put aside his power struggle with Pastor Greg, or the fictitious Nancy Tabor could refuse to be a victim, no longer living in fear of others.

Following the explanation of the Council at First Church example, the LAT was asked to privately reflect on the question, "How healthy is the Harrison fellowship?" This question directly related to the second question posed during the first LAT meeting, "Why does this matter?" The Lay Advisory Team was provided with a series of documents which the candidate referred to as *artifacts*. This term referenced

documentation from throughout the fifty year history of HUMC that reflected repeated

unrealized dreams, unresolved conflicts, or recurring issues. These artifacts included

reports from ministry teams, a church consultation report from 1999, and a Vision 2000

long-range planning report. The same ideas, plans, and concerns were recycled

throughout each of these reports, suggesting numerous times in the history of the church

where the leadership and congregation became stuck. In *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership

in the Age of the Quick Fix*, Edwin Friedman identified that the origin of such recycled

issues stems from the leadership of an organization addressing the anxiety or symptoms

surrounding the issue, rather than dealing with the cause of the chronic anxiety.

Consequently, leaders turn to consultants or develop programs which offer short term

solutions, but eventually the same issues resurface.[9] The artifacts, as well as the stories

of the *Revolution* service and Peck Hall, suggest the need to address the anxiety with the

congregational system and examine the overall health and functioning of the HUMC

system to determine the cause of the systematic paralysis. As explained to the LAT, by

exploring and applying FST to assess the health of the church, new and current leaders

may become equipped, encouraged, and empowered to function at healthier levels,

thereby breaking the homeostatic forces holding the church back from realizing the

dream and vision God has for HUMC.

Before concluding the meeting, the responsibilities and expectations of the Lay

Advisory Team were discussed:

- Provide encouragement and support of the process, positively communicating the

  benefits of the project to the congregation.

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[9]Edwin H. Freidman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 59.

- Make suggestions and provide input for revisions or variations of the project, especially concerning the evaluation instrument.

- Be present and participative during the Site Visit, completing the nine evaluation questions in preparation for the Site Visit.

The researcher also asked the team to reflect on the evaluation process, using the questions provided in the Prospectus and in the Project Site Review Report form provided by Drew University in preparation for the next meeting. As stated in the opening comments of the meeting, rather than focusing on a specific outcome that could not be measured in the short-term, the nature of the project was to focus on encouraging a process to develop over time. The LAT was also reminded that the evaluation was multi-faceted, encompassing the project design (format and materials), the overall process, and the candidate's leadership. This concluded the first meeting of the LAT.

Second LAT Meeting

Two events occurred prior to the Lay Advisory Team's second meeting. First, there was an additional first or initial meeting of the LAT which met on December 19, 2013. This meeting was necessary, since over half of the members were unable to attend the December 1 meeting due to scheduling conflicts. The make-up meeting followed the same format as the initial gathering, with a teaching block on FST, the Council of First Church case study, and the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the LAT.

Between the first and second meetings, the LAT members read and reviewed the Prospectus, artifacts and other documents, bringing several other questions to light for the researcher to consider. Some questions concerned specific individual or scheduling issues, which could be directly addressed. More significantly, other questions regarded

clarification on two concepts: an explanation of enhanced health of the church system as stated in the project purpose; and in reference to the church genogram, further explanation on how to effect change and improve functioning in the church system.

When the second meeting convened on January 9, 2014, these concerns were first addressed. The candidate prepared a handout for the team, entitled Points of Clarification, to further define the concept of health and well-being. Health, defined through the lens of FST, is process oriented, referring to transformative development, adaptation, and maturity which gradually occur over an extended period of time. Peter Steinke, in his work *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, defined it this way: "Health is a process, not a thing or state. It is ongoing, dynamic, and ever changing. Health is a direction, not a destination, a once and for all property."[10] While growth is typically defined as more or bigger, and health defined as the absence of conflict, these are unreliable indicators of a healthy church. Steinke further explained that health was not a measurement of growth in the traditional sense, but characterized by the following:

- "A healthy congregation is one that actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of trouble."[11]
- Becoming a healthier church "is a manifestation of a process"[12] by which individuals develop enhanced responses to stress, anxiety, conflict, and crisis.
- "Health is 10% of what happens and 90% response."[13]

From this, an attempt was made to address the second concern of the Lay Advisory Team, "How do you change a system?" The short answer was to understand health of a

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[10]Peter L. Steinke, 27.

[11]Ibid., 13.

[12]Ibid., 4.

[13]Ibid., 18.

system as relative to the level of self-differentiated leadership present in the system.

Understanding differentiation involves understanding that, within each individual, there are two expressions of the self. The first self, or *solid self,* allows a person to function at a higher level and to be less reactive because of the basis in an intellectual set of core values and beliefs. The second self, or *pseudoself,* is a lower level of functioning with permeable boundaries. The *pseudoself* is the part of a person that is susceptible to becoming controlled by the emotions and behaviors of others. Persons who are less defined are subject to react from emotions and operate more from the *pseudoself.*[14] As an example, the relationship between the fictional Sam Young and Nancy Tabor from the First Church genogram was re-presented to the LAT. Sam was a loud, angry alcoholic who bullied others to get his way. Nancy was meek and cowered when Sam exploded at Council meetings because of her experience of living with her abusive, alcoholic ex-husband. Both Sam and Nancy were interacting with each other from the *pseudoself*, with decisions being made in response to emotion, rather than from the principled *solid self.* Sam's emotional outbursts were meant to intimidate others to get his way. His position concerning the homeless ministry was not based on principles or beliefs; he was reacting against Pastor Greg. Nancy's *pseudoself* was preventing her from taking a principled stance because she was reacting to Sam's behavior which reminded her of her ex-husband's behavior. In order to function at a healthier level at First Church, a self-differentiated leader, acting from the *solid self,* must emerge.

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[14]Jon L. Winek, *Systemic Family: From Theory to Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2010), 85.

Ronald Richardson's work, *Creating Healthier Congregations: Family System Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, explains differentiation as the capacity to be in charge of oneself, especially under pressure.[15] Self-differentiated persons are less affected by the emotional field of a system. Instead of reacting, such individuals reflect on situations and circumstances from those persons' own core set of values. The more self-differentiated a person, the less subject one is to approval seeking, placating, and consciously or unconsciously fulfilling unmet emotional needs. Given the power of emotional and relational dynamics embedded within most church systems, this shift will take time to achieve. There is no quick remedy or technique that will result in a lasting solution.

To further explain the concept to the LAT, the candidate relied upon the expertise of Edwin Friedman, who observed in *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* that, rather than looking for easy answers or a program to *fix* a problem, the crucial element leading to long-term change is found in investing in one or two key leaders who have the greatest impact and influence in the system. By *investing,* Friedman meant helping leaders to become self-differentiated. [16] This concept, as with the FST project, is a long-term process, not a program. Thus, as one or two leaders in the church gain a greater sense of self and begin to function at a higher level, opportunities for growth and development are multiplied. This empowers others in the system to move toward greater well-being and heathier functioning.

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[15]Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating Healthier Congregations: Family System Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 87.

[16]Freidman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 19.

To summarize the concept of self-differentiation, the LAT reviewed *Five Characteristics of Self Differentiation,* developed through the Timothy Project at Eastern Mennonite University. These characteristics included personal boundaries and the boundaries of others, clarification of beliefs, the courage to stand on principle, staying on course, and remaining connected to others.[17] These characteristics reflect the importance of both self-definition and self-regulation.

Following the clarification of these questions, the LAT concentrated on the evaluation process for the project. Two documents served to direct the conversation: the first being the Project Prospectus,[18] and the second being the unrevised Congregational Health Assessment tool. The candidate, as project leader, explained to the team that the Prospectus included a standardized set of reflection questions for each small group session, to include:

- What have you learned from this session?

- What are you taking away from the time together?

- How will this session impact you, your family, and our church?

Many LAT members had thoroughly read through the Prospectus between the scheduled meetings and made detailed notes regarding this section. Each shared personal insights with the team, ultimately suggesting that the reflection questions be amended to pertain directly to topics discussed in the small group sessions. An additional question was also proposed to help connect faith with the course content. It was proposed that,

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[17]Eastern Mennonite University, *Five Characteristics of Self-Differentiation (Definition of Self Within Relationships),* http://www.emu.edu/seminary/timothy/documents/FiveCharacteristics.pdf (accessed February 15, 2015).

[18]Hancock, "DMin Prospectus - Project Outline."

periodically, the small group participants be asked to reflect on where they saw God at work or what they believed God was encouraging them to do with what was being learned. The team reviewed each section of content to develop a new set of questions.

After revising the questions, a rough draft of the Congregational Health Assessment was presented to the LAT as a tool to measure the perception of health of the congregational system at Harrison. The assessment was originally developed by the Reverend John Winn as part of a workbook for pastors of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. Using the concepts from Freidman's book, *Generation to Generation*,[19] Winn formulated six questions to measure the probability of a congregation to create triangles, conflict, stress and burnout in pastoral leaders. The six questions targeted isolation, insulation, distance, fusion, and a lack of differentiation.[20] Using Friedman as a guide, Winn categorized his instrument by the degree of isolation, the degree of insulation, the emotional distance between the congregation and the leadership, the fusion within the leadership team, and the amount of self-differentiation of the leaders as key indicators that could be used to diagnose the health of a congregation.

The candidate proposed that the assessment would be used as a pre-test and post-test for the small group participants. The responses would be compared and evaluated to determine the impact that awareness of FST had on the perception of healthy functioning. Using a Likert scale of 1 to 5, the participants would be asked to respond to each question, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest designation of agreement. Building from Winn's framework, the LAT cooperatively brainstormed and redesigned

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[19]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*.

[20]John Winn, *Reading Guide and Workbook for Edwin Friedman's Generation to Generation* (Slidell, LA: 2011 photocopies), 29.

specific content questions or statements for each of the key indicators. Additionally, the wording of one of the questions was intentionally reversed to avoid injecting bias toward directing survey respondents. For reliability in statistical score interpretation, a reversal of the scale corrected for this discrepancy to assure consistency in comparison of the other responses' means. The adapted Congregational Health Assessment Survey, as redesigned for the candidate's FST project, is located in Appendix C.

This concluded the work of the LAT until time to prepare for the Site Visit. However, the team was reminded about the role of communication of the project to the congregation. Furthermore, involvement in the evaluation process would be critical in preparing for the upcoming Site Visit. In this regard, the team was also reminded that Site Visit forms provided by Drew University would need to be completed at the conclusion of the project. Lastly, LAT members were invited to observe or participate in the small group sessions, though only one LAT member did so to serve as videographer.

The Small Group Participants

Team Selection

This Doctor of Ministry project is designed around the small group (SG) model. Church consultant and coach, Bill Easum, along with small group pastor, John Atkinson, in *Go Big with Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry*, provide insight into the transformative power of a small group, noting that through small group ministry, God works in powerful ways as SG members share life together. Furthermore, Easum and Atkinson cited the benefits of small groups as connecting

people at the relational level to the body of Christ, identifying and equipping future

leaders, and cultivating trust by providing the opportunity for a deep level of sharing.[21]

The recruitment for the SG was similar to the selection of the LAT members, in that

a set of criteria was developed and used to extend invitations to potential participants.

Leadership was the primary criterion. As mentioned earlier, Steinke believed the way to

promote healthier, higher functioning churches was to invest in one or two key leaders.[22]

Thus, a prerequisite for a SG participant was either to be a current member of a church

leadership team or to be identified as having the potential to hold a leadership position in

the church. It was critical to include current leaders, while investing in new leaders for

sustainability. Current leaders would have immediate influence and impact on the church

system and, as new leadership emerged within the system, the principles learned in a

Family Systems Theory small group (FSTSG) would continue to influence the well-being

and functioning of the leadership team.

The second criterion was specific to the context of the Harrison congregation. As a

small to mid-sized church, leadership has typically fallen upon established families; and

while leadership roles changed, the leaders remained the same. For instance, the same

leader may have served as Finance chair, Council chair, and Trustees chair within a ten

year period. In some cases, the mantle of leadership was passed down to the next

generation, creating power families. While this may be symptomatic of a deeper issue,

this practice should not be construed as an indictment upon those families who stepped

into leadership roles. Throughout the church's recent history, leadership roles in the

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[21]William M. Easum and John Atkinson, *Go Big With Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 56-57.

[22]Steinke, 28.

Harrison fellowship were accepted out of necessity. Additionally, both the patriarch and matriarch of these power families normally served in leadership roles or held influential positions within the church. This same trend could also be observed in the new families, where both the husband and wife of newer members were also entering into leadership roles. In light of this family dynamic, special attention was given to inviting leadership couples. From this criterion, invitations were extended to five couples to become part of a covenant Family Systems small group. Seven of the ten people invited accepted invitations, to include three couples and one half of a couple. Unfortunately, the couple and a half that declined were key leaders in the church, tipping the balance of current leaders versus potential leaders in favor of the latter.

Table 3.2 Development of the Small Group Cohort

Small Group Invitations	Small Group Acceptance Roster
Church Council Chair	
Finance Chair	
Lay Leader of church	
Education Chair	Education Chair
Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) member	Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) member
Finance Committee member	Finance Committee member
Trustees & SPRC member	Trustees & SPRC member
Education Committee member	Education Committee member
United Methodist Women Vice President & Nominations Committee member	United Methodist Women Vice President & Nominations Committee member
Member of Harrison Church	Member of Harrison Church
New Member to Harrison Church	New Member to Harrison Church
New Member to Harrison Church	New Member to Harrison Church

The pairings represent couple relationships in the FSTSG invitations, many being active leaders in the church (note the power couples in many instances) or potential future leaders.

Overview of Project Small Group Sessions

The group met for seven sessions, extending from January to April 2014. The group

gathered on Sunday evenings at the church for approximately an hour and a half to

explore, discuss, and learn to apply the basic concepts and principles of FST, for growth

as individuals and discovering healthier ways of functioning as a family and as a church.

The format for each session was a forty-five minute block of instruction, a break for

fellowship with a light meal, and a thirty minute block for reflection and application.

Each session was also videotaped to assist the researcher in the instruction and evaluation

of the project. During the *Introductory* session, each participant was asked to sign an

Informed Consent Form (Appendix D), agreeing to participate, based upon an outline of

the project, and consent to being videotaped for the purposes of the research narrative.

Each member of the group was also asked to enter into a Small Group Covenant

(Appendix E), pledging to be faithful in preparation, participation, and prayers.

The *Introductory Session* focused on a basic introduction to FST, emphasizing the

interconnectedness of human relationships compared to individualistic models and the

effects on the well-being and functioning of individuals, families, and churches.

Exploratory Sessions 1 through 5 introduced specific concepts of FST. Special attention

was given to the design of each session to maximize learning, based upon the stages of

learning as outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy.[23] During each session, the main concept was

illustrated using a case study, movie clip, or a story from *Friedman's Fables* for

knowledge and comprehension. Illustrations helped to provide a working definition,

which led into a time of group reflection. The reflection time was an opportunity for

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[23]G.M. Seddon, "The Properties of Bloom's Taxonomy for the Cognitive Domain," *Review of Educational Research* 48(2) (1978): 303-323.

analysis and application, during which time the group applied the knowledge of the concept in pairs, smaller groups, or larger group discussion. Additional reflection was encouraged through personal journaling to engage in the higher level learning skills of *evaluation and synthesis*. To further enhance learning, a driving metaphor was used to illustrate the theme of the session. For instance, to illustrate systems thinking, a virtual fish tank was used to help communicate interconnectedness. The final *Evaluation Session* focused on the application of FST through a case study within the context of a fictitious church setting. Finally, an exit interview was scheduled with each group member to discuss personal genograms, clarify learning points, share insights, and offer suggestions. Chapter 4 will provide further details of the project segments, and Chapter 5 will address evaluation outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

Chapter 4 addresses, in detail, the Family Systems Theory project used in the small

group setting, including:

- the Introductory session on FST;

- five exploratory sessions on the topics of homeostasis, over- and under-

  functioning, anxiety, triangulation, and self-differentiation; and

- the final Evaluation session with all group members present to cooperatively

  demonstrate synthesis and application of the project's topics within a group-

  conducted genogram case study on a congregational system.

Small Group Sessions

Introductory Session

During the first session of the Family Systems Theory Small Group (FSTSG),

following the welcoming, the first order of business was to have each group member

complete the Congregational Health Assessment (Appendix C), which was developed in

cooperation with the Lay Advisory Team (LAT). Special instructions were given to

answer each question based upon one's current perception of the Harrison Church and lay

leadership. The FSTSG participants were asked not to consider staff or pastoral

leadership in their responses. Furthermore, the group was not made aware that the same

tool would be used at the end of the study as a post-instructional project assessment tool.

The Informed Consent (Appendix D) and Small Group Covenant (Appendix E)

documents were then explained and signed. Confidentiality was emphasized, not only in

terms of the use of videotaping for project documentation, but also within the group to

help establish and build trust among members. With the potential for personal and

sensitive information being shared, trust within the group needed to be developed quickly

and without the concern of information being shared outside of the group. Forming a

covenant community was essential to achieving the goals for the project. As R. Paul

Stevens and Phil Collins pointed out, in *The Equipping Pastor*, "Covenant implies that

relationship is more important than performance, that belonging is more important than

succeeding, that being is more important than doing."[1] The covenant also served to

remind the group of God's presence and work in and through the small group. Blessing,

in *Families of the Bible: A New Perspective*, noted that covenants are not solely defined

on contractual terms agreed upon by the participating parties, but are grounded in "God's

nature to create, love unconditionally, forgive transgression and relieve human

suffering."[2] With God's help, through the small group, the hope was for each individual

to know God's creative, transformative work in one's own life, to be touched with God's

unconditional love, to realize God's forgiveness in the individual's life to extend

forgiveness to others, and to experience supernatural healing from the hurts and wounds

of the past.

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[1]R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, *The Equipping Pastor* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1993), 3.

[2]Kamila Blessing, *Families of the Bible: A New Perspective* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 8.

The discussion continued by using the syllabus, located in Appendix F, as a guide to clarify the structure, purpose, and benefits of the project. The overview was nearly identical to the introductory session provided for the LAT with several key distinctions. First, building from the information gathered in the LAT session, special attention was given to defining health and emphasizing that achieving greater well-being and functioning, for individuals or church systems, is a process that occurs over time. To illustrate this definition, the group looked at eight characteristics of healthy families or congregations, contrasting unhealthy and healthy behaviors on a sliding scale. Table 4.1 provides a simplified comparison. The further to the right the behaviors, the greater the health of the system.

Table 4.1   Eight Characteristics to Measure the Behavioral Health of a System

Unhealthy Behaviors	Healthy Behaviors
Individualistic Approach	Team Approach
"All about me"	"All about us"
Dependence	Freedom
Defensive Thinking	Offensive Thinking
Rigid	Flexible
Blame and Avoidance	Responsibility
Reaction	Reflection
Problem-Focused	Process-Focused

The emphasis was that the goal was not to achieve perfection; there is no perfect family or perfect church. The goal was to strive for improved health and functioning. The intent was to shift the understanding from treating symptoms to an awareness of the relational dynamics and emotional processes which are made manifest through these characteristics. Ronald Richardson noted that many churches are symptom focused, believing that changing pastors, implementing a new program, improving

communication, or developing goals and long-range plans will remedy the problems.[3]

There will always be another problem, so to improve health and functioning of a family

or church system requires addressing the emotional processes that sabotage growth and

success.

Genograms

Genograms provide a useful tool for learning to identify the emotional processes

within a family of origin that impact the health and functioning of a family system, and

also help in gaining greater self-awareness. The research candidate, as project leader,

explained to the group that a genogram was a family tree in picture form that also shows

how relationships work within a family system. Each group member was asked to begin

constructing a personal genogram to span three generations. A sample genogram was

provided in the course materials with a legend of commonly used genogram symbols

(Appendix B). The genogram was intended to be a work in progress, with the first step to

discover the biographical information about family members: ages, important dates (e.g.,

birth dates, marriages and/or deaths), occupations, education levels, medical concerns. In

the following weeks, the genogram would be updated and revised based on FSTSG

members' increasing knowledge of Family Systems Theory.

The participants were asked to reflect on personal family dynamics to identify

patterns and behaviors which revealed emotional responses and processes. The example

which was given was a pattern of multi-generational addiction. If self-medicating was

the primary coping tool to handle acute or chronic stress, the self-destructive behavior

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[3]Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating Healthier Congregations: Family System Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 131.

was like a stone thrown into a pond, with emotional waves rippling throughout the entire system. Not only might addiction become a learned behavior, but it might also affect the emotional responses and stability of the system. Others within the system may have responded through co-dependency, rebellion, withdrawal, depression, or secret keeping. It was emphasized that every person within a family system influences every other person within that system.

A concern was mentioned about the inability of collecting biographical data of family members. Certainly, the more detail contained in the genogram, the more useful. Therefore, the group was reminded about the power of stories. One of the most useful ways to gain insight into a family's relational subtleties and to uncover the emotional processes within the system was to listen to others' shared stories about family members. Going beyond the raw data often reveals hidden family secrets. In listening to the stories about his grandfather, the research candidate shared that, when he was constructing his genogram, he discovered that his grandfather was married four times and fathered seven children, with five children from past marriages having no connection with the current family. This brief example was used to conclude the administrative portion of the Introductory session and move toward content consideration.

Systems Thinking

Following a short break, the FSTSG's attention was focused on a learning block covering reactive versus reflective thinking, linear to systematic causation, an introduction to systems theory, and operating terms. The concepts covered in these blocks of instruction have been previously explained in the LAT Design and

Methodology chapter. While the information remained the same, the method was more reflective of a typical small group format, delivered to encourage conversation, rather than in a lecture-listening format.

To introduce systems thinking, the domino effect was used as a visual illustration of the concept. The candidate, as group leader, explained, "Dominoes can be placed in a line, balanced on their short ends just far enough apart so that, if one domino falls, its neighbor will be affected and also fall." The group leader pointed to the line of dominoes that was set up on a table in front of the group, continuing, "This simple chain reaction demonstrates linear thinking: A causes B causes C causes D and so on."

Taking the domino illustration to the next level, the group leader showed the cohort a short video from a recent dominoes world record attempt. Not only was the number of dominoes greatly increased, but the design was multi-colored, multi-layered, and multi-directional. The complexity of the design revealed the interconnectivity and systemic influence characteristic of systems theory. This example was used to illustrate the impact of anxiety within a system and the chain reaction traveling through each part the entire system. One group member asked the obvious question, "How do you stop everyone from falling?" To answer the question, the group examined Edwin Friedman's parable, *Panic*, from his work, *Friedman's Fables*. In the story, a group of dominoes were trapped in a cycle of chronic anxiety. They fell one way, righted themselves, and then fell the other way. Each domino did all it could to resist falling, but even when able to hold temporarily, the momentum eventually won out. Those who tried to stop the tumbling searched frantically for answers, but to no avail. All seemed hopeless. Then, one day, the back and forth ricocheting stopped. One domino, no different from the rest,

decided to stop focusing on its neighbors who were falling down and began focusing all

of its attention on doing everything it could to remain standing.[4]

This story is similar to what occurs in a family or church system. When there is

anxiety in a system, it begins with one domino falling, thereby affecting the next domino,

which affects the next domino like a chain reaction. The way a system breaks the cycle

of emotional reactivity is through greater self-awareness in as few as one person. The

group leader asked the group to write down the key phrase of FST, "The only person you

can change is yourself." So when one individual controls one's own emotional response,

this modifies the entire system, opening the possibility for greater health in the system

and enhanced functioning. For effect, the researcher tipped the first domino in the line of

dominoes set up in the front of the room. The domino effect illustration helped define

one of the goals for the small group. Discovering the relational dynamics and learned

responses through one's genogram, combined with an increased understanding of the

emotional processes identified by FST, will improve the level of a person's self-

awareness and emotional maturity. When applied in our families, our workplaces and

our churches, personal growth, which results from focusing on one's own functioning,

empowers change and increases the well-being and functioning of these systems.

The session ended with an overview of Family Systems definitions and operating

terms, with participants being provided a handout of these for future use. These terms

have been defined in the theoretical rationale section of Chapter 2, but were also

readdressed in the explanations of each session. The group leader re-emphasized that

each group session would focus on one family systems principle. The group was asked to

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[4]Edwin H. Friedman, *Friedman's Fables* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), 137-140.

begin constructing personalized genograms and to reflect on what was learned by

journaling answers to the following questions:

- What did you learn?

- What are you taking away from this session?

- How will this impact you, your family, and our church?

Exploratory Session 1: Everything in Balance

The theme for the first Exploratory session was the principle of homeostasis. The

working definition provided to the group defined homeostasis as the desire of any system

(whether family, work, or church) to preserve the status quo and maintain balance,

despite the constant pressures and outside influences upon the system to change.

