

2-2023

# Ideas Explosion! How Church Can Create More Ideas

Scott M. Shelton  
sshelton20@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Shelton, Scott M., "Ideas Explosion! How Church Can Create More Ideas" (2023). *Doctor of Ministry*. 564.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/564>

This Project Portfolio is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

IDEAS EXPLOSION!

HOW CHURCH CAN CREATE MORE IDEAS



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

SCOTT M. SHELTON

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. EKAPUTRA TUPAMAHU

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



# **PORTLAND SEMINARY**

George Fox University

## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Scott M. Shelton

has been approved by  
the Evaluation Committee on March 15, 2023  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

### Evaluation Committee:

Primary Project Faculty: Ekaputra Tupamahu, PhD

Second Project Faculty: Jeffery Savage, DMin

Lead Mentor: MaryKate Morse, PhD

Evaluation Committee Referee: Loren Kerns, PhD

Copyright © 2023 by Scott M. Shelton

All rights reserved

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family. Stephanie, my wife, is my rock and source of encouragement. She reminds me endlessly of my abilities, calling, and values. Without her, none of this would be possible. Through the years, we have moved to various churches in unique parts of the United States that have given me perspective on what a church can be. Her adventurous spirit keeps me pushing for more.

In addition, my children Macy, Lincoln, and Karis keep me grounded on what is most important. Being your father is the greatest gift I have ever received. I hope you will never stop dreaming. A group of people genuinely seeking the way of Jesus – find them and never let go.

I also dedicate this work to the people in the churches where I have served. Many people in these churches gave me the creative license to explore and innovate long before I believed in its primacy for churches. In doing so, you took a great risk on me as a young and ambitious man seeking his pastoral calling. Thank you for the successes and the failures.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the churches I have served: you have been loyal companions in some of the ministry's fun and difficult lessons. I am honored to have served with you. Our work together has guided this project. I am always grateful. One church in Annapolis, Maryland took a high-risk chance on a young pastor from Texas - Heritage Baptist Church. We did not know each other all those years ago, but we have grown together. Thank you for allowing me the freedom to share some of the things we have learned. I am honored to be your pastor. Let's keep dreaming and creating!

To my fellow pastors who have struggled in countless meetings and brainstorming sessions: Kyle Henderson, Chris Stapper, Wade Huggins, Cindy Henderson, Ross Shelton, Skye Hallman McQuillan, Ralph Manuel, Willie Hadnot Jr., Michelle Rivera, Heather Mooney, Chris Curran, and Jeff Moran. We have all been on this road together and created some incredible things. Through you, I have learned to dream.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Ekaputra Tupamahu of Portland Seminary for his review, thoughtfulness, and encouragement during the process of this project. His life and ministry served as a constant inspiration to persevere.

## Epigraph

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-13

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?'

'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?'

For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen!"

Romans 11:33-36

# Table of Contents

Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Epigraph .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	ix
List of Abbreviations.....	x
Glossary .....	xi
Research Method.....	xii
Abstract.....	xiii
Introduction .....	1
Discovery Phase .....	2
Discovery Workshop and Interviews .....	2
NPO Development .....	2
Key Findings .....	3
Design Phase .....	4
Idea 1 - Modular.....	4
Idea 2 - Training .....	4
Idea 3 - Consulting .....	5
Delivery Phase .....	5
The Project and Future .....	5
Summary of the Research Journey .....	6
Doctoral Project .....	7
Project Overview.....	8
Presentation of Project.....	8
Introduction .....	8
The Project .....	8



Starting Point and Findings .....	8
Personal Experience .....	9
THE GDD Process .....	10
THE BOOK – IDEA EXPLOSION! .....	14
<i>Idea Explosion!</i> Table of Contents .....	15
Assessment.....	15
Benchmarks .....	15
Relevance .....	16
Usefulness .....	16
Willingness.....	16
Findings.....	16
Relevance .....	16
Usefulness .....	17
Willingness.....	17
Project Launch Plan .....	18
Doctoral Project Description.....	19
NPO Statement.....	19
Project Description: .....	19
Audience.....	19
Development Plan .....	20
Spring 2023 .....	20
Summer 2023 .....	20
Fall 2023 .....	20
Beyond .....	21
Development Process .....	21
Appendix A– Milestone 1 The NPO Charter.....	22
Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay .....	45
Appendix C–Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report .....	62

Appendix D–Milestone 4 Design Research Report .....	77
Appendix E–Project Appendix Documentation .....	91
APPENDIX 1 .....	92
APPENDIX 2 – Introduction and Part 2 of <i>Idea Explosion!</i> .....	93
Introduction .....	93
Part 2: The Process – Chapters 3-6 .....	96
Appendix F–Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation.....	131
Appendix 1: .....	132
Bibliography.....	135

## List of Figures

Figure 1 .....	99
Figure 2 .....	103
Figure 3 .....	112
Figure 4 .....	119

# List of Abbreviations

NPO – Need, Problem, Opportunity

GDD Process – The Gather-Discern-Decide Process

# Glossary

**Established Churches** – any church that has been around long enough to have existing traditions to guide their action and decision-making.

**GDD Process** – The Gather-Discern-Decide Process is an ideation process within the context of a local church.

**Healthy Church** – There are many parts that help foster a culture of health in a congregation. For the purposes of this project, exploration and innovation are aspects required for a church to move forward productively in healthy ways. While it is not intended to be an exhaustive statement on church health, it is vital to the current and future aspects of church wellness.

**Ideation** – the process of generating ideas around a particular topic.

**Co-create** – the belief that God desires to work with humanity to generate new things.

**Church Leaders** – A person who occupies a leadership position (formally or informally) in a church context. Often in a structured meeting, this is held by the senior/lead pastor, but for the purposes of this project, it is not limited to them.

## Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilizes a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

## Abstract

In this project, I am addressing my NPO: *A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation*. One of the key findings is that there is not enough material focused on how a healthy<sup>1</sup> church can process and explore ideas. In addition, church leaders often feel ill-equipped for a process that requires creativity. Believing that God made everyone creative, especially the church, this project is a book that details a system to explore ideas, properly discern strengths and weaknesses, and prepare leaders to make informed decisions. I created the Gather-Discern-Decide (GDD) Process from research findings, personal experiences, and feedback to guide ideation for churches. The project targets pastors and church leaders with 400 or fewer members in congregationally led systems.

The book currently contains six chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion. Part 1 (chapters 1 and 2) of the book seeks to establish humanity's partnership with God in the works of creation. It includes four values that a healthy ideation process reinforces in a congregation. Part 2 (chapters 3-6) details the GDD Process and its ability to leverage low-risk creative endeavors into larger, risky church goals. The GDD Process helps build a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

---

<sup>1</sup> There are many parts that help foster a culture of health in a congregation. For the purposes of this project, exploration and innovation are aspects required for a church to move forward productively in healthy ways. While it is not intended to be an exhaustive statement on church health, it is vital to the current and future aspects of church wellness.

## Introduction

I was in a place of unknowing. The church I served was in chaos. The new senior pastor led with militant enthusiasm in all the wrong directions. Staff meetings were spent belittling members who left the church. Hierarchical power was leveraged with threats and fear-mongering. My wife and I were praying for a way out. We knew that one phone call could change our situation.

Therefore, we prayed and waited. A phone call did finally come, but it was from a smaller congregation an hour and a half away from the nearest big city. By a worldly mind, it was a step down the ministry ladder. However, the pastor captured my attention by breaking the traditional rules of the search process. I was intrigued by his unconventional directness, honesty, and eagerness caused me to be intrigued. He wanted to meet with my wife and me the *next* day. We quickly agreed. He thoughtfully brought everyone I would be working with, including the secretary, with him to the meeting. This pastor broke all the rules, and I wondered why? I knew that in this place there was nothing off-limits to be explored, improved, or innovated. It would be an incredible opportunity to grow. In those years of ministry, I learned that an established congregation in a relatively obscure town could leverage its communal gifts of brainstorming to maximize its potential. As will be shown in scenario one of chapter 3, this congregation's desire to explore and be innovative in low-risk tasks prepared it for the more costly moments of ministry. What I experienced was a church alive with belief: there was an expectation that low-risk and high-risk endeavors would be thoroughly explored because this was an established part of its culture.

These experiences continue to influence my current ministry context as a senior pastor of an established congregation of 100 family units. The church sits in the middle of three public housing communities in the capital city of Maryland. Its lengthy history in Annapolis means that there are many wonderful and complicated expressions of ministry. When I arrived seven years ago, the church was in the midst of looking for options for their future, including disbanding and selling all church assets. I realized that this was a congregation primed for revitalization if they would be willing to explore all ideas and responsively innovate.

A rapidly changing world, emerging social expectations, and a global pandemic have continued to reinforce my suspicion that the church needs to be open to all possible ideas to be part of God's work in the world. The limitations that churches experience are primarily self-imposed: the typical view is that outside forces are creating chaos for the church. Churches often unfairly blame their problems on outside society instead of taking responsibility for their own deficiencies. The internal systems within congregations are consciously and unconsciously undercutting the powerful work of ideation that can occur within a church. Building a culture of exploration must be a primary task of church leaders.

The primacy of exploration within the church is the center of my ministry. Therefore, at the onset of this program, I knew I wanted to study how churches can be more creative. With the experiences of established churches stepping forward to explore and innovate, I began seeking sojourners who would help me dream of a project that could allow churches to properly consider their involvement



in innovation. Through stakeholder meetings, one-on-one discussions, my own experiences and research, I have been able to make several significant contributions that I hope will benefit established churches that are looking for a process of exploration and innovation.

## Discovery Phase

During the discovery phase, I sought to understand the need, problem, or opportunity (NPO) around creativity in churches. Therefore, I needed to bring the most creative, open, and forward-thinking leaders I could acquire into one place. To do this, I traveled from Annapolis, Maryland, to Dallas, Texas, to gather in person with five other clergy and church leaders to help establish an appropriate NPO that would bring focus to my research.

### DISCOVERY WORKSHOP AND INTERVIEWS

The discovery workshop was set up at a church in Dallas, Texas, that gave participants a space to spread out (during COVID) in a safe and comfortable atmosphere. In this all-day workshop, everyone had ample opportunity to share their theories, ideas, and critiques. This group aimed to help me establish an NPO to serve as the base for my research and project development. Various activities were put into place to help us creatively think through all the root causes of why church leaders do not have creative brainstorming strategies within their churches.

After the workshop, the one-on-one interviews with three church leaders in the Annapolis and Washington, DC, areas confirmed the NPO that I had formulated. In addition, it served as a way to clarify and adapt the NPO for my context in Maryland. One modification in the NPO's development was adding the word "courageously" to describe the work of leadership (NPO 4). However, it was later removed after a discussion with another stakeholder (NPO 5). The removal came because "courageously" is implied in the act of a leader choosing to build a culture of exploration and innovation.

### NPO DEVELOPMENT

The NPO has gone through 4 phases of change in the process of its development. The phases began with my hypothesis of the NPO (NPO 1). It was clarified for simplicity by my project faculty (NPO 2). Then, the key stakeholders (NPO 3) spent three hours analyzing the language in my NPO and helping generate new ways of stating the target. They suggested that the statement needs to have a more optimistic tone so it does not unfairly criticize leaders for their inability to explore and innovate. Through one-on-one interviews (NPO 4), the NPO expanded slightly. However, upon further reflection with my last one-on-one interviewee, I returned to the NPO that came out of my workshop (NPO 5). I went into the discovery workshop with a general sense of how I thought the NPO should be addressed. Thankfully, through several rounds of clarification, we landed at a positive and affirming NPO that addresses the root causes of why churches do not innovate and embrace an exploratory mindset.

**NPO 1:** Established churches often trade easy programs, antiquated systems of communication, and closed-mindedness for the deeper, God-given task of exploration into areas of unique calling

and creativity. The failure to embrace group-brainstorming techniques in quick and functional ways has kept many established churches isolated from people anticipating a uniquely creative God.

**NPO 2:** Established churches often trade easy programs, outdated systems of communication, and closed systems for the deeper, God-given task of exploration into areas of unique calling and creativity.

**NPO 3:** A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

**NPO 4:** A healthy church courageously nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

**NPO 5:** A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

## Key Findings

One of the things we discussed in the discovery workshop was the baggage that the word “creative” holds for some leaders. Many leaders do not feel comfortable with this word and relegate creative tasks to others instead of embracing their own God-given ability to generate new, thoughtful, and responsive ideas. They often say, “I am not creative” or “I leave that up to our worship pastor because they are creative.” Because of this, I decided that in the NPO and all my other writings, it is wide if I stay away from using this word in order to communicate the fact that everyone is a part of the culture of exploration and innovation.

Additionally, determining the root causes was key to target my research and project implementation. In this process of discovering the root causes, I realized that many of these causes were quite common and universal. The universality of the findings demonstrates that church leaders are struggling to establish a culture of exploration and innovation. The root causes must be addressed with thoughtfulness and intentionality. Here are the root causes that my stakeholder workshop found:

- **Focused on the wrong things:** Leaders are often too focused on daily interruptions and they overlook the broader calling of discipleship that requires development and change.
- **Fear:** Leaders are afraid of expanding ideas due to job security or disappointing members.
- **Reliance on former success:** Leaders can easily rely on former successes instead of continuing to explore and innovate. It is the “good enough” mindset.
- **Failure to recognize that we all are beloved by God:** A failure exists in embracing the Imago Dei within individuals and members.
- **Cost and weariness of leaders:** Leaders can roll with established norms because of the complex nature of producing change.
- **Poorly trained:** Leaders are not trained to tactfully challenge long-held positions.

- **Short-term mindset:** Thinking is focused on short-term results. Responsible leaders do whatever is needed to keep pushing an organization forward, even if that requires fewer personal rewards.
- **Lack of relationships/trust among members:** No one can freely explore or innovate without trust. The failure of leaders to establish deep relationships means parishioners are unlikely to share, dream, or cultivate change with them.

## Design Phase

In the design phase, I focused on brainstorming how best to address my NPO. More than anything, I wanted to create something that would help church leaders find pathways for exploration and innovation. I came into the design workshop with several ideas but remained open to hearing the ideas and feedback.

The design workshop was designed to generate as many ideas as possible and to have time to discern the strengths and weaknesses of each idea. The stakeholder group was the original participants of the discovery workshop. Gathering the same people was intentional because it allowed them to continue to be a part of the process of discerning potential project ideas.

The design workshop was conducted virtually to maximize time for all participants. The format gave room for the group to participate fully. Before the workshop began, I told each participant that I was looking to gather ideas. I wanted them to come ready to share their thoughts. During the workshop, I gave a brief overview of the NPO and reminded everyone how we arrived at that statement. We then started to brainstorm. I listed the ideas as they were shared. Afterward, each person was given time to ask clarifying questions about the proposed concepts. It was a great time of brainstorming in which I could hear many unique ideas. Allowing the participants to ask each other questions helped me discern what ideas caught their attention.

After the workshop, the three one-on-one interviews helped me determine the viability of ideas and clarify three potential project ideas. The three one-on-one participants were two senior pastors and a cross-cultural missionary professor. Each of them values adaptability and creative expression. Their input ensured that I was addressing the NPO's targets. From these meetings, the three concepts that emerged were:

**IDEA 1 - MODULAR PROGRAM:** Create a modular program (online and print) that guides a congregation through a process of addressing the root causes of unhealthy habits and helps solve a problem. This will foster a sense of exploration and innovation in a subversive way as it asks probing questions of a group before arriving at solutions. This may be especially important in churches resistant to the language around creativity.

**IDEA 2 - TRAINING:** Full-church training and curriculum that allows a congregation to participate in the learning process of exploration and innovation. The emphasis would be on the entire church's participation and discovery.

**IDEA 3 - CONSULTING:** Create a business that allows me to guide pastors and church leaders through a process of exploration and innovation. This can be around a specific issue or a broader culture the leadership is attempting to create.

## Delivery Phase

The process between the design and delivery phases clarified the project's scope, benchmarks, and long-term objectives. I was continually reminded that I could not solve all the issues in one project. This understanding forced me to consider what an initial phase should be. For churches to have a healthy culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation, their leaders must be equipped. Therefore, the leaders of a congregation are my prime target. In addition, I wanted the scope to include churches with 400 or fewer members. Besides it is the majority of churches in America, these congregations are less likely to spend time engaging in exploration and innovation. The complex situations in these congregations require their staffs to fill multiple roles. While this seems to require creativity, it also means that one can be caught in a trap of endless work. In this type of environment, the urgent needs of administration often trump the critical work of innovation. Therefore, it is important to create a process of ideation that could be effective and efficient while also nurturing the values of equality and fun became primary.

I then established the benchmarks of success with an assessment based on relevance, usefulness, and willingness. Next, ten different pastors and church leaders were given an overview of my project's proposal and guided through the ideation process I created. Finally, each of them filled out a Google form with questions centered around the three concentrated areas.

## The Project and Future

After all these factors were considered, I decided that a book was the natural first step to help pastors and church leaders of established congregations with 400 or fewer members begin to nurture a healthy culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. Before a curriculum can be written, a modular program put into place, or a sermon series developed, there's a need for a detailed writing about how a church can generate more ideas. Only if a church believes they can generate ideas, can it start exploring. Therefore, my project is a book called *Idea Explosion! How Churches Can Create More Ideas*.

The concern is not a church's inability to generate *an* idea. Instead, it is to help generate *more* ideas. The emphasis on *more* summarizes the goal of my project. When *more* ideas are gathered, a church is in a better spot to provide relevant solutions to their complex problems. However, churches and their leaders often consciously or unconsciously undermine brainstorming activity because of their inability to suspend judgment and refrain from criticism. *Idea Explosion!* walks church leaders through a process I call the Gather-Discern-Decide Process (GDD Process).