Whether the pressures are deemed positive or negative, systems are resistant to changes

in functioning. During this session, two driving metaphors were incorporated.

The first metaphor was a mobile used to illustrate the balance within systems. The

small group was broken into smaller teams and given instructions to build a mobile.

Each of the sub-groups was provided with wooden dowels, paperclips, and foam shaped

letters, symbols and animals to construct these mobiles. As each group completed the

project, these mobiles were hung on display in the meeting area, and remained on display

throughout all future FSTSG sessions as a reminder that systems seek to maintain

homeostasis.

As the groups worked to construct their mobiles, a virtual fish tank screen saver

played on a large flat screen monitor. This served as the second metaphor, used to

illustrate the various roles each person plays within a family or church system. Such

roles define how individuals in a system function to create stability and maintain homeostasis. The group leader noted that stability, in and of itself, was not a true indicator of a healthy system. Even in dysfunctional systems, attempts are made to maintain a sense of balance, albeit an unhealthy one.

The virtual fish tank illustration also helped to set up the parable, *Burnout*, for the session from *Friedman's Fables*. In this parable was a fish tank. Every fish in the aquarium had its place in the community, a role and a function to fulfill, so that everything remained in balance. Then one day, the scavenger fish decided she had had enough of cleaning up after everyone else. This threw the entire system out of balance. The guppies became dull and lifeless. The seahorse lost its "s" curve and curled up in a ball. The piranha became more aggressive, and the angel fish began to swim upside-down. Everything in the tank was affected because the scavenger fish had resorted to just going through the motions, not actually doing her job. Her behavior was noticed by those outside of the tank as well; so one day she disappeared and, in her place, appeared a brand new scavenger fish who started cleaning right away. Soon everything returned to the way it had always been.[5]

The FSTSG discussed the roles in the parable and were challenged to consider personal reactions or roles within their families of origin, work, or the church. The question for discussion was, "How do you react in times of stress, and how does your reaction help maintain homeostasis?" Some participants thought they were like the piranha and became aggressive, while others shared they reacted more like the guppies, becoming depressed and withdrawn. The different fish helped demonstrate how one's

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[5]Friedman, *Friedman's Fables*, 137-140.

role and reactions affect the roles and reactions of others within a system and how homeostasis eventually returns, even in the midst of dramatic changes. The same truth applies to family roles within families of origin.

The group considered the following scenario in the family functioning around an alcoholic father. When dad comes home drunk, everyone leaps into action. The wife may try to coach the children to "not make dad mad" or to act like nothing is wrong. One child may rebel against the family rules and act out. Another child may try to comfort the mother. The next morning, the wife may take a co-dependent role, calling her husband's work place to let them know "he isn't feeling well." Whether caretaker, rebel, or comforter, each person in the family performs a role to maintain balance and stability in the family system.

Roles are only one way that systems maintain homeostasis. As the discussion moved forward, the group turned its attention to rules, rituals and myths, utilizing online resources prepared by therapist Arlene Harper.[6] While rules, rituals and myths are helpful to create identity and define culture, rules, rituals and myths can also perpetuate unhealthy patterns and emotional responses. One of the participants, a retired school teacher, offered the example of rules for her classroom. In her situation, she allowed the students to come up with five class rules at the beginning of the school year. The group discussion built from her example. First, the discussion centered on how rules had a positive impact, helping to set boundaries, create order, and encourage community. While most classroom rules are positive, the group was pressed to consider the unspoken

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[6]Arlene F. Harper, Support4Change.com, http://www.support4change.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=112&Itemid=154 (accessed February 15, 2015).

rules that may govern a classroom, family, or church - rules that may have detrimental effects or maintain unhealthy habits, such as secret keeping, injustice, or abuse.

The conversation transitioned to rituals and the role these play in protecting the status quo. Rituals reinforce rules and reflect values. While the group talked about classroom rituals, such as attendance, lining up for lunch, and passing papers to the center, the focus shifted to family life, as the group began to open up and share the rituals and traditions that bound their families together. These included when (and how) the Christmas tree gets put up, birthday celebrations, who does the disciplining when the rules are broken, and routines, like visiting relatives. It was agreed that these are the predictable patterns of life that give us identity, help us feel secure and provide stability. However, rituals can also create barriers and tell us what is important and who does not belong. The illustration shifted focus, this time to life within the church. The liturgy, music and hymns, and overall structure of the worship service are filled with rituals. These extend beyond Sunday morning worship to the polity, and even theology, which have their own rituals. FSTSG participants were asked to consider how church meetings and committees were structured, and how the people of our church understood and celebrated Communion or Baptism. The question was posed to the group, "How do these beliefs and rituals exclude others who do not belong?" Most importantly, participants were asked to consider, "How do such rituals help maintain homeostasis?"

The power of myths was the next topic for discussion. Returning to the classroom illustration, the cohort looked at myths surrounding the reputations of teachers and administrators, such as which teachers were mean or difficult, or what happened when a student was called into the principal's office. As group members shared stories from

their school years, the group leader nudged the topic toward family myths, particularly

stories of family members, repeated so often that they become mythical in nature. An

example was provided where author and therapist, Arlene Harper, shared a powerful

illustration about her grandmother. She remembered coming home from school one day

and walking into the kitchen, where she saw her mother crying. When she asked what

had happened, her mother simply said, "Grandma Gilbertson died of cancer today." That

was all there was; the explanation became a myth about how Grandma Gilbertson died.

Some thirty years later, the truth came out that her grandmother had actually taken her

own life. The story about cancer developed because her father was afraid suicide could

be hereditary, and he was afraid how others might look upon the family. The secret had

multiple repercussions for the family, since the truth remained hidden and the deep grief

went unresolved.[7]

The group leader reviewed that roles, rules, rituals and myths were neither positive

nor negative, in and of themselves. The ultimate determination of value was measured by

the level of rigidity. A lack of flexibility was one symptom of an unhealthy system.

Peter Steinke, in *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, posited that rigidity

inhibits growth and learning, stating that, "Rigid behaviors or patterns mean there is less

awareness, less thinking, less self-control available."[8] While homeostasis naturally

resists change, by seeking balance within the system, rigidity intensifies the resistance

and the possibility for discovering a new healthy balance. In reality, the world does not

operate on absolutes. Roles change, there are exceptions to rules, rituals are modified,

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[7]Harper, "What is Your Family Myth?"

[8]Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1996), 81.

and myths are dissolved with truth. Thus, one characteristic of a healthy system is openness and flexibility, as opposed to being closed and rigid.

To give the participants time to process the learning, the group took a break for fellowship. Without being prompted, the discussion continued through the recess, with several members asking questions about the material. Then, returning from the break, the class was divided into twos and threes to discuss the influence of roles, rules, rituals and myths in maintaining homeostasis from personal experience in the FSTSG members' own lives.

The larger FSTSG came back together to further explore unhealthy behaviors or mechanisms employed by individuals or groups within a system to maintain the status quo and preserve homeostasis. Four common strategies that the group leader categorized were gridlock, avoidance, sabotage, and compliance. Gridlock refers to any action that paralyzes a system from moving or proceeding, which might include delaying an important decision or distracting from an important issue. Avoidance is defined as simply refusing to deal with something, whether through denial of the problem or creating emotional or physical distance. Sabotage is the conscience or unconscious undermining of a cause, plan, or effort. Finally, compliance is the tendency to easily yield to the opinions and wishes of others.

Before adjourning, the group was asked to reflect on the information from the session and apply it to their own lives. Specifically the following questions were posed:

- What rules, rituals, and myths exist in your family? In our church?

- How do these rules, rituals, and myths maintain the status quo?

- How might you respond differently to deal with gridlock, avoidance, sabotage, or compliance?

- How will your new insights impact -you, -your family, -our church?

Exploratory Session 2: Too Much or Not Enough

When the group gathered for the second Exploratory session, the class opened with an extensive time of reflection, focusing on how the group had or could apply the learning that had taken place. The group leader questioned, "How did you experience or realize the power of homeostasis, roles, rules, rituals, and myths over the past two weeks since our last meeting?" The observation was made by one couple that they realized their family had a lot of rules, but none of them were written down; and the rules they did have, their children knew how to get around. Another couple agreed with this, saying they realized they had too many rules when they overheard their granddaughter say, "Don't put your hands on Nana's walls." A third couple added that their struggle was in identifying the *real* rules. The group agreed that rules are useful to set guidelines and define roles, but that too many rules or inflexibility can be detrimental to the functioning of a system.

FSTSG members were asked if they had discovered any myths in their families or careers. Many in the group shared some common childhood myths, such as swallowing watermelon seeds would cause a plant to grow in your stomach, or that certain foods were imbued with magical powers. One of the female participants joked that her father would tell her to eat all of her broccoli to put hair on her chest. She stated that she still hates broccoli, emphasizing she certainly has no desire for a hairy chest.

The tone turned serious when one of the members shared her myths about marriage and family. She admitted that, while she did not think life would be happily ever after or that marriage did not require work, she thought her second marriage would be different, that she would avoid the mistakes she had made in the past and things would go well. She went on to explain that she was having trouble raising her teenage daughter, who had been adopted by the couple. The group offered words of encouragement, dispelling the myth of the perfect family. However, as this participant talked about life at home, several emotional factors emerged that influenced her relationships. One factor was that the rules, rituals and myths in this family's system were rigid and were used as a manipulative means to control or change others. This participant had not yet come to understand, "The only person you can change is yourself." Sadly, rather than focusing on her own emotional responses and behaviors, she continued to focus on what she perceived others were doing wrong or doing to her.

The facilitator helped move the conversation away from this family to consider the ways rules, rituals, and myths operate within church systems by sharing a story of how breaking ritual can create unintended anxiety in a system. During the Pastor's first worship service, the offertory time was moved from the beginning of the service to the time following the sermon. During worship service that week, one man, accustomed to the ritual of presenting his offering at the beginning of the service, stood up while waving his check. He later explained that he thought the Pastor had forgotten to take up the offering. This story encouraged another account by a group member who had been elected as vice president of the women's group at her church. Each year, the group hosted two special dinners at her church, the blueberry supper and the strawberry supper.

Excited about the chance to do something different as the new vice president, she researched new recipes and thought of new ways to invite the community at large. She suggested that, instead of using biscuits for the shortcake, they might try using angel food cake; and maybe they could consider updating the small hand-painted signs used to publicize the suppers. She was shocked by the resistance of the group, especially when she was told, "We just don't do those things here."

While the discussion extended beyond the allotted timeframe for reflection, the examples and stories that were shared exquisitely illustrated the power of homeostasis, rules, rituals, and myths. The research candidate was encouraged that the information covered in the learning block from the previous session was being synthesized by the participants. This reflection time also served to lower inhibitions and build trust within the group as members shared with one another.

The FSTSG transitioned, turning attention to the family systems principles of the day, over- and under-functioning. An outline was given to each participant to guide the discussion, beginning with the definition of over-functioning. A simple definition of over-functioning is doing for others what they can and should do for themselves. Over-functioners assume the thinking, feeling, or actions of under-functioners.[9] The root cause of over-functioning is anxiety, frequently expressed by fear or worry. Leaders who over-function are often seen as micro-managers, assuming too much responsibility out of fear of their own failure. An example was given of parents who over-function when they are so concerned about their child's grades that the parents complete the child's homework.

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[9]Richardson, 133.

To illustrate the principle of over-functioning, the group's attention was directed to the television monitor to view a clip from the popular sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*. In the clip, the main characters, Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj, were preparing for the Annual Physics Bowl. As the team practiced, the brilliant, yet narcissistic, Sheldon announced that he could win the Physics Bowl singlehandedly, without any help from his friends. Feeling disrespected by Sheldon's arrogance, an argument ensued, with the friends splitting away to form a new team. The two teams in the bowl consisted of *PMS*, with Leonard, Howard, Raj and a fellow co-worker versus *AA*, with an overconfident Sheldon, the third floor Russian janitor, the university lunch lady, and her son. As the two teams faced off, they engaged in a fierce intellectual battle, with all of the members of PMS working together to answer the questions in each one's own area of expertise. On the other side, Sheldon was anxiously relying on his own abilities to determine the destiny of his team. As the competition neared the end, the score was tied, whereby the team who answered the final question would win. The final challenge was to solve a complex physics formula, which had both the PMS team and Sheldon perplexed. With the tension building and time running out, PMS ventured an incorrect guess. The Physics Bowl was Sheldon's to win if he could answer the question, but his nervous ticks and twitching revealed his fear of failure. With only seconds left, the Russian janitor unexpectedly announced an answer; but Sheldon quickly dismissed his teammate's response, belittling him in the process. Sheldon answered incorrectly, and the match ended in a tie. The arbitrator revealed that the Russian janitor had, in fact, been correct. At that moment, the janitor announced that, while he may be a janitor in this country, he was a physicist in Russia. It is unlikely that important divulgence would have changed

Sheldon's course of action; the over-functioning Sheldon was unable to shallow his pride and accept any help, thus costing him the Physics Bowl win.

This video sparked a number of thoughts among the group as they laughed about Sheldon's need for control and his superior attitude. One person astutely observed that Sheldon even displayed physical symptoms as his anxiety reached its peak. The cause or motivation for Sheldon's over-functioning was identified as his belief that he was intellectually superior to his friends and everyone else. Over-functioners commonly believe they are more capable and knowledgeable than others around them. The class was reminded that every display of behavior or emotional response has a conscious or unconscious motivation for an emotional pay-off. The group's attention was directed back to the class outline, identifying other common motivations of over-functioning: the appearance of responsibility, the beliefs that over-functioners have greater emotional health, greater maturity, or inflated or even deflated self-esteem.

The cohort was then challenged to consider and identify these common motivations of over-functioning while examining *The Net*, one of *Friedman's Fables*. The story goes that, one day, a husband decided to teach his wife how to play tennis. He made sure she had plenty of opportunities to learn the game, but when that did not work, he bought her books, magazines, and instructional DVDs to teach her the basics. He even arranged lessons with a local pro, but her game never seemed to improve. In fact, over time, her game actually became worse. She also started getting ill, feeling fatigued, and expressing undefinable pains which eventually led to an elbow injury that took over a year to heal.

Once the wife finally recovered, the husband decided to teach her how to play himself. So the first thing he did was to make sure she had the best equipment, the best

clothing, and best shoes. He went to great lengths to remove anything that could hinder her learning or performance. Despite all of his hard work, his wife still felt self-conscious playing in front of others, so he drove around the city until he found the perfect out-of-the-way court where they could play in privacy. The husband had removed every reason his wife had given for failure, such as being distracted, apathetic, or out of shape.

So, one perfect, beautiful spring morning, they headed to the out-of-the-way court to play. The wife did not seem too excited with the whole idea and developed a slight headache on the way, but she went along. When they arrived, the husband discovered his wife was not wearing her new tennis outfit and had forgotten her new racket. No worries, he thought, and they walked on to the court, where he positioned his wife to return the first serve. Returning to his side of the net, he lobbed a ball in to her, aiming so he would hit her racket; but it flew by her. "Follow through!" he encouraged. On the next serve, she hit the ball and it flew over the fence, then the next hit into the net, and a third veered off to the side. The husband made suggestions and offered words of encouragement each time. The wife smiled, but her heart was just not in the game. "What's wrong?" her husband asked. "Don't you want to play? I'm doing this for us." He did not wait for her answer; instead, he came up with a new idea.

From his side of the net, he prepared to serve and hit the ball straight up in the air and over the net. As the ball soared, he quickly ran to the other side, let it bounce, and hit it up into the air to the opposite side of the court. Again and again, over and over, he batted the ball skyward and ran to the opposing side of the court each time for the return.

Their match went on for hours, without the wife's participation. But never again did the husband let the ball fall on the wife's side of the court.[10]

The story seems silly, but as FSTSG members shared their observations, they began to reflect on the ways they over-functioned or under-functioned. One participant shared his experience with an over-functioning co-worker who tried too hard to impress others and gain acceptance. Since the man was in law enforcement, many times the over-functioner endangered others. Then one parent in the group began to share stories about raising children and over stepping boundaries. The pressure to be a good parent resonated with two other families, also struggling to raise teenagers who were acting out. In one case, the parent became overly concerned with the perception of others and was trapped in the belief that she was failing as a parent because of her daughter's dropping grades and behaviors at school. In her anxiety, her response had been to over-function with harsh punishments and restrictive rules. This led to an increase in rebellion and an escalation in anxiety within the family system. Amplifying the anxiety, the daughter's grades and behaviors became worse.

The other set of parents experienced similar difficulties with their teenage daughter. They took corrective actions, attempting to help their daughter, but learned that ultimately they could not control her choices or behaviors. While this was heart-breaking to experience as parents, eventually, they came to peace with allowing her to take full responsibility for her actions and face the consequences for her behaviors. The lesson this second set of parents had learned was that, rather than over-functioning as parents, the solution was to allow their daughter to take responsibility for her choices and not hold

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[10]Friedman, *Friedman's Fables*, 63-67.

on to her anxiety for her. They admitted it was not easy to watch their daughter fail, but their story illustrated the way to break free from over-functioning behavior. The over-functioner resisting the need to save the other person has to also become comfortable with the anxiety that results from allowing others to fail.

The FSTSG took a break for food and fellowship at this point and, as the group reconvened, the question was posed, "What motivates people to over-function?" While these concepts were mentioned during the conversation about Sheldon's over-functioning, the concepts were further explored in greater detail. The group leader reviewed the five emotional pay-offs common to over-functioners:

- Appearance of responsibility,

- Appearance of greater health,

- Appearance of greater maturity,

- Feeling of more adequacy or knowledge, and

- Fulfillment of an emotional need connected with self-worth.[11]

The mother from earlier in the group discussion recognized that her own anxiety caused her to over-function with her daughter to the point that she admitted she was "picking at her daughter" in hopes of correcting or changing her behavior. While the mother knew it was ineffective, she said she could not control her own behavior. Even when the father interrupted and attempted to explain to his wife the importance of creating space for the daughter to fail, the mother reacted by attacking him and saying, "He simply doesn't care or worry about our daughter's situation." Her confession and response demonstrated a typical over-functioning principle. Typical of over-functioners,

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[11]Richardson, 133-134.

even when she intellectually understood her behaviors were producing negative results, she still believed she was not doing enough. This again demonstrated that, to enhance well-being and functioning at a healthier level within a system, requires an individual to focus on one's own response and level of functioning, rather than focusing on others and trying to fix someone else.

As the session came to a close, the group leader segued into the Biblical narrative to apply the learning to the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:28-42, and the story of Moses in Exodus 18:13-26. The participants were asked to listen and share how these stories related to over-functioning by considering the motivation behind the actions of the main characters. It was observed that neither Martha nor Moses acted out of pride like Sheldon, nor did they try to change someone else. In fact, Martha and Moses were both acting out of care and concern. They both were being diligent in doing their best and in trying to be their best. Yet, even when we think we are doing something for the right reasons, our responses can still be detrimental when showing love becomes distorted into an obligation, as in the case of Martha; or when our actions prevent others from growing and maturing, as in the case of Moses.

Before adjourning for the evening, the group was asked to reflect on the following questions between sessions:

- What are the major stressors in your life? Why do they create stress?

- Are there areas of your life where you are taking too much responsibility or not enough responsibility?

- Are you expressing burn-out in your life? If yes, where? And what are you going to do to act differently?

- How does the information in this session relate to the functioning of our church?

Exploratory Session 3: Nervous?

Even before the FSTSG gathered to continue the study, the conversation had begun, as people were sharing insights and stories about the ways they discovered they were over- and under-functioning in their lives. Laughter filled the room, particularly as wives lamented over their failures to train their husbands to do the laundry to their specifications. There was a tale of compulsive cleaning behaviors, where cooking utensils disappeared as one spouse, trying to prepare dinner, found glasses, bowls and stirring spoons snatched up, already washed and put back in the cupboard while still needed for use. Parents struggled over the attitudes of their teenagers, and mothers could not understand why it was so difficult for children to make their beds.

This group dialogue sparked one person to share about a military experience, with anxiety being created by a drill sergeant who loudly commanded hospital corners and covers that were so tight, he could bounce a quarter off the bed. Before that experience, this recruit had never even made his own bed, but the anxiety created by the drill sergeant changed the young soldier's behavior because the responsibility for making the bed was delegated. The FSTSG was asked, "Can you imagine a drill sergeant going through the barracks each morning and making up the racks of all the privates under his charge?" "Of course not," the group members agreed, applying this reasoning to the over-functioning of the mothers who had assumed this responsibility to reduce their own

anxiety. The group spent a few minutes reviewing the keys to freedom from over-

functioning which were discussed during the prior session.

One person asked if there was a way to distinguish between someone being helpful

versus over-functioning. The group leader asked the FSTSG members to consider the

ministry of Jesus, bringing group members to realize that Jesus helped people to help

themselves. It was important for the participants to distinguish that, while Jesus

performed many miracles and healed many people, he was careful not to do for people

what they could do for themselves. John 5:1-8, the Healing at the Pool, is the story of an

invalid man who spent 38 years sitting by the pool, hoping to be healed. Verse 4 explains

that, at a regular and known time, an angel would descend from heaven and touch the

water in the pool. The first person to enter the pool thereafter would be healed. When

questioned, the man told Jesus that no one would help him get to the water; and when he

did make it to the water's edge, someone always entered the pool before him to receive

the healing. He appeared helpless and stuck, trapped by his illness. But Jesus asked the

man, "Do you want to be healed?" He then told the man, "Get up, take your mat and

walk." It certainly could be argued that Jesus healed the man with Jesus' words. But

what was the tone of the question? Was Jesus simply asking if the man wanted his help,

or was Jesus testing the man's desire to be healed? Was Jesus implying, "You have been

here for 38 years, so do you even want to be healed?" Given the dialogue between the

man and Jesus, this alternative interpretation is plausible. Jesus was empowering the man

to take responsibility for his own healing. The man had a list of excuses for his inability

to heal himself, but Jesus challenged the man to go and touch the water to be healed.

Certainly, the power of Jesus to bring about this miraculous healing should not

diminished, but it could be that the miracle Jesus performed was in giving the man the ability to touch the water, so that he could participate in his own healing and could walk into new life.

One of the group members observed that this interpretation emphasized that people should be given a freedom of choice. This participant continued, noting that, as parents, supervisors and leaders, we have to allow people to fail at times. This is one of the keys to avoiding over-functioning – learning to become comfortable with anxiety, our own failures, and the failures of others. Another group member added that she had to resist the urge to correct others or to re-do things because they were not done to her standards. The group leader pointed out that French philosopher, Voltaire, is credited with saying, "Perfect is the enemy of good." This speaks to our desire for perfection getting in the way of the greater good of helping others learn and mature. The group recognized that our self-focus and concern for how we might be judged by the actions of our children, co-workers, or others leads to over-functioning as a way to deal with our own anxiety.

Following these observations, the reflection time transitioned to the discussion for the day on anxiety. To begin, the cohort established a working definition to guide the conversation. The group leader stressed that anxiety is a natural part of the human experience. In FST, "anxiety can be defined as the response of an organism to a threat, real or imagined. It is a process that, in some form, is present in all living things."[12] While everyone experiences times of stress and crisis, anxiety, in and of itself, is a neutral condition for individuals and systems. As Peter Steinke noted in his work,

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[12]Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York: Norton, 1988).

Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What, the impact of anxiety is determined by our own response.[13]   Some people develop healthy ways to manage stress and anxiety, while others respond through unhealthy behaviors, ranging from addiction to prolonged conflict. The response is also influenced by the type of anxiety we are experiencing. Steinke observed that acute anxiety is "situational and time-based" while chronic anxiety is "perpetually present".[14] Another way to distinguish these forms is that acute anxiety is a response to an immediate threat, change or crisis.

The group leader shared an account of being in middle school and seeing a math progress report that said F minus, minus, minus. He said, "I wasn't sure if I was imagining it or not. I'd never seen an F with three minuses! I just knew that I would be in a lot of trouble once my parents saw that grade." There was immediate anxiety over the grade, but it was short-term. Acute anxiety can be positive in the sense that it creates a strong response of self-preservation and survival, triggered by a specific event. This type of anxiety keeps us alert, aware, and ready to take necessary action to return to healthy functioning. The group was reminded that acute anxiety may also result from a major life change, such as health issues, a change in employment, a marriage, divorce, children going to college, or death. While some of these events may be traumatic, regardless of whether the event is perceived as positive or negative, the anxiety created by the change is often temporary and the system adapts to a new homeostasis.

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[13]Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute 2006), 7.

[14]Ibid., 10.