*Idea Explosion!* can be an immediate resource for church leaders who seek to find ways of integrating a process of ideation. The guidelines at the end of chapters 3-5 intend to be an efficient resource for leaders to utilize in meetings while creating a safe space to surface the ideas of others. Eventually, the GDD Process will become a natural part of developing strategies and programs.

In the future, all of the proposed ideas generated during the design phase are possible because of the detailed layout of the GDD Process. In addition to those ideas, establishing a seminar-style talk for breakout sessions at conferences and a church staff is easily adapted. Developing these areas will allow me to gather even more diverse feedback to continually edit the practices in the GDD Process.

## **Summary of the Research Journey**

The research journey has made me aware of how God has been preparing me for this project long before I was aware of its need. In the early years of ministry, I would often be frustrated by churches' failure to brainstorm effectively. More times than not, I was left frustrated by inactivity and criticism. Therefore, I chose to process ideas with a small group of trusted people. However, this left gaps in the ideation process. Experiences have been an excellent teacher to me, but until I saw it lived out in pastoral ministry, I was uncertain that churches could nurture a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. By combining the experiences of a healthy congregation where exploration and innovation are an expectation and best practices from business, I have developed a system that can help churches. I hope this resource can help churches at a "breaking point" believe that they have everything within them to be a healthy church. To establish a healthy congregation takes more than one process of ideation. However, with the best ideas on the table, a church can be better equipped to respond intentionally and thoughtfully to the needs around them. What starts as a simple idea can blossom into a thriving force in a church and its community.

# Doctoral Project

## Project Overview

The doctoral project is a book that gives pastors and church leaders the tools to create effective brainstorming through the Gather-Discern-Decide Process (GDD Process). The book targets church leaders with 400 or fewer members in a congregationally led structure.

This book is structured in three parts. Part 1 explores how the GDD Process' groundwork is infused with its biblical, theological, and values-driven principles. A proper biblical and theological understanding is central to exploration, innovation, and discernment in a faith community. Part 2 details the GDD Process and the potential pitfalls of participants. Part 3 deals with the challenges and strategies leaders should expect once the GDD Process is implemented in the church.

## Presentation of Project

### Introduction

Ideas are dreams filled with imagination and hope. They are what give a group of people a shared vision. Ideas lay the groundwork for a community to actively engage in God's mission. However, ideas are frequently cut down so quickly and they do not have time to flourish. In addition, criticizing ideas creates an environment of suppression. The implications are enormous for churches seeking to be the presence of Jesus in a skeptical society. Churches must find ways to generate ideas and discern them healthily so they can thoughtfully bear witness to Christ. The premise of this book is that *a healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation*.<sup>2</sup> This book will help the church's community know that ideation is *not* just something they do; it is who they are. Ideation will create a culture of openness and reflection.

### The Project

#### STARTING POINT AND FINDINGS

A good joke takes a listener on a journey and then lands with an unexpected twist. This punchline offers a surprise that creates a memory. I began this program with the premise that churches need to explore new ways of ministry that leverage the foundations of our faith. The new forms of ministry need to be like the punchline of a joke that surprises people. A church's ability to reframe the longstanding traditions of faith in a captivating way will allow the gospel to be heard from a new perspective.

With this in mind, I traveled to Texas to meet with a group of stakeholders that would help me properly consider what need, problem, or opportunity surrounded this desire within me. We

---

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1

concluded that healthy churches nurture a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. With this in mind, I researched the available material in secular and faith-based literature surrounding organizations' ability to explore and innovate appropriately.

One of the findings from the research was that there are many resources that target the for-profit industry and there's a growing amount of writing that focuses on churches. The result is a consensus that all organizations must constantly evaluate their viability in the current and future markets. This understanding is widely held in the open market. However, there is a stubborn resistance in the church to think through the objectives of our mission and to properly evaluate their overall effectiveness and relevance to a rapidly developing society. In this sense, the church should always look at ways to frame its ministries to relevant strategies that target communities' current mindsets, cultures, and expectations. Also, this should be done with a lively exploratory mindset that requires creativity. The *need* and *ability* to explore are at the crux of the matter. Most church literature encourages new iterations of traditional practices but fails to guide leaders in how to get to the new idea.

In my study of the biblical and theological grounding for innovation, I found God's ability to adapt and invite humanity into the change process. God does not require changelessness. Instead, people can be resistant to change for many reasons. Resistance to an exploratory mindset limits our understanding of God, who invites humanity to partner with Him. Therefore, to be spiritually and organizationally robust, the church must be willing to venture on the journey to explore and innovate.

Several project options were identified as potential solutions to the question, how can a church humbly explore and responsively innovate? Other questions that kept reframing the project were: how can the resource become something that church leaders *actually* utilize? What format would be the best resource? What can be created that might serve as a launching pad for future resources for churches seeking to explore and innovate? All these questions were the framework for creating a book that targeted how churches can generate lots of ideas, discern together, and make wise decisions.

## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

The content of this book is gathered from personal experiences and works to contextualize Edward De Bono's book *Six Thinking Hats*.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of many years in church contexts that allowed me the freedom to explore and innovate utilizing De Bono's strategy of ideation, I have been able to personalize methods and reframe them for the context of church settings. My book is an assortment of gathered material from many sources. The greatest source has been the experience I have gained in pastoral leadership, especially in times when I attempted to bring about change in established churches. These changes, while difficult, were more easily, peacefully, and corporately

---

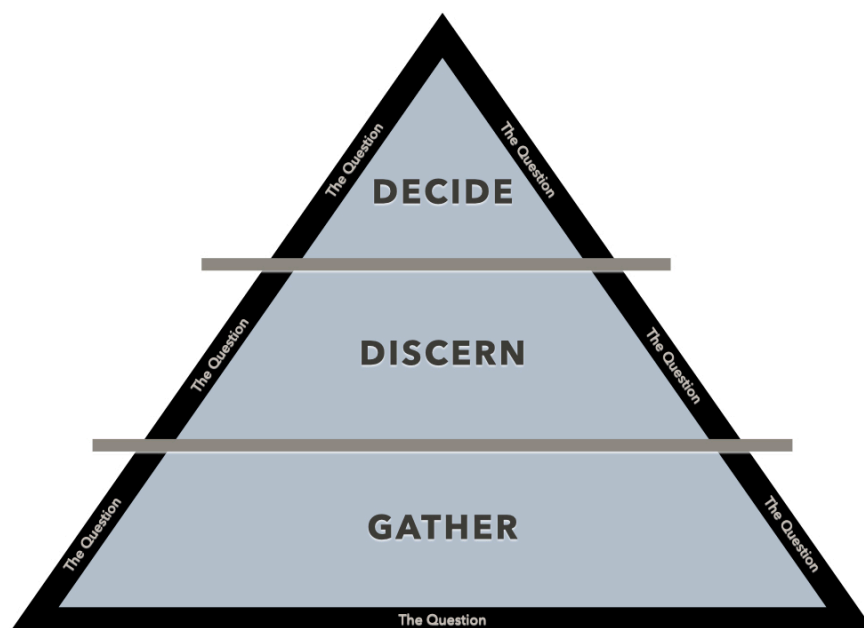
<sup>3</sup> Edward De Bono, *Six Thinking Hats* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999).



supported when all ideas were channeled through a process. Too many things are lost when an individual (typically a leader) impulsively and singlehandedly decide on an idea. Therefore, I created a tool for church leaders to guide them through the process of ideation.

## THE GDD PROCESS

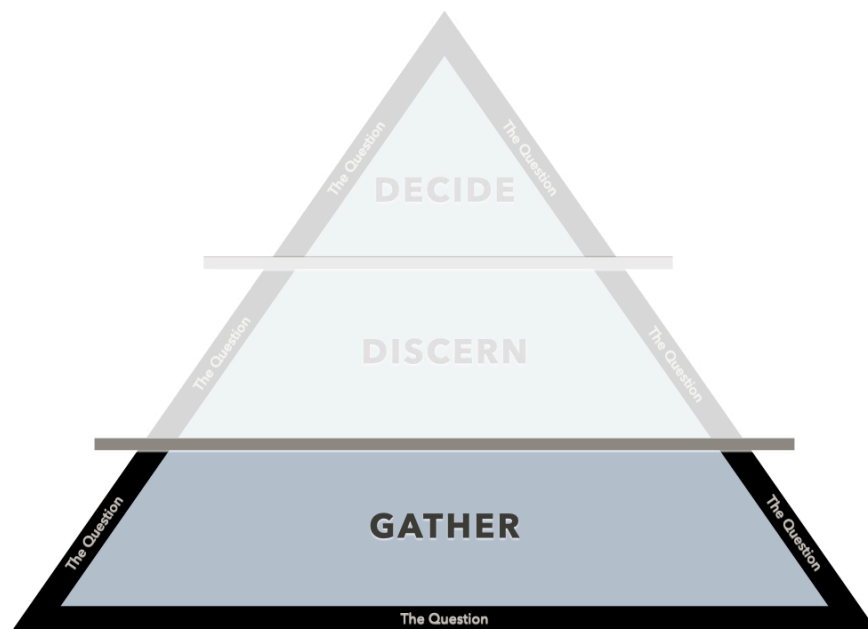
The shape, outline, and phases of the GDD Process seek to make the exploration of ideas easier to achieve maximum creativity. The graphics are created to visually represent the GDD Process. "What question or problem are we trying to solve?" is the starting point of the process. It will guide the ideation, discernment, and decision phases of the GDD Process.



The word "creativity" is used sparingly throughout the book. However, after encountering many church leaders who refer to themselves as "not creative," I found that using the word would immediately turn some pastors away. They tend to delegate anything that requires creativity to others within their congregation. Two reasons stand out as to why this happens. First, they are insecure about new ideas because it requires honesty, vulnerability, and time. They need a clear, simple, proven process to implement and develop a sense of confidence. Second, church leaders are often afraid of being wrong or perceived as being extreme in their ideas. This would naturally open them up to criticism that they would prefer to avoid. Pastors feel that they are unable to create a process of ideation. However, part of the importance of the GDD Process is to help pastors and leaders see themselves as creatives! These leaders stand before intelligent people, exposit ancient texts into current times, and lead people into worship, but unfortunately, they often do not see themselves as a creative force. As I press into these pastors and leaders, I am reminded that leaders often have an overly-critical view of themselves. Therefore, the GDD Process shows how pastors can lead in forming new ideas. Chapters 3-5 explore each of the three phases of the GDD Process and end with a summation of the seven guidelines that can be leveraged as a quick reference for leaders. The guidelines are:

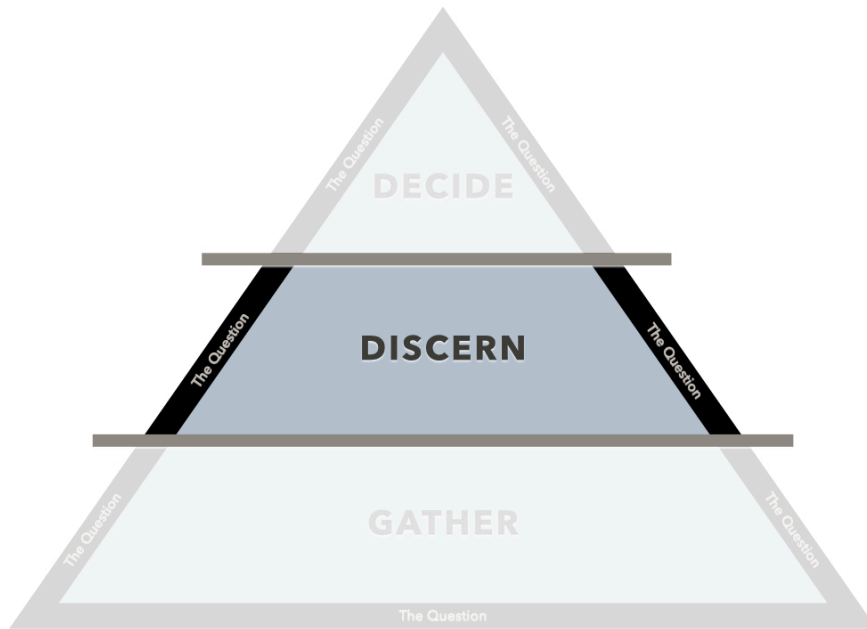
**Phase 1: Gathering** – generating as many ideas as possible*Guidelines*

- Ideas are verbally submitted.
- Each idea is written down for everyone to see.
- No idea is rejected.
- No idea is verbally or non-verbally critiqued, attacked, or accosted.
- No idea is defended or justified.
- Seek outlandish ideas.
- Everyone in the room is a contributor.



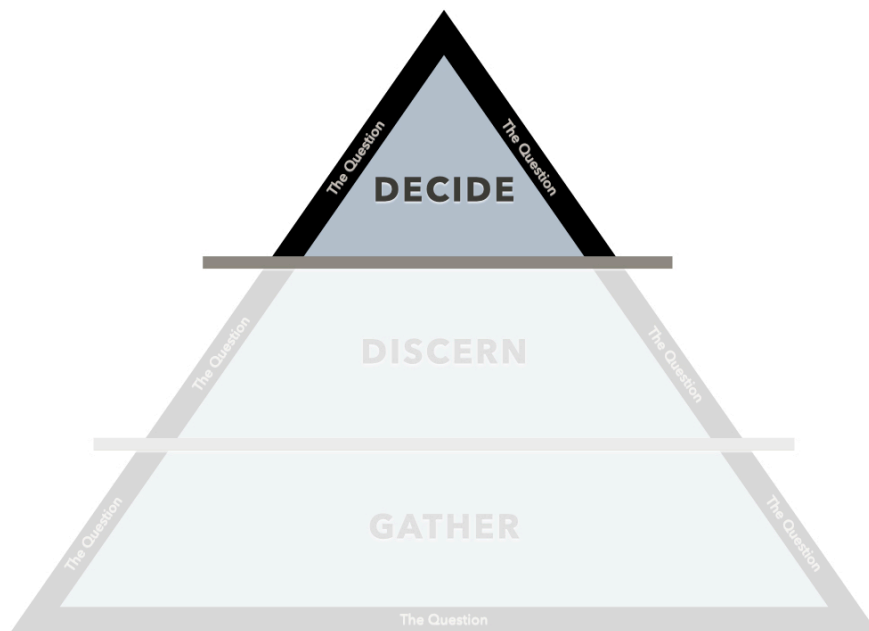
**Phase 2: Discern** – determining what needs to stay*Guidelines*

- Each idea is briefly reviewed.
- Ask clarifying questions about ideas.
- Very similar ideas can be paired together.
- Add additional ideas that might come to mind.
- Give everyone in the room time to process and privately list their top 3 or 5 ideas.
- List their top ideas from the list.
- Review all ideas that receive points or votes.



**Phase 3: Deciding** – determining a final idea*Guidelines*

- Take a 5-minute break.
- During the break, a leader should erase the eliminated ideas.
- Review ideas again.
- Test the feasibility by time, finances, people-power, and cultural implications.
- If needed, bring others into the decision-making realm.
- The leader must be willing to bring finality to the GDD Process by making final decisions based on all available information.
- Begin an implementation process.



## THE BOOK - IDEA EXPLOSION!

Embedded within the fabric of the GDD Process are four essential values required to help establish a healthy church culture and make it accessible to its leaders. Those values are ease, efficiency, equity, and fun. These values are established throughout the three phases of the GDD Process: Gather Phase, Discern Phase, and Decide Phase.

Depending on the situation, a group can enter the process at different points. The level of detail or what phase to enter the GDD Process will need to be determined by the leader. Some decisions need help generating ideas. Other times, a group may struggle with deciding between several good ideas. And finally, if the issue is serious enough, a full-scale GDD Process would be most helpful. The success of this process, however, depends on the leader's ability to lead with confidence.

Currently, the introduction and chapters 1-6 are completed.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 1 focuses on the biblical and theological themes around divine invitation to participate in the work of creation. Chapter 2 outlines the four values of ease, efficiency, equality, and fun. These values are both practical and biblical truth.

The second part (chapters 3-6) begins with a scenario of a church in a mid-size rural town in Texas that nurtured humble exploration and responsive innovation in all parts of the church. They were able to generate ideas around low-risk and high-risk endeavors. This allowed them to be in an advantageous situation when they were asked to host refugees from Hurricane Katrina. The ability of this congregation to generate ideas quickly, thoughtfully, and in unity gave them the creative muscles to answer the challenge and opportunities that came to them. Chapter 3 speaks about the book's most important contribution: how to generate as many ideas as possible. Chapter 4 gives the leader a guide to processing the ideas that are worth further exploration as they are discerned by the group. Chapter 5 narrows the focus toward the leader as decisions begin to be made: no idea can be implemented until it is determined what the group is doing. Therefore, the leader's challenge is making the wisest decision with all the available information. This is basically a collective effort that involves as many people as possible. Chapter 6 speaks to the "people pitfalls" that everyone must be aware of in a brainstorming session. Those pitfalls are the "devil's advocate," the "everything-is-impossible person," and the "reluctant leader." They can destroy the process of generating ideas. The goal is to eliminate these pitfalls from the group.

The final two chapters will address the potential challenges of the GDD Process, such as unhealthy mindsets, unwilling traditions, and practical strategies to healthily implement the GDD Process against various barriers. Chapter 7 will highlight the barriers that may arise from the unseen forces of culture in the church. Those barriers include tradition, laissez-faire attitudes, distrust of leaders and self, and a lack of urgency. A culture of exploration and innovation will only work if leaders have

---

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 2.

a healthy understanding of the circumstances that limit them from fully embracing an exploratory mindset. Chapter 8 will discuss how the barriers are a powerful force within the church and push the congregation in various ways. It is not enough to know the barriers. A leader must take proactive stances to foster a new culture of alertness to the things that hold the church back. Areas of focus will be an evaluation of self, building an exploratory mindset and culture, Route versus Retreat (combating an all-or-nothing mindset), working up and down the chain of command, patience, and how to bring others with you. The table of contents is presented below:

## ***IDEA EXPLOSION! TABLE OF CONTENTS***

### **Introduction**

### **Part 1: The Groundwork**

Chapter 1 - **Partnership with God**

Chapter 2 - **Four Values**

### **Part 2: The Process**

Chapter 3 - **Gather**

Chapter 4 - **Discern**

Chapter 5 - **Decide**

Chapter 6 - **The People Pitfalls**

### **Part 3: The Practice**

Chapter 7 - **Unseen Challenges to GDD**

Chapter 8 - **Practical Strategies to Overcome Barriers**

### **Conclusion**

## **Assessment**

### **Benchmarks**

Three major benchmarks for this project are: relevance, usefulness, and willingness. They will determine the success of the GDD Process. Each of the benchmarks targets not just the viability of the project but also its potential to influence the culture of a church. The three markers serve as a way of determining the potential success of the project and its cultural implications. That is to say, the project's mission is as much about generating more ideas as it is about establishing a culture of ideation.

Relevance, usefulness, and willingness were developed as the key benchmarks through stakeholder conversations, research, and best practices. Any new process that targets pastors must seriously consider their overworked conditions. Creating something new must add immediate benefit to their work with staff and volunteers. Feedback through formal and informal channels has made this abundantly clear. Pastors do not have the time or patience for *another* program. Instead, if it is to be a benefit and consequently successful, it must be easy to learn, direct, and useful. For example, it is much more likely to be implemented if it can serve the practical needs of the church and help reiterate the values of a church's culture.

**RELEVANCE:** This question is targeted at the church leader's belief in the need for the GDD Process in a local church context. This benchmark aims at analyzing the importance for churches to learn a system to generate ideas. Relevance is essentially a cultural question. In chapter 2, two cultural values of "equality" and "fun" are highlighted as outcomes of implementing the GDD Process within a church. The theory is that the GDD Process, when appropriately used, will strengthen a church's values of equality and fun, and therefore make the GDD Process relevant.

**USEFULNESS:** This deals with leveraging the three-phased approach of the GDD Process into the church's life. Often new systems take time and effort to implement. One of the GDD Process goals is its ability to be easily learned by a leader. In addition, the phases of the GDD Process can be used at different points for exploring new ideas. Emphasis was placed on the ease and efficiency of communicating the GDD Process in chapter 2. The ease of learning the system helps make it more useful for leaders, and the efficiency is the speed at which it can be implemented.

**WILLINGNESS:** A critical component of the GDD Process is a congregation's receptivity to an idea-generating process. This survey was given to church leaders, who were asked to figure out a congregation's receptivity. The answers are primarily based on their experiences trying to install a new system, idea, or change. While something can be relevant and useful, a congregation and its leaders must be willing to experiment.

## Findings

Ten pastors and church leaders completed a survey after a one-on-one meeting or group session to explain the GDD Process. During these times, participants gave clarifying questions to help shape the book's chapters. In addition to these pastors and church leaders, who make up the formal statistical calculations, others have given excellent feedback over the last three years of processing the role and impact of the GDD Process within a church.

**RELEVANCE** was determined by participants answering, *Is the present content (GDD Process) relevant to church ministry?* The answers ranged from 1 to 10 (1 being not relevant at all and 10 being extremely relevant). Eight or higher shows "great confidence" in the process. Five to seven shows "confidence but some doubt." Four or fewer show "little to no confidence."

The benchmark is that 80% of church leaders feel the work of the GDD Process is relevant to the life of their congregation and its staff.

The results were: 2 – eight votes, 1 – nine vote, and 7 – ten votes. Therefore, all (100%) participants had “great confidence” that the GDD Process was relevant for their congregations. The benchmark was achieved.

**USEFULNESS** was determined by participants answering, *How likely would you be to utilize this resource for your team?* The answers ranged from 1 to 10 (1 being not likely and 10 being very likely). A score of eight or higher shows they “would utilize the GDD Process.” A score of five to seven would show “some hesitancy in utilizing the process.” Four or fewer means they “would not participate in the GDD Process with their team.”

The benchmark is that 80% of church leaders would use the GDD Process for their teams.

The result totals were: 2 – eight votes, 1 – nine vote, and 7 – ten votes. All participants (100%) would use the GDD Process with their team. The benchmark was achieved.

**WILLINGNESS** was determined by the church leader's thinking from their member's angle. They were asked, *After reviewing the material, how likely would you say churches are to try new approaches to generating ideas?* The answers were scaled from 1 through 5 (1 being highly unlikely to 5 being very likely). The answers have variants due to the church leader's own biases. However, it is important to determine if they think their congregation would be open to experimenting with the GDD Process. A score of five will show “certainty that a church would participate.” Four reveals a “strong likelihood.” Three reveals “some doubt if a church would desire to participate.” Two or one exposes a “no confidence that a church would participate.” Therefore, a score of four or five shows that a pastor thinks a church would participate.

The benchmark is that 80% of leaders think their church would be willing to try new approaches to generating ideas through the GDD Process. A score of 4 or 5 shows what the pastor thinks is a willing congregation.

The result totals were: 5 – one vote, 4 – four votes, 3 – four votes, and 1 – one vote. Therefore, 50% say churches would participate. However, 50% say churches would be unlikely or have no confidence that churches would participate in the GDD Process. Therefore, the benchmark failed in the willingness category.

To increase a congregation's willingness, they must understand the potential gains of the GDD Process. In general, people are willing to do things that add value to their lives and experiences. Therefore, pastors need to articulate the implications of the GDD Process in nurturing an exploratory and innovative mindset. In addition, drawing attention to the importance of ideation within the church can be done through writings, social media posts, and captivating stories of churches that have chosen to utilize the GDD Process. The wider launch plan has several aspects that can target church leaders and congregations.



# Project Launch Plan

## Doctoral Project Description

**NPO Statement:** A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.<sup>5</sup>

### Project Description:

This book will give pastors and church leaders in churches of 400 persons or less the tools to create effective brainstorming through the Gather-Discern-Decide Process (GDD). Together, they will find that ideation is *not* just something they do. Instead, it is established in their church's culture through a new way of openness.

The book is structured in three parts. Part one explores how the GDD Process' groundwork is infused with biblical, theological, and values-driven principles. A proper biblical and theological understanding is central to exploration, innovation, and discernment in a faith community. Part two details the GDD Process and the potential pitfalls of participants. Part three deals with the challenges and strategies leaders should expect once the GDD Process is implemented in the church.

Through the research process, I found many authors encouraging creativity, but do not show *how* to be creative in the context of a church setting. People are told to be creative and embrace ideas but practical steps are rarely found. In addition, church leaders have little time for complicated systems requiring significant time and staff buy-in. Church volunteers are reluctant to sit through long meetings that require extended agendas. They want clear, concise, and proven systems so they can be the critical influencers in their congregations. Therefore, a system of exploration and innovation is vital to the enduring culture of a church. I believe God is inviting church leaders into a process of ownership that puts them in the spot to think creatively about the issues they are facing.

The project currently has six complete chapters, an introduction, and a supporting graphic.<sup>6</sup> Chapters 3-5 are broken into the guiding principles of each part (Gather-Discern-Decide). In the conclusion of each chapter, the guidelines are listed in a bulleted format to give the leader easy access to the information.

## Audience

The book targets pastors and church leaders serving in churches of 400 or fewer members in a congregationally led environment. These churches often have limited budgets without large endowments. The financial limitation makes creativity a necessity. In addition, having a wide

---

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2.

breadth of leadership requires the senior leaders and staff to report to the congregation. It is this type of cooperation between members, volunteers, and staff where the GDD Process would work well.

## Development Plan

### Spring 2023

- March 2023 - Approval of Portland Seminary faculty
- April 2023 - Describe the project's focus to pastors and continue to receive feedback through the Google Forms evaluation document. This will help me build all the feedback into one location.
- May 2023 - Teach the process to my congregation through a series on Wednesday evenings. While this has been taught in sections, it will be the first comprehensive teaching to my congregation.
- May 2023 - Complete chapters 7, 8, and the conclusion so the manuscript is ready to send to publishers.

### Summer 2023

- May 2023 - Seek professional editors to improve the readability of the book.
- June 2023 - Identify and contact publishers that would be likely candidates for publishing practical and leadership resources for congregations. A full manuscript will be sent to InterVarsity Press, Baker Publishing Group, Judson Press Publishers, Zondervan, and Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- July 2023 - Break the various parts into article formats for potential publication in periodicals.
- July 2023 - Inquire about sharing the GDD Process as a conference breakout session with friends in various denominational offices and roles. This will include the District of Columbia Baptist Convention, Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (national convention), and Texas Baptists.
- August 2023 - Begin creating a plan to consult with churches by establishing cost requirements and time commitments. Ask Chris Stapper and John Kirk to help me establish healthy financial requirements and boundaries.
- August 2023 - Develop a conference breakout session with slides, format, and activities.
- August 2023 - Soft launch of social media page via Instagram. Content will be reviewed and feedback will be solicited before it goes live.

### Fall 2023

- October/November 2023 - Conference breakout sessions at various locations
- September - December 2023 - Social media page via Instagram goes live.
- July - November 2023 - Church consulting - formally and informally.

## Beyond

- Book
- Breakout conference sessions
- Consulting

## Development Process

Evaluation and Data Collection: The project's ultimate success depends on how easily it can be used in a church. While the ease of use is a priority, it will require the pastor and church leaders to believe in its viability. A formal feedback questionnaire has been created through Google Forms to measure the success of its implementation. This will be the source to gather feedback from participants so that I can continuously improve presentation, written materials, and format.

There is also an intuitive component where I read body language, evaluate questions, and sense excitement within a particular group. Body language such as head nodding, leaning forward, or positive eye contact reveals an eagerness to experiment. Evaluating questions helps me learn how to articulate points more clearly and gauge curiosity. In general, questions are a sign of interest. Lastly, sensing a group's excitement can be an indication of their attentiveness to the explanation of the GDD Process.

Further Improvements and Components: Several reiterations can be produced from the book project. First, a social media page that reveals tips for generating ideas. The social media pages can help bring business concepts into the church. Instagram platform will allow easy access for pastors to develop how they can continually lead congregations to new ideas. Besides giving more usable content, new ways of brainstorming can be explored through these social media avenues. Second, videos can show how the process works in an actual meeting. Achieving a high-end recording is well within reach. Often people struggle with concepts like the GDD Process until they have seen it: the goal of the video is to show leaders how it actually can be done and useful for their church.

# Appendix A— Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

### **Personal Research Manifesto**

I will evaluate and discover by listening, learning, and setting aside assumptions to fully evaluate the core issues around the NPO.

### **NPO Statement**

A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

### **NPO Scope and Constraints**

Through this doctorate program, a strategy will be available to church leaders to help infuse established congregations with a culture of exploration and innovation. The system will be able to be implemented in issues facing church leaders. The goal will be to help establish a culture of creativity in all areas of a church. The research will be grounded in the current realities facing local congregations so they have a manageable means of exploring and innovating. A tactful and respectful approach will be applied due to the cost of challenging traditions and loss of control as new areas are explored.

### **NPO Context**

The ministry context for the NPO is for established churches in the United States. An “established church” will be defined as any faith group that has been meeting long enough to have significant procedures that guide ministry direction. Some of these procedures may be listed in official church documents or understood within long held traditions.

The NPO is an opportunity for churches to think critically and shape its organizational culture to better respond with an attitude of exploration and innovation. While the factors facing regional churches may differ, there is need among all churches to have a strategy for processing the decisions that are required to be a healthy organization.

The research and exploration of the NPO will be done primarily in a Baptist congregation that is over one-hundred years old. The congregation has a mix of ages, expectations, and viewpoints. This context forces new ideas to be tested against long-held expectations. The church is located in a mid-size American city that is representative of many American communities.

### **Root Causes**

- **Focused on the wrong things:** Leaders can often be focused on daily interruptions and forsake the wider calling of discipleship that requires development and change.
- **Fear:** Leaders are fearful of expanding ideas due to job security and/or disappointing parishioners.

- **Reliance on former success:** Leaders can easily rely on former successes instead of continually exploring and innovating the areas where God is calling. It's the good-enough mindset.
- **Not recognized we are beloved:** A failure exists in the embrace of the imago Dei within individuals and parishioners.
- **Cost and weariness of tired leadership:** Leaders can roll with established norms because of the complex nature of producing change.
- **Poorly trained:** Among leaders, there exists an inability to tactfully challenge long held positions.
- **Short term thinking:** Often thinking is focused on the short-term results. Patrick Lencioni calls it, "rewards-based leadership verses responsibility-based leadership." Responsible leaders do whatever is needed to keep pushing an organization forward, even if that requires fewer personal rewards.
- **Lack of relationships/trust among parishioners:** No one is free to explore or innovate without trust. The failure of leaders to establish deep relationships that are forged by trust means parishioners are unlikely to share, dream, or cultivate change.

### **Discovery Workshop Stakeholders**

- Participant 1: A senior pastor of a mid-size Baptist congregation
- Participant 2: A worship pastor who actively works to embrace cutting edge experiences of worship that links historical and current trends
- Participant 3: Vice President of a seminary/college who engages in the administration, teaching, and discipleship of ministers
- Participant 4: A trusted friend, writer, and speaker (female)
- Participant 5: A local church pastor of a non-denominal church (not in my tradition)

### **One-On-One Interviews**

- Participant 1: An executive director of an association of Baptist churches in Washington, D.C.
- Participant 2: A pastor and regional director for a national Baptist organization.
- Participant 3: A pastor and lead organizer of an inner-faith organization focused on social change and power shifts.

## **Key Biblical Texts**

### **Romans 12:1-2**

The link between our ability to place ourselves in a position of transformation and the actual change is a work of art that requires humble exploration and responsive innovation in our soul.

### **Joshua 1:9**

Moses turning over command to Joshua and the Lord's authoritative words speak to an anxious leader who lacks many things. He will be tested but God will ultimately give him everything he needs to succeed.

### **Exodus 31:1-6 (35:31-36)**

God's calling of Bezalel and Moses' ability to grant power is fascinating.

### **Ephesians 4:12**

The work of leadership in the church is focused on the people being equipped for full participation in the discipleship process.

## **Academic Resources**

The scope of this project will include a variety of sources from fields including Christian scripture (Robert Alter, Walter Bruggemann, N.T. Wright), the use of progressive ideas in church history (Rodney Stark, C.H. Spurgeon, David Bosch), current models of change within congregations (Tod Bolsinger, Dallas Willard), use of creativity in secular fields (Edward de Bono, Alex Osborn, Seth Godin, Jim Collins, Ed Catmull), and the origins of terms such as "brainstorming" and "group think" (Alex Osborn). Understanding how application is given in secular fields will help transfer principles into the life of a church being led by the Holy Spirit.



## **Appendix A**

### **Discovery Workshop Description**

My discovery workshop was held at Canon Creek Presbyterian Church in Richardson, Texas. All attendees traveled to the church. A room was rented so we could properly social distance and apply all CDC guidelines due to the coronavirus. We met on Thursday, October 22, 2020. The workshop went from 9 a.m. through 3 p.m.

In attendance were:

- 2 Senior Pastors
- 1 Vice President of a Seminary/College
- 1 Worship Pastor
- 1 Writer/Speaker

The attendees were ready to thoughtfully dissect my first NPO statement, which was:

“Established churches often trade easy programs, outdated systems of communication, and closed systems for the deeper, God-given task of exploration into areas of unique calling and creativity.”

### **Discovery Workshop Format/Outline**

#### ***Introductions***

- IRB
- Color assignments

#### ***Devotional/Prayer***

***Get-to-know-you:*** Fish Bowl Activity – 9:15

- Set up: Two chairs in center and others nearby listening.
- Questions to consider
  - What/where is your most memorable meal?
  - Describe your childhood home.
  - What is something you are good at?
  - What something, you think everyone should know?
  - What is your favorite book?

#### ***Establishing Norms*** – 9:30

- I’m here to listen to you.

- You are here to engage.
- I will be the emcee for the day...activities and questions that will lead us down a road.
- I trust each of you. I want to learn from each of you.
- There will be times when we may have to move on...you will always be able to send me further info/thoughts.

### **NPO Definition & Audience** 9:35-10:35

- "Established churches often trade easy programs, outdated systems of communication, and closed systems for the deeper, God-given task of exploration into areas of unique calling and creativity." - Scott
  - This is a map...not the final destination.
  - We are seeking to evaluate root causes, is it an NPO, and based on our discussion have a re-frames NPO.
- Activity: Gallery Walk
  - Questions on large sticky notes (sticky notes & stickers):
    - "it" is the NPO
    - What key issues does this NPO address?
    - Why is it important?
    - How might it be measurable?
    - Who is this NPO for?
    - What areas of church would be most impacted by this NPO?
    - How might you think of this NPO in a different way?
  - COMMENTS posted with sticky notes
  - *After comments are written...stickers for important points*
  - Drill into "who" of the NPO.

Questions being presented to me by stakeholders:

- Is this the thesis statement for research?
- What do you mean by "systems"?

- Is "you" mean "Scott" or me (the stakeholder)?
- Feels like the NPO has some frustration is behind it...maybe not going to serve you well in the future.
  - How do you approach someone who is good hearted but in a stuck church?
  - Are you rightly valuing the "other" perspective?
  - If you are going to be talking about creativity and open-ness, your statement needs room for that.
  - Try to capture their mind with the NPO that makes them go "huh!" They are not minded by "how do we do this better?" Capture their wonder!
  - People are never considering the "other" thing that could happen.
  - They do not have the permission to try something new.
- Proactive change vs. necessary change --- how do encourage and provide a safe space BEFORE the system is down?
- What's the plan for people to produce change? People often don't have a plan when a problem needs to be solved.

**Re-write** 10:35-10:45

- Needed items: legal pad and pen.
- "Re-write the NPO."