In contrast, chronic anxiety is generally a fearful, uneasy emotional state, perpetuated by what *might* happen. Chronic anxiety has become common throughout our society, in part because people are bombarded with negativity and tragedy. It is not uncommon to turn on the news and hear stories of gloom and doom, such as struggling economies, rising unemployment, brutal crimes in our neighborhoods and schools, the threat of terrorism, violence and war, and an uncertain future. In many churches, people are anxious about the declining membership, as loved ones pass away or people move; church leaders lament over diminishing finances with dwindling attendance, along with the increasing negative public perception of Christianity.

Both acute and chronic anxiety affect family, work, or church systems; however, chronic anxiety creates a negative feedback loop, whereby fear and worry generate more fear and worry, ultimately resulting in system paralysis. The person or system in chronic anxiety operates with reactivity, becoming immersed in a perpetual fight or flight mode. In this mode, the smallest stress becomes a major distraction. Steinke noted both the physiological, as well as the psychological, effects of chronic anxiety, including:

- decreased ability to learn;
- creativity replaced by a desire for certainty;
- reinforcement of hierarchies;
- inability to concentrate;
- release of neurochemicals which distorts hearing;
- simplified yes or no thinking;
- desire for the quick fix;
- feelings of helplessness and self-doubt;
- defensive behaviors;
- rigidity; and
- imaginative gridlock without the ability to think of alternatives, options, and new perspectives.[15]

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[15]Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 8-9.

Steinke's list of anxious responses provided a foundation from which the group could build when exploring how individuals experiencing chronic stress might react. To guide the discussion, the cohort also considered the work of Richardson's *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, which identified four patterns of reactive anxiety used by individuals, including *compliance, rebellion, power struggle* and *emotional cut-off* (or distancing).

Compliance may sound harmless, even helpful; but reactive compliance is a passive-aggressive behavior. The person may outwardly agree with an idea or decision, while secretly holding resentment, feeling forced into that decision. Consequently, leaders become confused and frustrated because there is either no, or very limited, progress made toward the agreed upon action or decision. This may occur because the compliant party did not implement the change, or what was done was incorrectly or poorly accomplished.[16]

Rebellion is simply open defiance. The rebel does or says exactly the opposite of what has been agreed upon. Rebels emphasize personal rights and view any decision made by another as an unfair demand. Ironically, a rebel cannot maintain a personal rebellious identity without someone else making decisions, because this reactive personality needs an authority figure or a cause to rebel against. Rebels have no goals, direction, or ideas of their own; they simply oppose every decision or change.[17]

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[16]Richardson, 93-94.

[17]Ibid., 94.

Power struggles are the result of people wanting to be right and getting their own way. A power struggle goes beyond resistance because it makes demands: "I'm not going to do that, BUT you'd better do this!" The tactic of power struggles focuses on changing and controlling others, which normally leads to increased frustration and anger between the parties in the power struggle. As the power struggle accelerates, both sides increase the use of accusations, blaming, and fault finding. Power struggles can tear systems apart because they regress into personal attacks, rather than focusing on the issues.[18]

Emotional distancing results from a sense of helplessness, whereby people do not know what to do or say. When this happens in a church setting, for instance, people begin to withdraw and stop attending worship or ministry team meetings. Members may simply become less active in areas of the church, or even stop talking to or relating with friends in the congregation. Someone who is distancing might say, "I need to step back from church life for a while," or "Things are getting crazy in my life; I need to take a break."[19]

These individual patterns of reactive anxiety not only prevent churches from improved functioning and moving forward, they can also destroy leaders and have devastating effects on the relationships within a congregation. Unfortunately, these are not the only obstacles to change, decision making, and effectively managing anxiety within a church. Friedman extensively studied congregational and synagogue systems and observed several group reactions to anxiety. He noted that reactive anxiety results in

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[18]Richardson, 94-95.

[19]Ibid., 95-97.

over-reaction, the erosion of boundaries, exaggeration, unhealthy seriousness, and

rigidity. Specifically, Friedman observed that congregations experiencing chronic

anxiety exhibited the following characteristics: *herding, blame displacement, a quick-fix

mentality*, and *poorly-defined leadership*.[20]

Herding is an unhealthy force within a system which encourages togetherness and

unity at the cost of individuality. Herding is unhealthy because it focuses on the least

mature, most dependent, or most dysfunctional members of the congregation. The major

concern here is that, if a decision is made, it may hurt someone's feelings or offend

someone or some group. In many ways, this is the "squeaky wheel gets the oil"

principle. The entire system adapts to and accommodates the most troublesome or vocal

members. Anxiety is increased in the system because leaders are afraid to look uncaring,

heartless, cold, or selfish. Even if a decision will be the best for the whole, the leadership

rallies around one individual or group to preserve unity, avoid offending, and remain

politically correct.[21]

Blame displacement occurs when leaders focus on an *outside agent* as the cause of a

problem or crisis, rather than taking responsibility for personal decisions. This

displacement of responsibility is an avoidance of the problems that are leading to the

anxiety or crisis. For instance, it is easier to blame changes in cultural attitudes for the

decline in young people participating in the life of the church, or a pastor or music

director for a decline in worship attendance, than for the leaders of the church to face the

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[20]Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 62-63.

[21]Ibid., 66-71.

deeper issues, finding solutions beyond the *symptoms* they are experiencing (i.e., fewer young people or a decline in attendance.)[22]

The Quick-fix mentality is another example of how individuals and systems look outwardly, rather than inwardly, to deal with anxiety. The quick fix mentality is all too common. People look for the fastest ways to lose weight, to get immediate relief for pain (e.g., aspirin for a headache), or for a charismatic leader to solve the problems. The present society grows impatient, expecting an immediate resolution to anything that creates discomfort. Unfortunately, this approach only deals with the symptoms, rather than the root cause of the problem. It is unrealistic to expect an immediate solution to any problem. We know from personal experience that we do not just change personal behaviors, thoughts and values from one day to the next. The way we live today has developed over years, so we must understand it will take more than a day, a week, or a month for real transformative change to take place. The same is true in the life of the church. We have developed a unique culture with engrained ways of functioning and set beliefs. A denominational program, church product, or strong pastoral personality is not the answer. At best, these things can increase our awareness and help us develop strategies to address the challenges and opportunities of the future, but they are only part of a lifelong process of looking at ourselves so we can grow toward a healthier, brighter future.[23]

Poorly-defined leaders can get caught up in the anxiety existing in a system, rather than becoming less anxious in presence. Effective leaders have the ability to

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[22]Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 75-83.

[23]Ibid., 83-88.

appropriately deal with anxiety, as well as provide a calming presence in the midst of the emotional storm. This requires the resistance of the trappings already discussed (herding, blaming, and looking for the quick fix), as well as those patterns identified by Richardson (compliance, rebellion, power struggles, and emotional cut-off). This is why leadership is not an easy task. Not only will leaders deal with all of these patterns and characteristics of reactive anxiety, they will also have to resist the pressure to *fix* problems, maintain peace, and take responsibility for the happiness of others. Effective leaders make decisions based on core values, while challenging the system to consider healthy ways of dealing with anxiety, change, and conflict.[24]

The group took a break to fellowship and, upon returning, separated into two groups for conducting an anxiety self-test. Using an online resource written by Charles Stone, entitled *8 Signs You May be an Anxious Leader*, each group was asked to read, reflect, and share with others in their group to answer the following questions:

- Do you yield to the opinions of others to avoid increasing anxiety (e.g., people-pleasing or peace-making)?
- Do you easily blow up at others?
- Do you focus on the responses and reactions of others toward you?
- Can you be easily and quickly hurt?
- Do you see yourself as a victim?
- Do you respond to issues with yes/no, either/or options?
- Do you blame or falsely criticize others?
- Do the threats from others sway your thoughts or behaviors?[25]

The smaller group discussion transitioned into a large group discussion, with FSTSG members sharing personal insights and experiences. One new member of the Trustees

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[24]Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 88-90.

[25]Charles Stone, "8 Signs You May be an Anxious Leader," Charles Stone Stonewell Ministries, accessed February 15, 2015, http://charlesstone.com/8-signs-may-anxious-leader/.

committee shared his struggle with the important decision concerning closing the church's fellowship hall for safety reasons. He admitted that he feared upsetting those on both sides of the issue, so he was reluctant to share his insights and opinions. Another group member expressed her emotional attachment to the Peck Hall situation, remembering her wedding reception, and voiced concern about the closing. Quickly, another group participant, a current leader in Education ministries and a long-standing member of HUMC, expressed her support for closing Peck Hall because of the safety concerns. With the focus shifting from personal experience to the church system, the researcher seized the opportunity to redirect the group's attention to assess the current level of anxiety within HUMC.

Peter Steinke, in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, identified thirteen triggers of anxiety for congregations that the cohort was asked to consider. Steinke posited that, if a congregation experienced five to six of these triggers consecutively or simultaneously, anxious reactivity may result in chronic anxiety throughout the system. Following a handout, each of these triggers were named and the group considered the relevance of each to the church. These triggers are identified in Figure 4.1.

Money	Sex, Sexuality
Pastoral Leadership Style	Lay Leadership Style
Growth, Survival	Boundaries
Trauma, Transition	Staff Conflict, Resignation
Harm/Death of a Child	Old versus New
Contemporary versus Traditional	Ideal and Reality Gap
Building, Construction, Space, Territory	

Figure 4.1   Thirteen Triggers of Anxiety within Congregations[26]

The group identified at least five triggers, and as many as seven, currently affecting

the HUMC congregational system. Some of those serving on committees or in leadership

roles understood current financial challenges, declining worship numbers, significant

deaths and losses, or the situation with Peck Hall; but they had yet to consider the

cumulative effect of such triggers. Through this exercise, the FSTSG group realized that

the church was functioning from a position of chronic anxiety and exhibiting the

symptoms and characteristics that had been discussed throughout the session.

The next question was not unexpected: "How do we fix this?" The group leader

directed the attention of the group participants to the scriptures and the story of God's

people wandering through the wilderness. Throughout the book of Exodus, the Hebrew

nation was seized by fear and anxiety. When God intervened, usually through

miraculous means, the anxiety of the people lowered until the next crisis, when the

people once again found themselves overwhelmed by fear. The cycle culminated at

Mount Sinai, as the people feared they had lost their leader, Moses, and continued to fail

to recognize God's presence in their midst. Looking for a quick fix, they turned to Aaron

for leadership and forged the golden calf to be their god. The result was that, while God

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[26]Richardson, 15-17.

continued to pour out divine providence and presence, neither Moses nor that generation would realize the fulfillment of God's promise to see the Promised Land. This story shows the destructive nature of dealing with anxiety reactively. To break the cycle of chronic anxiety, the first step to functioning at a healthier level is managing the anxiety within the system, which means resisting the patterns of reactivity discussed in the session to break through the imaginative gridlock that has been paralyzing the leadership of the church. The group leader further explained that the session on self-differentiation would also provide additional insights and strategies to move from reactive to reflective responses.

One group member added, "When we're operating out of a spirit of fear, we need to recognize that God didn't give it to us. God's Word says that God does not give us a spirit of fear. So when we're reacting on that basis and that's how we're making decisions, and God didn't give it to us, we'd better consider who did. And we'd better back up and rethink our strategy." With that, the participants were asked to reflect and journal on three questions between sessions:

- How do you deal with anxiety in your life?

- Is there a time in your life that you resisted reacting and reflected before you spoke or took action?

- What do you think God is asking you to do with what you have been learning?

Exploratory Session 4: Triangles

The conversation from the previous session on anxiety began even before the class members were seated. The group was reminded that anxiety is one of the key concepts in

FST. Expanding this concept, the researcher reminded the group that, while anxiety itself

is neutral, an individual's reaction to a situation determines the impact it has both upon

that person and others. For instance, when reacting out of unmet emotional needs, such

as a need for acceptance from others, people may choose to go along with the crowd,

rather than choose to do what is best overall. One group member responded by sharing

about her work situation, where cliques had developed among her co-workers. Her

frustration was that an adult co-worker was acting one way in her presence but, feeling

the peer pressure to belong and be accepted by those in the office clique, she acted

another way when around that group. Most disturbing was that this coworker was willing

to go so far as to belittle her friends in the office if it meant gaining acceptance into the

clique.

The general question was posed to the FSTSG members, "How have you seen

anxiety impact your life?" The group leader also posed a follow-up question, "How have

you heard God speaking to you through the group sessions?" One member expressed that

he could see how the covered principles could help the church, but noted it was almost

always easier to apply the learning to his work situation rather than the church. His

reasoning behind this was, "You don't want to make any waves. No one gets mad at

church, or at least you don't show it. Everyone plays nice and you are on your best

behavior here." His struggle was in fighting against his own anxiety and the pressure he

felt as a member of the Trustees. As a new member of the committee, he wanted to be

accepted, but felt torn by the difficult decisions needing to be made about Peck Hall. As

Steinke pointed out in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times,* the church has

developed a *culture of nice*, where someone in the church is permitted to hold the entire

system hostage because no one wants to directly deal with the issues being created. The belief within the church system is that confrontation would not be the appropriate Christian response.[27] This FSTSG member's frustration was supported by others in the group, one affirming she observed more FST principles at work than in her family or in the church. Another said, "If people get mad in the church, they just leave. And you don't find out until later that someone's feelings were hurt." The group leader asked, "How does that relate to what we have been talking about?" The answer came quickly as, "emotional distancing," confirming that learning was happening, but that the principles were not yet easily recognizable or applied. Adding to the examples of other reactionary behaviors to anxiety, a long-time church member expressed that, over the years of serving in leadership, she had witnessed power struggles and rebellion among the leadership. Someone else noted the extremes within the church and within anxious responses. The group observed and gave examples of different levels of both compliance and emotional distancing, such as people pulling back from leadership rolls or from serving, even if remaining as church members. However, the point was made that these are unhealthy behaviors, affecting the overall health and functioning of the church system. Someone observed, "Then maybe God is asking us to let go of the past so we can move ahead." The discussion had come full circle, because as long as a person holds on to the past, decisions in the present will be affected, which will shape the future.

The discussion segued to the FST principle for this Exploratory session on relationship triangles. Using Ronald Richardson's observations, the group leader provided an overview by explaining that, while the most basic relationship is only two

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[27]Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 13.

people, or a dyad, the triangle is the basic relational unit within FST. To understand how emotional triangles function is to realize that two people are never isolated by themselves, in part because they exist within a community and within interconnected systems. While two people can maintain a relationship for a short period of time, as soon as anxiety increases, a third party is brought into the relationship to manage the anxiety and maintain stability.[28] Edwin Friedman, in *Generation to Generation*, explained, "An emotional triangle is formed by any three persons or issues…. When any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will "triangle in" or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another."[29]

Triangles also function to minimize individual differences and reduce conflict, so as with anxiety, these relational structures are normal, being neither healthy nor unhealthy. What determines whether or not a triangle is positive, neutral, or negative is the response and interaction of the parties in the triangle. The perfect relational triangle is reflected in the Trinity between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Each side of the triangle is equal because each person in the triangle acts out of the best interest for the other two persons. There is no anxiety or conflict because the Trinity is held together by perfect love.

To understand the difference between unhealthy and healthy triangles, the cohort referred to the work of Phillip Guerin, Thomas Fogarty, Leo Fay, and Judith Kautto, in *Working with Relationship Triangles: The One-Two-Three of Psychotherapy*, which explains that all groupings of three are not referred to as *triangles*, but instead these

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[28]Richardson, 115.

[29]Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 35.

authors used the term *threesomes* to denote those positive and balanced relationship triangles. The group discussed the distinctions based upon the information provided in Table 4.2.[30]

Table 4.2. Descriptions of Relational Threesomes versus Triangles

Threesome	Triangle
Each person can interact one-on-one.	Each twosome's interaction is tied to the behavior of the third person.
Each person has options for his or her behavior.	Each person is tied to reactive forms of behavior.
Each person can take "I" positions without trying to change the other two.	No one takes "I" positions without needing to change the others.
Each person can allow the other two to have their own relationship without interference.	Each person gets involved in the relationship between the other two.
Self-focus is possible and the usual situation.	No self-focus in anyone, and everyone is constantly focused on the other two.

Each of these points was contrasted with one another and expanded upon with examples. Then the group was asked to identify the common theme or thread in all of these points, the common theme being the functioning of each individual within the threesome/triangle. In the healthier threesomes, each individual was self-focused, concentrating on personal responsibilities in the relationship and governing individual behaviors. In triangles, however, one or more persons in the relationship were focused on the others, rather than taking responsibility for oneself, while also reacting to the responses of the others. The group was reminded that FST is built upon the premise that, within a system, "the only person you can change is yourself."

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[30]Phillip J. Guerin, Jr, et al., *Working with Relationship Triangles: The One-Two-Three of Psychotherapy* (New York: Guildford Press, 1996), 46-47.

To further grasp the concept of triangles, the group turned its attention back to

Friedman's work in *Generation to Generation* to examine the seven laws of emotional

triangles.

1. The relationship of any two members of an emotional triangle is kept in balance by the way a third party relates to each of them or to their relationship.
2. If one is the third party in an emotional triangle it is generally not possible to bring change (for more than a week) to the relationship of the other two parts by trying to change their relationship directly.
3. Attempts to change the relationship of the other two sides of an emotional triangle not only are generally ineffective, but also, homeostatic forces often convert these efforts to their opposite intent.
4. To the extent a third party to an emotional triangle tries unsuccessfully to change the relationship of the other two, the more likely it is that the third party will wind up with the stress of the other two.
5. The various triangles in an emotional system interlock so that to bring change in any one of them is often resisted by homeostatic forces in the other or in the system itself.
6. One side of an emotional triangle tends to be more conflictual than the others.
7. We can only change a relationship to which we belong. Therefore, the way to bring change to the relationship of the two others (NOT an easy task) is to try to maintain a well-defined relationship with each, and to avoid the responsibility for their relationship to one another.[31]

The group leader diagrammed several triangles using family, work, and church

situations to illustrate the relational dynamics of threesomes and triangles. One example

considered a church's decision to hire a new children's director. The three sides of the

triangle were the Finance chairperson, the Staff Parish Relations chairperson, and the

issue, which was the need for a children's director. The Finance Chair was convinced the

church did not have the money, while the Staff Parish Relations Chair was lobbying hard

for the new position. The conflict in the triangle was preventing the church from moving

forward because the financial anxiety of the Finance Chair was causing gridlock in the

larger church system.

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[31]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 36-39.

As the FSTSG members processed the learning, several other personal examples surfaced. One case was a dynamic between mother, father, and child, in which the father was mediating and managing the conflict between mother and daughter. This was a powerful illustration of the second law of triangles. All sides of the triangle were focused on the other rather than on one's own behaviors, so mediation on the father's part yielded short-term results rather than long-term change in the family system. Since the father was actually carrying the anxiety of the system, the situation also illustrates Friedman's third law, because his attempts were creating the opposite of the desired result, increasing tension rather than resolving the conflict.

An increase in anxiety also creates interlocking triangles. As Richardson noted, other triangles (persons who form new triangles and are parts of existing triangles) are brought into the situation to manage the anxiety.[32] For instance, the couple may seek help in the issue with their child. They may seek assistance from teachers, guidance counselors, therapists, other parents, or a pastor. The introduction of these other individuals creates a series of interlocking triangles where the influence of others impacts the original triangle of father, mother, and child. For instance, the mother, father and pastor form a new triangle, while the mother, father and therapist form a new triangle. These two triangles may interlock if the mother sides with the pastor against the father, and the father sides with the therapist against the mother. Frustrated, the father asked, "How do you get out of a triangle?" As stated earlier, the answer is to modify one's own response while staying positively connected to others in the triangle. At this, the cohort took a break.

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[32]Richardson, 120.

Reconvening, the FSTSG cohort turned to scripture to build upon the work of

Kamila Blessing and triangles in the family of Abraham and the Prodigal Son in Luke

15:11-32, as already described within the LAT methodology in the segment on *Triangles*.

With limited session time remaining, the group was asked to reflect on the learning of

this segment through the following questions:

- Can you identify triangles in your life and family?

- Have you experienced triangulation in our church?

- What are the fused relationships in your life?

- When have you emotionally distanced yourself in an unhealthy way?

- How is God using your learning to reconnect and reconcile a broken or strained

  relationship in your life?

Exploratory Session 5: Me, Myself and I

Gathering for the last of the Exploratory sessions, the group leader led a quick

review and offered clarification of emotional triangles, thereby asking the question,

"How have you experienced triangles at home, work, or church?" The group offered a

few examples; however, one person mentioned that she had been telling her spouse,

"Stay out of my triangle." The group leader pointed out that we are all in threesomes or

triangles. It is not a matter of being part of the triangle as much as it is one's own

response and reactions as to whether there exists a healthy, relational threesome. The

researcher illustrated equidistant triangles versus elongated triangles, using a rubber band,

to explain that anyone in a triangle can move closer or become more distant to any others

in that triangle.

The other question concerning triangles addressed the role of triangles in group dynamics. The confusion resulted in a misunderstanding that triangles are the basic relational unit but the points of the triangle may extend beyond individuals to encompass issues or groups. The example was proposed of a triangle including the Pastor, the Trustees committee, and an issue with interlocking triangles including the Pastor, the Trustees Chair, and the Finance Chair. The review concluded with the group turning its attention to the principle of self-differentiation.

To introduce self-differentiation, the group leader began the FSTSG discussion by reading Edwin Friedman's fable, *The Bridge*. In it, there was a man who had spent many days reflecting on his life and what he wanted from the rest of his life. Then, one day, the perfect opportunity came to him; but in order to seize it, he had to act quickly. This had all happened before, but he had missed out in the past because he had hesitated; so this time, he was determined to go after this opportunity before it could pass him by. Invigorated by the possibilities, the man began his journey. His steps seemed lighter, and the strength and optimism of his youth that had remained dormant for so long was re-awakened. He was overflowing with anticipation when he approached a bridge along the trail. As he started across, he saw a man coming from the opposite direction. The other man seemed to be coming to greet him, but the first man did not know the other. Even more strangely, the other man was dressed the same except for a rope that was wrapped several times around the other man's waist. As the two men met, the stranger removed the rope from around his waist and asked the man if he would mind holding the end of the rope. Then, without warning, the stranger leapt over the side of the bridge! Instinctively, the man braced himself but was still almost dragged over the side.

"Hold on tight!" the other man shouted from beneath the bridge. "My life is in your hands! If you let go, I'm lost."

The man tried with all his strength to pull the other man to safety, but he was just not strong enough. "Why did this have to happen today – today, of all days?" the man thought. He tried to call for help or find some place to tie the rope, but had no luck. In frustration, he yelled, "What do you want?"

"Just your help," was the reply.

"How can I help? I can't pull you up, and there's no place to tie off the rope."

"Tie it around your waist! Remember, my life is in your hands."

The man was perplexed. If he let go, the other man would die; if he stayed, he would lose the hope of his own life. He considered teaching the man a lesson and jumping off the bridge himself, but he was so close to the life he had always wanted. He wanted to live and live fully. Time was of the essence, as it was almost too late to arrive at his destination on time. He had to make a choice.

The man was struck by a new plan. Since he could not pull the other man up by himself, if the other man could curl around the rope to shorten the length while the man pulled, then by working together, maybe it could be done. So he explained his plan to the stranger, but the stranger was not interested in the plan.

"If you fail, I die," the stranger said, choking back the tears.

The point of decision had arrived for the man. Would it be his life, or the life of the other man? With no time to spare, the man had an epiphany, a radical new way of thinking beyond the usual way he thought.

"I want you to listen carefully," he said, "because I mean what I am about to say. I will not accept the position of choice for your life, only my own; the position of choice for your own life I hereby give back to you."

"What do you mean?" the other asked, afraid.

"I mean, simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends. I will become the counterweight. You do the pulling and bring yourself up. I will even tug a little from here." He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself anew against the side.

"You cannot mean what you say," the other shrieked. "You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me!"

The man waited for a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope. "I accept your choice," he said, at last, and freed his hands.[33]

The group was silent, deep in thought when the researcher asked, "Whose rope are you holding?" One participant noted immediately that the story spoke to the struggle of co-dependency and addiction. Another joked that the moral of the story was, "If your friend jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?" He followed his joke with the observation of the struggles with our own selfishness and guilt, then added, "Eventually we have to learn to let go of the rope. If we can't let go of the rope, others can't grow and mature, and we become stuck." One mother in the group opened up about her own struggle, wanting to help her family, but realizing that she had been holding onto the rope to the point that she was barely able to prevent herself from being pulled over the bridge.

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[33]Friedman, *Friedman's Fables*, 16-20.

She knew that to let go may mean death for her husband or children, but to hang on meant death to all. The epiphany came when she recognized she was trying to be the savior for her family, instead of letting go and trusting the true Savior. Eventually, her husband chose death, committing suicide. She wondered if she had let go of the rope earlier, if the outcome would have been different. She admitted that she was exhausted when she had finally released the rope. She said, "It was like trying to save a drowning person that was pulling me under." The pain of her story revealed a profound truth: despite the attempts to over-function by the one holding onto the rope, and the blaming accusations by the other one hanging at the other end of the rope, we cannot be responsible for the decisions or behaviors of others; each of us must take responsibility for one's own self.