**Break**

- During break - re-write everyone's NPO in my handwriting

**Re-writing NPO** 10:55

- 5-3-1 Exercise
  - Individual (5)
    - Everyone has NPO statement...may not be their own. Highlight important additions that you see.
    - Attempt to re-word the statement you were handed.
  - Group of 2...1 person on own (3)

- Review each of the new statements
- In the group, re-write an NPO statement and merge the goods of the statements and your own.
- All (1)
  - Discuss the 3 statements
  - Attempt to get to one NPO statement

## **LUNCH**

### **Root Causes**

Why is this NPO an opportunity for established churches? (x5 times)

Answers:

1. Why?
  - a. Why?
    - i. Why?
      1. Why?

Based on the “why’s”, do we want to add/subtract anything from the NPO statement?

## **BREAK**

### **Putting It Together - Outcome**

Discovery statement – focused on the “outcome” part here.

Considering \_\_\_\_\_ (target audience), we’ve discovered \_\_\_\_\_ (NPO), which is caused by \_\_\_\_\_ (root cause). If solved, it would mean \_\_\_\_\_ (**outcome**).

- Activity: Sticky Note Outcomes...
  - Answer: If achieved, what would solutions to this NPO create (outcome)?
  - Supplies: everyone get large sticky note and pen.
    - Things you like about the particular statement on small sticky notes.

### **Debrief/Affirmation**

- What is something you gained today?
- One at a time...
  - what did participant 1 contribute?
  - What did participant 2 contribute?
  - What did participant 3 contribute?
  - What did participant 4 contribute?
  - What did participant 5 contribute?

### **Other debrief questions**

- As I continue researching, what should I be sure to examine?
- What potential blind spots should I explore?
- What are the pitfalls that I should avoid?

### **Discovery Statement**

Considering **church leaders** (audience), we've discovered that **a healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation** (NPO), which is caused by **senior leaders focused on the wrong things, fear, reliance on former success, not recognizing we are beloved, cost and weariness of tired leadership, poorly trained, short term thinking, and a lack of relationships/trust among parishioners** (root cause).

If solved, it would mean **deeper disciples, health, longevity of programs, sense of adventure among parishioners, larger by-in, greater energy, more people to the table, increased faith conversations, and authenticity** (outcome).

### **Critical Insights from Discovery Workshop**

After several rounds and activities to help target the NPO's audience we were then able to grapple with the aim of the NPO. It was determined that the original NPO should be shifted to an opportunity statement. This shift was critical for how the statement will be received in the context of a local congregation.

Another important result of the workshop was the elimination of the word "creativity." While this word hits at the heart of the subject matter, it carries a lot of baggage. The group spent a lot of time digging into the phrase "humble exploration and responsive innovation." The words "humble" and "responsive" were added to help qualify to soul of "exploration" and "innovation." The idea was that

we never explore the depth of God's calling without a deep sense of humility. Likewise, with innovating, there needs to be element of response to an actual need/problem. This phrase captures the heart by which church leaders can nurture a culture of creativity.

The 5-Why's activity was beneficial to see how, if done correctly, the implementation of this NPO will create positive outcomes.

### **One-On-One Interview Discoveries**

The answers and feedback given during each of the three one-on-one interviews was helpful as each took a unique stance on the NPO. Participant 1 wanted a stronger prophetic voice. This resulted in the suggestion of adding "courageously" in the NPO statement ("courageously nurtures"). Participant 2 dug into the definition of "healthy church." We were able to process possible definitions. Participant 3 added valuable insight into relational aspect of this NPO. In addition, participant 3 helped push me away from the word "courageously." The thought is that all of this implies courageous.

### **Synthesis**

The fusion of ideas, experiences, and affirmation of these trusted stakeholders gives me great confidence moving forward. From their perspective, there is a contribution that can be made by this research and NPO. There will be temptation to divert from the original goal of helping church leaders nurture a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. However, if accomplished, there will be a valuable tool created to help churches facing a variety of circumstances.

### **Next Steps**

I would like to develop a deeper scriptural and theological framework for exploring and innovating by looking at the life of Moses. In addition, I think there is much to be learned from secular fields of organizational research. While there are practical things to be learned, I would also like to frame the wider conversations, for churches, in the movement of God's mission. I believe, God's people should be the most eager and willing to experiment with ideas. Solidifying a strong biblical and theological case will help strengthen the pitch to church leaders and congregations.

## **Discovery Workshop Documentation**



# Who is this NPO for?

1st. Christian community of faith  
2nd. Lay leaders  
3rd. Local ecc. organization  
4th. The congregation, but  
the 1st. should be the focus

The  
Lay

Parish  
public  
State of affairs

Pastors  
&  
Church leaders

Christian/Church leaders  
Lay leaders  
Church historians

Senior  
Pastor  
Staff  
Key Lay leaders

# What key issues does this NPO address?

1st. Lay leaders  
2nd. Lay leaders  
3rd. Lay leaders  
4th. Lay leaders  
5th. Lay leaders  
6th. Lay leaders  
7th. Lay leaders  
8th. Lay leaders  
9th. Lay leaders  
10th. Lay leaders

It is the creation  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)

It might have  
considered  
considered the  
creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)  
the creation (creation)

Creativity  
is  
HARD

Clay for  
pottery  
based on  
pottery  
is more  
creative

Church Institutionalization  
Church as Process/Corporation  
Not as project of the Divine in the  
world

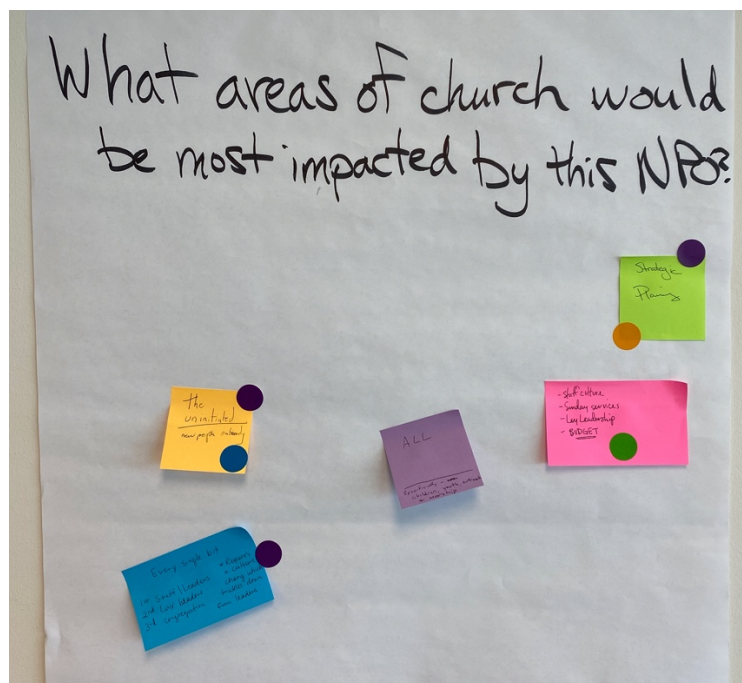
Decision  
Making

Identify  
a  
congregation  
calling

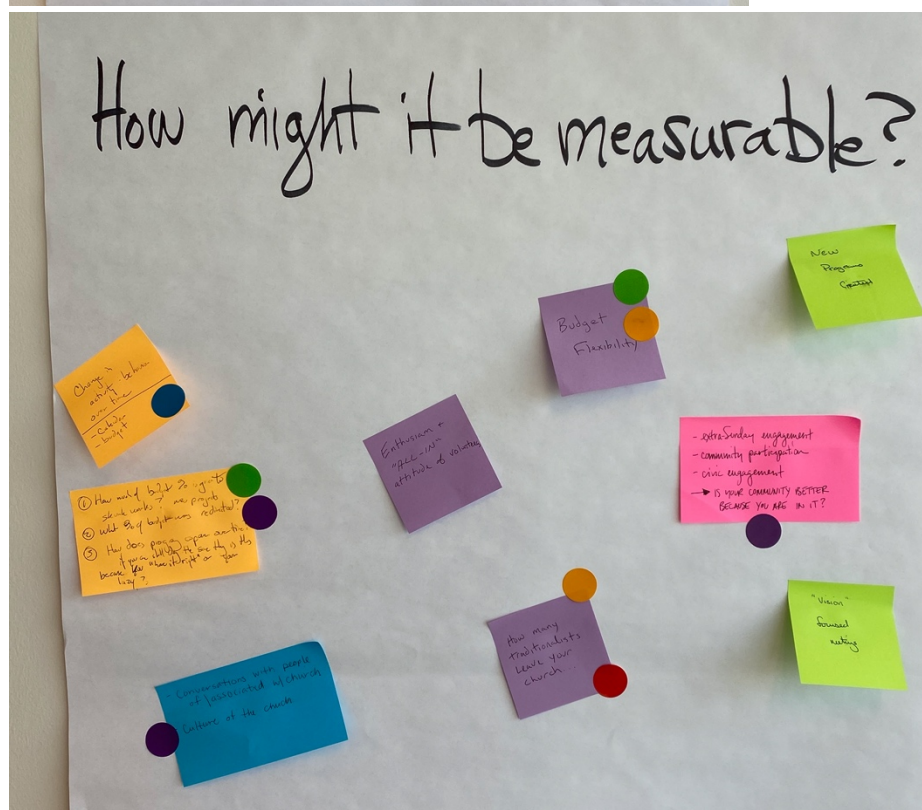
1st. Lay leaders  
2nd. Lay leaders  
3rd. Lay leaders  
4th. Lay leaders  
5th. Lay leaders  
6th. Lay leaders  
7th. Lay leaders  
8th. Lay leaders  
9th. Lay leaders  
10th. Lay leaders

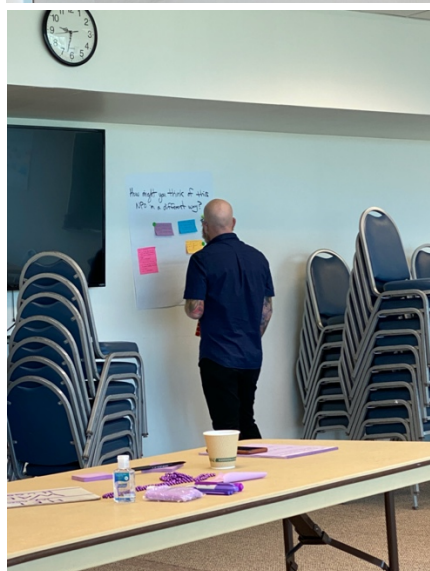
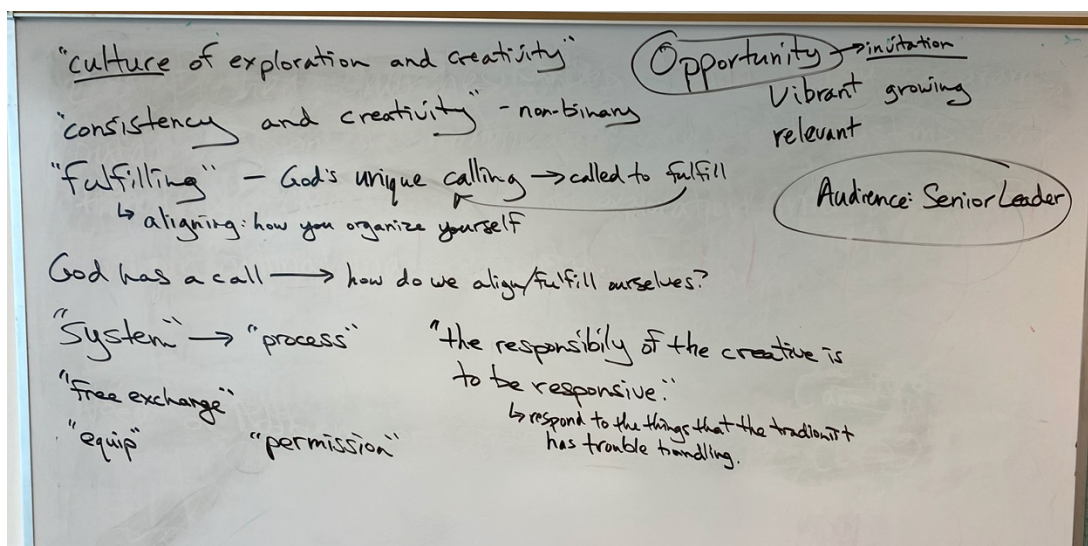


# What areas of church would be most impacted by this NPO?



# How might it be measurable?





A healthy church nurtures a culture of <sup>wise</sup> exploration and <sup>positive</sup> innovation.

### Outcome:

- Disciples
- Health
- Longevity - building something that will last
- Community begins to look different
- Sense of adventure among people
- Greater buy-in
- creates energy
- more people get a spot at the table
- greater/more faith conversations
- authentic to de-churched

A healthy church nurtures a culture of <sup>wise</sup> exploration and <sup>positive</sup> innovation.

Root Causes:

### Fear

- Former success
- Right/wrong mentality
- Not recognizing we're beloved.
- Cost/weariness - tired leaders
- Not recognizing who God is
- Non-discipleship

### Poorly trained

- Focused on wrong things
- Criticizers
- Cost benefit analysis
- Short term thinking
- Rewards based leaders vs. Responsibility
- ↳ Lencioni



A healthy church nurtures a culture of exploration and innovation.

Why: B/c they are humble

Why: accepting who they are

Why: not faking it

Why: B/c they are safe

Why: Beloved

A healthy church nurtures a culture of <sup>we</sup> exploration and <sup>expansive</sup> innovation.

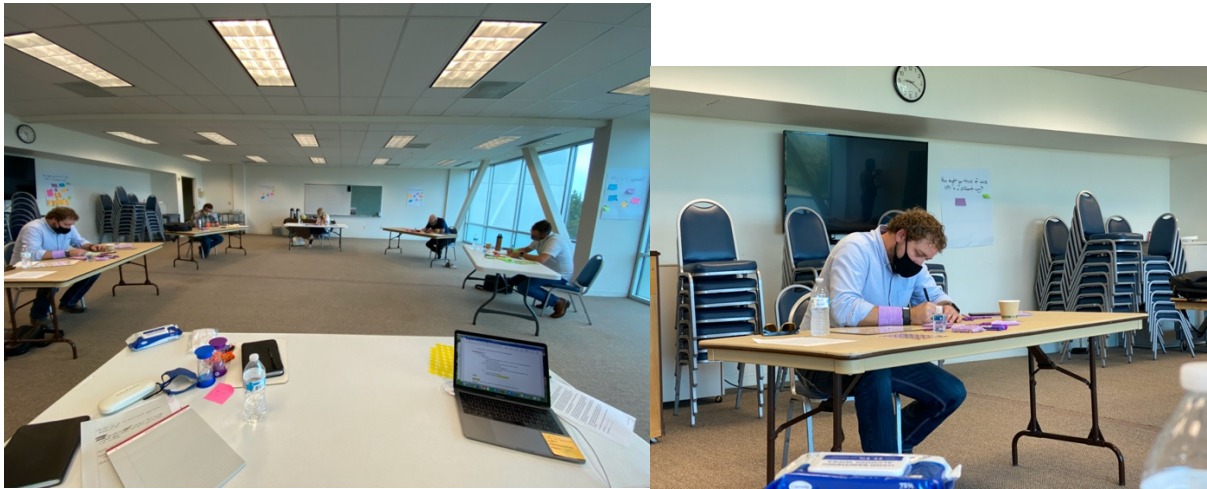
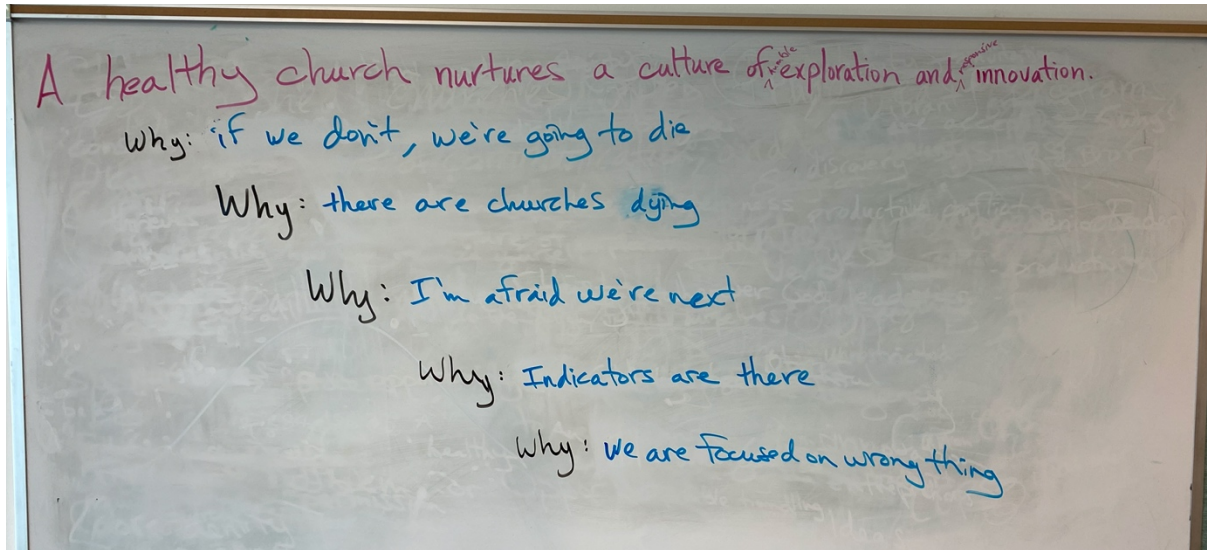
Why: Allows God to move radically

Why: Church is in a posture of open-ness

Why: We have trust in wherever God leads us.

Why: B/c God has been faithful

Why: It's who God is



### **One-Page Post Workshop Message to Stakeholders**

Dear Discovery Workshop Participants,

Thank you so much for participating in my discovery workshop to help fulfill my requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program at Portland Theological Seminary.

I am thrilled with the work we did that helped form the following statement:

A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. Your help creating this statement will be the foundation for my continued research. Thank you!

In addition, I wanted to continue to invite you into the process of exploring the truth, limitations, and issues with this statement. As you stumble across things in your personal learning, feel free to pass them along to me. You never know what book, article, or blog might reinforce an idea.

Lastly, I wanted to remind you of the three questions we ended our workshop discussing. Feel free to email me your thoughts. They were:

- As I continue researching, what should I be sure to examine?
- What potential blind spots should I explore?
- What are the pitfalls that I should avoid?

I am very grateful to have the privilege of calling each of you a friend. Many blessings!

*Peace to you,*

Scott Shelton

D.Min Student

Annapolis, MD

(443) 510-8395

### **One-On-One Interview Documentation**

#### **Participant 1 Interview Notes:**

##### **With what do you agree/disagree? Why?**

- First statement energized her. This new statement doesn't feel prophetic.
- "Nurture" and "humble" feels passive.
- "Humble exploration" not sure what it means when it is read
- Loves "responsive innovation" and the notion of engaging culture
- Seems like it is not "daring enough"

##### **How does this conversation make you feel?**

- Passive
- "humble exploration" feels like you are taking a feather.

### **What would you add to this conversation?**

- Add “courageously”
- “Humble exploration” - needs to be explored more

### **What biblical stories/ideas does this trigger?**

- Ester
- Deborah
- David

How might you add/rewrite the statement:

A healthy church courageously (add) nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

### **Participant 2 Interview Notes:**

#### **With what do you agree/disagree? Why?**

- I like the statement.
- Thinks about the times when churches have done this and the many ways we don't. He thinks the
- Question I would ask, how do we define a healthy church? Different people come up with a different idea of what healthy is. Sometimes how big a church is may qualify or disqualify a church from being “healthy.” Some church people think “health” means no conflict (especially church members). Tension around the word “healthy.”
- Can people have a different understanding of what “healthy” is?
- How are you going to define some of these terms?
- What is the image we want to see at the end of this?
- Does the pastor/leader have permission to do things?

#### **How does this conversation make you feel?**

- Curious to see how it plays out. To see what are ways that churches can do humble exploration and bring about innovation.
- Hopeful

- It sounds like a good way to phrase “change”. The word “change” has baggage.

### **What would you add to this conversation?**

- “Healthy”
- “Permission”
- Work out what innovation looks like? Sometimes “innovation” sounds too much like engineering. Innovation is hopeful.

### **What biblical stories/ideas does this trigger?**

- The Biblical narrative tends to talk about seeing the world differently and often to be faithful to God is to be holy. “Holy” is a different way of being and living in this world.
- Moses – the experience in the desert and how God prepares the people to live into God’s design. To go from slavery to being His people...because the temptation was to go back. Go back to Egypt...at least we knew where the food was.
- Jesus was often challenging the old concepts to bring new light and to live into God’s way by welcoming outcasts, not afraid to flip a table, telling captivating stories that often had surprise endings. EVEN, how the Gospel was placed in the hands. Innovation by the Holy Spirit.
- Apostle Paul going out to the Gentiles and the major cultural shift. There was tension in doing this! It was responsible to do this.

### **How do the stakeholder’s findings, support (or not support) your own experiences?**

- I’d have to dig deep to see a way that this does NOT support the statement.
- Experiences support the statement.
- Most churches that he can think of that he considers “healthy” fit this NPO.
- A church that he worked in during seminary closed 5-7 years after he left because it could not adapt to the neighborhood. An inner-city church (Richmond, VA) where the demographics changed around the church. However, when they closed, they gave the building to an African-American church and the church filled up! They had to let go over all control.

### **How might you add/rewrite the statement:**

A healthy church courageously nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.



### **Participant 3 Interview Notes:**

#### **With what do you agree/disagree in the NPO? Why?**

- Don't disagree – a lot of it is in the execution of how this happens
- "courageously" sounds unnecessary. We nurture a culture. He has a prejudice against "ly" words. I don't like anything that gets in the way of the point of a sentence. There is nothing about courageous about nurture...seems like it is a fundamental act. The action is courageous.
- Follows Bruggeman in this. We equip the disciples in this. Our job is to equip disciples.
- I don't see "people" when I read this. Equipping the disciples. Reminding ourselves that this is about the people in our congregation.
- A healthy church equips disciples to do the work which God has called them into and we do that by "humble exploration and responsive innovation."
- Give the backdrop of empire, a healthy church is itself a courageous act...not just nurturing.

#### **How do the stakeholder's findings, support (or not support) your own experiences?**

- Seems true because it feels like an "of course." The nature of forming a relationship with others is form humble exploration and the actions toward it are "responsive innovation."
- Fostering a culture of relationships. It is seeking out the imago dei in people. A church that is curious about people...not just issues. We need to get to know people first. People are more important than an institution.
- Church that are dying, dead, or declining are too focused on doctrine, dogma, or issues over disciples and discipleship. Develop relationships with people. The culture of a church should be about relationship. Membership is a cohort (wait until there are 4-5 people), expectation is that they do three relational meetings (pastor, a church person, and someone in the cohort) and they together write a statement membership of what they hope to express to the wider congregation.
- Relational culture prefaces
- Jesus preached a lot of things but every time he did it was for or with people.

#### **What would you say are root causes of churches NOT embracing such a view?**

- People have to feel safe...and to feel safe you have to know the people around you.
- Our relationships give us the ability to know their self-interest. Part of the creativity is pulling all these self-interests and creating a church. Two drives to self-interest (food, shelter,

money – primal) and the second is recognition/meaning. We give people recognition as a child of God – and that requires a relationship.

### **How might you add/rewrite the statement:**

A healthy church courageously (remove) nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

### **NPO Statement Progression**

#### **September 2020**

##### NPO Statement

Established churches often trade easy programs, outdated systems of communication, and closed systems for the deeper, God-given task of exploration into areas of unique calling and creativity.

Shifts:

- Move from a “problem” to an “opportunity”
- First statement sounds judgmental and likely to turn people off

#### **October 2020**

##### After the Discovery Workshop

A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

Shifts:

- Statement felt passive...lacking prophetic voice

#### **November 2020**

##### After one-on-one with participant #1

A healthy church courageously nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

Shift:

- Lack of prophetic voice. Add “courageously.”

#### **December 2020**

##### After one-on-one with participant #3

A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

Shift:

- "Courageously" should be implied because of the nature of the statement. Elimination of unneeded word.

# Appendix B– Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

NPO: The healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

## **Section 1: Biblical and Theological Foundations**

The Church has long been a creative force that actively participated in society to meet practical needs in local communities and the wider world. However, the last 40 to 50 years have seen a seemingly decline in productive exploration and innovation within the Christian faith community.<sup>7</sup> To recover a healthy model of church that is addressing societal needs and embracing a new paradigm of ministry, we need a fuller understanding of how humanity and God's partnership work in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. An emphasis will be on how established churches can equip themselves theologically and biblically for change. Established churches is defined as any church that has been around long enough to have some existing traditions to guide church action and decision-making. While there are several examples in scripture of God leading the people toward exploration and responsive innovation, the focus of this essay will be on the partnership of Moses and Yahweh through prayer in Exodus 32 and Jesus inviting Peter to experience a miracle with him in Matthew 14. In the book of Exodus, Aaron is in the grip of a people frustrated by the delay of Moses (and Yahweh). Aaron fails in his leadership responsibilities by creating a golden calf for the people to worship. In the moments afterward we see God's anger (32:7-10), Moses' reasoning with God (32:11-13), and God relenting from destroying the people (32:14). This passage highlights the responsiveness of God to the prayers of the people. Then an example of Jesus summoning a disciple to partner in the miraculous, walking on water in Matthew 14:22-33. While in a boat, Jesus approaches the fearful disciples. Peter's subsequent request and Jesus' invitation to step out of the boat emphasize God's partnership with humanity. This will be followed by a discussion on the immutability of God and an open future established in open theism. In addition, from an ecclesiastical standpoint, established churches will benefit from the example of cross-cultural missions as it is forced to be creative and adaptive in forming the contextualized message of the Gospel. The translation of the Gospel into every culture and time is a creative task as they look for ways to adapt the message of the Gospel to diverse contexts. This demands an understanding of the ecclesiastical structure and a theology that holds God's mutability and more recently in open theism.

A proper biblical and theological understanding is central to any activity of exploration, innovation, and discernment among a faith community. The identity of the church should be centered around

---

<sup>7</sup> Jones, L. Gregory. *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p.5. This opinion was collected from a conversation between Gregory Jones and Greg Dees (Duke University professor of social entrepreneurship) who has noticed a decline in faith-based "entrepreneurial approaches to social needs and problems." Dee wonders why the Church has stopped being actively engaged.

God's mission in the world.<sup>8</sup> To believe that a church is called to innovate and explore, the leader must first settle the reasoning of why change is necessary. As Gregory Jones says, "Christian social innovation depends on a clear and driving sense of purpose—the *why*."<sup>9</sup> To grasp a culture that nurtures humble exploration and responsive innovation one must first believe some foundational aspects of God and our world. This will help answer the "why?" question.

First, God is working with humanity to bring about the Kingdom of God. This principle can be traced back to the Old Testament. God creates from *ex nihilo* but is not limited in time or ability to only create from nothing. Throughout the biblical canon, are examples of God restructuring a society so it can be in a position to fulfill the mission of God, *missio Dei*.<sup>10</sup> Mission, as the prescribed activity of every church, flows from God.<sup>11</sup> At the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth raised the notion of "mission as an activity of God himself."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, mission is not only about the activities of the church, but also God's very nature.<sup>13</sup> As a means of the mission of God, the church is called to explore and innovate with the humility of Christ and the responsiveness of an entrepreneur. Change is central to the ongoing work of God's mission and partnership with humanity.

Understanding how God properly relates and fulfills his relationship with humanity is necessary. God equips people to fulfill his strategic mission in the world and, because of this, the primary spot to which God seeks to establish the mission is through the church. However, the identity of the church, as a people of God sent into the world, is largely constructed as an organization that lacks the attributes of an outward-oriented God that is actively seeking pathways of renewal. In this sense, the ecclesiological structure can be a stumbling block instead of a source of exploration and innovation. In a new paradigm, the church is the best, most-willing, and able organization to fulfill the good that the world needs. As David Bosch points out, "There is church because there is mission, not vice versa."<sup>14</sup> Fulfilling the mission of God becomes the primary aim in the church. The local worshiping community is an outpost for God's mission to be fulfilled.

---

<sup>8</sup> Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll,

N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 390.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, L. Gregory. *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991, p.390.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 389

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 389

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 390.

<sup>14</sup> Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991, p. 390.

In a new paradigm of ministry, church leadership must understand the biblical idea of an on-going creative order by which God is calling the church to serve and where God anxiously desires to participate. The God who intervened, saved, and established a covenant with the people of Israel continues to work in history.<sup>15</sup> This is a past, present, and future understanding of God's activity. As Dallas Willard says, "...we should think of our destiny as being absorbed in a tremendously creative team effort, with unimaginably splendid leadership, on an inconceivably vast plane of activity, with ever more comprehensive cycles of productivity and enjoyment. This is the 'eye hath not seen, neither ear heard' that lies before us in the prophetic vision (Isa. 64:4)."<sup>16</sup>

Second, that God has the capacity to change. In the Pentateuch, Moses is the first leader that God asked to lead the Israelite people even though they seem to turn away from God at every opportunity and spend as much time praising God for good things as they do complain about the hardship of freedom.<sup>17</sup> The leadership sharing between Yahweh and Moses comes to a climax on Mount Sinai as the immediacy of the Israelites perceived-needs override Moses commands (Exodus 20:22-23 and Exodus 32).

Exodus 32 is an example of the partnership between Moses and God. The Israelites had created and begun worshipping a golden calf with the collected gold from the people. God's anger burned and commanded Moses to go down off the mountain (32:7). In this section of the wilderness wandering the partnership is seen in the, "efforts of God and Moses to come to terms with this apostasy."<sup>18</sup> The dialogue goes back and forth in a manner that is starkly different from the original calling of Moses where he hid his face in fear of God at the burning bush (Exodus 3:6). Instead, we see Yahweh in constant communication with Moses as ideas are presented and solutions left open.<sup>19</sup> As a leader, Moses speaks in defense of the people without fully knowing the extent to which they have rebelled against God. In anger, Yahweh refers to them as, "*your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt*" (Exodus 32:7). But Moses, knowing God's heart, confronts and asks, "*why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt?*" (Exodus 32:11). Moses and God, in conversation, both refer to the mistaken Israelites as "*your people.*" This repetition<sup>20</sup> is key to realizing the artful way in which the author is attempting to pose this dialogue. Both are attempting to hold the other off by putting the responsibility of the people back to each other. God is angry with the people but Moses attempts to reason with God with a reminder of past faithfulness. This sense of confidence by which Moses speaks makes partnership clear, as Fretheim

---

<sup>15</sup> Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.*, p.17.

<sup>16</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God.* San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, p. 399.

<sup>17</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Peculiar Treasures: A biblical Who's Who.* San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1979, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Fretheim, Terence E., *Exodus - Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991, p. 283.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 283.

<sup>20</sup> Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* New York: Basic Books, 1981, p.55.

says, "God has so entered into this relationship that such dialogue is invited, indeed welcome: God is not the only one who has something important to say."<sup>21</sup> In this section of scripture, we see God interacting with humanity within a relationship of trust and openness. "Moses' own obedience is integral to the divine mission."<sup>22</sup> Based on Moses' words of rebuttal, God does indeed relent (Exodus 32:14). God is open to change.

There are many contextualized means the authors are using to describe Yahweh and interpret God's mission. Because of this, source and form criticisms can be great services to any act of interpretation. It is the "creative, interpretative tension" that holds the current reader to the context of ancient Israel.<sup>23</sup> A better understanding of God's works in the scripture leads to a deeper understanding of God's partnership with humanity.<sup>24</sup> Even the action of scripture development is a creative task and is a God-inspired partnership with humanity that has allowed faith to be translated for thousands of years. This act of exploration and innovation is at the heart of the mission of God and the on-going task of the church. The narrative in Exodus 32 is a revelation of God's nature, desire for partnership with humanity, and ability to change.

As a leader, Moses stands between the people and God to negotiate mutual understanding and peace. In this, God is working with Moses. That is to say in cooperation or partnership with humanity. Note that God does not harden Pharaoh's heart apart from Moses. He is called upon to reveal God's authority and power through a series of dramatic exercises. It is within this revelation that Pharaoh chooses to ignore God and consequently hardens his heart (Exodus 7-12). Moses is the mediator between God's desires and the earthly consequences that they face. Moses' courage to trust God as he went to Pharaoh with such confidence would have been a tremendous revelation of God's faithfulness to him in the past. Throughout his life Moses had learned of God's power and he was equipped for his leadership responsibilities.

People are formed with a unique creative ability that they develop over their lifetime. God is profoundly involved in the ongoing human development of their creative capacity. over an individual's lifetime; it would seem reasonable to conclude that God is a part of the ongoing development. God is working in partnership with humanity.<sup>25</sup> God is therefore, not stationary in creation. In the creation narrative we see Yahweh working in partnership to create, "Let us make humankind..." (Genesis 1:26).

---

<sup>21</sup> Fretheim, Terence E., Exodus - Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, p. 285.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, p. 20.



Relationship involves care and desire to restore. "God treats the relationship with the people with an integrity that is responsive to what they do and say."<sup>26</sup> Words offered in humble prayer are welcomed by an infinite God who loves creation and works in partnership. As is described at the burning bush: "The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians.'" (Exodus 3:7-8a).<sup>27</sup> Robert Alter translates the end of verses 7 by saying, "I (Yahweh) have heard, for I know its pain."<sup>28</sup> God is incarnational in the pain of the people. God's response to the particular needs of a specific people will continue to be realized in the life of the people of God. Therefore, God does not and cannot stand outside of the situations that face humanity. Instead, God responds and changes as necessary to the causes of human sin, mistakes, and opportunity. "The Hebrew verb used here (yada', "to know") indicated something broader than cognitive knowledge. It indicates a participation in and experiencing of that which is known"<sup>29</sup> The mission of God demands that God be present in all times and all ways with humanity. In this, change is a part of the relational fabric of God and humanity. Change, while difficult to embrace is a natural part of life and faith.

Change breeds uncertainty and that can make exploring and innovating uncomfortable. In Matthew 14:22-33, Jesus walked toward the fearful disciples on the water. Their boat was being, "battered by the waves" (v.24). The disciples, mirroring the moments of fear before Jesus calmed the storm (8:23-27), are confronted by Jesus standing on the chaotic waters. As he stood with water beneath his feet, he invited Peter to enter the miracle with a summons of "come" (14:29). Jesus is inviting Peter to experience more than is humanly possible. This invitation mirrors every disciple's offer from God. In this story is the truth that God is inviting the disciples to participate in Kingdom work. They are being asked to join and facilitate the new identity found in the Gospel.

Jesus could have made the miracle a reflection of his power alone but instead he made it about the character of God. Douglas Hare says, "while this story is indeed talking about who Jesus is, it emphasizes his function rather than his nature."<sup>30</sup> The work of God in this world will bring about risk-filled partnerships between God and humanity. This account of Peter walking on the water is only found in Matthew and, "graphically depicts what it means to be a Christian caught midway

---

<sup>26</sup> Fretheim, Terence E., Exodus - Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, p. 287.

<sup>27</sup> Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, A *Theological Introduction To the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999, p.110.

<sup>28</sup> Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation With Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, p.320.

<sup>29</sup> Birch, Bruce C., Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, A *Theological Introduction To the Old Testament*. p.111.