One group member noted that, in Matthew 22: 34-39, the Great Commandment, Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves; so there is guilt that comes from not trying to meet the needs of others. His fear was that, as he stood before God one day, he would hear about the one time he did not help someone in need. The group leader countered that, in looking at how Jesus loved others, he did not *hold the rope* for them, but he freed people from their bondage. His kind of love empowered people to move forward, but it was love in the form of an invitation to a new life. More often, we help others because of the reward or pay-off we receive, so it is about us rather than the other person. Sometimes to love someone means we let them go or allow them to face the consequences for their own decisions or actions. Steinke offered the following insight in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*:

> Love is long suffering…But love is not long suffering and foolish. Love is not overindulgent. Love is not a failure of nerve. Love suffers long so that something

new can be erected out of the old. Yet love does not suffer long because it is anxious about naming and confronting the violation. Love doesn't put up with harmful boundary intrusion, because it would agitate the community's peace. Long suffering love is about doing away with suffering that issues from the harm of others, not being an accomplice to harmful invasion.[34]

One member of the group interjected, "Sometimes loving is praying and living the serenity prayer; asking God for the serenity to accept what is beyond us to change, the courage to change what is ours, and wisdom to know the difference."

This prayer offered the opportunity to redirect the attention of the group to the principle of self-differentiation. A paraphrase of Friedman's definition provided guidance. Self-differentiation is defined as a person's ability to stay connected with others and maintain one's own sense of identity (core values and beliefs) under stress without being influenced by the pressures exerted from within the relational system.[35] In his later work, *A Failure of Nerve*, Friedman further noted that differentiation is a life-long process of emotional maturity, learning to regulate our emotions and define who we are through greater self-awareness. Self-differentiation is not, however, the pursuit of individual autonomy or independence, but an emotional process allowing one to maintain personal integrity while remaining connected with others.[36]

The FSTSG cohort discussed several factors influencing a person's ability to become a self-differentiated change agent and leader. The first was shifting the focus away from outside forces and accepting personal responsibility. Friedman stated that self-

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[34]Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 94.

[35]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 27.

[36]Friedman, *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 183-184.

differentiation begins with the ability to accept our role within the system instead of playing the victim by placing blame on fate, society, our environment, or our parents.[37] However as this shift happens, the self-differentiated individual is perceived as a threat to the homeostatic forces of the system, which will increase the anxious response, leading to resistance from others in the system and the possibility of attempts to sabotage. When a growing sense of uneasiness, worry and fear are present within a system, it is also important to recognize that the attacks of others are not personal, but emotional responses, triggered by others' anxiety. Friedman offers the encouragement that if you are being labeled as *cruel, heartless, unfeeling* or *cold*, it may be confirmation you are headed in the right direction.[38]

Richardson furthermore advised that to face the resistance of others requires recognizing one's personal limits to control the reactions of others and to remain self-focused.[39] Again, this does not mean becoming selfish or self-centered, but focusing on one's core beliefs and values without yielding to the desires or pressure from others. It is acting on a firm set of principled beliefs in a way that is consistent with what the individual is trying to achieve. There is a lack of leadership in many systems because of the tendency to make decisions based on whims, polls, rumors, unsubstantiated threats, or irrational fear. Such reactivity results in a lack of clarity, and creates confusion and mistrust.[40]

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[37]Friedman, *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 185.

[38]Ibid., 69.

[39]Richardson, 177.

[40]Ibid., 179.

Self-differentiated people are also able to monitor their own anxiety, which regulates and lowers the effects of anxiety on the entire system.[41] A less anxious presence will not only calm the system, but will allow the system to develop the ability for more rational and thoughtful decision making. Calmer systems have calmer leaders. One of the most important functions of a leader is to offer security and sureness by eliciting calmness within the system. People often confuse knowledge with competence, but the necessary wisdom and experience are usually present within a group to resolve most issues or challenges. If emotions are allowed to govern the decision making process, anxiety increases and short circuits the thinking processes, thereby resulting in poorer decisions. The group leader summarized that the process of self-differentiation is a journey toward greater maturity characterized by "self, strength, and integrity."[42]

The group took a break for food and fellowship, and then examined the leadership principle of non-anxious or less anxious presence. The group leader issued a reminder that anxiety is an ever present reality, a natural and even healthy part of life. It is also important to remember, however, that anxiety is a neutral force. How individuals deal with anxiety determines the effect on the system and eventual outcome. Steinke, in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, defined non-anxious presence as self-management of one's emotions working toward affecting other relationships in a positive

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[41]Richardson, 179.

[42]Friedman, *Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, 83.

manner.[43] Steinke also observed that it is not our action, but our reaction, that is important – reaction, in the sense of managing our emotional responses toward others.[44]

The group again used the work of Richardson to learn how to become a less-anxious presence. Richardson suggested three characteristics exhibited by those who practice being a less-anxious leader: seeking to understand, objectivity, and humor. Seeking to understand is the opposite of knowing what is best or trying to fix a problem. Many times we are tempted to rush to fix, and when in leadership, we may even feel the pressure or need to provide an answer or develop a strategy which is a reaction of anxiety on our part. However, less-anxious presence requires shifting from statements and arguments of telling someone what to do, to a not knowing, questioning approach in order to learn from others and find solutions together.[45]

One parent wondered how this concept might work with a child failing in school. The group leader responded by pointing out that, when a child is failing in school, parents typically react with a lecture about studying more and try to fix the child by taking something away, to assure more time for homework. Parents assume that time management is the problem. Instead of jumping to conclusions, the idea was proposed to attempt being a less-anxious parent, with a scenario provided. What if the parent tried to understand things from the child's perspective, beginning by asking what is happening at school? Perhaps the parent would learn of other factors preventing the child from learning, such as a bully, a disruptive classmate, lack of comprehension of the material,

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[43]Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 32.

[44]Ibid., 34.

[45]Richardson, 174-175.

or even something happening in the home that is affecting the child. Or the parent might simply be able to help the child discover the solution for himself or herself with open-ended questions and working together to define the exact nature of the problem.

Applying Richardson's observation of objectivity, the story of Job was offered as an illustration. Job had lost everything in his life - his oxen, donkey and servants were carried off by the enemy; flocks and servants were burned by fire falling from the sky; and, in another attack, his camels and more servants were raided by enemies. Finally, his house collapsed, killing his family. All of this happened in one day. The next day, Job lost his health, being covered in painful sores. When Job's friends heard of his troubles, they came to sympathize and offer him comfort. For the first seven days, these friends sat with Job in silence. For the first seven days, Job's friends acted objectively, caring for their friend, not trying to offer solutions or answers, and not trying to avoid the pain and sorrow of their friend. Then they lost their objectivity as they tried to convince Job that it must have happened because of some unresolved offense or sin against God. Their concern turned to accusations, thus magnifying the grief and anxiety of their friend. Becoming a less-anxious presence requires that we care with feeling, not compelled to try to help the other feel better and not being afraid to be with others who are expressing intense emotions.

The conversation turned to humor, Richardson's final suggestion for being a less-anxious presence. In times of high stress, we lose perspective and a cloud of seriousness hovers above us or the situations bringing us anxiety. We need to learn what matters and what does not to move forward, and sometimes we need to simply be able to laugh at ourselves. The group leader shared a story of a time when he lost perspective. He and

his wife had decided to go on one of those body cleansing fad diets and were severely limited in what they were supposed to eat. One weekend he and his wife had gone to watch their son at a youth wrestling tournament. They left the house after a quick, healthy breakfast around 6:00 a.m., expecting to be home later that afternoon. As they arrived for weigh-ins, they realized the host team had overbooked, so the day would be off to a late start. The gym was packed with excited kids and parents, being filled to capacity, meaning everyone was crowded together on hard wooden bleachers. As the afternoon pressed on, he and his wife became hungry (which did not impact their young son, who could eat heartily from the concession stand offerings). The gym was hot, and the bleachers were starting to create sore backs and backsides. By 6:00 p.m., husband and wife were on edge; and by 10:00 p.m., when the last match ended, there was silence emanating between the two to prevent any arguments. Tired, sore and hungry, they drove toward home, but they still had not eaten all day. After nearly an hour's drive, they decided, just this once, they would stop for fast food. Of course, even those choices were limited at that hour of night. The group leader's spirit lifted at the thought of the French fries from a specific restaurant that he had been craving over the last several weeks. As they pulled into the drive-thru, the husband asked his wife if she wanted anything. "No," she said, deciding to try to maintain her willpower and assuage her guilt. "It's just too late, and I don't want to ruin this diet." The husband, feeling absolutely no guilt in the matter, ordered a kid's meal for his son, and two of the biggest hamburgers on the menu with a large order of fries for himself. The smell alone was causing the husband's mouth to water. He could hardly wait to get home. By now it was 11:00 p.m., and he had not eaten for 17 hours. Bursting through the door, he tore open the bag, just as he heard his

wife timidly ask, "Could I just have one bite of your hamburger?" Reluctantly, he agreed and handed over one of the burgers. The group leader swore that, from that point on, everything went into slow motion. "Her mouth opened wider than I had ever seen before, and as if I was watching a horror movie, the burger traveled deeper and deeper into her mouth. I heard myself saying, 'NNNOOOOOOOO!' But it was too late. I was sure that one bite had become half the hamburger. Shock turned to anger on both sides, and the accusations began to fly." The group leader confessed that the long day ended with a long night. By that time, the husband and wife had completely lost perspective, with something as innocent as a hamburger escalating their anxiety into a fight. In looking back, they have no trouble seeing the foolishness and finding gut-busting humor in the incident.

The Scale of Self-Differentiation

The practice of becoming a less-anxious presence is easier than the journey toward self-differentiation. To more fully comprehend and possibly gauge one's own self-differentiation, the group looked at Edwin Friedman's scale of differentiation, found in Figure 4.2.[46] Friedman uses three imaginary married couples to help explain the various levels of differentiation and their characteristics. Couple A1 and B1 at the top of the scale represent the most differentiated people and relationship. This relationship is characterized by personal responsibility and "I" statements, rather than blaming and accusations. Neither partner is dependent upon the other for personal happiness or well-being, and both are free to be themselves. From the outside looking in, the couple may

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[46]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 28.

appear distant, but they are connected in the healthiest way. For instance, the husband

may decide to go for a walk. The wife could say, "That's a great idea. Do you mind if I

come along?" or she might say, "I think I will stay here at the house and watch

television." In self-differentiated couples, both answers are fine and the feelings of the

other are not hurt either way. Even if the husband had asked his wife directly to go, she

would have felt the freedom to choose, not having to worry about upsetting her husband.
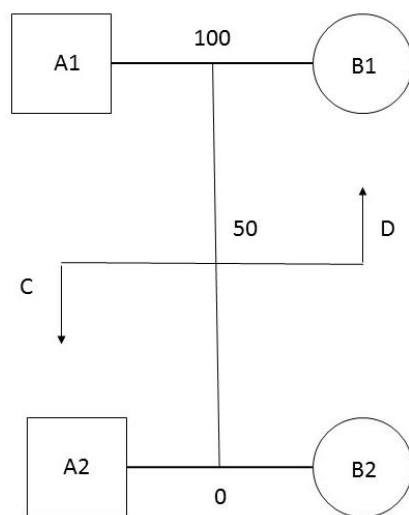
Figure 4.2. Friedman's Scale of Differentiation[47]

In contrast, couple A2 and B2 are on the opposite end of the spectrum, fused

together. Their relationship may either be filled with conflict or a plastic, artificial peace.

There is an undercurrent of blame and, while they may appear close, there is a sense of

stuckness in the relationship. Each feeds off the mood of the other and expects to be

made happy by the other.

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[47]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 28.

The couple in the middle of the diagram, couple C and D, move counter to each other. If C moves down, D will move up to maintain homeostasis; and if C moves up, then D will move down to balance the relationship. Friedman observed that those on the lower end of the scale have the most difficult time moving upward because they lack a consistent less-anxious presence to provide the stability for change. He continued by saying, "Anxious systems are less likely to allow differentiated leaders, while leaderless systems are more likely to be anxious."[48]

The session concluded with a case study being handed out to the group as homework to prepare for the Evaluation session. The researcher explained that the group would construct a genogram of the church, identifying the key FST principles at work within the church system. An example was provided to offer additional guidance. The FSTSG also received the following reflection questions to consider for journaling:

- When did you yield to the peer pressure of a group and what happened?

- When did you resist peer pressure and what was the result?

- What things in your life are non-negotiable?

- What do you believe are the benefits of self-differentiated leadership in a church system?

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[48]Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, 29.

Evaluation Session: Application

The FSTSG gathered together for the final time to apply the learning from the last

six sessions to a church case study. The study used was originally authored by Dr.

William Presnell of Drew University for a class in *Prophetic Leadership in the*

Congregation and Community and edited for the purposes of this small group.[49] The full

version used by the FSTSG is included in Appendix G. The case study provided an

overview of the community to include socio-economic and community demographics,

and a staff and pastoral leadership synopsis. A majority of the introduction focused on a

brief biography and synopsis of the situation between Jenny, the part-time Education

Director at Cherry Blossom UCC, the Pastor, and various leaders and congregational

members. The remainder of the case study presented a specific concern addressed by

Ken Buck, the authoritative, business-minded member of the Education committee,

through an email to Jenny Swift that had also been forwarded to the chairs of the

Administrative Board and Personnel Committee. The Pastor and Flora Friend, the

Education committee chair, however, were not included in the email. Ken addressed

Jenny's leadership of the Education department, citing issues with financing, the current

curriculum, questioning her work ethic, and accusing her of failing to properly supervise

the youth over a kissing incident witnessed by one of the members. Jenny was hurt and

in shock over the attack, but tried to address the concerns in a professional manner.

Unfortunately, once Pastor Dan heard about the situation, rather than offering support, he

exploded toward Jenny, worried that he would upset Ken Buck. Hoping to be supported

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[49]William Presnell, "Case Study: Cherry Blossom UCC," Reading, Prophetic Leadership in the Congregation and Community, DMin Course CNCD913-002 from Drew University Cohort, Matthews, NC, March 2013.

at home, Jenny shared the incident with her husband, Shep, who dismissed her concerns

for his own.

The group was asked to listen closely as the story was read to reflect upon and

analyze the situation, then offer suggestions to help the church move beyond this

incident. The group leader reminded the group that the church system was also

interconnected and affected by other systems, such as the community and the

denomination. They were also asked to listen and consider how the church's pastoral

history continued to shape present realities. Jenny's family history was also a

consideration, with the rules, rituals, and major events that shaped her life. The group

stopped to discuss each of these aspects in the introduction, with questions offered by the

group leader to check participants' understanding.

Following the reading, the participants charted the relational dynamics between the

congregation and recent pastors. The group recorded the following:

- Pastor Dan, age 52, informal, passive style of leadership, reactive, avoidant, un-defined identity; he did not receive the e-mail.
- Pastor Hank, served seven years before leaving ministry and pursuing a medical degree, divorced his wife after 25 years of marriage while serving as pastor, charismatic, compassionate, effective leadership. Much loved. Left abruptly (within 3 weeks), leaving many with unresolved grief. Asked not to be contacted.
- Pastor Jim, age 64, theologically and socially liberal, low energy, inactive leadership style, cruised through final two years at Cherry Blossom before retirement.[50]

The FSTSG cohort realized both the positive impact and the anxiety caused by the

ministries and personalities of the various pastors throughout the years. The cohort also

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[50]Presnell, March 2013.

re-emphasized that, while two of the pastors were no longer part of the church system, their ghosts still impacted the decisions and functioning of the church.

Applying this dynamic to HUMC, it was noted that a recent ministry of hospitality had been started, with the serving of coffee and a light breakfast before worship. Under the current pastor, this was seen as a positive way to help people feel welcomed and enhance fellowship. Several people had told the Pastor how much they enjoyed this new ministry. However, under the leadership of a previous pastor, the ministry was avoided for fear people would bring food and drinks into the sanctuary. So even with the positive comments by some, others who were looking back at the ministry of the former pastor were still upset about the practice.

The group then focused on Jenny's family history to determine the factors that were influencing her reaction in the case study situation. The group leader reiterated that the benefits of genograms were to look into the emotional and relational dynamics of the family of origin, which provides insight into a person's present-day functioning. The participants noted the strict and closed system in Jenny's family of origin, governed by the rules: "Do things right," "God is watching," and "Do your best." These rules shaped Jenny's reaction because she was trying hard to do the right thing, to please those in authority, and to go above and beyond in her duties by introducing new ideas and special programs. She had been trying to do her best to seek approval and validation.

It was also observed that, within Jenny's family of origin, her father, a junior high school teacher, had been involved in a scandal which sent shock waves through the family. Her mother, a passive person, had silently endured the situation, but Jenny was angry with her father; and the fact that her family had been headline news in the

community led to a period of rebellion and eventually emotional cut-off from her family. The group noted that Jenny may have become an educator, following in her father's footsteps, possibly to gain approval or possibly trying to make amends for her father's failures. Furthermore, the observation was made that she may have been projecting her father's qualities on Pastor Dan. She trusted Pastor Dan, but like her father, he had disappointed and wounded her with his actions. Jenny may also have seen her mother in the passivity of Flora Friend. Ethyl Crotchet, a member of the Education committee and church gossip, may have reminded Jenny of the townspeople who had gossiped about her family.

The group next considered Ken Buck's role in the system. Words like hero and savior complex were used to describe Ken's authoritative, controlling, know-it-all attitude. Ken saw himself as the moral gatekeeper and used his financial prowess to control others. The group leader asked why the Education committee and congregation would allow Ken to have so much control. The obvious answer may have been financial, but in times of anxiety, people look for the quick fix and someone to manage the situation, so they do not have to be responsible. Even the pastor was allowing Ken to over-function. As such, anxiety is not lowered, but increased, with power struggles ensuing, such as the case between Ken and Jenny, with blaming and fault finding of Jenny, and the compliance or yielding of Pastor Dan to Ken Buck. Additionally, one person observed the triangulation of Ken, Ethyl, and Jenny, which pushed Jenny to the outside.

The ideas were flowing, but the group leader finally broke in and asked if participants saw anyone like the fictitious Ken Buck in real persons at HUMC. A long-

term leader in the church remembered and shared the story of Jack Peck, for whom Peck Hall was named. "Jack was a mountain of a man. His hands alone were so large that, when he shook your hand, it felt like half of your body had been swallowed up. His heart was as big as he was; and when he prayed, you could physically feel the love he had for the Lord. No one could pray like Jack Peck. The problem was that Jack liked to be in control, and he had a temper. It was Jack's way or the highway, so people avoided crossing him. He believed what he believed – and, most importantly, he believed things should stay just the way they were. Consequently, he resisted change even if it meant destroying the people he loved. When talk of building a new sanctuary began, Jack's temper got the best of him. After he had said his piece, he stormed out of the meeting, spewing threats of leaving the church. To appease Jack, when the old church transitioned to the fellowship hall, it was named in his honor."

This story was a good breaking point for fellowship time, and when the cohort returned, they began constructing a genogram of the system at Cherry Blossom UCC. The sub-systems were reviewed, with a quick mention of how the church system was being impacted by Jenny's family of origin, the pastors, the Education committee, and the congregation. The composition of Cherry Blossom Church was quickly reviewed, noting its one hundred and twenty-five year history, theologically diverse views, with a professional, middle class membership, and a social justice emphasis. After Jenny's genogram and the Education committee diagram were constructed, lines of closeness, conflict, and cut-off were added (dynamics which have been previously mentioned).

Next, the group was asked to work together to develop ideas to help the church move forward. There was a long silence as the group struggled to find a resolution. The

FSTSG participants debated a number of options, including passing the issue to the Personnel committee, but inferred that since the email was sent to the Chair, he was aware of the situation and likely siding with Ken Buck. Another suggestion was approaching Flora Friend, but she had also been excluded from the email. Another FSTSG member suggested for the Council to address the issue. One person observed that dealing with any committee would be difficult because Ken was essentially controlling the Pastor, and the Education, Finance, and Personnel committees. In addition, the Personnel committee had been bypassed when Jenny was hired and, from the information available, the committees were not functioning effectively. Cherry Blossom Church was experiencing a leadership void, so Ken Buck stepped in, holding the church hostage with his checkbook.

The conversation turned to Jenny's response. One person advised for Jenny to survey the Sunday school parents and get their support. Another noted that, because of her past responses to similar situations, she most likely would leave. The FSTSG participants continued this discussion, noting that even if Jenny tried to stay, Pastor Dan was not supporting her. The possibility of trying to reason with Ken or illicit new support from either Flora or Pastor Dan was considered, but to this point, neither had demonstrated the ability to stand up to Ken. Eventually, the group decided that, if Jenny could resist running away, the only option was for her to stand up for herself to create a change in the system.

Ken's financial stronghold on the church continued to enter into the discussion. One member said he had encountered a similar situation at HUMC. During a youth trip, his son got into a tussle with another youth in the group. His son was told that he needed to

back down because the other youth's parents were big donors in the church. Another

participant shared an experience from a church she had previously been involved with

where the pastor was limited to ten minute sermons because the biggest donor family

came to worship for the music. These asides were part of the struggle of the group in

deciding how to address Ken Buck's hold on the church. The group understood Ken

could not be allowed to continue to hijack the church.

The FSTSG participants also all agreed that this scenario was not a healthy situation,

that things would not change quickly, and a lack of well-differentiated leadership was

exacerbating the problem. With that, the conversation concluded, with the realization

that Jenny may leave and Pastor Dan may continue to submit out of fear, but that a leader

needed to emerge and take a stand against Ken. Even if Jenny left the church, the group

agreed that someone in leadership had to take a stand for what was right. As Steinke

observed, "A positive outcome will emerge if a leader's presence and functioning is

centered on principle, based on self-regulation, and anchored in taking thoughtful

positions.[51]

The session concluded with the group leader reminding the FSTSG participants that

exit interviews would be scheduled to help interpret personal genograms and evaluate the

overall project. Evaluation questions were provided. A follow-up Congregational Health

Assessment (Appendix C) was also given to the participants as a tool to determine if their

perceptions about the health of the church had changed after completing the course.

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[51]Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What*, 65.

Summary

The small group sessions provided the FSTSG participants with a foundation of Family Systems Theory. By no means was this an exhaustive study of all the concepts and principles offered through FST. However, as evidenced by engagement with class materials, the FSTSG participants personalized and synthesized these concepts, applying them within their families, work settings, and the church system. The FSTSG members also recognized that personalities, programs or principles were temporary solutions to deeper issues. As Stevens and Collins noted, "Change takes place when it is not merely programmatic but on the level of the church's systemic life…."[52] These current and future leaders of the FSTSG are now equipped to become change agents within the HUMC system.

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[52]R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, 45.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION

Introduction

This chapter includes evaluations associated with the Family Systems Theory (FST) project, to include observations and assessments by the Lay Advisory Team (LAT) members, the FST Small Group (FSTSG) participants, and the candidate. The LAT's section addresses the evaluation of the project, the functioning of the LAT, and the candidate's leadership of the project. The FSTSG evaluations consist of personal observations made during the exit interviews by small group participants, the overall perceived benefit of the SG process and the FST project, an evaluation of the candidate's development of and role within the project, and an assessment comparison of congregational health between the FSTSG participants and church leadership. The candidate's personal observations and evaluation will address the LAT and FSTSG, with suggestions and modifications to the curriculum, and general observations.

LAT Evaluation of the Candidate

In preparation for the Site Visit from the Drew University faculty advisor, the LAT reconvened to hear the findings of the project and to discuss the evaluation of the candidate in project design and implementation. On May 17, 2014, five of the seven members of the LAT considered items on the Project Site Review Form, provided

by Drew University, to guide the discussion. The areas of evaluation included an overall

assessment of the project, the LAT's participation and support, and leadership provided

by the candidate. The assessment of the project was based on the project's Prospectus

and an instructional overview of FST. As mentioned in Chapter 3, with the exception of

one member who served as the videographer, none of the LAT members participated in

the actual small group sessions. Consequently, the candidate provided a detailed

summary of the FSTSG observations which were compiled from the Small Group Exit

Interview Questionnaire (Appendix H). From these responses, the LAT strongly

affirmed the design, methodology, and implementation of the project. The LAT did

understand and acknowledge, however, that while the project greatly impacted the

FSTSG members, the long-term effect on the church system could not be fully evaluated,

nor had the process-based project been designed to do so.