<sup>30</sup> Hare, Douglas R.A., Matthew: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993. p. 169

between faith and doubt.”<sup>31</sup> The nature of God and fragile human emotions are on full display in this interaction between Peter and Jesus. In a remarkable act of courage, God still invited Peter to join the story.

Jesus understands that everyone seeks to make a contribution that counts. Peter stands on the edge of the boat in a moment of tension between who he is, what he wants, and who he is still becoming. In this moment of fulfillment, he steps out toward Jesus on the water. It will be for his own good to experience the miracle of walking on water yet he will also have to contend with his human frailty. Viktor Frankl writes, “It can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. Such a tension is inherent in the human being and therefore is indispensable to mental well-being.”<sup>32</sup> Peter, in all of his zeal wants to experience it all. In this divine/human partnership, that is full of possibilities, Jesus knows what Peter needs. In this formative moment he is confronted with his truest self. The zeal of ambition overtakes Peter and his humanity is revealed. It reveals that Peter does indeed doubt and is capable of sinking. However, this does not negate the partnership that is being forged between God and Peter. This risk-filled act of summoning Peter out into the water reveals a God who embraces and puts humanity in a situation to experience the power of exploration and innovation.

The risk of failure is not manufactured. All explorations and innovative ideas are filled with risky moments that cannot be fully anticipated. Peter could have drowned. Jesus could have turned away from Peter. But in the moment of need, Peter cries out, “Lord, save me!” (v. 30). To which, Jesus reaches out and grabs Peter. This highlights the believer’s confidence in exploring and innovating with God. The situation will never fully define the identity of the disciple. Instead, the situation helps to shape them into fully-formed people who are in a better spot to partner with God in Kingdom-building activities. The resulting partnership with God is so much greater than the potential loss for Peter.

The illustrations for an established church are plentiful. Like Peter, God is summoning his Church to an unbelievable journey of humble exploration and responsive innovation. The risks are real and great. However, the anticipated rewards are worth all the possibilities. God will summon disciples to step out of the boat and partner with them to bring about lasting change in people’s lives.

The corporate act of exploring and innovating assumes the need for change. Like a parent who can retain their nature of love and direction but who can at times change their minds based on the needs of their child, so God can change and adapt in accordance with circumstances facing believers. This ability to change falls squarely in line with the God who is on mission with his people to humbly explore and innovate in responsive ways to the needs facing the faithful community.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hare, Douglas R.A., *Matthew: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. p. 169.

<sup>32</sup> Frankl, Viktor E., *Man’s Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*. London: Rider Books, 2004, p. 85.

Established churches will find health when adapting with missionary zeal and believing that their prayers can change the mind of God.

## Section 2: Topic History and Key Voices

### Topic History

One of the prominent Catholic theologians in the Middle Ages,<sup>33</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, raised the question of God's immutability. He argues that the perspective that God as the source of all has no potentiality.<sup>34</sup> For him, God is enough in current form and to think otherwise would diminish the nature of God. Aquinas says, "that which does not exist begins to exist only through something already existing."<sup>35</sup> God's existence, he argues, is an already perfect being that has no room for more perfection. That is to say, if something is already perfect, it cannot be *more* perfect.

"Absolute perfection must be pure act, for potency implies non-realized being. That is why God is pure act."<sup>36</sup> What separated Aquinas from other theologians of his days was the emphasis he placed on the absolute immutability of God.<sup>37</sup>

Here is the proof, that God is altogether immutable. First, because it was shown above that there is some first being, whom we call God, and that this first being must be pure act, without admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to change in any way.<sup>38</sup>

As a primary part of his extensive writings, it is vital to understand the foundational aspect of this theology in interpreting Aquinas. For him, God cannot change at all.

---

<sup>33</sup> Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999, p. 331.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 340.

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Ed.1 (Christian Classics, 1981), question 2.

<sup>36</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L. *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, Vol. 2. Rev.ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987, p. 265.

<sup>37</sup> Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999, p. 341.

<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Ed.1 (Christian Classics, 1981), question 9.

In addition, according to Brian Davies, a modern Aquinas scholar,<sup>39</sup> "To feel sad about another's misery,' he writes, 'is no attribute of God'... For Aquinas, God's mercy lies in what he brings about, not in what something brings about in him."<sup>40</sup> In this respect, God is not swayed improperly by the emotions and circumstances of humanity.

However, to better understand a compassionate God one must believe that God can be moved by the emotions and expressions of creation. There should be some room for negotiation among the needs of the created order, which would require change. God, according to Aquinas' position stands outside the emotional appeals of creation. Humanity, however, is invited into a special bond of relationship as the adopted children of God (Ephesians 1:3-14) and as such, one must consider how God can be affected by prayer if he is detached and emotionally unengaged.

Roger Olson pushes back from Aquinas by saying:

But this portrait of God seems quite foreign to the God of the scriptural narrative, who genuinely grieves and sorrows and even repents (relents) when people pray. All these characteristics and emotions of God have been dismissed as mere anthropomorphisms by defenders of the classical theist view, but one has to wonder what kind of God it is who loves (not an anthropomorphism) but does not genuinely feel compassion, mercy, sorrow and grief when his creatures suffer or rebel.<sup>41</sup>

While it is a potentially comforting feeling to believe that God is absolute immutable, it also assumes a callousness of a God who, without emotion, directs actions on earth. God should be able to be moved by God's creation for the sake of relationship because it is impossible to have relationship with an unmoved being. There is a natural ebb and flow with God as cultures progress. In addition, sinful humanity has the freedom to make decisions that have the potential to sway certain aspects of God's mission in the world. God warns of the destructive power of sin throughout the scripture.

With personal freedom, comes high responsibility to act in accordance with God's stated mission. This is why it is imperative that leadership walk in humility, justice, and mercy. Participating in God's works is of highest importance and has the potential to positively or negatively impact the community.

---

<sup>39</sup> Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. p. 342.

<sup>40</sup> Davies, Brian. *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Olson, Roger E., *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. p. 343.

Open theism is a new trend in the theological and biblical conversation on God's nature. It challenges the idea of the immutability of God and insists on the open nature of the future. It moves beyond the questions of, "can people help change the mind of God?" toward a theology that says: God is working with creation to establish the future. It is a future that is full of possibilities.<sup>42</sup>

One of the prominent open theists, Gregory Boyd, detects traces of open theism in the works of Calcidius, a fifth-century theologian.<sup>43</sup> Boyd further argues that the idea that God has an exhaustively definite foreknowledge of the future is not an originally Christian thought. It is the legacy of ancient Greek philosophy in Christian theology. Boyd writes,

The association of foreknowledge with providential assurance was a central aspect of the Hellenistic debate over the issue of divine foreknowledge, fate, and moral responsibility...and this undermining of providence understandably put far in the hearts of many ancient Greek and Romans, just as it seems to do for many people today.<sup>44</sup>

With the hesitancy of ancient theologians to adopt such contradictory ideas of God gives understanding as to why many refused to espouse such an opinion of God. Yet, Calcidius is one of the earliest Christian theologians who articulated the open view of God. "Calcidius insightfully argues that, far from undermining prophecies, they are given more practical value if interpreted as *conditional predictions* that will come to pass *if* things do not change."<sup>45</sup>

As the dialogue of God's ability to adapt and foreknow the future continues there are traditions that hold many of the ideas of an open future without being directly tied to open theism because it is relatively new conversation to Christian history. "According to some African-American commentators, the open view has been commonly assumed within the African-American Christian tradition,"<sup>46</sup> which would be understandable as they grappled with the problem of evil based on the sins against them (slavery, segregation, social injustice). They read the scripture with different eyes than an established power. This experience with social injustices has resulted in a belief that God's people can change both the world and God.

<sup>42</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p. 115.

<sup>44</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., "Two Ancient (and modern) Motivations for Ascribing Exhaustively Definite Foreknowledge to God: A Historical Overview and Critical Assessment." *Religious Studies* (2010) 46, Cambridge University Press, p. 48-49.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., "Two Ancient (and modern) Motivations for Ascribing Exhaustively Definite Foreknowledge to God: A Historical Overview and Critical Assessment." p. 59, footnote 32.

<sup>46</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p. 115.

As open theism continues to be explored for theological and biblical accuracy, it is gaining traction in its ability to help answer questions with the problem of evil, God's relatability with humanity, and reason. Coming to a proper belief about God's interaction with creation can develop churches from passivity to active participation in the work of God. Humanities partnership in the *missio Dei* is the intention and hope of God.

## Key Voices

With key voices emerging over the last few decades that have placed renewed emphasis on the mutability and foreknowledge of God, like the *Openness of God*<sup>47</sup> with five authors writing on a defense of open theism by articulating a biblical hermeneutic, theological perspective, philosophical understanding, and the practical implications. Other theologians and pastors like Thomas Oord and Greg Boyd have given rise to open theism. Due to the controversy surrounding much of the openness viewpoint, there are others, like Dallas Willard, who prefer to abandon any labels while still adhering to teachings that very much fall into aspect of an open future and humanity's role in determining all that will happen. The two key voices that will be highlighted will be Dr. Greg Boyd and Dr. Dallas Willard.

An individual's theology is built around their belief about God's ability to change and their participation in the events. In this sense, if change is possible for God than it must also become a viable option for humanity and especially for the Church. The unchanging nature of many established congregations can limit the scope of God's in-breaking of the Kingdom. For exploration and innovation to become the dominate feature of a community, there must be a belief that God is nurturing creative possibilities in the world.

Within a traditional Christian theology or "classical view of divine foreknowledge,"<sup>48</sup> and the belief that the future is settled, one is left with fewer choices about participation with the on-going created order. The voices outlined are those who have a belief structure that, can at times fall outside the classical view of Christianity, yet invite believers into greater participation with the Kingdom of God through action, prayer, and creation with God. They are described here as open theists.

Greg Boyd

As a scholar and pastor, Boyd has become an active voice in the conversation regarding the openness of God in the world. As an open theist, (a term that he does not like<sup>49</sup>) he expresses the

---

<sup>47</sup> Pinnock, Clark, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

<sup>48</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Sprinkle, Preston. Interview with Greg Boyd. *Theology in the Raw*. Podcast audio. October 28, 2019.  
[https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl\\_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl_branch=1)

open idea that God is full of possibility and the future is only partly settled.<sup>50</sup> This position has been widely criticized as not being within the parameters of classical or traditional Christian theology. However, in *God of the Possible*, Boyd attempts to expand upon the openness view of God while making a practical, biblical, and theological case for the limits God has placed upon himself in dealing with humanity. While a classical theology holds that God is in every respect unchanging,<sup>51</sup> Boyd believes that future is filled with open possibilities.

God is a God of risk. Rather than a weakness, Boyd thinks that taking a risk is actually a sign of strength and confidence. God's ability to adapt to circumstances with humanity is a release of control that God chooses. The examples of this can be found in Moses charged with leadership responsibility to lead the Israelites into the unknown wilderness. The psalmist feels the weight of pain and responsibility. Jesus turns the mission of God over to the disciples. The book of Acts is the story of a entrusting and cooperation between God and His people.

Boyd asks, "Don't we normally regard someone who refuses to take risks as being insecure? Don't we ordinarily regard a compulsion to meticulously control everything as evidencing weakness, not strength?"<sup>52</sup> He goes on to say, "God's risk are always wide, of course, for the possibility of things going God's way is worth it. But they are risks nonetheless. In a cosmos populated by free agents, the outcome of things – even divine decisions – is often uncertain."<sup>53</sup> The future as being full of possibilities is not only an important aspect of open theism but a key contribution of Greg Boyd within the Church. The future is not fully known by God (traditional theology) or void of God's involvement (process theology) but instead full of potential and a wide range of possibilities. The future has, what can appear to be, endless possibilities of outcomes that people are free to decide. The decisions become less about being right and more about the desire to honor God in all aspects.

Within a traditional theological framework, one is often paralyzed by unknowing. This can be because we are uncertain about how we actually hear God through prayer or fear of arriving at the wrong answer. Open theism, as Boyd describes, is a biblical and theological articulation of how humans, Christians or not, already prepare for possibilities.

Whatever view of God we might embrace, we still lock our doors at night. We take steps to protect ourselves and our loved ones from harm. This is wise, for a world in which innocent kids of godly parents can get kidnapped or killed by drunk drivers is scary. We all already know this. The open view simply articulates what we already believe at a core level. Just look at how we act.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p.86.

<sup>51</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p.86.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.57.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

Boyd highlights two important Old Testament passages as evidence of a partially open and partially closed future in Exodus 32 and Jeremiah 18. This point is important because he suggests that those within a classical view of foreknowledge are imposing a hermetical strategy that says, "Where the open view and classical view differ in their treatment of passages such as these is that the open view does not read into these verses the assumption that the future must be exhaustively settled."<sup>55</sup> Another example of how Boyd handles the areas in which the scripture seems to point toward a determined future is by placing emphasis on the general nature of foreknowledge as opposed to specific circumstances. He says, "In the same way that God predestined and foreknew the death of Jesus without predestining or foreknowing which individuals would condemn him, so God predestined and foreknew the church without predestining or foreknowing which specific individuals would belong to it."<sup>56</sup>

The rule and reign of God is not about control. God releases control because of love and trust for humanity.<sup>57</sup> God is most glorified when the free agents of humanity voluntarily chose to implement kingdom change. This participation in the mission of God is what defines and inspires the church. A theology that creates passivity in God's people does not fully articulate the impact of God's kingdom to the Church. The shift from an institutional mindset to one that is living, breathing, creating, and adapting is the joy of life inside the Kingdom of God. Boyd encourages, "The understanding that the church is a dynamic organism instead of an organization."<sup>58</sup> The living component of a church must be continuously nurtured. If God is willing to change, adapt, and innovate, how much more should the church be willing?

Lastly, Boyd is Christocentric in all his theological and biblical interpretations. In this sense, all things must be interpreted through the cross.<sup>59</sup> All pathways of understanding how God interacts with humanity is found in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ on the cross. The relationship of Jesus, humans, and the cross cannot be separated in our understanding of God's actions for humanity. This willingness to suffer, to the point of death, is revelation that God is willing to do anything for humanity, including change.

Dallas Willard

---

<sup>55</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, p.42.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.46.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.69.

<sup>58</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*, p.117.

<sup>59</sup> Sprinkle, Preston. Interview with Greg Boyd. *Theology in the Raw*. Podcast audio. October 28, 2019.  
[https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl\\_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl_branch=1)



In the openness of God discussion, it is not always likely to hear Dallas Willard's name articulated. Roger Olson still wonders if Willard is an open theist.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, Willard does not desire to put on a label on his view of God's foreknowledge for a variety of reasons but there are aspects of his understanding of God that support the open view of God. In particular, from the angle of prayer and cooperation with God to help determine a more kingdom of God oriented world.

In, *Divine Conspiracy*, he entitles a section on prayer, "Can we change God?"<sup>61</sup> in which he articulates a version of prayer that falls in line with the open view of God. He says:

And God's "response" to our prayers is not a charade. He does not pretend that he is answering our prayer when he is only doing what he was going to do anyway. Our requests really do make a difference in what God does or does not do. The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best. And of course God does not respond to this. You wouldn't either.<sup>62</sup>

The relational aspect of God is framed within this view of prayer. Humanity is not a passive bystander as God's divine actions are unleashed. Instead, humanity becomes an active participant within the created order. In this sense, "it is intelligently working with him to accomplish ends that fulfill his purposes in creation and in fostering human life upon the earth for a short while."<sup>63</sup>

Exodus 32 had a profound impact upon how Willard understands prayer and an individual approaches God. The interactions between Moses and God serves as an example of the kind of partnership and openness that God displays for creation. Willard goes on to say that Exodus 32:12-14, "is one of the most instructive passages on prayer in all of the Bible."<sup>64</sup> The emphasis he places on this particular passage can reveal much about his understanding of God's open future.

Willard correctly argues that God's, "nature, identity, and overarching purpose are no doubt unchanging."<sup>65</sup> This view seems to be in line with Boyd's key idea that, "the future is partly open and partly settled."<sup>66</sup> God allows for unlimited possibilities because God is relational. God can

---

<sup>60</sup> Olson, Roger E., "R.I.P. Dallas Willard (and Was He an Open Theist?)" *Patheos*. May 15, 2013. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/05/r-i-p-dallas-willard-and-was-he-an-open-theist/>

<sup>61</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. p. 244

<sup>62</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. p. 244

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 249

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 245

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 246

<sup>66</sup> Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. p.86.

foresee an enormous number of possibilities without knowing exactly which will occur. Willard describes this with an illustration regarding a framework for living with God's desired outcomes.

When our children, John and Beck, were small, they were often completely in my will as they played happily in the back yard, though I had no preference that they should do the particular things they were doing there or even that they should be in the back yard instead of playing in their rooms or having a snack in the kitchen. Generally speaking we are in God's will whenever we are leading the kind of life he wants for us. And that leaves a lot of room for initiative on our part, which is essential: our individual initiatives are central to his will for us.<sup>67</sup>

Throughout *Divine Conspiracy* there is a strong urge to reconsider the goal of life with Christ. Moving from a "Gospel of sin management"<sup>68</sup> into something more relational and real. For him, the ultimate aim of the Christian life is to, "learn from him (Jesus) to live our lives as he would live them if he were we. We can enter his eternal kind of life now."<sup>69</sup> The emphasis on the relational nature of God and the future allows a person to choose from a future of possibilities.

God communicates through the wide offering of human experiences, biblical understanding, prayer and the Holy Spirit. This overlay of communication helps encompass the changing nature of the world and God's willingness to hold a variety of possibilities as a way to adapt to each time and place. Willard writes, "We should expect nothing else, for this variety is appropriate to the complexity of human personality and cultural history. And God in redemption is willing to reach out to humanity in whatever ways are suitable to its fallen and weakened condition."<sup>70</sup>

### **Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion**

For a culture of innovation and adaptation to set into the rhythm of an established congregation, there must be an understanding of God's ability to change and cooperate with humanity. The act of innovation and adaptation is a normal part of the Christian life. However, its implementation requires tactful leadership, trust, and healthy teaching.