Concerning the participation and support of the LAT, the team and candidate

discussed that the major contributions to the project included assisting in the short-term

evaluation, defining success, and providing support to the candidate. The cooperation

between the LAT and the candidate in the design of the Congregational Health

Assessment Survey (Appendix C) provided one avenue of evaluation, comparing the

perceptions of the FSTSG members concerning the health and functioning of the church's

lay leadership before and after the project. This tool demonstrated the short-term impact

of the project through increased awareness by the FSTSG members of well-being and

functioning within the church leadership team and church system.

Defining success was the greatest challenge faced by the LAT, given the project was

designed to initiate a process toward transformation. The team did not set specific

benchmarks or goals, recognizing each small group member was beginning the journey

from various levels of emotional maturity and health in functioning. However, based on

each LAT member's own understanding of FST and observations and feedback of the

FSTSG members, the LAT did acknowledge that the project increased self-awareness and

modifications in behavior of individuals in both the LAT and FSTSG.

In regards to the candidate, the LAT offered prayer and emotional support,

instructional suggestions, and feedback. Given the design of the structure, which focused

on a small group rather than the congregation, the LAT was not required to actively

communicate the project to the congregation. The LAT was expected to offer

personalized communications and answer individual questions concerning the project as

opportunities arose. The team was also very affirming during the project debriefing and

during the Site Visit.

The support of the LAT was further made evident in the assessment of the

candidate's leadership of the project. The LAT affirmed the candidate's knowledge of

the subject matter and the design of the project. Furthermore, the team recognized the

candidate's teaching abilities and willingness to be transparent to create a safe, sacred

space for others to share openly and honestly. Finally, the team acknowledged the

willingness of the candidate to accept suggestions and listen to constructive criticism.

In summary, the candidate expressed appreciation for the guidance and support of

the LAT. The team was not simply cheering from the sidelines, but partnered with the

candidate, to the degree of each member's ability, to ensure the success of the project.

Once the LAT recognized the realities within the HUMC system and realized the

potential of the project for transformative change, the team embraced the project. One

member suggested that anyone in a leadership role would benefit, and that FST should be

a requirement before serving in a leadership role.

Small Group Evaluations

FSTSG Exit Interviews for Personal Gain

After the FSTSG sessions had ended, each individual or couple was asked to

schedule an exit interview. During this time, participants reviewed the personal

genograms with the researcher to reveal insights and develop greater self-awareness.

These interviews also provided the opportunity for each group member to express

thoughts and share personal learning. A questionnaire (Appendix H), divided into five

major areas, was prepared to help guide this process, to include:

- interviews with the participants which covered general questions,

- evaluation of the small group sessions,

- evaluation of the overall process,

- evaluation of the study and course materials, and

- evaluation of the candidate's leadership.

Overall, the genogram tool was helpful in identifying emotional patterns of reactivity

within each participant's family of origin. One participant shared that this was the first

time she realized how her family of origin was impacting her current-day relationships.

With that said, interpreting the genogram was easier for some than others. The researcher

listened and asked open-ended questions to seek understanding and offer clarity for both

personal benefit and to help each person recognize possible emotional connections and

reactive tendencies. Through the process, each member discovered at least one key

generational relational dynamic which was still having a life impact and influence. Many saw engrained patterns of conflict and emotional cut-off with grandparents or parents leaving the home (e.g., divorce). Some discovered tendencies for over-functioning or compliance revealed by addiction issues; and still others realized personal resolutions to be different from a parent or other relative had failed, thereby recognizing that the same reactions and behaviors were being repeated.

Each participant agreed there was some level of dysfunction within each one's family of origin; however, the researcher further observed a strong connection between the level of self-awareness and dysfunction. Those individuals with the greatest amount of dysfunction were not always able to comprehend the emotional and behavioral patterns revealed through the genograms. In one case, the researcher asked a direct question to a participant concerning a reactive response of withdrawal demonstrated in the genogram. The participant was unaware of this tendency in his own behavior. That is not to say that others did not have blind spots. The researcher's observance is noteworthy, however, that the greater levels of dysfunction within a family system corresponded to lower levels of self-awareness in one or more individuals in the system.

If the project was repeated, the researcher would be more intentional in connecting the material from each session with the construction of the genograms. A reminder to update the genograms was provided in the syllabus, along with the reflection questions; however, either a private session or time within each session to review the genograms could be beneficial to reinforce learning and application of the concepts. Understanding the relational dynamics within one's family of origin is important because of the influence in interacting with others throughout life. In application to this project,

Friedman observed that the church or synagogue is a "prime arena for the displacement of important, unresolved issues."[1]

FSTSG Project Evaluation

The participants agreed that the small group experience was both insightful and positive. Almost all of the participants expressed the desire to continue the small group beyond the FST project, citing a deepening connection with others in the group. As trust among the group members increased, a sense of *koinonia* began to develop, especially as group members opened up with one another in genuine caring and the sharing of life together. This excitement prompted some participants to suggest that adding more people might also help foster a greater sense of connectedness in the congregation and extend the impact and benefits of FST at HUMC. One participant shared how much she enjoyed hearing the stories of others because it helped her feel a deeper connection to others in the church and realize she was not alone in experiencing some of the same family dynamics and daily struggles. She said, "I enjoyed getting to *really* know people. On Sundays we talk to people, but we don't get to know them." The researcher encouraged the FSTSG members to talk with each other to explore if a group member would be willing to organize and facilitate a continued small group structure. It is unknown if this occurred.

It was apparent the group had made an investment in one another and had become engaged with the course material. Moreover, there was overall agreement that each group session could have been extended and the time between sessions reduced. Some

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[1]Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 198.

members suggested longer sessions would allow for more opportunities to apply the learning by "acting out" the concepts, or other activities could be included to facilitate group participation and enhance comprehension. Supporting this option, the mobile making activity, used to illustrate the principle of homeostasis, received very positive feedback. One person commented, "I liked making the mobile, but I loved watching others making their mobiles, because I realized things about their personalities I had never noticed." Overall, the group felt the course materials helped them reflect on the subject matter and engage in their learning. The *Friedman's Fables* were specifically mentioned as a useful learning tool. One member observed, "The stories seemed ridiculous at first, but then I realized how true they were."

While the comments were generally supportive in regards to the structure of the small groups and course materials, some group members thought there was too much material to be adequately covered in one session. The researcher had already come to this realization while piloting the study. In the sessions on anxiety and triangles, the class became more lecture oriented. Additional time was also required for some participants to fully comprehend the key concepts in these areas, which greatly limited overall group participation. In these sessions, group exercises, stories and videos had to be modified or eliminated due to time constraints. Furthermore, the review and opening reflection, covering the previous session's topic, took more time than expected, also limiting the availability for introducing and covering new material. However, from the depth and length of the opening conversations, it was evident that the group was applying the learning and eager to share personal insights. Therefore, by increasing the number of sessions or extending the length of each session, key principles could be introduced and

illustrated while allowing more time for personal stories, illustrations, and activities.

Since the overall structure called for the group to meet every other week, these additional

sessions could have easily been added in the off weeks, thereby addressing the feedback

of meeting more frequently.

When asked to reflect on the impact that FST could or would have concerning the

health and functioning of personal lives and the church system, several positive insights

were shared. A notable comment written on the evaluation form indicated, "I better

understand myself and why I do or react the way I do." Others mentioned the personal

benefits of recognizing and resisting patterns of reactivity to address anxiety with

reflective responses. One father realized that his emotions were driving his parenting

decisions, and those same emotions occasionally surfaced in the work environment when

he became frustrated. This same individual reflected that he also needed to resist outside

pressure to conform and yield to the opinions of others. This insight resulted from his

involvement with the struggles of serving on the Trustees committee during the events

surrounding Chapter 1's *Introduction*.

More specific to the principles covered in the group sessions, several participants

commented on realizing the tendency to either over- or under-function. During the group

session on over- and under-functioning, Friedman's fable, *The Bridge*, personally

touched nearly everyone in the group. One person admitted in the exit interview that,

even though she now understood how over-functioning cripples people and stunts

emotional growth, thereby harming the church and destroying community, she continued

to struggle with trying to take responsibility for others. Her awareness of this tendency is

still seen as a positive finding because recognizing a problem is the first step to greater

well-being and higher functioning.

While extra time was necessary to properly explain the difference between

threesomes and triangles during that particular small group session, one person

commented that this principle of FST and that class resonated most in his life. Struggling

in his relationship with his wife and teenage daughter, he expressed the new freedom he

felt in knowing he was not responsible for fixing the relationship between his wife and

his daughter. For years he had felt pulled between the two to manage the conflict,

becoming fused at times or emotionally withdrawing at other times. He came to realize

that the solution to being triangulated was being self-focused (self-differentiated), rather

than being focused on changing the actions and behaviors of his wife and daughter.

Reacting differently and not allowing one side to fuse with him could change the system.

He stated, "The only person you can fix is yourself." Ironically, while every other group

member recognized the power in this statement, his wife remained other-focused.

Applying this learning to the HUMC leadership and functioning of the church, most

of the participants recommended that all new persons going onto committees would

benefit from the knowledge and understandings of FST. One small group participant,

who was new to serving in a ministry committee, noted that the learning came alive when

she started "…watching the committee and applying [her] learning; realizing that people

were reacting through power struggles, rebellion, and looking for quick fixes." Later, the

same person admitted that she and her husband left their Sunday school class because the

dynamics of the committee meeting were spilling over into Sunday mornings. The

couple realized the chronic level of anxiety being demonstrated throughout the church

system and believed a number of current leaders were reacting, rather than reflecting; they were seeking to be understood, rather than to understand; and they became focused on the actions of others, instead of their own actions. This particular couple, along with others in the group, recommended that all leaders within the church should go through FST training, whether in a retreat setting or in small group sessions. They expressed that these understandings would help develop self-differentiated leaders, which would positively impact church health and functioning.

FSTSG Research Candidate Evaluation

Finally, the small group was asked to evaluate the research candidate's leadership of the project, including strengths and/or growing edges. The group affirmed the research candidate, citing knowledge of subject matter, clear communication of goals and objectives for each session, transparency and vulnerability, and the appropriate use of humor. One member in the group appreciated that the researcher was sensitive to the learning level of the participants. When extra time was needed to clarify an idea or concept, the leader allowed the learner to ask questions and gain clarity before moving forward. Another participant mentioned the candidate helped create a safe, positive learning environment by sharing his own stories and experiences with the group. This participant noted that the transparency and vulnerability of the leader gave her the confidence and freedom to share her own story with others in the group, without feeling embarrassed or judged. The laughter in the group was also appreciated by several group members who mentioned that the humor not only made sessions fun and enjoyable, but

broke the tension at times. By the researcher finding humor in his own stories and situations, others believed they gained perspective to laugh at themselves.

Only one growing edge was mentioned. The candidate did not supply all of the class material at the beginning, instead distributing pertinent handouts per each session for the participants to add to their personal instructional folders. The rationale was to limit the loss of course materials. Some members expressed frustration that the number of handouts was difficult to keep up with when given multiple handouts per session. The group suggested that, if all handouts were not given at the beginning of the small group study, then tabs might be provided in advance to help organize the materials by session, once provided.

FSTSG Unanticipated Evaluation Feedback

One point of interest not previously discussed in the evaluation segment of the FSTSG sessions concerned one of the couples attending the group. Several group members expressed frustration that the group was occasionally hijacked by the personal issues and needs of this couple. At first the group members were patient and supportive, and the candidate allowed for extended discussion while working these situations into the lesson. However, as the couple attempted to use the group as a personal therapy session, and as the issues of the wife, in particular, prevented others from sharing, group frustration grew. This couple had been struggling with family dynamics for some time, so the candidate hoped that the concepts and principles of FST could help this family find healing and move forward. Unfortunately, as one group member observed, whatever the topic of the day was, it became ammunition for the wife to use against her husband.

While it was stated in the *Introductory* session that openness and sharing were important to the success of the group, clarification was needed to recognize that the small group was not therapy. Some participants suggested that this be emphasized in the covenant at the beginning of the first FSTSG session. Furthermore, the candidate could have exercised tighter control over the group, keeping everyone on task.

Small Group Evaluations Summary

In conclusion, the evaluation of the small group was positive in all major areas, which included:

- evaluation of the small group sessions,

- evaluation of the overall process,

- evaluation of the study and course materials, and

- evaluation of the candidate's leadership.

As indicated by the answers in the exit interview and on the Small Group Questionnaire (Appendix H), greater self-awareness was achieved through learning and applying FST. These results amplify the possibility for enhanced well-being and functioning for individuals within the church system, their families, and the HUMC congregation.

Additionally, several important considerations were noted concerning design, structure, and implementation to increase the effectiveness and impact of the small groups. The greatest indicator of success was the ability of participants to articulate their learning. When asked individually how each might describe the small group to another, one person wrote:

The group was designed to give participants the opportunity to learn how families are similar to church families, with fun times, struggles, disappointments and hard work. To be a well-functioning family or church, there has to be good communication, defined goals, and well-functioning leaders.

In this, the researcher believes the objectives and goals of the small group experience have been met. Through the FSTSG, there exists the possibility for improved health and enhanced functioning of the church by continued equipping, encouraging, and empowering leaders within the Harrison congregation.

Congregational Health Assessment

Evaluations by Small Group Participants

Each FSTSG participant completed the Congregational Heath Assessment survey (Appendix C) prior to the small group sessions and once again at the conclusion of the small group sessions. Comparing the answers on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest designation of agreement, the following observations and conclusions were made. In general terms, the FSTSG's perception of the overall health of the HUMC congregation was lower on the second, post-project survey (S2) compared with the first, pre-project survey (S1). Table 5.1 compares the means of the seven group participants' responses from both surveys.

Table 5.1.   Mean Scores of Pre-Instructional and Post-Instructional Small Group
Surveys

Concept	Questions/Statements	n	M_{S1}	M_{S2}
Isolation	1. To what degree does our congregation interact with other churches and faith communities?	7	3.4	3.3
Insulation	2. To what degree does our congregation interact with other local organizations in our community?	7	4.0	4.0
Distance	3. To what degree is our congregation encouraged by lay leadership to develop relationships/friendships with others outside our own faith community?	7	3.0	2.3
Fusion	4. The degree of interactive and informative communication between the church lay leadership (e.g. the church Council or other ministry teams) and the church fellowship.	7	3.1	3.1
Fusion	5. The lay leadership of the church has interdependent relationships with one another beyond congregational functioning (e.g. related by blood or marriage, business relationships, or lifetime friendships.) (Scale has been reversed for consistency of interpretation.)	7	3.3 (2.7)	3.6 (2.4)
Differentiation	6. The degree to which our church's lay leadership takes well-defined positions, independent of critics.	7	3.9	3.7

S1 = First Survey
S2 = Second Survey

Results

In Concept 1, measuring *isolation*, scores slightly decreased from a pre-instructional *M*=3.4, *SD*=0.54 to a post-instructional *M*=3.3, *SD*=0.49, with beliefs nearly remaining the same. In Concept 3, measuring *fusion* in the church, scores lowered from a pre-instructional *M*=3.0, *SD*=0.58 to a post-instructional *M*=2.3, *SD*=0.78. On the second statement related to *fusion*, Concept 5, reversed responses decreased from an already somewhat-low pre-instructional *M*=2.7, *SD*=0.76 to a lower post-instructional *M*=2.4, *SD*=0.53, indicating greater belief in fusion and a lower level of functioning in the church. Finally, concerning Concept 6, which addressed *differentiation*, participants' perceptions lowered only slightly from a pre-instructional *M*=3.9, *SD*=0.69 to a post-instructional *M*=3.7, *SD*=0.76. Not all statements rated lower in perceived congregational functioning, however. The perception of the congregation's *level of insulation* of the church with other community organizations, Concept 2, remained at *M*=4.0, *SD*=0.82 from the first survey to *M*=4.0, *SD*=0.58 in the second; and Concept 4, concerning *distance* between the leadership and congregation, remained at *M*=3.1, *SD*=0.69 in both surveys. Though sample numbers were small in this pilot study, these results suggest that knowledge gained through the small group sessions somewhat influenced the FSTSG's perception of the overall health and functioning of the HUMC lay leadership, which corresponds to a SG mean perception of less well-being and functioning of the larger church system following completion of the FSTSG's instructional sessions.

Discussion

In considering responses of the FSTSG participants, several factors should be noted. Again, the sample size was small, thereby limiting the ability to determine any statistical significance. Five of the seven members of the small group were relatively new to the church fellowship and leadership roles, with tenure at the church extending between two to five years. These participants verbalized uncertainty regarding knowledge of issues on the first survey, questioning their own ability to provide informed responses. One subject wrote on his second survey, "I'm not that active, so my opinion is just guessing." Additionally, the results from one of the second surveys demonstrated that a participant simply went through the survey, circling the same answer. In the exit interview, this participant was asked about her responses, at which time she stated that she was in a hurry and just completed it to turn in before the interview. Though these responses were included, the reliability of results has to be questioned.

Evaluations by Church Leadership

In an attempt to gain further insight of church community perceptions, the research candidate requested for the leadership of the church to also complete the survey. This was not in the original design of the project and was decided upon after the survey results from the small group were collected. If the project is repeated, the researcher intends to ask the current lay leadership of the church to complete the survey prior to the start of the SG sessions. Of the eleven lay leader positions, ten responses were received. Table 5.2 shows the results of the small group (SG) at the time of the study exit, as compared with the lay leadership (LL) at project's end.

Table 5.2.   Mean Scores and Standard Deviation Comparisons between Small Group
Participants and Lay Leadership at Study Exit

Questions	M_{SG}	SD_{SG}	M_{LL}	SD_{LL}
1. To what degree does our congregation interact with other churches and faith communities?	3.3	0.49	2.4	1.00
2. To what degree does our congregation interact with other local organizations in our community?	4.0	0.58	4.2	0.79
3. To what degree is our congregation encouraged by lay leadership to develop relationships/ friendships with others outside our own faith community?	2.3	0.78	3.2	1.32
4. The degree of interactive and informative communication between the church lay leadership (e.g. the Church Council or other ministry teams) and the church fellowship.	3.1	0.69	3.7	0.82
5. The lay leadership of the church has interdependent relationships with one another beyond congregational functioning (e.g. related by blood or marriage, business relationships, or lifetime friendships.) (Scale has been reversed for consistency of interpretation.)	3.6 (2.4)	0.53	4.0 (2.0)	0.94
6. The degree to which our church's lay leadership takes well-defined positions, independent of critics.	3.7	0.76	3.6	0.84

SG = Small Group
LL = Lay Leadership

Results

Table 5.2 not only highlights the differences in perception between the lay leadership team and SG participants, but also demonstrates the differences in perceptions among the lay leadership as being broader than those among the SG members. Both groups perceived the church as well connected within the local community. The small group rated this area (*insulation* in Question 2) at $M=4.0$, while the leadership team rated $M=4.2$. The leadership team acknowledged that the HUMC congregation did not interact often with other faith communities, rating *isolation* in Question 1 much lower at $M=2.4$, while the SG members rated these interactions slightly higher at $M=3.3$. (Lay leadership obviously had more discrepancies among their responses, though, with $SD=1.0$.) Conversely, SG members believed that lay leadership were less encouraging of the congregation to develop these other faith community relationships than the lay leaders perceived themselves to be. In Question 3 on *distance*, the SG members rated this area low at $M=2.3$, while the lay leaders rating was higher at $M=3.2$. (Again, the lay leadership's $SD=1.32$ demonstrated a greater level of discrepancy in responses.)

Both groups rated the ability of the leadership team to take well-defined positions without being influenced by criticism at above average, with Concept 6 on *differentiation* rated at $M=3.7$ by the small group and $M=3.6$ by the lay leadership. However, there were significant differences in perception among the two groups concerning communication between the leadership and congregation, and control of the decision making. From responses to *fusion* in Concept 4, in which the SG members rated communication much lower ($M=3.1$) than did the lay leaders ($M=3.7$), results might suggest that the congregational members do not feel informed. Perhaps more telling is that, within the

small group, five of the seven participants (71.4%) were serving on various committees

or in significant ministries at the time of the study. Lack of appropriate communication,

then, was an issue indicating poor functioning even within the committee level, not just

beyond it. According to Concept 5 on *fusion*, the church's leadership team

acknowledged a high degree of interdependent relationships within the lay leadership.

This might suggest that family members believe that, because they are communicating

among themselves, other related parties should also be informed of operational issues and

church business. The small group responses demonstrated less awareness of

interdependent relations (non-reversed *M*=3.6) that would fuel this dynamic, likely

because even those serving on committees are not serving with the same long-term

history or biologic connections. Lay leaders acknowledged the higher level of agreement

to the interdependent relationships among church leaders (whether family members or

long-term friendships), with a non-reversed *M*=4.0.

Discussion

This acknowledged concentration of relational power among the leadership had

resulted in fusion, power struggles, and triangles, but with a slightly above average ability

to self-differentiate. Compliance, peace-mongering and avoidance were also evident in

the system. These observations were confirmed by one member of the small group who,

during the exit interview, voiced his frustration while serving on the both the Staff Parish

Relations Committee and the Trustees. He observed power groups within the church who

controlled the money and the decisions. This emerging new leader was concerned that

some in the congregation were given preferential treatment, while his voice was being

drowned out by the established members. He was further hurt as he witnessed the difference between Sunday behaviors versus committee meeting behaviors. As the Trustees attempted to resolve the Peck Hall issues, this individual felt attacked and bullied at several meetings when trying to take a self-differentiated stance. The Congregational Health Assessment was a useful tool to confirm the presence of triangles, stress, and conflict which had created chronic levels of anxiety within the HUMC system.

Candidate's Personal Evaluation

While several evaluative comments have been included or suggested through the section on small group exit interviews, the following is an assessment of the project by the candidate. Both during and following the implementation of this project, several positive aspects were noted, as well as several areas which required additional attention or modification. The following observations will encompass all aspects of the project, beginning with the Lay Advisory Team (LAT), the small group (SG), and the evaluation process.

Lay Advisory Team Assessment

Assessing the selection of the LAT, the criteria developed by the candidate was sound in that it targeted the most influential leaders in the church; considered the diversity of team members to reflect the entire church system in terms of leadership experience, age, and gender; and included experts to assist in the development of the project. However, the final team was less reflective of the entire system than had been hoped for, with those accepting the invitation ranging in age from 37 to 70 (n=7, M=57.7,

SD=11.3), and predominantly female, with a 5:2 female to male ratio. This is important when considering the different areas of influence and groups represented by each team member. For instance, with no one under thirty-seven years of age represented, this consequently resulted in no representation of younger adults or youth. Similarly, the retired senior adult group was not adequately represented. This was due in part to the leaders in these areas declining the invitation to participate and beyond the control of the researcher. However, if the project were to be repeated, the candidate would attempt to encourage the leaders in these missing areas to participate more fully in the process. One possibility would have been to develop a leadership training event or retreat of the leadership team focused on FST prior to extending the invitations to participate on the LAT.

Despite attempts by the candidate to accommodate schedules and add additional meetings, three members of the team had difficulty attending the team meetings, two of these members serving in the highest leadership roles in the church and the third being the FST expert. The leaders not attending due to scheduling conflicts were the Lay Leader, who acts as liaison between the Pastor and church, and the Lay Delegate to Annual Conference, who is an ex officio member on all major committees. Unfortunately, the Lay Leader attended just one meeting and offered little in the way of helping communicate the project to the congregation or in offering suggestions regarding the project design. While the Lay Delegate attended two of the four meetings and offered several positive observations, he was unable to offer consistent leadership to the team and was unable to be present to lead the discussion during the Site Visit. The third team member who had limited input due to an inability to attend team meetings was the expert

in FST. This proved especially disappointing because her expertise could have further

helped the other members of the LAT understand the value of FST and the potential of

the project.

These factors are also symptomatic of the HUMC system, which has become

complacent and lacks strong, well-defined leadership. Several of the leaders who

declined an invitation to participate are key symptom-bearers in the system, consistently

demonstrating unhealthy patterns of reactivity which continually feed the anxiety within

the leadership team and throughout the church. Amplifying the dysfunction, other church

leaders reinforce these negative behavior patterns by focusing on the emotional reactions

of these symptom-bearers, rather than addressing critical issues affecting the church

system. The researcher attempted to address this concern on two levels. Beyond

extending invitations to these leaders to take part on the LAT, the team members were

also encouraged to attend and observe the FSTSG sessions, which would have facilitated

learning and more profoundly impacted leadership growth. Unfortunately, none of the

advisory team members participated in the small group sessions, beyond the instructional

methodology expert who assisted in the videography.

However, while the LAT reflected some of the unhealthy patterns which existed

within the church leadership team, the researcher believes those members of the advisory

team who were engaged in the process, and participated fully, benefited and will have a

positive impact on HUMC. Through the introduction to FST and the church genogram,

several of the members of the team realized the relational dynamics and emotional

processes that have affected, or are currently affecting, the health and functioning of

HUMC. During the church genogram exercise, the LAT came to understand the

importance and purpose of the project. For some, it was the first time they recognized the unhealthy patterns that existed at HUMC and that there was the possibility for enhanced health and improved functioning for the church. From that point forward, the LAT members who were present took ownership of their responsibilities and committed to the success of the project.

This energy could be seen as the LAT assisted in the development of project components. The team's input on the reflection questions that were used during the small group sessions added new and a more in-depth dimension. As mentioned previously, the researcher had developed three standardized questions for reflection following each FSTSG session. The LAT expanded these questions, formatting them to address the session topics more directly and specifically. Later, in the FSTSG sessions, this proved to be a positive change. Additionally, the modification of the Congregational Health Assessment (Appendix C) positively impacted the project. Finally, during the evaluation phase and in preparation for the Site Visit, the team affirmed the need for all church leadership to participate in a FST leadership development seminar.

In conclusion of the LAT evaluation, the candidate would have attempted to improve the participation of the current church leadership on the LAT, by possibly adding a FST training event prior to the selection process. This not only may have improved engagement and buy-in of the project, but also would have assisted in the LAT's ability to communicate the purpose and benefits of the project to the congregation. A second option might be to have the leadership team read and report on one of the books used in the project, such as Ronald W. Richardson's *Creating a Healthier Church*, Peter L. Steinke's *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No*

Matter What, or Edwin H. Friedman's *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. While ideally all leaders would read the book, one leader would be assigned each month to report on a chapter at the Church Council meeting.

Despite these possible modifications, the LAT effectively carried out its responsibilities, offering encouragement and support to the candidate, suggesting effective modifications to the Action Plan, and offering positive and affirming feedback in the evaluation process. The members of the team embraced the purpose and recognized the potential of FST to equip, empower, and encourage leaders so that the health and functioning of the HUMC congregation would be enhanced.

Small Group Assessment

Information about the FSTSG selection process and participant information was discussed in Chapter 4, Project Design and Methodology, where it was noted that careful attention had been given to inviting those in current leadership roles and those serving on ministry teams or committees. The selection criteria rationale aimed to equip current leaders, while investing and mentoring future leaders to extend the impact of the FSTSG. Additionally, given the concentration of power held by a few families in the church, often power couples, couples where both the husband and wife were serving in leadership were intentionally invited to take part in the FSTSG. Specifically, the husband or wife teams of the Finance Chair/Chair of the Church Council and the Lay Leader/the Chair of Education were initially considered and invited. Of these four leaders, only the Chair of Education accepted the invitation to join the FSTSG, though without participation of the spouse. This meant that a majority of leaders participating in the FSTSG were deemed

future church leaders. This limited the immediate impact, influence, and benefits of the

project on the leadership team. Fortunately, the candidate was able to recruit some of the

current leaders, who had declined to participate in the FSTSG, to serve on the LAT.

While not optimal, participation in the LAT did offer limited exposure to FST and its

benefits to improve leadership functioning and system well-being.

Current Curriculum

Examining the FSTSG sessions and overall instructional design, the candidate

identified several modifications that would facilitate and enrich the experience and

learning of the small group. First, the length and number of sessions has already been

noted by the FSTSG participants, as well as the need for more interactive experiences to

enhance learning. The candidate discovered that the original course design and

individual lesson plans for each session required constant modification to accommodate

for both the amount of instructional material and for learner comprehension. The original

design for each session, as outlined in the project Prospectus, was divided into four parts:

Illustrate, Define, Share and *Evaluate*. The *Illustrate* block served to introduce the

concept by using a variety of methods, including a driving metaphor, hands-on activities,

and media. *Define* was the next instructional block to provide a working definition of the

FST principle for that session and teach key concepts. Following a break for fellowship,

the group would *Share*, dividing into smaller groups to share stories of how they

experienced the FST principle in their own lives, at work, or at the church. The

Evaluation phase was part of the homework which became reflection questions that the

participants were asked to consider between group meetings. However, it became

evident to the candidate, by the third session, that this original design needed modification.

To open each session, the candidate began with the reflection questions from the previous gathering. These questions proved to offer valuable insight in assessing comprehension and synthesis of the FST principle, while also offering the opportunity to answer questions and clarify key concepts for the FSTSG cohort. The opening reflection also became a time for the participants to share stories and struggles. While this time was important, this review and reflection extended the length of the sessions significantly. What was originally scheduled to take ten minutes stretched to twenty or thirty minutes in some sessions, thus limiting the amount of time to illustrate the new concept for that particular FSTSG session. The results were that, by the third session, the use of a driving metaphor was excluded, as well as the elimination of other teaching elements, such as the *Friedman's Fable*, a group activity or video clip, in order to recapture some of the lost instructional time.

Furthermore, in order to adequately introduce and explain the FST concept for a particular session, the researcher found the instructional blocks, which defined and familiarized the group to the concept, needed to be extended from the planned fifteen to twenty minute segments to thirty to forty minutes in length. This greatly limited the time for the *Share* phase in the lesson plan. The researcher was able to find creative ways to integrate sharing, but felt those times were less productive than if the original lesson plans could have been followed. Additionally, if the time for sharing could have been preserved, it may have reduced the amount of time needed to review the reflection questions in the following session.

If this pilot project were repeated, the researcher would follow the recommendation of the FSTSG participants to extend the number of small meetings from seven sessions with an exit interview to 12 sessions with a preliminary session and an exit interview. Each session would remain one and one half hours but, instead of bi-weekly gatherings, the group would meet weekly. The comparative breakdown is shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3.   Comparison of Piloted Curriculum versus Proposed Curriculum

Piloted Curriculum Sessions Design	Proposed Curriculum Sessions Design
Introduction	Preliminary
Homeostasis	Introduction
Over- and Under-Functioning	Homeostasis 1
Anxiety	Homeostasis 2
Triangles	Anxiety 1
Self-Differentiation	Anxiety 2
Case Study	Over- and Under-functioning 1
Exit Interviews	Over- and Under-functioning 2
	Triangles 1
	Triangles 2
	Self-Differentiation 1
	Self-Differentiation 2
	Case Study
	Exit Interviews

Proposed Curriculum

In the proposed curriculum, the Preliminary session would be used to distribute class materials (i.e., folders with syllabus and session handouts), sign the Informed Consent (Appendix D), and introduce the Small Group Covenant (Appendix E). Additionally, this meeting could be a gathering at a home or a restaurant to provide the small group members an opportunity to develop relationships. The candidate noted that, prior to this project, the FSTSG members did not have personal interactions with one another beyond

church activities. An earlier opportunity for the beginning of deeper personal

connections could help reduce the time to build trust among group members and enhance

the times of sharing.

The *Introductory* session would remain similar, covering the principles of

reactionary and reflective thinking, linear versus systems thinking, and a brief overview

of FST. The genograms would also be explained. Since the current lesson plan for the

Introductory session includes the driving metaphor of the domino, one possible opening

activity could be to distribute dominoes to couples in the small group to set-up together

and connect with other participants. This would illustrate the dynamic of the family

system connected with and influenced by other systems. Friedman's Fable, *Panic*, could

be used to further illustrate the principle of interconnectedness and the contagious effects

of anxiety.

The *Homeostasis* small group sessions worked well under the current format.

However, with an extended format, the small group would have additional time for an

activity to help them share their own personal experiences of rules, rituals, and myths.

The second session covering homeostasis could be used for this purpose. The candidate

noted that, during the homeostasis session, the participants were unsure or reluctant about

sharing even in smaller groups or pairs. It may have been the result of processing the

instructional materials or simply feeling uncomfortable sharing in front of the group at an

early stage together. While both of these factors influenced group discussions and

sharing, the former seems most likely due to the amount of sharing during reflection in

the following session. Clearly, the additional processing time between sessions

facilitated the group's increased ability to reflect and share. This group dynamic

observed by the candidate provides further rationale and support for additional sessions so that learning, application, and synthesis can be enhanced.

The next modification concerns the arrangement of instructional material. In the original design, over- and under-functioning were the next FST concepts considered by the small group. In hindsight, the candidate questioned whether it would be more beneficial to address the FST concept of *Anxiety* before *Over- and Under-functioning,* in part because over- and under-functioning are reactive responses to anxiety. But beyond that, understanding the role and effects of anxiety is essential to understanding all of the other concepts of FST. While anxiety begins with the individual's response, the impact of that response affects the entire system. Thus, in FST, anxiety is the common denominator which influences all emotional responses and relational dynamics, both individual and corporate. Given this relationship of anxiety within FST as a whole, the candidate strongly recommends addressing *Anxiety* as the second FST concept.

Considering the overall expansion of sessions, the session covering *Anxiety* was one of two sessions which required an extended instructional component. The limited time forced the researcher to eliminate the illustration of Friedman's Fable, *Soaring*, and modify the group activities. With the addition of another session on anxiety, the project leader would have more opportunities to engage the group through participatory activities. To introduce and illustrate the concept of anxiety, the group facilitator has the option of using a group activity, such as a timed game or problem-solving exercise which increases anxiety, with a follow-up discussion. Additionally, the focus of the two sessions could be modified, with the first part focusing on individual responses and effects of anxiety, and the second focused on corporate responses and effects of anxiety.

The session on *Over- and Under-functioning* was effective in helping the group

understand over-functioning using Friedman's Fable, *Net Results,* as the opening

illustration; and from the lively discussion that followed, it was evident that the FSTSG

participants could identity with the concept of over-functioning. The candidate was also

encouraged during this session as the group became aware of the connection between the

biblical narrative and FST. Using the stories of Moses appointing judges, and Mary and

Martha hosting Jesus at their home, the candidate was able to illustrate the emotional

motivations or pay-offs for over-functioners. Since the current curriculum effectively

covers over-functioning, in the proposed additional session, the group leader would focus

entirely on under-functioning. One possibility to help illustrate this principle would be to

use a leadership or team building activity, presenting a problem which requires a high

degree of teamwork. Prior to the gathering, the small group leader would ask some of the

team members to not participate in any way, looking to see who emerged as the team

leader to find the solution. The objective of the exercise would be to illustrate the

negative results from those who under-function (the *plants*), allowing others to over-

function while the *plants* refused to assume responsibility. The facilitator would direct

the discussion to the dynamic of how under-functioning exists within church systems.

Specifically, the leader would examine the over- and under-functioning relationship that

sometimes exists between pastors and congregations, where the Pastor assumes too much

responsibility for the functioning and well-being of the congregation, while the

congregation resists or refuses to take responsibility and looks to the Pastor to do for

them and make them feel good about themselves. Furthermore, the functioning of church

committees should be covered. Often over-functioning ministry team leaders assume too

much responsibility for the outcome and success of the ministry, while other team members who under-function may or may not attend meetings, may never volunteer to lead in current ministry areas or engage in developing new ministries. The result is frustration, resentment, and burnout of the committee or team leaders.

Concerning the sessions on *Triangles*, the candidate observed that this concept required extensive instruction and review. This particular session morphed into a lecture, with several of the principles becoming over-personalized by one of the couples in the group. One member of this couple sought to use triangles to justify personal functioning within the family system. Thus, this participant was not listening to learn. This over-personalization distracted from the group and extra time was spent clarifying the concepts and principles of healthy threesomes/triads versus unhealthy triangles. The result was that the illustrations, such as Friedman's Fable, *The Power of Belief*, were eliminated for this session and participation was limited. The original lesson plan included group members using the biblical narrative of God, Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to diagram the various triangles and identify the emotional cut-offs between individuals. Utilizing a two session structure, the candidate would focus the first session on teaching and the second session on application. Opening the first session, the candidate believes a video demonstrating the concept of relational triangles would prove helpful. In the instructional block, the terminology should also be modified to distinguish healthy threesomes/triads and unhealthy triangles. The term threesomes was used for healthy triangles, but the candidate recommends the term triads for future projects. Further explanation concerning fusion and distancing is also needed to explain the fluid and flexible nature of relational triangles. The researcher covered this as review in the

following session using a rubber band to demonstrate distance and closeness of each side of the triangle. However, this explanation and demonstration should be included in the first session on triangles. With time for the group members to process the learning from the instructional block, the second session covering triangles should focus on application. A case study asking the group to identify triangles would enable the group leader to check comprehension and offer the opportunity for clarity of the concepts. This exercise can also facilitate a discussion of healthy triads and unhealthy triangles by asking the group to provide rationale for the observations. The biblical narrative, the story of the Prodigal Son, could be examined and triangles diagrammed to further reinforce learning and application.

The session on *Self-differentiation* had a profound impact on the group as they read Friedman's Fable, *The Bridge*. The story provided a powerful illustration of operating from a well-defined, principled position by focusing on one's own actions instead of being controlled by the actions of another. However, as with anxiety, self-differentiation is pivotal in FST thought. It is the key emotional maturity leading to increased health and well-being and critical to optimal functioning within a system. Consequently, the instructional block was extended to ensure comprehension, but once again, time constraints prevented the group from fully exploring how to apply the knowledge learned. Since self-differentiation is a process of growing self-awareness, self-definition, and self-regulation, the candidate noted more time was needed to integrate the learning within leadership situations.

During the proposed second session on self-differentiation, the logical emphasis would be to consider case studies or scenarios to provide the small group members an

opportunity to apply the learning. One option which may prove helpful consists of group members bringing their own case studies from the teams in which they lead, or are a part, for consideration. After a case is presented, the FSTSG participants could offer insight and suggestions to address dysfunction, resolve issues, and develop strategies to move forward. However, since the final session involves a case study already, another option for the second session could be to utilize Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development with the Heinz dilemma. Kohlberg theorized that moral and ethical reasoning develops through a series of distinct stages in a person's life from childhood throughout adulthood. Furthermore, Kohlberg posited that moral development is the result of social relationships and emotional needs, which offers a connection point between Kohlberg's theory of moral development and FST.[2] Table 5.4, adapted from the work of Uwe Gielen, offers a brief overview of the stages.

Table 5.4.   Comparison of Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development with FST[3]

Stage	Primary Motivation
Pre-Conventional Level	
Stage 1: Obedience	Avoidance of Punishment
Stage 2: Self-Interest	Seeking Rewards
Conventional Level	
Stage 3: Conformity	Good Intentions/Behaviors
Stage 4: Law and Order	Doing One's Duty
Post-Conventional Level	
Stage 5: Human Rights	Differentiation between Moral and Legal Rights - rules can be broken
Stage 6: Universal Human Ethics	Principles of Conscience – accounts for the repercussions of a decision

[2] Lisa Kuhmerker, Uwe P, Gielen, and Richard L. Hayes, "Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory," in *The Kohlberg Legacy for the Helping Professions* (Birmingham: Doxa Books, 1991), 28-29.

[3] Ibid., 28-29.

These stages correspond to self-differentiation in FST. Beginning with Stage 3, a person recognizes the inter-connectedness of personal relationships with other systems and society as a whole. Yet individuals in this stage yield to the expectations of others, rather than acting according to a well-defined set of personal beliefs. Moving through the stages, self-awareness and self-definition increase with Stage 5, marking the emergence of self-differentiation. In Stage 6, behaviors and decisions are based on principled beliefs characterized by an impartial respect for others and careful considerations of the options and views of all parties.[4]

To assess an individual's stage of moral development, Kohlberg utilized a structured interview process, developing stories which presented a moral dilemma. The best known of these stories is the Heinz dilemma.

> In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $400 for the radium and charged $4,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means to do so, but he could only get together about $2,000, half of what the drug cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered this drug, and I'm going to make money from it." Heinz becomes desperate and considers breaking into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should Heinz steal the drug? Why or why not?[5]

Gielen offers a scoring guide to assess the level of moral development, with several other options easily accessible online. In addition to assessing each participant's stage of moral development, the scoring offers insight into an individual's level of self-definition.

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[4]Kuhmerker, Gielen, and Hayes, 30.

[5]Ibid., 20.

The candidate also believes that using Kohlberg's theory provides another perspective to help illustrate self-differentiation as a maturation process.

The final *Evaluation* session of the small group was designed around a church case study which afforded the group members the opportunity to apply the knowledge and concepts of FST to a specific fictional church setting named Cherry Blossom United Church of Christ. During the FSTSG discussion, the candidate was pleased that the small group members recognized the impact of pastoral history and denominational influences accounting for how church systems operate in past relationships, or ghosts, and outside forces which shape church culture, theology, and core values. The group members also recognized the key relational dynamics and emotional processes of individual members within the system which were influencing the level of anxiety within the system. Overall, the candidate felt the case study exercise worked well as an informal assessment and offers no further suggestions regarding this session.

General Observations

While the research candidate is encouraged about the impact that the small group participants will have on the functioning of the overall leadership team in the future and the influence on the well-being of the overall church system at HUMC, the candidate would recommend expanding the project to include more of the congregation. Newsletter articles and weekly updates were distributed to the congregation as teaching tools, to introduce the key concepts and principles of FST covered in the small group sessions. However, the candidate received minimal feedback from members of the congregation, leading the candidate to question the overall effectiveness of this strategy

alone. Limited communication of the concepts also occurred through the integration of FST into sermons and bible studies. For instance, the concept of over-functioning was introduced in a sermon using 1 Peter 2:4-10, the priesthood of all believers. The sermon discussed the relationship between the clergy and laity in ministry together, specifically, how over-functioning by clergy encourages under-functioning of the congregation, thus hindering the spiritual growth and opportunities of the laity to witness to God's work in the world.

If the project were repeated, it is recommended for a sermon series to accompany the small group sessions, with newsletter articles to expand the sphere of influence and benefits of FST within the church leadership and the congregation. The sermon series would focus on using FST to enhance the health of families, resulting in a healthier church.

A creative approach to teaching FST to the congregation could be to integrate the FSTSG members in the learning and teaching process. The sermon series could be coordinated with a follow-up study the next week, using the small group participants on a teaching team to facilitate the class. For example, the first sermon, using Mark 2:23-3:6 as the primary text, would discuss Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees through the lens of the FST principle of homeostasis. During the next week, the FSTSG members would apply the knowledge they had learned about homeostasis to teach others.

Summary

Friedman noted, "To be a leader one must both have and embody a vision of where one wants to go. It is not a matter of knowing or believing one is right; it is a matter of

taking the first step."[6] The Evaluation chapter demonstrates that the first steps in a healing and maturing process have begun at HUMC. The affirmation of the LAT, with recognition that the project should be used to equip and empower leaders, is a first step toward healthier functioning for those who are currently serving as leaders. The impact and influence from the learning and interactions on the FSTSG participants, which resulted in greater self-awareness, is a first step toward healthier personal and system functioning of future leaders at HUMC. The observations and project modifications suggested by the candidate are a first step toward even greater possibilities and opportunities, according to the insights, suggestions, and assertions made within this chapter.

This pilot project is a first step to beginning a journey toward freedom for the HUMC leadership team and congregation. Through the evaluation of this pilot project, each of these steps build upon one another, thereby enabling greater progress to be made by the candidate the next time the FSTSG is offered, wherever that may be.

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[6]Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007), 179.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In the Historical Context section, the story of Peck Hall was shared to illustrate how Harrison United Methodist Church (HUMC) was operating in chronic anxiety. The Peck Hall situation was also referenced a number of times throughout this dissertation, demonstrating the profound impact the closing of the fellowship hall had throughout the entire church system. The story in the Introduction chapter ended abruptly, with the resignation of the chairperson of the Trustees. Obviously, the story did not end there.

The learning and preparations by the candidate for the project, the participation of the Lay Advisory Team (LAT), and the learning and equipping of the Family Systems Theory Small Group (FSTSG) all contributed to a noticeable change in the church system that could be seen through the story of Peck Hall. The change was also observable - beyond the candidate, the LAT, and FSTSG members - to other members of the leadership team of the church and the congregation. Individuals who had either declined the invitation to participate entirely in the LAT or small group, or had limited participation in the project, began to function differently. The end to the Peck Hall story reveals that the FST project, itself, led to a breakthrough.

Obvious Outcome of FST Project

The locks went on Peck Hall, as decided in a follow-up Trustees meeting with the structural engineer, this action being ratified by a vote of the church Council. With a void in the leadership of the Trustees, the Pastor and Chair of the Council, Mrs. J, met to discuss the situation and brainstorm a new co-chair. Both nominated Mr. R, a current member of the Trustees, to assist the other under-functioning co-chair. Mr. R was a well-respected member of the congregation and had many strong leadership skills, which both the Pastor and Mrs. J believed would provide the Trustees much needed direction in this critical time. Both the Pastor and Mrs. J further recognized that the church Council had frequently over-functioned concerning Peck Hall to compensate for the under-functioning of the Trustees committee and to manage the anxiety of the congregation. They agreed the Trustees needed to be empowered and permitted to assume the responsibilities of the Trustees committee, functioning within the guidelines defined by the denomination's Book of Disciple. Also, during this meeting with Mrs. J, the Pastor began to redefine his leadership role. He advised her that he would intentionally be assuming a more indirect leadership role and stepping back from the decision-making process after realizing his own tendency to over-function. This personal epiphany was the direct result of the candidate's preparation for this Doctor of Ministry project. The Pastor understood that his new way of functioning would raise questions and possibly increase the anxiety of the leadership team and congregation. The Pastor wanted the Council Chair to understand that this was not a reactive decision based upon hurt feelings or anger from past events, but a reflective decision with the purpose of re-establishing appropriate boundaries of responsibility and investing in the leadership team, so that they could function and grow

as leaders. The meeting ended with the Council Chair agreeing to approach Mr. R about co-chairing the Trustees committee, pending approval by the Nominations committee.

Mr. R reluctantly agreed, despite his frustration with the closing of Peck Hall and his frequent disagreements with the Pastor. Under Mr. R's leadership, the Trustees committee began to meet, function, and assume responsibility for the facilities. The Trustees notified all groups using the fellowship hall, apprising them of the closure. The Committee developed a contact list and a facilities use schedule for the main church building. Mr. R delegated these responsibilities, and team members began to take ownership. With space being at a premium to accommodate the various ministries and groups using the church, a plan was developed to identify and re-organize storage space. The Trustees partnered with several other ministry teams and volunteers for church clean-up days and to inventory the church's property and the contents of Peck Hall. Simultaneously, Mr. R formed a task force from within the Trustees, including the Lay Delegate to Annual Conference, Mr. G (who had previously been disenchanted by the idea of closing Peck Hall), and two other members of the Trustees to secure estimates to explore the cost of repairs, renovations and replacement of the fellowship hall (one of these being the Pastor's adult son, who was a general contractor). Over a four month period, Mr. R was able to reduce the anxiety of the Trustees and improve committee functioning and effectiveness. During this time, the Pastor attended one of the Trustees meetings to simply observe the progress, and the church Council offered support and encouragement to the Trustees committee throughout this time.

That's not to say that all anxiety had been eliminated. Mr. R and Mr. G did not always share the same perspective. In fact, Mr. R questioned if Mr. G was even an

official member of the Trustees. Mr G, in fact, was not, but was serving as a

representative of the Council because of his role and knowledge in the Peck Hall project.

Mr. R wanted to find a way to acknowledge Mr. G's contributions and service, then

thereby relieve him of his responsibilities. The situation became more complicated when

Mr. R reported to the Pastor that Mr. G questioned if there was a conflict of interest with

the Pastor's son (a contractor) serving on the Trustees committee, since he had been paid

for some prior repairs to the church. Investigating the matter, it was determined that

proper completive bidding practices were observed, and the grounds for this accusation

were proven false. However, the Pastor's son, who had been asked to serve on the

Trustees because of his knowledge and experience, and who had secured bids for a new

fellowship hall from other outside contractors, discreetly resigned from the Trustees

committee, in good faith, following this accusation. This led to additional acute anxiety

among the Trustees, who pointed out that this member had more often performed jobs

with additional labor and materials at no cost to the church. Despite the power struggle

between Mr. R and Mr. G and the attempts to triangulate the Pastor by both Mr. R and

Mr. G, the anxiety was managed effectively by the Pastor, who became a less anxious

presence and remained self-differentiated.

    At approximately the same time that the research candidate had completed

preparation for implementation of the FST project by recruiting the LAT members and

introducing the project's structure, meaning and goal to the church Council, the special

task force from the Trustees was ready to present estimates and options for the repairs,

renovations, or replacement of Peck Hall. A special meeting of the church Council was

called on October 1, 2013. Three proposals were heard, beginning with replacing Peck

Hall with a steel frame structure at a cost ranging between $300-400 thousand. The

Council members were fully aware that there was less than $20,000 in the building fund

and that the church had been operating from a deficit for the past two years.