How someone understands change in relationship to God is of theological importance when considering innovation and adaptation in the world. In this sense, if change is possible for God, change must also become a viable option for humanity and especially for the Church. The unwillingness of many established congregations to change, adapt, and be creative can limit the scope of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in the world. For exploration and innovation to

---

<sup>67</sup> Willard, Dallas. *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999. P. 11.

<sup>68</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. p.41

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 58

<sup>70</sup> Willard, Dallas. *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*. p. 26-27

become the dominant feature of a community, they need to believe in a God nurtures the hope of possibilities within the world and invites human participation.

The movements from Aquinas' defense of God's immutability to open theism has been a long road. This change indeed takes a lot of time. However, the theological understanding that the future is full of possibilities, and that God would partner with humanity, has to become the foundation for Christians in their works to bring "the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven." Much of the concern around open theism is its lack of evidence in tradition, in Christian history. While the term is new, there is an attempt by some to show how it was present in history. As it is often the case, the steps toward progress are incremental and time consuming.

Fear has kept good people from fully experiencing God. The churches participation with Kingdom activities of innovation and adaptation is often regulated to a small group of people who seemingly hold unique gifts of creativity and idea-sharing. While this may be true, it must also be embraced by the wider group of people so the innovative and adaptative ideas have a foothold to move forward. Often new ideas are plagued by leaders with in the fear of failure and change. However, within a future filled with possibilities, it is not only normal to explore and innovate, it is a God-given assignment for leaders. Therefore, the church leader must begin to learn, often by experience, that God can be found not only in what is known but also in the possibilities of the unknown.

Adaptation is a natural and an expected part of life with Christ. In this respect, it is part of any local congregation. The fully formed disciple knows that change is the natural outcome inside the life of Christ.

Contextualizing the message for a particular time and place is the goal of Gospel outreach. This strategy of cooperation between God and humans needs to become the foundation for all local congregations. It must become natural for a church to ask questions of change throughout it's systems of operation. This will allow it to be formed fully. Churches must, once again, become the thriving centers of exploration and innovation because that is what God has set forth in the created order. The future is full of possibilities and God anticipates the future. Because this is true of God, it must now become true of the Church.

Prayer functions as the base in this evolution of change. Not only does it allow for the proper interaction between humanity and God to openly communicate, but it also serves as a litmus test for belief. The prayers of many have an expression of open theology as they request God to change (heal, restore, bring salvation) yet they unfairly abandon the position for the classical interpretation because of a misunderstanding of open theism. Like Moses, the person who prays often communicates with God in the spirit and hope that they will be able to change God's mind. This is significant because it defies much of what traditional Christianity has taught. The prayers of God's people are to be bold and future oriented. In a time in history when the churches, especially established churches, seem to be irrelevant and do not impact the world around them, it is vital that the prayers of God's people represent the deepest desires of change in society. This is both a responsibility and opportunity given by God.

God is open to all the future possibilities. This only amplifies the omniscience of God because the vast array of options is anticipated by such a God. In relationship with humanity, God knows all that could be done, both good and bad. In God's divine wisdom, humanity is given the opportunity to choose and participate with the ongoing creative process in the world. Like Peter, the summons is for all disciples to "come" onto the water and experience the full presence and power of God.

A proper biblical and theological understanding of God within established churches will create the needed anticipation for change. An established church can be a healthy church as it nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

# Appendix C—Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

## **NPO STATEMENT**

A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

## **NPO SCOPE AND CONSTRAINTS**

The range of this project is targeted at established churches. That is, churches that have been in existence long enough to have a certain pattern of procedures that potentially limit them from reaching their creative potential. The focus of the project will be local congregations that desire to know themselves, their communities, and abilities more clearly.

While there will be many overlapping qualities of implementation in other aspects of life (business, family life, etc.) the focus will remain on how individual churches can foster a healthy culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

## **NPO CONTEXT**

This project will have many features that will reach beyond a particular culture, time, and/or community size. However, the primary focus and experimentations of this project will be done with local churches in Annapolis, Maryland USA. This city, which is the capital of Maryland has a population of nearly 40,000 people which is tightly bordered within Anne Arundel County with a population just over 500,000 people. This diverse community hosts many “big city problems” that are marked by gentrification, widening educational gaps between the rich/poor, and declining churches. The state of Maryland continues to be marked by the heavy influence of Catholicism as it was founded as a refuge for fleeing Catholics as one of the first colonies in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

This influence continues today and has pervaded certain liturgical aspects of Protestantism in modern times. There are certain lingering notions that make the actions of innovation and exploration difficult. First, many view the clergy in loftier terms than many protestant denominations usually embrace. In this thinking, the clergy are to be the holders of ideas, logic, and priestly duties that come from God. There is little need for an entire congregation to set off in exploring and innovating because of the perceived function of the clergy. Second, church has largely been viewed as dull ritual that lacks the flavor of personal meaning. Church, in this sense, is viewed by many as detached from society.

## **ROOT CAUSES**

- **Focused on the wrong things:** Leaders can often be focused on daily interruptions and forsake the wider calling of discipleship that requires development and change.
- **Fear:** Leaders are fearful of expanding ideas due to job security and/or disappointing parishioners.
- **Rely on former success:** Leaders can easily rely on former successes instead of continually exploring and innovating the areas where God is calling. It’s the “good-enough” mindset.

- **Not recognized we are beloved:** A failure exists in the embrace of the imago Dei within individuals and parishioners. A church's lack of innovation and exploration may be a litmus test to the overall discipleship aspects of the church.
- **Cost and weariness of tired leadership:** Leaders can roll with established norms because of the complex nature of producing change.
- **Poorly trained:** Among leaders, there exists an inability to tactfully challenge long held positions. They are not properly trained at how to implement new initiatives within established systems of operations.
- **Short term thinking:** Often thinking is focused on the short-term results. Patrick Lencioni calls it, "rewards-based leadership verses responsibility-based leadership." Responsible leaders do whatever is needed to keep pushing an organization forward, even if that requires fewer personal rewards.
- **Lack of relationships/trust among parishioners:** No one is free to explore or innovate without trust. The failure of leaders to establish deep relationships that are forged by trust means parishioners are unlikely to share, dream, or cultivate change.

### **DEFINITION OF 'DONE'**

The ultimate goal will be a healthy system that churches can utilize to address needs (big/small) in a way that leverages God's ongoing work in the world.

### **THREE BIG IDEAS**

**Idea 1 - Modular:** Create a modular (online and/or print) that guides a congregation through a process of addressing root causes of unhealthy habits and solves a problem. This will foster a sense of exploration and innovation in a subversive way. This may be especially important in churches that are resistant to the language around creativity.

**Idea 2 - Training:** Full-church training and curriculum that allows a congregation to be a part of the learning process of exploration and innovation. The emphasis would be on the entire church's participation and discovery.

**Idea 3 - Consulting:** Create a business that allows outside voices to guide pastors and church leaders through a process of exploring and innovating. This can be around a specific issue or a wider culture that the leadership is attempting to create.

### **3 CONCEPT PITCHES**

**BIG IDEA ONE:** A modular (online and/or text) that walks a congregation through multiple processes of addressing root causes of unhealthy habits and solves a problem.

- Audience: A church that is resistant to the language around creativity or unfamiliar in the approaches of brainstorming.
- NPO: Addressing the lack of open thinking and idea exploration in a church context.
- Benefit: The user benefits by having a piloted set of questions/approaches to address key concerns in the church.
- Approach: One example of how this can be done is a five-step process to engage visitors. Questions will be asked that allow the church to evaluate itself (ex: who are we? What do we want people to know about us? How can we engage others?). As they learn (explore) about visitor needs, they are in a spot to innovate and subsequently remember their own values. This is a way of backing into an idea.
- Risks: Processes may be too broad for a church to contextualize into their system - especially if they do not have a leader who is open to adaptation.
- Assumptions/Hypotheses: If a church leveraged one process effectively, they are likely coming back to address another concern.
- Benchmarks of Success: (1) Someone/church asking clarifying questions about the process, (2) Coming back for multiple processes to navigate areas within a church, (3) A church that adapts the processes to their context/system.
- Other Approaches: There are several systems of brainstorming that guide people through idea generation. The unique aspect is that this targets a felt need *within* the congregation. In this, you get to the target faster. This is important for many people who are impatient with the creative process of exploring and innovating.

BIG IDEA TWO: Full-church training and curriculum that allows an entire congregation to be a part of the learning process of exploration and innovation.

- Audience: Local churches.
- NPO: It opens the door to talking about the churches role in exploring and innovating within their context. It also allows the *entire* congregation to be a part of idea generation. This is as much formational work as it is problem solving.
- Benefit: The users benefit because everyone, within a church, is able to use similar language around the exploration of new ideas. In addition, grounding this in the liturgy allows it to have greater stick within the congregation.
- Approach: The goal in this type of system is for people to understand the importance of its (the churches) power to explore and innovate in areas of need within itself, community, and world.



- Risks: To remain a part of the church culture, this will need to be revisited often as new people come in. The ongoing process of nurturing this type of system will require intentionality of each leader.
- Assumptions/Hypotheses: Testing to see if the church can be a greatest place to explore ideas to address problems in the world.
- Benchmarks of Success: The best benchmark will be if processes are implemented into committee/leadership meetings within the church without a paid staff member forcing it.
- Other Approaches: While there are many church-wide curriculums, I am not aware of anything that directly targets exploration of ideas and responsive innovation as a matter of discipleship.

BIG IDEA THREE: Create a consulting business that guides pastors and church leaders through a process of exploring and innovating.

- Audience: Pastors and senior leadership who will then trickle down the information within their areas of responsibility.
- NPO: Direct and contextualize consulting around idea formation that is meant to foster an entire culture shift within a congregation.
- Benefit: The benefits are personalized attention around idea formation and assessment of church abilities around the implementation of ideas. The system works as it gets footing within the wider church system. However, the church often, must first see the benefits of such a system before they decide to go deeper themselves. Hence, this is why the leaders will need to be engaged initially around the exploration, innovating ideas, and implementation.
- Approach: The approach is for pastors and senior church leaders to have planned meetings to assess needs, generate ideas, and deal with obstacles as they arise.
- Risks: This will fail if church leaders and pastors assume they already hold all the ideas needed to get them to a unique spot. This will also fail if a congregation is unwilling to explore the usefulness of innovating strategies.
- Assumptions/Hypotheses: Testing to see if a healthy and humble church leader can lead a congregation to embrace the mission of ongoing creativity.
- Benchmarks of Success: (1) A pastor's willingness to open up about their own limitations, (2) Church leaders who are hungry for progress and willing to experiment, (3) Ongoing communication with key leader that suggests deep ingestion of material and ideas.

- Other Approaches: There are consulting firms that help church leaders address specific concerns. However, this will target not just the leader's ability to implement new ideas but also how to leverage the creative power within the congregation.

### **DESIGN WORKSHOP STAKEHOLDERS**

- Annapolis Area Clergy - This pastor understands the stress of the local congregation in my geographical area. His approach and thoughtfulness allow me to be grounded in my context. His ideas were rich because of their practicality for churches in the Annapolis, Maryland area.
- Seminary Administrator - The addition of a seminary administrator allows for an understanding of curriculum formation, educational philosophy, and how to market a distinctive approach to a wide audience. He is also gifted at generating ideas without limitations or negativity.
- Active-layperson, Writer, and Social Media Influencer - This was one of two female voices that offered a unique perspective regarding the power of communication across several channels. As a layperson, she also offered a perspective of how ideas might be received from those within a church.
- Student pastor - Regarded as an outside-the-box thinker this student pastor offered many ideas regarding the church's role and responsibility to younger generations. She also serves many adult leaders so she understands the demands imposed on decision-makers.
- Worship pastor - While this position on a church staff is thought to be "the creative one," this worship pastor believes everyone has the capacity to think creatively. His approach is helping wrap these concepts into the regular liturgy of the church and allowing that to soak into the culture of a congregation.

### **ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS**

- Seminary Professor & former cross-cultural missionary - A career missionary, this professor was forced to think in contextualized and creative ways throughout his first career. In addition, he also mentored missionaries on effective means of communication, gospel translation, and strategy. Most recently, he has begun a program that highlights the need for the Church to leverage laypeople for innovative ideas. This one-year program will seek to give non-clergy a deeper and healthier theology of work and how to leverage their influence for innovation within the Church and God's Kingdom.
- Senior Pastor - A truly creative pastor who has innovated so deeply that it is infused within his congregation. He has implemented creative-idea-formation throughout all the systems (staff meeting, leadership team meetings, building renovation plans). He views the loss of creativity as a major factor why people leave church.

- Senior Pastor/Annapolis Area Clergy – A struggling pastor who is seeking alternatives to the usual systems of change. His perspective is valuable because it highlights some of the limitations churches face in the midst of a rapidly changing culture.

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Boyd, Gregory A. *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*.**

**Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.**

In *God of the Possible*, Boyd challenges many of the assumptions that lie at the root cause of why churches fail to explore and innovate. One factor, is that they fail to risk innovation because they assume God already knows every aspect of the future. Instead, Boyd helps the reader to understand that God is actually seeking partnership in developing the future. This awareness comes with a great sense of responsibility because of God's invitation for us to participate.

**De Bono, Edward. *Six Thinking Hats*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999.**

*Six Thinking Hats* shares practical knowledge on how a small group of people can explore ideas by walking through six different hats. The various hats are symbolic for what each person in the room should be "wearing" at a particular moment to generate the right ideas to specific concerns. This process of idea generation has been an extremely helpful guide for business and organizations all over the world. Harnessing the power of people who care about a problem/organization can be the tool to think differently.

**Jones, L. Gregory. *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness*. Nashville:**

**Abingdon Press, 2016.**

As dean of Duke Divinity, Jones was asked by a visiting professor why the church in the modern era had stopped innovating. Surprised, he began down a journey to explore how and why churches have stopped creating organizations and structures that address the deep holes in our society (ex: hospitals, orphanages, universities). These acts of innovation can extend to thoughtful music and creative proclamation techniques. Jones helps address many of the root causes of why churches have failed to continue the process of innovation and where we go from here.

**Osborn, Alex. *Your Creative Power: How to Use Imagination to Brighten Life, To Get Ahead*.**

**New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.**

This book is targeted at those who might consider themselves, "not creative." This book intends to give practical steps of brainstorming. This term, "brainstorming" originated in this text from its first printing in 1948. Osborn thinks of creativity as a function of the brain that needs to be stimulated and nurtured for the successful formation of ideas. He elaborates on the power of individuals' imaginations and harnessing it for the task of creativity.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Design Workshop Description**

I am comfortable with fuzzy outcomes that lead to more clarified results. The author sites that we can string together several different games to help arrive at a healthy conclusion. In fact, I think this will aide in the exploration process as we are open minded and focused on the ultimate goal of producing something that will help established churches move to a healthy model of exploration and innovation.

I intend to structure the flow around the pencil analogy that is sharpened on both sides. The first part will be the introduction of people, rules of games, and items needed for exploration. The second part will be constructing small group conversations and having them present on designated topics. Last, we will (hopefully) be able to build some usable outcomes. All of the parts will support me in the production of the ideas.

Within the expected emotional swings, myself and stakeholders must hold to the belief that the "goal" is not the end. Therefore the "failures" along the way will be producing the redefined goal. Each person will be given an opinion but we will hold loosely to the interpretation and mode at which it is implemented.