Consequently, while some on the leadership team were hopeful for a new structure, it was

evident this was an unrealistic option. Considering repairs and renovations, it was

reported that the necessary repairs to reinforce the roofing system, repair the floor joists,

install new subflooring, and replace the ceiling would range between $55,000 to

$130,000, depending on the beam used to restore the roofing system to code. The cost of

renovations to the youth room, expansion of the lower level of Peck Hall, and addressing

the inadequate ventilation issues totaled $38,000, with an additional $38,000 for

renovations to the upper level of the fellowship hall. The total renovation project cost

ranged from $131,000 to $206,000. Silence gripped the room, once again, as the

leadership team processed the alternatives.

The Council was faced with two seemingly impossible possibilities. In the past, the

anxiety of the decision would have created unimaginative gridlock, paralyzing the

leadership from considering creative possibilities and blinding them from potential

creative solutions. However, this time, the anxiety was managed reflectively, rather than

reactively, allowing the Council to brainstorm and develop a plan to address the

immediate repairs to re-open Peck Hall, while looking ahead toward future renovations

and beyond. The plan that emerged from the discussion involved developing four phases.

Phase one focused on repairs, phases two and three on renovation, and phase four reached

into the future, planning for a new building. The Council also addressed the much

overdue issue of communication to the congregation, appointing the Lay Leader, Finance

Chair and Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) Chair to follow up on exact costs for contractors and to formulate a strategy to communicate the situation and needs to the congregation. The Pastor was cautiously optimistic and encouraged the leadership's decision and the process.

The Pastor continued to encourage, but not push for, action, self-regulating his own anxiety while continuing to practice being a less anxious presence. This change in functioning and leadership style was one factor that positively influenced the functioning of church leadership. Additionally, as early as September 2013, the Pastor had been meeting with individual church leaders to explain the Doctor of Ministry project and discuss the benefits. By late October 2013, the candidate's project was endorsed by the Church Council, with formal invitations thereby being extended for participation on the LAT. In mid-December 2013, the entire Lay Advisory Team had received a basic block of introduction on FST and explored the emotional responses and relational dynamics through a case study analysis, using a church system genogram as described in Chapter 2.

However, the Council decisions made in October grew cold through December. The candidate attributes this period of inactivity to the homeostatic forces within the church leadership team's sub-system. Reacting to the Pastor's modified level of functioning, the anxiety level increased, causing a counter-reaction of resistance to the change. Several of the key leaders, including those appointed to communicate the plan for repair and renovations to Peck Hall, continued to under-function, hoping to influence the Pastor to assume a more active role or provide a quick fix.

Further threatening the recent victories in improved functioning, Mr. R turned in his resignation as co-chair of the Trustees effective January 1, 2014. The rationale was a

disagreement about having leadership of the Trustees split between co-chairs. However, when Mr. R was offered the sole responsibility as Chair of the Trustees, he also declined. Yet, he did say he would be willing to remain as a member of the Trustees. This left the Trustees under the leadership of the severely under-functioning co-chair, Mr. L, who was rarely available for Trustees meetings due to work responsibilities and had never attended a Church Council meeting. The Pastor attempted to mentor Mr. L and hoped Mr. R would offer guidance, as well, particularly since Mr. R was the leader of the Sunday school class attended by Mr. L, who greatly respected Mr. R. Unfortunately, now that Mr. R was no longer in a leadership role, he began to sabotage the efforts of the Trustees and the church Council, resuming his power struggle with the Pastor. During the Sunday school class he led, Mr. R openly criticized the plan developed by the Council, citing his own fears that it was destined for failure and that the morale of the congregation, already low from the Pastor forcing the closure of Peck Hall, would reach a new low. The tension and anxiety increased through January 2014 and peaked at the February 2014 Trustees meeting, where Mr. R confronted Mr. L publicly, questioning his leadership, criticizing the work of the Trustees, and ranting about the closure of the fellowship hall. Mr. L was in shock and deeply hurt from the attack of someone he considered a friend. Within the week, Mr. L resigned as Chair of the Trustees and eventually left the church.

The immediate response was another spike in anxiety, as it appeared the Trustees would be without leadership and the assigned special task force continued to be idle. Frustrated by the stonewalling, blaming and inaction, Mrs. C volunteered to lead the Trustees. The Pastor was reluctant to accept Mrs. C's offer because her involvement would result in one family controlling nearly forty percent of the church Council. The

Pastor conferred with the other members of the Council and the Nominations team to explain the perception of a power family dynamic and seek input. Both the Council and the Nominations team approved Mrs. C's nomination. The Pastor continued to lead from behind and, by this time, the FST project and small group meetings were underway. As noted in Chapter 4, Project Implementation, the emotional processes and relational dynamics of the Trustees committee were spilling into the FST small group, as the participants began processing and discussing the situation during group sessions.

Maybe it was the approval of Mrs. C as Trustees Chair, the impact of the FST project, or both, but for whatever reason, there was a marked increase in the response from the task force appointed by the Council to communicate the plan for Peck Hall. By the March 2014 Council meeting, the Lay Leader reported that the task force had met to consider a way forward and presented a campaign slogan, *Rejoice in the Past, Reach for the Future*. It was determined that the best method to communicate the situation with Peck Hall was a special church conference following a Sunday worship service. Since the contracts were still being negotiated and awaiting approval by the church attorney, the plan that emerged involved presenting a timeline of events and the proposed action plan to move forward. Each phase would be explained with caution concerning the actual cost. Rather, it was recommended by the Council that a cost range be offered if there were specific monetary questions. As already noted, the total cost was estimated between $130,000 to a little over $200,000, but it was agreed that the money, as it was raised, would determine the extent of repairs and renovations. The Council approved the slogan and the communications. The SPRC Chair volunteered to present to the congregation and began preparing for the congregational meeting by developing a PowerPoint

presentation, a timeline of events, and the phase-by-phase proposal to repair and renovate Peck Hall. The slogan was used to announce the congregational meeting and as a marketing tool to assist in fundraising.

Following the congregational meeting, the Finance Chair, SPRC Chair, and the Lay Leader met and developed a plan to identify and meet with potential donors. During the meeting, each of these leaders recognized the importance of leading by example and determined each would start the fundraising with a personal gift of $10,000. Next they complied a list of potential donors at various giving levels. The highest level peaked at $10,000, followed by $5,000 or more, and finally $2,500 or more. They also explained this was not a pledge, but a gift to jump start the project, hoping to raise enough money for the first phase to bring Peck Hall up to the safety code. Depending on the final monetary figures negotiated and agreed upon with the contractors, additional phases would be completed as funds became available. In teams of two, task force members met with potential donors and, within six weeks, had raised $115,000.

As the fundraising progressed, Mrs. C arranged to meet with the various contractors to secure an official bid and prepare for the repair and renovations. In the negotiations, it was revealed by the general contractor that some of the plans, such as expanding the lower level, were not feasible due to structural restrictions. The contractor also noted that, to meet fire codes, additional exits would be required. In the end, the general contractor bid the entire job, repairs and renovations at $115,000. Word spread quickly through the Trustees, the church Council, and the congregation that the money had been raised and construction would soon begin. The spirits of HUMC members were lifted as they celebrated this victory.

The Pastor celebrated too, but for a different reason. After years of looking to pastoral leadership for guidance, direction, and answers, the leadership team had seized the opportunity to become unstuck and move forward. Through the FST project, the Pastor learned to resist over-functioning. Instead of focusing on the actions or inactions of others, his focus shifted to his own emotional responses to the anxiety in the system and attempting to be a less-anxious presence. Even as he watched leaders refuse to take responsibility, sabotage others, and occasionally stumble, the Pastor understood that, in order to help the leaders grow, they had to be allowed to fail.

The self-differentiated actions of the Pastor changed the relational dynamic of the leadership team, which resulted in changes in behaviors from other leaders. Once Mr. G and Mr. R realized that the Pastor was not susceptible to becoming triangulated, unwilling to participate in the power struggle, or to defend himself against false accusations, both Mr. R and Mr. G lost power over the Pastor and influence in the system. This empowered other leaders to emerge and take self-differentiated stances, thereby freeing the church to move forward.

In a similar way, the under-functioning Trustees committee and various individuals on the leadership team were empowered when the church Council and the Pastor ceased assuming responsibilities of others to manage the anxiety of the church. While it took nearly a year for HUMC to begin functioning appropriately around the Peck Hall issue, once clear boundaries were re-established and the under-functioners became impacted by the anxiety, overall functioning improved, participation in meetings increased, anxiety was managed more effectively, and eventually, the leadership team experienced a breakthrough.

Beyond the healthier functioning of the Pastor, the LAT members and the FSTSG members also began to function differently. Chapter 3, Project Design and Methodology, explained that the LAT received a block of instruction, examined a church case study, and constructed a church genogram. From this basic introduction, the members of the LAT realized the leadership of HUMC had not always functioned in healthy ways. In fact, following the genogram exercise, Mrs. J, the Council Chair, observed, "I can put names of people here at Harrison on those fictional characters. I know those people." The knowledge and understanding that some problems were symptomatic of deeper issues with no simple solutions, along with the impact of reactive emotional responses and interpersonal dynamics, modified the thought processes of the LAT. The emphasis shifted from discovering the right technique, trying to persuade others, or change someone else's behavior to maintaining relationships, controlling emotional responses, and changing oneself. The candidate saw this shift occur in the four leaders who served on the LAT and were involved in the Peck Hall decision.

For those in the small group, the transformation was much more dramatic. One participant noted, "I see things differently now. I realize the conflicts at work are people who are reacting from emotion. I think some people are going with the crowd because they want to be liked or feel like they belong. They're the ones caught in relational triangles, gossiping and forming cliques. I see the same things happening in church. Even with my family, I realize that I have to stop taking responsibility for my adult son and let him grow up."

The sole member of both the FSTSG and the church Council impacted the church system by joining with the four LAT members and becoming a less anxious presence

during meetings concerning Peck Hall. This meant that nearly one-half of the Council had been exposed to FST. Furthermore, five of the small group members were serving on church committees, one member being on the Trustees. The detailed observations are included in Chapter 5, explaining how the participant serving on the Trustees was able to manage his fear of rejection, which had previously prevented him from voicing his opinion at the Trustees meetings. At the Trustees meeting where Mr. R verbally attacked Mr. L, this man spoke up, which changed the direction of the meeting, thereby reducing anxiety so the group could refocus and move ahead with the agenda. As each of the FSTSG members continues to apply the FST learning in leadership roles, the system has the potential for further positive change.

Summary

The situation surrounding Peck Hall provides a glimpse into the new possibilities for HUMC. Unfortunately, the candidate will not be unable to follow up and determine the long-term effects of the project in this church system. The candidate, as Pastor, itinerated to a new church in June 2014, just as the repairs and renovation to Peck Hall began. However, the Peck Hall situation demonstrates how the project achieved the short-term goal of equipping the leaders of HUMC to function at a healthier level, which increased congregational well-being. This was, after all, the original goal of the project.

The candidate, the leadership, and the congregation were all impacted by the project, and the candidate intends to use FST small groups to train and equip leaders in the future. The candidate also agrees with both the LAT and the FSTSG evaluations, that FST should be an integral part of a leadership development strategy for helping individuals to

become self-aware, self-regulated, and self-defined. Friedman offers an eloquent

summary, in his work *Generation to Generation*, which also applies to this project. He

states that understanding the significance of a person's family of origin leads to

understanding the complex relational dynamics that govern how a person functions in all

other relationships throughout life. The opposite is true when a person becomes more

differentiated, whereby home, work, church, and all other systems become impacted.

Consequently, when leaders understand their own origins, they can better sympathize

with others; the more they can define their own families, the better equipped the leader is

to help others break free from the unhealthy habits of the past, or draw from the strength

of the past toward greater well-being and healthier functioning.[1] Through this Doctor of

Ministry project:

- the members of the FSTSG came to understand themselves better, thus providing

  the opportunity for further systemic change;

- the candidate, as Pastor, practiced becoming a less anxious presence and

  becoming more self-differentiated, thereby transferring this impact throughout

  the system; and

- the leadership at HUMC, because of these understandings related to FST, began

  to function in healthier ways.

What happens next is yet to be determined, but for today, the leadership of HUMC is

further equipped and empowered to lead the church at Harrison into the bold, risk-taking

and joy-filled future God has planned for His Church.

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[1]Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2011), 295-296.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Harrison United Methodist Church

Making Jesus Real To All

Dear Leadership Team:

As most of you already know, I have been pursuing my Doctorate of Ministry degree through Drew University. The class phase has just been completed and the project phase is beginning. During this phase, each doctoral candidate designs, implements, and evaluates a ministry project designed to enhance the ministry within their specific ministry context they are serving.

My ministry project uses Family Systems Theory to equip leaders and improve congregational health. Family Systems Theory is a psychological model used to understand human relationships and the interaction and functioning of individuals within the family system. Since individuals do not act independently of one another, each individual influences and impacts the family system or other system such as a church system. Understanding and applying the principles and concepts of Family Systems Theory the health and functioning of the church will be enhanced, resulting in growth and new opportunities.

Between January and March 2014, selected current and potential leaders will be invited to participate in a small group experience. During each of the gatherings, a concept of Family Systems Theory will be introduced, illustrated, defined, shared, and applied. To accomplish the objective of each class, various teaching methods will be used including- the biblical narrative, personal stories and parables, life experience, and multi-media. Since the probability exists for the sharing of personal information, group trust and confidentially are critically important. The group will enter into a covenant relationship with one another and all documents of a sensitive nature will be secured and limited to the instructor's access only. Each participant will also be asked to be an active part of the evaluation process by preparing a family genogram, applying their learning between group meetings, filling out a short questionnaire, and scheduling an exit interview. Since the project is focused on developing a process, ongoing assessment and follow up will be needed.

Following the small group experience, the observations and findings from the project will be documented in written form and submitted as a Doctor of Ministry project. The project will be on file in the Drew Theological library as a future resource for other students and leaders who seek to enhance the functioning and well-being of their church settings.

If you have questions or concerns about the project or the process, please feel free to contact me.

Grace and Peace

Pastor Tom Hancock

APPENDIX B

GENOGRAM SAMPLE WITH LEGEND

Constructing a Genogram

A genogram is similar to a family tree in that it is a visual representation showing relationships and data for a particular family. However, a genogram focuses on the relationship dynamics and interactions within a family system. Analyzing a genogram can reveal patterns of behaviors which may be influencing personal life choices and individual behaviors. Understanding these patterns can improve the overall well-being and functioning of a family, leading to stronger relationships by increasing the emotional IQ of the individual.

Usually, a genogram spans at least three generations (i.e., yours, the one before yours, and the one following yours).

All genograms include basic information, such as the name, gender, date of birth, and date of death (if applicable) of each individual. Additional data may include education, occupation, major life events, chronic illnesses, social behaviors, nature of family relationships, emotional relationships, and social relationships. Further insight is gained with additional information, such as disorders running in the family (e.g., alcoholism, depression, diseases), alliances, and living situations. Genograms can vary significantly because there is no limitation as to the detail and what type of data can be included. Depending on the focus, genograms can be useful to medical professionals, family therapists, and in pastoral counseling settings.

The first step is to collect the information you need. Write down as much information about each person in the genogram that you already know. It is a good idea to write notes so you remember all the details. Next, you will probably need to contact

family members and maybe close family friends to fill in the gaps. You should be ready to hear the stories connected with these people. Listen carefully, because stories reveal insights that basic facts conceal.
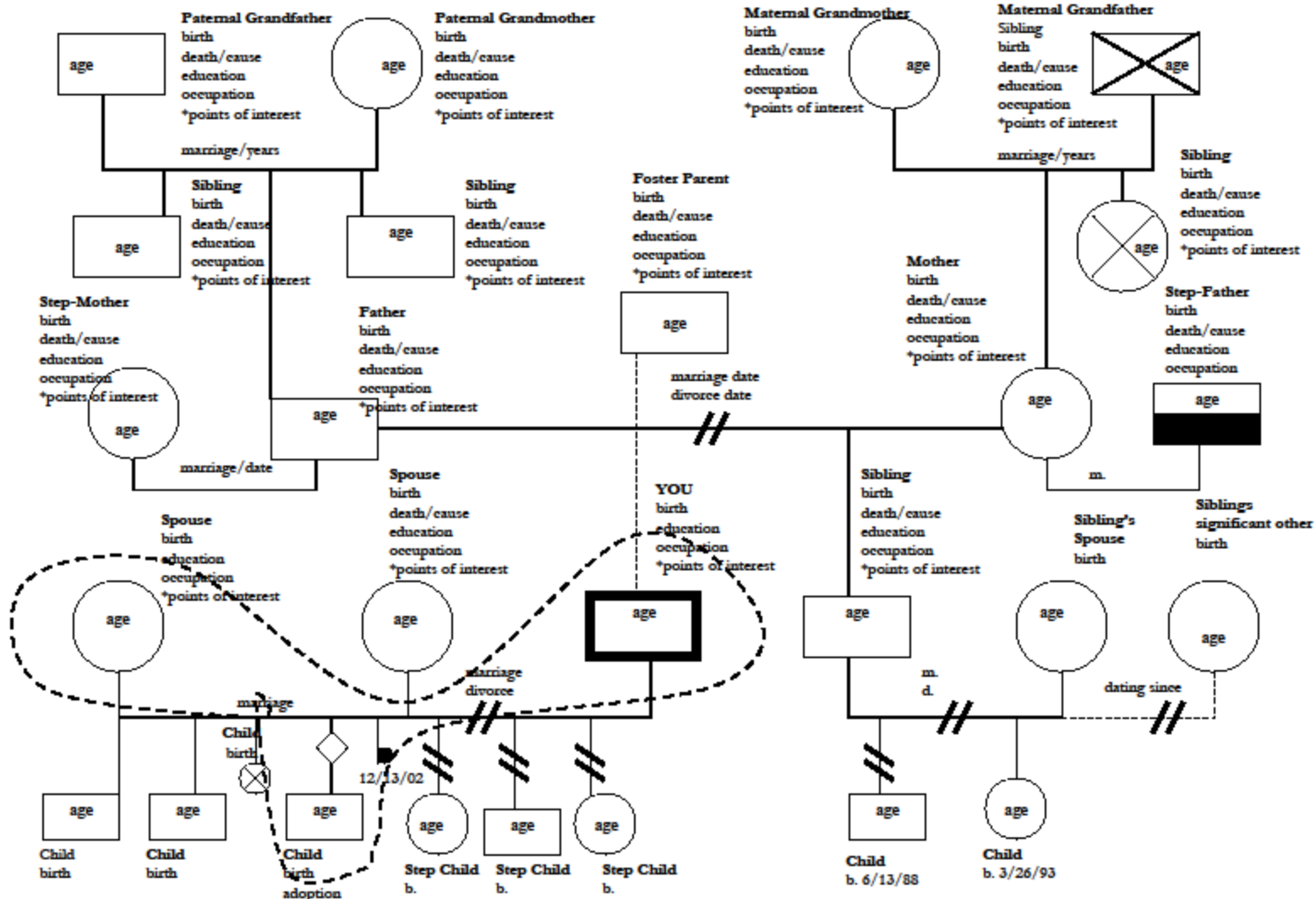
Next, begin drawing your genogram. You should use genogram symbols whenever possible, but if you modify or construct your own, make sure you make a note in the legend. Genograms can be drawn out by hand, constructed with a word processing program, or through the use of an online program. A few basic rules include:

- Males are indicated by a square. Women are indicated by a circle.

- When indicating a marriage, generally position the male symbol to the left and the female symbol to the right. (This will not necessarily work as the genogram expands.)

- A single horizontal line between two individuals indicates marriage (two slanted lines indicate divorce/separation) or the generational connection (parent to children).

- The oldest child is always below and to the left of his family, whereas the youngest should be below and to the right.

- Other available symbols help you describe family events such as pregnancy or miscarriage, illnesses and deaths. You will receive a legend to help you in your genogram development. (You may even create your own symbols, such as a diamond symbol to represent pets who may be viewed as "family members." Just add them to your legend for understanding.)

After you have the basic biographical information, you are ready to begin looking at the relational dynamics and unique characteristics within your family. Standard

genogram symbols also begin to identify emotional features such as conflict, closeness, distance, cut-off, violence or abuse.
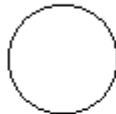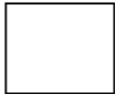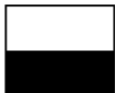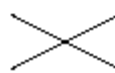
Now you are ready to look for patterns and tendencies within your family system. However, be careful not to jump to conclusions or make judgments. Remember that you have some of the information, but never the whole story. It is important to note at this point that a genogram is for *your* personal growth and insight and should never be used as a tool to prove a point or confront other family members. If you find something disturbing or unsettling, you may feel the need to discuss the matter. Please feel free to contact Pastor Tom.

Paternal Grandfather
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

marriage/years

Paternal Grandmother
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Maternal Grandmother
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Maternal Grandfather
Sibling
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

marriage/years

Sibling
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Sibling
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Foster Parent
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

marriage date
divorce date

Sibling
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Step-Mother
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Father
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

marriage/date

Mother
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

Step-Father
birth
death/cause
education
occupation

age

m.

Spouse
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

YOU
birth
education
occupation
*points of interest

Sibling
birth
death/cause
education
occupation
*points of interest

Sibling's Spouse
birth

Siblings
significant other
birth

Spouse
birth
education
occupation
*points of interest

age

age

age

age

age

age

marriage

marriage
divorce

m.
d.

dating since

Child
birth

12/13/02

age

age

age

Child
birth
adoption

age

age

age

age

age

Child
birth

Child
birth

Step Child
b.

Step Child
b.

Step Child
b.

Child
b. 6/13/88

Child
b. 3/26/93

GENOGRAM TEMPLATE
Biographical Information

BASIC GENOGRAM SYMBOLS

LEGEND

*Female

*Male

*Denotes Alcohol Abuse

*Denotes Drug and Alcohol Abuse

*Deceased

-------------- *Foster Parent

▬▬▬▬▬ *Close Relationship

▬▬▬▬ ▪ *Close Broken Relationship (non-conflict)

-------------- *Distant Relationship

-------------- *Distant Broken Relationship

▬▬▬ ▪ *Now Distant/Past Close Broken Relationship (non-conflict)

ΛΛΛΛΛΛ *Conflicting Relationship

ΛΛΛΛΛΛ *Conflicting Close Relationship

*Cut off

APPENDIX C

CONGREGATIONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Congregational Assessment

Name:_____   Date:_____

Please rate the following survey questions/statements on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating of agreement. Circle your responses.

Please rate all questions to the best of your ability.

1. To what degree does our congregation interact with other churches and faith communities?

      Low degree   High degree

           1   2   3   4   5

2. To what degree does our congregation interact with other local organizations in our community?

      Low degree   High degree

           1   2   3   4   5

3. To what degree is our congregation encouraged by lay leadership* to develop relationships/friendships with others outside our own faith community?

      Low degree   High degree

           1   2   3   4   5

*The term lay leadership is defined as the members of the church who serve in a leadership role. It does not include the pastor or staff.

4. The degree of interactive and informative communication between the church lay leadership* (e.g. the Church Council or other ministry teams) and the church fellowship.

    Low degree   High degree

         1   2   3   4   5

*The term lay leadership is defined as the members of the church who serve in a leadership role. It does not include the pastor or staff.

5. The lay leadership* of the church has interdependent relationships with one another beyond congregational functioning (e.g. related by blood or marriage, business relationships, or lifetime friendships.)

    Low degree   High degree

         1   2   3   4   5

*The term lay leadership is defined as the members of the church who serve in a leadership role. It does not include the pastor or staff.

6. The degree to which our church's lay leadership* takes well-defined positions, independent of critics.

    Low degree   High degree

         1   2   3   4   5

*The term lay leadership is defined as the members of the church who serve in a leadership role. It does not include the pastor or staff.

APPENDIX D

SMALL GROUP PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

Using Family Systems Theory to Equip Leaders and Improve Congregational Health at Harrison United Methodist Church

Participant Name (printed or typed): _____

    You have been invited to a small group research project exploring how Family Systems Theory can be used to enhance congregational functioning and health. Family Systems Theory examines the relational interactions and interconnectedness of individuals related to their family of origin and how those relational patterns influence and affect decision making and functioning in other aspects of life. For this project you will be asked to apply Family Systems Theory to the church setting. You have been asked to participate because you are either a current leader in the church or you have shown potential for leadership in the future. Please read over this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have in regards to this project before you agree to take part.

    Description of the Project: By agreeing to participate in this research project you will be asked to join a bi-monthly small group which will meet for seven sessions between January 2014 and April 2014. At our first meeting you will be instructed on how to construct a genogram, a visual genealogical map of your family of origin. The genogram is for your reflection and remains confidential between you and the researcher, unless you feel comfortable sharing the information with others. Each of the following meetings will explore a concept or principle of Family Systems Theory. A metaphor will be chosen to help illustrate the theme of the session. The instructional tools used to meet our goal include: an illustration (case study, movie clip, or a story from Friedman's Fables), definition, sharing, and evaluation. To reinforce learning, you will be asked to

reflect on how each concept has been illustrated throughout the week. The final session will focus on the application of Family Systems Theory through a case study within the context of a church setting. Finally, you will be asked to review and revise your genogram and participate in an exit interview.

The researcher may use photographs or videotaping to aid in the instruction and evaluation processes. In the event that you are photographed or videotaped, your consent will be needed to share the images. Your consent to be photographed or videotaped is included as a part of this form.

Risks and Benefits: There are no physical, psychological, social, economic, or other types of risks or harms risk involved in this research project. There are several possible benefits however to you personally and for Harrison United Methodist Church. Family Systems Theory aims to improve the overall functioning and health of individuals and families which impacts the functioning and health in other areas of life. Some of the possible benefits of learning Family Systems Theory include dealing with conflict, managing anxiety, overcoming strongholds, and strengthening self and relationships. Applying these tools in your personal life also affects your interactions and relationships in the church and your approach to leadership.

Compensation: There are no monetary or other forms of compensation for participating in this project.

Confidentiality: All materials and records from this study will be kept confidential and anonymous. Your privacy will be protected in all written reports with the researcher excluding any information that might identify you beyond the fact that you are associated with Harrison United Methodist Church. The only information that might identify you

would be the photographic or videotaped images taken during the small group sessions. However, this information will not be published or distributed in any form unless you have been notified and additional permission is granted. All photographs and videotapes will be secured by the researcher and destroyed following the conclusion of the writing phase of the project. Please signify here, *by your initials*, your preference for sharing photographs or videotapes of your involvement in this project:

_____I give permission for my image to be taken in photographs and/or videotape for the purpose of this research project as outlined and explained to me.

_____I DO NOT give permission for my image to be taken in photographs and/or videotape in this research project.

Voluntary Participation: Taking part in this project is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part in any aspect of the study in which you do not feel comfortable. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without your decision affecting your status or relationship with the researcher or Harrison United Methodist Church.

Additional Questions: The researcher conducting this project is Thomas E. Hancock, Pastor of Harrison United Methodist Church. Please address any questions you may have now or in the future to Pastor Hancock. He can be contacted by e-mail at {supplied to group} or by phone at {supplied to group}.

You can request a copy of this consent form by contacting Pastor Hancock.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have had the opportunity to have my questions concerning the project addressed. I give my consent to be a participant in this project.

Participant Signature_____ Date_____

Participant Name (printed or typed)_____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to being photographed and/or videotaped for the purposes of the research project. I have read through the above statement concerning photographs and videotaping and signified with my initials on this document my consent to be photographed and/or videotaped.

Participant Signature_____ Date_____

Participant Name (printed or typed)_____

APPENDIX E

SMALL GROUP COVENANT

Small Group Covenant
"Making Jesus Real to All"

January 19, 2014

We are disciples of Jesus Christ, created to love and be loved. God desires that we grow in our relationship with God and with each other in faithful community. As a community, we live together in *koinonia*: The fellowship that happens when there is "sacrifice" and an authentic common life which is a sharing and caring together where the people of God dwell in joyful unity of the Holy Spirit.

Today, we form a small group community seeking to grow closer to God and closer to each other to reflect genuine *koinonia*. Together, we enter into covenant with God and each other, pledging to be faithful in the following areas:

Faithful Preparation
- ❖ Be open and expectant to God's leading, knowing God invites us to be instruments of hope and healing.
- ❖ Respect others in the group, making every effort to be present and on time for each gathering.
- ❖ Realizing God desires my best, I will dedicate myself to excellence in all things.

Faithful Participation:
- ❖ Create a safe place for sharing and caring to take place in the group.
- ❖ Encourage and challenge each other to grow emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually.
- ❖ Show grace to each other by dealing with conflict respectfully and lovingly.
- ❖ Be authentic and vulnerable with each other.
- ❖ Keep confidential all information that is shared in the group.
- ❖ Respect each other's opinions, questions, and experiences.

Faithful Prayer
- ❖ Be intentional and committed in prayers for each member of our group.
- ❖ I will listen for God's voice and watch for God's presence in my life in order to grow closer to God and those in our group.

Signed: _____

Printed Name: _____Date: _____

APPENDIX F

SMALL GROUP STUDY SYLLABUS

Family Systems Small Group Syllabus

January 19-April 13, 2014

Group Leader:

Pastor Tom Hancock

Harrison United Methodist Church

Harrison, TN 37363

Purpose:

We all deal with stress, conflicts at home or at work; and even in the church, we face difficult decisions and circumstances. In dealing with all of these issues pressing in on you, have you ever been frustrated? Have you ever felt stuck? No matter what you try, you seem to be moving in a circle? You read all the books, attend workshops and seminars, try the latest ideas; but whatever you do, you end up in the same place—just more tired, more discouraged, and more frustrated. This small group experience has been designed to introduce, explore, and apply some basic concepts of Family Systems Theory (FST) to grow and equip current and future leaders (at home and in the church) to deal with the challenges of life in a healthier way. Family Systems Theory recognizes that chronic stress, system gridlock, burnout, and fear are byproducts or symptoms of unhealthy ways of living and leading. FST looks beyond the problem or current crisis to the emotional processes and relational dynamics impacting the individual, family, or church. Furthermore, FST realizes that it is impossible to change anyone else. The only person you can change is YOU! Over seven group gatherings, we will discover how to

become the men and women God created us to be and how to live life more abundantly -

which will benefit us, our families, and our church.

Course Outline:

January 19: Introduction

The first session is designed to provide the foundation for the small group experience, by

providing a rationale/overview of the learning group, a comparison between a problem

solving approach and a systems approach, and an introduction to *Family Systems Theory*.

Following the gathering, the participants will:

- Understand the terms of the group covenant.

- Recognize key differences between problem solving and system approaches.

- Identify basic concepts of Family Systems Theory.

Reflection: What have you learned in this session?

What are you taking away from our time together?

How will this impact -you, -your family, -our church?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Survey: Please complete and return the pre-study Congregational

Assessment survey.

Genogram: Using the resources you received during our first gathering, begin constructing a basic genogram. Each week as new information is introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family Systems Theory and add to the genogram. Remember, your genogram is confidential and the information will not be shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an individual interview where you will have the opportunity to discuss your genogram and share insights.

February 2: Everything in Balance

The second session will focus on the principal of *homeostasis*. The learning goal is to realize that every system seeks to maintain equilibrium and will react to any force or influence which threatens the stability of the system. The participants will:

- Understand that within a system there are rules, rituals, and myths that help maintain homeostasis.

- Identify *negative methods to maintain homeostasis*, such as gridlock, avoidance, sabotage, and compliance.

Reflection: What rules, rituals, and myths exist in your family? In our church? How do these rules, rituals and myths maintain the status quo?

How might you respond differently to deal with gridlock,

avoidance, sabotage or compliance?

How will your new insights impact -you, -your family, -our

church?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, add to your

genogram, as necessary. Each week as new information is

introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family

Systems Theory, continue to add to the genogram. Remember,

your genogram is confidential and the information will not be

shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an

individual interview where you will have the opportunity to

discuss your genogram and share insights.

February 9: Too Much or Not Enough

This session will focus on the principal of over- and under-functioning. The learning

goal is to comprehend *over-functioning/under-functioning*. The participants will:

- Be able to identify over/under functioning behaviors.

- Understand the role of anxiety in over/under functioning.

Reflection: What are the major stressors in your life? Why do they create

stress?

(You can only use the first person to answer the second question.)

Are there areas in your life where you are taking on too much

responsibility or not enough responsibility?

Are you experiencing burnout in your life? If yes, where and what

will you do to act differently?

How does the information in this session relate to the functioning

of the church?

*Please record your reflections in your journal.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, add to your

genogram, as necessary. Each week as new information is

introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family

Systems Theory, continue to add to the genogram. Remember,

your genogram is confidential and the information will not be

shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an

individual interview where you will have the opportunity to

discuss your genogram and share insights.

February 23: Nervous??

This meeting will focus on the principal of anxiety. The learning goal is to realize anxiety is an emotional response to a perceived threat. Group members will explore the *patterns of reactivity*: compliance, rebellion, power struggle and emotional distancing. Finally, building from the group's previous learning, participants will apply their newly gained knowledge to develop strategies to effectively manage anxiety. The concept of *less-anxious presence* will be introduced. The learners will:

- Identity the four patterns of reactivity.

- Develop a basic understanding of less-anxious presence.

Reflection: How do you deal with anxiety in your life?

compliance

rebellion

power struggles

emotional distancing

Is there a time in life that you were able to resist reaction and reflect before you spoke or took action?

What do you think God is asking you to do with what you have been learning?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, add to your

genogram, as necessary. Each week as new information is

introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family

Systems Theory, continue to add to the genogram. Remember,

your genogram is confidential and the information will not be

shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an

individual interview where you will have the opportunity to

discuss your genogram and share insights.

<u>March 9: Triangles</u>

During this class, the participants will focus on the concept of *triangulation*. The

learning goal is to understand that the triangle is the basic relational unit of Family

Systems Theory. Furthermore, those triangles are usually unbalanced with one side in

conflict and two sides in harmony, contributing to issues in other systems. The class

members will:

- Understand the function of triangles in managing system anxiety.

- Recognize that triangles can be modified by repositioning or de-
triangulating.

- Be able to define *fusion* and *cut-off*.

Reflection: Can you identify triangles in your life and family?

Have you experienced triangulation in our church?

What are the fused relationships in your life?

When have you emotionally distanced yourself in an unhealthy way?

How is God using your learning to reconnect and reconcile a broken or strained relationship in your life?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, add identified relational triangles, fusion and cut-offs on your genogram. Each week as new information is introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family Systems Theory, continue to add to the genogram. Remember, your genogram is confidential and the information will not be shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an individual interview where you will have the opportunity to discuss your genogram and share insights.

<u>March 23: Me, Myself and I</u>

During this class, the participants will focus on the concept of *self-differentiation*. The learning goal is to understand differentiation of the self as the difference in individuals in their need to depend on others for acceptance and approval. The participants will be able to:

- Define and understand the terms:
  - self-differentiation
  - fusion
  - emotional cut-off.
- Recognize healthy ways to maintain the boundaries of the self while remaining connected with the system.

Reflection: When did you yield to the peer pressure of a group and what happened?

When did you resist peer pressure and what was the result?

What things in your life are non-negotiable?

What do you believe are the benefits of self-differentiated leadership in a church system?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, add to your genogram, as necessary. Each week as new information is introduced and insights gained, reflect on the concepts of Family

Systems Theory, continue to add to the genogram. Remember,

your genogram is confidential and the information will not be

shared unless you choose to share it with the group.

At the conclusion of the small group study, we will schedule an
individual interview where you will have the opportunity to
discuss your genogram and share insights.

April 6: Wrap Up

This session will focus on how Family Systems Theory can be used as a tool for

improved health and functioning within the church system. The participants will:

- Examine a case study, diagram the system, and apply their learning

  to analyze the scenario using Family Systems Theory.

Reflection: What has been the greatest benefit to you during this small group

study?

How has your learning impacted your life?

In what ways do you see Family Systems Theory positively

impacting our church?

Please record your reflections in your journal.

Survey: Please complete and return the post-study Congregational

Assessment survey.

Evaluation: Please complete and return the course evaluation form.

Genogram: Using the resources you received this session, review your

genogram.

Please look over your calendar and be prepared to schedule an exit interview.

You should bring your genogram and your completed evaluation forms.

APPENDIX G

PRESNELL CASE STUDY: CHERRY BLOSSOM UCC

Case Narrative

Cherry Blossom United Church of Christ (CBUCC) is a four hundred member congregation in Cherry Blossom, Pennsylvania. The Pastor of the church is The Reverend Dan Weakly, a fifty two year old graduate of Andover Newton Theological School. The church is situated in a middle income suburban community on the edge of a large urban sprawl. Its members come from a rich variety of backgrounds. The majority are professional men and women, especially business persons. A minority are less educated working families in technical or service professions. Ethically, the largest group is Euro-American, with a growing number of Hispanic, African American, and Asian American families.

The paid staff of the church includes the Senior Minister, a half-time Director of Educational Ministries, a two-thirds time organist and choir chair, a full-time administrative assistant, and a custodian. A number of other important ministries are staffed by volunteer laity. The church has a chancel choir, a children's choir, and a bell choir. It is socially conscience and has ongoing ministries to the homeless and to nursing homes. It has begun partnering with an inner-city "sister" church. It maintains a tutoring program at a nearby urban center.

Pastor Dan was preceded by a more charismatic and beloved minister, Hank Bolt, who served as a compassionate and effective leader for seven years, then abruptly divorced his wife of twenty years and left the ministry to enroll in medical school. Many in the congregation felt spiritually bereft and sorrowful upon his departure. There was a period of only weeks that they could grieve and say "goodbye." He was gone before

some even knew about it. He insisted that no one call or contact him again for any

pastoral service.

The Pastor before Hank Bolt was Jim Doolittle, a 64 year old minister, theologically

and socially liberal, low energy, and not very active in leadership. Some members

recalled that Jim seemed to be "counting the days to retirement" during his last two years.

He retired just before Hank assumed the pastorate. Cherry Blossom has gone through its

ups and downs. Nonetheless the church has not been severely conflict-ridden over its one

hundred and twenty-five year history. Congregants are proud to say, "No one goes away

from Cherry Blossom a stranger," and "We may not always agree with our ministerial

staff but we don't kill them off either." The covenant of the church affirms that: "We

seek to love one another even when we disagree."

Jenny was raised in a small town in the Midwest. She remembers a happy childhood

for the most part, having felt secure with her family, including a supportive and loving

extended family. She inherited a faith tradition from the Free Methodist Church, where

she attended Sunday School regularly with her devout family. She is a middle child. Her

brother is older and her sister is younger. She was raised in a strict, moralistic family

culture. "Do things right," "behave as though God is watching," and "do nothing but

your best" were family injunctions. Jenny's mother and father placed a high value on

educational achievement and community respectability. They had a stable, respectful,

but somewhat constricted marriage. In high school Jenny was popular, had many friends,

and starred in theater productions and musicals. In her teen years she began to rebel,

challenged her parents' authority, and expanded her experience with dating and sex. Her

grades fell from excellent to fair. Her parents were beside themselves, were ineffective in

reigning her in, and had decided to ride out that troubled episode in their parenting journey.

From then on, life had not always gone smoothly for Jenny. When she was a high school Junior, a traumatic community event involving her father wrought severe changes in Jenny and her behavior. A front page article in the local paper broke news of an accusation of her father's "improper" behavior at the high school, where he taught for eighteen years, and where Jenny attended as a student. Apparently, during high school hours, a student had stumbled upon Jenny's father in a "compromising position" with a female colleague. The shocked child reported the incident to her own parents, who promptly called the superintendent of schools. Jenny's father was suspended, her parents' marriage was terribly wounded, and the incident became the talk of the town. Jenny and her siblings were ashamed and humiliated. Jenny was also angry at her father, humiliated by the town gossip, and disillusioned. Yet, her parents demanded that the subject never be spoken of in the home and immediately disapproved if it were mentioned. Jenny's father retained his job, but only after sanctions and remedial counseling and oversight.

This traumatic incident sensitized Jenny not only to the complexity of adult life and relationships, but also to the inordinately cruel, judgmental, and destructive projections to which a family could be subjected in a small town. She determined that she would close herself up, graduate from high school as best she could, and leave town at the first opportunity. She went off to college and seldom returned home after that. Working several jobs and acquiring academic loans and scholarships, she paid her own way through college. Along the way she met a UCC chaplain-mentor whose ministry and

faith inspired her to reclaim her faith. Later, she received a genuine call to a ministry of

religious education and enrolled in seminary, completing her S.T.M. degree with honors.

When she assumed her current position as Minister of Educational Ministries at CBUCC,

she had already received field experience at a local church, served as part time

Educational Assistant at another church for two years, and then came to her present

position.

Jenny was hired upon the recommendation of Cherry Blossom's Senior Minister, the

Rev Dan Weakly. Dan had interviewed five candidates for the job, but had chosen Jenny

because: "…she seems qualified for the job and dedicated to Christ and devoted to the

Church's educational ministry. She makes a good appearance, and seems like a team

player. She projects a sweet and accommodating personality. I think she will fit in and

will be well liked here." (Jenny also came highly recommended by her former

supervising pastor, a male friend of Dan's, for whose church she had previously worked

for two years.) The day she was hired, Dan dismissed Jenny from their meeting after a

brief verbal description of her job and a handshake to seal her employment. As she left

Pastor Dan's study, his parting words to her were, "Welcome aboard, Jenny. We don't

stand much on formality here. All I expect is that you work with the Education

Department and give twenty hours a week of good leadership to our educational program,

especially the youth, in whatever way you deem best. You will report just to me. I will

have your back."

Recently, Jenny has made a special effort to introduce innovative programs in

keeping with postmodern era contextual realities and educational practice.

She tends towards educational methods that incorporate the arts and electronic media, draw attention to UCC social ministries, and promote stewardship over the environment. Though she is supported in this by a large majority of parishioners and elected officials, her innovations have been met with condescension, and sometimes derision and outright criticism by a small but vocal minority of the church's elected leaders. One of these persons, Ethyl Crochet, 49, is an outspoken member of the Education Department, who seems to take delight in trumpeting the claims and criticisms of the unhappy group. Recently Ethyl has been joined on the Education Department by another of the unhappy ones, Ken Buck, who seems bent on single-handedly saving the church from its financial and moral ruin. Within the past few months, Ken has unapologetically brought his "tried and true" business model to bear on his church leadership. The moderate members of the Department try to temper Ken's behavior with mixed results. This contention upsets Jenny at times. She loves people and ministry. She has a quiet vision of how the church could be effectively organized for its work as a covenant community of believers, each with a part to play. In her heart she realizes that conflict is normal in any church that is doing worthwhile ministry. Yet, she cannot help but feel disappointed and hurt that some people don't like her or her leadership initiatives. When she attempts to discuss this with Pastor Dan, he waves her away and urges her to, "Ignore those snipers - they can't harm us."

Presenting Concern/Opportunity

During the past week Jenny had received an urgent email from Ken Buck with a cc

to the chairs of the Administrative Board and Personnel Committee, but not to Pastor Dan

or the Educational Department Chair, Flora Friend, a sweet, seventy-two-year-old matron

and longtime church member. The email contained the following:

March 18, 2013

Dear Mrs. Swift,

Although I am aware that you were ill and unable to attend our last meeting, I am

writing you out of some concerns the Education Department has about your leadership.

First, please be advised that, although the Department last year approved the use of the

new educational curriculum that included the lessons on "Stewardship Over Creation,"

the funds for the purchase of these materials are not currently available from our limited

budget. Therefore, do not proceed with these lessons. I don't know how Pastor Weakly

has been advising you, but our former pastor, Hank, would never have allowed that

nonsense. He was strictly a biblical scholar and kept a careful watch over those teachers

and helpers in the Sunday School. Secondly, some people have noticed that you have not

been at church the twenty hours a week we are paying you for. Therefore, we are

requesting that you keep a journal and time sheet of your work activities so that we can

"cost out" your work efficiency.

Finally, it has also come to our attention that on April 11th, as she was leaving the

church after a meeting, Ethyl Crochett noticed two high school youth alone in the Youth

Lounge, kissing. We cannot help but wonder why you were not supervising them, since

you were leading the youth meeting that night. Or, perhaps you condone this "free love"

approach to youth work? In our judgment these are grave concerns, Mrs. Shift. We

remind you that our members and parents are paying customers of the church, and some

of them are unhappy with the educational services we have been providing them. We

trust that you will work cooperatively with us in the future to remedy this. We expect

that you will be with us at our May meeting to discuss these concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Ken Buck

Jenny was so shocked and devastated by this unexpected, hostile diatribe that she

became uncharacteristically emotional and couldn't move or speak for a while. Trying as

best she could to remain calm, her panic, hurt, and anger overcame her; she began to cry.

She was simply at a loss to explain what had happened to her or how she could possibly

be seen in this light. She wondered why, since she was completely innocent of these

"awful charges," she was not able to call or write Ken, to defend herself, to hash out the

incident, and to stand up to Ken's bullying and control antics. Inside herself she felt a

loud alarm going off. Fear that she would be unfairly charged with inappropriate

conduct, smeared as a person of good character, and lose her job, overwhelmed Jenny.

After hearing her painful tale that evening, Shep, her husband, comforted Jenny as

best he could, counseling her to look into things more thoroughly before over-reacting.

"It's just a small group of petty people who are used to having their way," he observed.

"They aren't worth getting upset over. Can't you pull yourself together so we won't look

like idiots at the PTA meeting tonight?" Angry at how Jenny had brought her work

problems home, he added, "I'd like to march right down there and give them a piece of my mind!" With Shep's tentative support, Jenny's anxiety just wouldn't go away.

After a while Jenny was able to pull herself together enough to call Pastor Dan. Upon hearing the details of the email he exclaimed, "Good Lord, Jenny, I thought you were on top of things. I don't have time for this petty crap. Call Flora and ask her what's going on. The last thing we want is someone encouraging a rebellion of the Sunday School parents. And we certainly don't want to tick off Ken Buck. He just about pays your salary with his pledge!"

APPENDIX H

SMALL GROUP EXIT INTERVIEW

QUESTIONNAIRE

SMALL GROUP FINAL QUESTIONS

(please use a separate sheet of paper if needed)

Interviews with all Participants

- **What insights have you gained?**

That theories related to an individual's family are very similar to the theories of

church families.

Reactivity vs Reflective response

Over/under functioning

The only person you can fix is yourself

However relationship in your family of origin influences your reactions with others

- **What did you find most/least useful or meaningful?**

Applying FST for better functioning and health

The dangers of over/under functioning

Improved self-awareness

Self-differentiation is still unclear

Two weeks between sessions was too long

- **How can what you learned be applied to your life, your family, and our church?**

How over-functioning cripples people- creating immature adults, harming the church, destroys community

Families of origin impacting life today

I realized how much peer pressure influences my life

- **If you were part of this group again, what would you like to see done differently?**

More and longer sessions

Less time between sessions

More opportunities to "act out" the concepts- role play or application activities

Add another couple

** Everyone said the group was beneficial and would recommend it to others.

   Most thought it should be offered to all leaders.

Evaluation of Small Group Sessions

- **What did you enjoy most from the sessions together?**

Interacting with others and hearing their stories… "I enjoyed getting to *really* know

people."

- **What worked well?**

Hands on activities- watching people's interactions with each other.

People grew closer together and were able to share their stories and life without

feeling threatened.

- **How can the small group sessions be improved?**

Adding more people?

More time and longer sessions to allow people to share their stories and experiences.

- **How would you describe this small group to someone?**

"The group was designed to give participants the opportunity to learn how families

are similar to church families with fun times, struggles, disappointments and hard

work. To be a well-functioning family or church there has to be good

communication, defined goals and well-functioning leaders."

Evaluation of Overall Process

- **What was successful?**

Understanding the role of triangles in family systems and church systems- how they

 change and how they manage conflict, create fusion or cut-offs.

"I better understand myself and why I do or react the way I do."

- **Were the goals and objectives clearly communicated?**

Yes- each session was clearly explained and the goals and objectives reached.

- **What needs to be added to facilitate deeper learning?**

More time for each session

Follow readings/ homework

More insight into our families

- **How has the project impacted the church?**

Creating stronger leaders who can make better decisions and avoid chronic anxiety

caused by problems.

Deeper thought and less reactivity in decision making- self-differentiated leadership

where all opinions are respected and heard.

- **What future impact do you foresee the application of FST having on the church?**

Improved understanding of one another.

Realizing problems will always exist and improved conflict management.

Helping people see their part in problems and solutions.

Evaluation of Study/Session Materials

- **What was most helpful in bringing the subject to life?**

Watching committees in the church and applying my learning- watching people react in power struggles, rebellion, wanting a quick fix, etc.

The genograms helped me better understand myself.

The short stories brought the concepts to life…

- **Did the study materials enhance your learning? If so, how?**

Yes, they helped me reflect on my learning.

The stories seemed ridiculous at first, but then I realized how true they were…

The materials made the concepts real….

- **What elements would be beneficial to add to the class materials?**

More video

A written summary for each session

Evaluation of Candidate's Leadership

- **What strengths did the leader demonstrate?**

Knowledge of the material and subject

Sensitive to different learners, making sure there was understanding before moving

forward

Shared personal experiences

Communication of goals

Used humor to ease the tension when necessary

- **Where are the 'growing edges' for the leader? (What areas need further attention?)**

Number the handouts in the course materials.

Organization of class materials- instead of supplying materials for each session

separately, provide all class materials at the beginning of the small group.

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