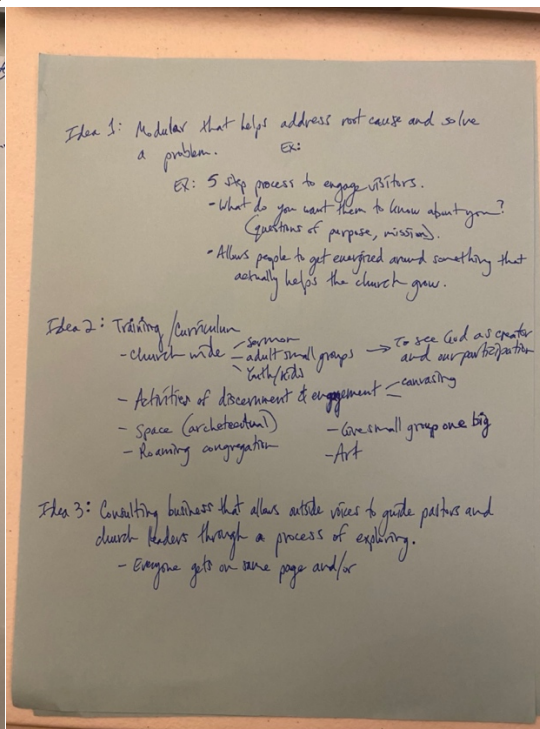
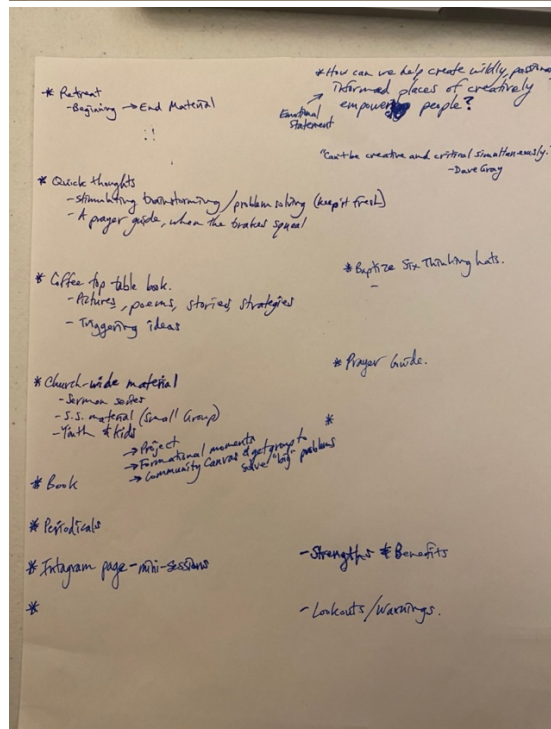
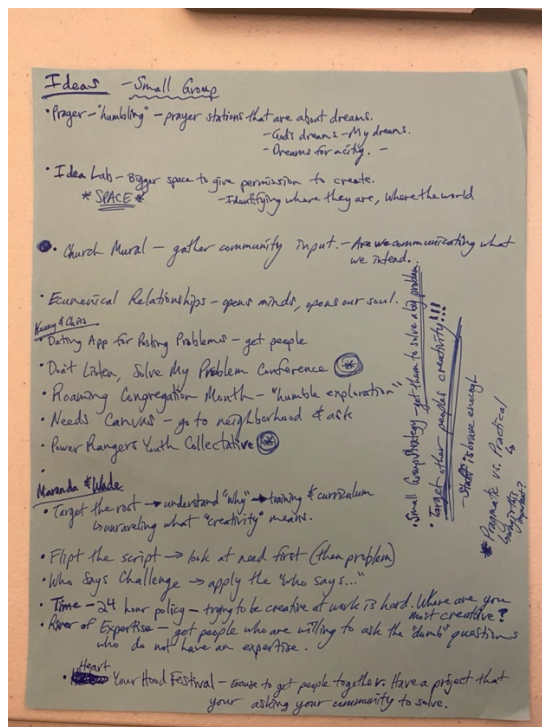
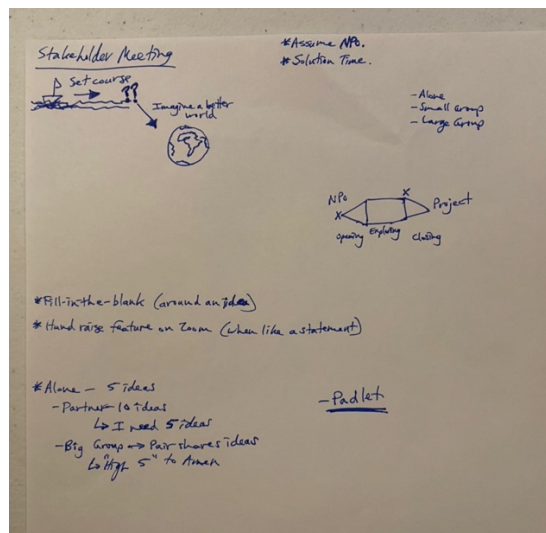
The outline for the Design Workshop will follow:

- Welcome
- Introduce the NPO
- Introduce the research conclusions so far
- Everyone shares: one thing they have recently seen/experienced that they would define as "creative." - Everyone shares
- Introduce the task of the day - gather ideas for implementing the NPO
- Individual time - 5 minutes to write down as many ideas as possible that address the NPO
  - Come back together after 5 minutes
- Breakup into one-on-one to share ideas
  - They will be tasks with fusing ideas together that seem relevant and/or highlighting ideas that they deem "good."
  - Must share 5 ideas with larger group.
- Large Group - each smaller group shares their 5 ideas...we listen.

- Large groups discusses the gathered ideas
  - Pros/cons
  - What stands out?
- Further thoughts - give the stakeholders freedom to say anything they want in conclusion

## DESIGN WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION

All notes were hand written during the workshop due to the online format. See pictures of notes included.



## **ONE-PAGE POST-WORKSHOP MESSAGE TO STAKEHOLDERS**

Dear Workshop Participants,

Thank you so much for participating in my workshop to help fulfill my requirements for the Doctor of Ministry program at Portland Theological Seminary. I am thrilled with the work we did to generate ideas reading my NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. Your help is much appreciated!

In addition, I wanted to continue to invite you into the process of exploring the truth, limitations, and issues with this statement and future ideas. As you stumble across things in your personal learning, feel free to pass them along to me. You never know what book, article, or blog might reinforce an idea. Finally, after a large group session and three one-on-ones I wanted to let you know which three big ideas, the definition of “done” (as it relates to this project), and benchmarks of success. I will be focusing next semester on extending these ideas out in details before a final research area is determined. They are:

### **THREE BIG IDEAS**

**Idea 1 - Modular:** Create a modular (online and/or print) that guides a congregation through a process of addressing root causes of unhealthy habits and solves a problem. This will foster a sense of exploration and innovation in a subversive way. This may be especially important in churches that are resistant to the language around creativity. *Benchmarks of Success:* (1) Someone/church asking clarifying questions about the process, (2) Coming back for multiple processes to navigate areas within a church, (3) A church that adapts the processes to their context/system.

**Idea 2 - Training:** Full-church training and curriculum that allows a congregation to be a part of the learning process of exploration and innovation. The emphasis would be on the entire church’s participation and discovery. *Benchmarks of Success:* The best benchmark will be if processes are implemented into committee/leadership meetings within the church without a paid staff member forcing it.

**Idea 3 - Consulting:** Create a business that allows outside voices to guide pastors and church leaders through a process of exploring and innovating. This can be around a specific issue or a wider culture that the leadership is attempting to create. *Benchmarks of Success:* (1) A pastor’s willingness to open up about their own limitations, (2) Church leaders who are hungry for progress and willing to experiment, (3) Ongoing communication with key leader that suggests deep ingestion of material and ideas.

DEFINITION OF “DONE”: The ultimate goal will be a healthy system that churches can utilize to address needs (big/small) in a way that leverages God’s ongoing work in the world.

I am very grateful to have the privilege of calling each of you a friend. Many blessings!

Peace to you, Scott Shelton

## **ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS DOCUMENTATION**

### **Seminary Professor & former cross-cultural missionary NOTES:**

One-On-One Project Ideas – Mike Stroope

12/1/21

NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

What parts of the NPO most resonate with you?

How can this be addressed?

- New master of art at Truett – In Contextual Witness and Innovation
  - For non-clergy
  - Real people...that want to learn how to live into what God has created them to be. To do it in the domains that God has given them. To be innovators for God in their domains.
  - Models and Practices of Innovation – how to think about anomalies...how to create new answers. That God has created you for this situation.
  - We have a bad understand a theology of work...
  - One year – 38 hours...in summer they go mentor with someone who is doing creative things.
  - Innovation in your domain...how do you think different about your job. You are meant to create in that space for the KOG. School teacher is their calling.
  - Vocation and work? Why did God put you into that domain? More than making money? More than serving a CEO? God gave your abilities
- A GOOD theology of work.
  - A calling to be the people of God.
- When people talk about innovation...attempts to get people into the church.
- A culture that frees people to it...
  - How do you count as success? Numbers? A new index of success?



## Senior Pastor NOTES:

One-On-One Project Ideas

11/29/21

NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

What parts of the NPO most resonate with you?

What opportunities/gaps are possible?

- Book: "Your Creative Power" - Osborn
  - Written to people who say they are "not creative."
  - Outline/Sections:
    - Preparation for creativity
    - Imagination guides
  - Page 4 quote...everyday
  - Pre-requisites for creativity
- Someone needs to protect someone who is generating ideas (not able to criticize)
- Creative ideas needs protection. Someone has to be the point...identified leaders who are going to take people on a creative process. Keepers of the flame...a guide. Six thinking hats - gives a structure to take people through a process. How do you shoot a bullet at creativity?
- Creating a low-threshold for creative....EX: getting a new idea for valentine's day
- Attempting to find the places where you need to generate your creative energy. Focus on certain areas....find a creative guide for each of those areas.
- Leader needs to be onboard with the creative process...at least supporting the people around him/her.
- What is that you could do for a church (any church)?
  - Energize creativity in the church...what are the gateway moments?
- 5 step processes to engage visitors
  - How do you respond to visitors?

- Questions of discernment that HBC could do...that are so *you*...would tell you about Heritage, help you engage, learn the culture.
- Energized by things they care about (visitors), energized by thinking about the church, energized by thinking about what Heritage is all about.
- A module that helps places assess who we are.
- Walking people through a process...and then ask, "want to do this more often?" Then ask what else you want to address?
- It's like you need to back into the idea
- A deck of cards that would generate creative ideas for churches....("Innovative Whack Pack")
  - It is a tool to help generate ideas.
  - Promotes to help people discuss
    - EX: Gideon...watches people drink water to determine who he wants.
      - Helps build a theological case for creativity.

Where did it begin with you?

- Engaging with church as a young person...renewal with Christ happened when Kyle decided was pleased with the way he was. He rejected athletics. He rejected academia. He rejected FFA. He was outside the mainstream. He said, "God doesn't need me to be any of those other things." Then he decided he didn't need to fit in by following the rules. He wanted to be uniquely himself...that fundamentally shifted so much of his life. BUT he was in a creative church...and that helps. Nourished in creativity.
  - Sunday night church gave them a place to experiment.
- Went to a liturgical church (Lakeshore Baptist) once married to Cindy. Then to another "last chance" Baptist church...willing to try anything.
- Can't hardly care if you care and are controlled by what people think. No Van Gogh if he had listened to all the people telling him his paintings were no good. That is a spiritual thing ultimately....if you believe God has put something in you.

Creativity implies personalization.

## Senior Pastor/Annapolis Area Clergy NOTES:

One-On-One Project Ideas

12/3/21

NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

What parts of the NPO most resonate with you?

- Tables in community. Hospitality
  - Idea form pastor, leveraging the leadership, and
- Block party sponsorship
  - Funding, organizing of community events...helps them know their neighbors
  - They can know their neighbors better
- Leadership that is soft/tender toward a community
  - Serving as an example and allowing people to see the benefits
- 6-7 non-profits that would give them space in a building
  - What structure could be created to establish partnership
- Inspired people...
  - Operating in an abundance mindset...not a scarcity
- Powerholders in a congregation...have the power to say "yes" or "no."
  - Healthy system of leadership.
  - Healthy system to get decisions created, planned, and implemented
  - Unhealthy systems means we can be hamstrung by people who hold lots of power.
  - People are terrified to make decisions on their own because of the fear of some of these powerholders.
- How can you get a church that wasn't siloed?
  - Used by different groups for different things.
- Hire correctly: Community organizer, facility manager, and 2 social workers

# Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

## Prototype Summary and Findings: Prototype 1

**Prototype Description:** A modular (online and/or text) that walks a congregation through multiple processes of addressing root causes of unhealthy habits and solves a problem. A way of systematically processing an identified need through a set of questions that focus thinking and target ideas. This will address the current needs and highlight areas of deeper dysfunction.

A question-and-answer system between a trained pastor/leader who navigates a prescribed set of questions to help a small group of people arrive at a solution of addressing a current problem. In addition, within the questioning to address the identified problem, the small group is also knowingly or unknowingly able to highlight root causes of stagnation.

A way of addressing practical needs that would also target root causes of problems/opportunities. For example, imagine that a congregation wants to get more visitors to fill out the informational card. They look up the "visitor assimilation" questions. The first question asks, "what are we currently doing to help visitors connect?" Then, "what could we do?" NOTE: the second question requires a confident leader who can help dictate and foster a list of ideas without the conversation being stolen by someone cutting down ideas prematurely. In this stage, every idea is welcome, no matter how crazy. The third question can then center the congregations unwillingly to do the listed ideas. It says, "What things lie behind our unwillingness to do the task (visitor assimilation)?" Next, "what things need to change to accomplish the goal? (funding, staffing, volunteer recruitment). Then, "how do we share the problem and solution with others?" Each questions plunges everyone into a deeper understanding about the root causes of stagnation in a certain area. The questions probe but the healthy congregation that is seeking new ways of exploration and innovation will welcome the internal work.

**NPO Statement:** A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

**Research Questions:** Can a congregation address deeply held problem areas within its structure by focusing on a current concerns of practicality? Is there a subversive way of addressing the critical areas of stagnation by focusing on immediate concerns with targeted questions of reflection and brainstorming?

### **Assessment Benchmarks**

- Multiple questions begin to be asked in addressing a seemingly easily-solved problem.
- The identified problem-solvers asking if there are underlying causes that need to be addressed to bring solution to a circumstance.
- After one solution is reached, another is immediately identified and addressed as an underlying cause.

- NOTE: To assess these benchmarks, lots of listening is involved to determine if the projects scope is impacting the culture of the church.

**Participant Description:** Congregation members that serve on decision making committees within a church. To lead the questions, a trained pastor/leader will be needed to facilitate the questioning. This discussion should be targeted and addressing one particular need. The questions help everyone understand the issue and how they might be able to solve it.

**Learning Summary:** This type of modular requires an enormous amount of contextualized knowledge about a congregation, relationship with people, and local history. The requirements do not make it impossible to help facilitate a question and answer

**Most Important Discovery:** Too many variables to consider for this to be wildly used with a diversity of Christian congregations. However, the idea may be something that can be adapted within local congregation to help foster a sense of exploration.

It is difficult for people to buy-in to the process when the problems are seemingly insignificant and/or over-simplified. In this situation especially, the congregation is not ready to enter the brainstorm and assessment needed to properly reflect upon the congregation's situation.

Another important discovery is that this type of assessment can be enfolded within a larger project as part of "brainstorming how-to."

## Prototype Summary and Findings: Prototype 2

**Prototype Description:** A writing project that will elaborate on many of the foundational elements required for a healthy congregation to explore and innovate. This work is intended to focus on the church system themselves and why healthier congregations are open to exploration and innovation. This can give the leader a model to describe how a system of innovation can be established within a congregation. A potential table of contents/outline of chapters is as follows:

### Introduction

### Section 1: Theological Reflection on Change

#### Chapter 1: Working with God

- A God who listens to the people
- A God who adapts to the world

#### Chapter 2: Formed into God's Image

- Co-creators - It's not just that you *can* but it's that you *must!* You were *created for it!*
- Dreaming big dreams - defining "new"
  - Psalm 126

### Section 2: Practical Steps - "Yes You Can!"

#### Chapter 3: Barriers to innovation and adaption within established churches

- Barriers
  - Traditions - Congregational and denominational
    - Some think it is easy in a free church and/or non-denominational. However, many local traditions keep them from exploring new liturgy structure, ministry responses, etc.
  - Laissez-Faire - "things are fine how they are" "Let it run its natural course." One of the problems with this type of thinking is that there can be truth in it. However, one aspect of truth does not mean that it should be the guiding principle in all matters.
  - The urgency only held by the leader. The truth is that things are not "fine" for churches in the North America. This requires a response in approach and structure.
- Building an Exploratory Mindset and Culture
  - "Canoeing the Mountains" by Tod Bolsinger

- Teaching our congregations to experiment
  - Trust grows if this begins in smaller goals

#### Chapter 4: Individual Exploring

- Begins with the leader's willingness to embrace an open-mind and exploratory mindset
  - Jesus, "....as he was going...."
- Personally, hearing God.
  - Being formed as an individual and leading other into healthy formation
  - Power of sabbath
- Prayer
  - Often, we tend to make prayer the last option, when all our efforts have been exhausted. But in the theory that we are actively in pursuit, with God, we can experience a different prayer that seeks cooperation.

#### Chapter 5: Group Exploring

- Practices from business - some do this naturally. Their minds are gears toward thinking "outside the box" but other need guides to direct the way.
  - "Six Thinking Hats" by Edward de Bono
  - "Brainstorming"
- Corporately Hearing God
  - Be formed in community
  - The power of sabbath

#### Epilogue: Modern Examples

- Greg Boyd
- Dallas Willard

**NPO Statement:** A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

#### **Research Question:**

- What are characteristics of an innovative culture?



- How do healthy congregation create?
- How can you demonstrate the traits of exploration and innovation within the church?

### **Assessment Benchmarks**

- New people coming into leadership positions annually. This shows an openness to new ideas and leadership styles.
- Senior leaders are asking “how” questions. *How* can we do this better? *How* can we do this differently? *How* is this adding value to our life-together?

**Participant Description:** This research will require supporting documents that help create a clearer picture of what is required for systems to thrive in exploration and innovation. Congregations and its leadership will be the target audience and subjects of learning.

**Learning Summary:** After interviewing Dr. Tod Bolsinger and learning of his perception of the gaps in the innovation gap of current work, I have decided to focus this section of work on the wider system of church life. While this still requires focused attention on individuals and leaders, it will seek to articulate what a healthy culture of exploration and innovation feels like from a congregational standpoint.

**Most Important Discovery:** Speaking with Tod Bolsinger helped draw my work away from a discussion on open theism. As we discussed, hitting this topic might unfairly bog the results into an unnecessary theological debate. The facts and ideas established will envelop several expressions within the sphere of Christian tradition.

Tod Bolsinger challenged me stay focused on an idea without going into too many directions. Often, the work is too big for just one project. There are parts that must be set aside for future research.

There has been lots of focus on the leadership skills required to lead through change processes. While these resources are helpful, there will naturally be some overlap with this research. My work is intended to focus on the church system themselves and why healthier congregations are open to exploration and innovation. The end result will be a thorough model that can be used to describe how a culture and system of innovation is be established within a congregation.

### Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solution

As I began to look at the emerging solutions, it was helpful to break down the Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) in sections. The NPO states that: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation. The process of breaking it down into sections gave each part the ability to be reflected upon and to established its importance in the overall project. In addition, it gave me a better understanding of what exists and what contributions can be made into the conversation of church innovation.

### *A healthy church...*

Exploration and innovation are aspects of a healthy church, not the complete definition of health. Though it is not intended to be the exhaustive definition, it is a vital component to a church that continues to seek pathways of healing in its community.

### *Nurtures a culture...*

Exploration and innovation are not one-time occurrences. Instead, a culture must be nurtured by leaders until it becomes a part of the fabric of a church's existence. In its purest form, it has the ability to impact all aspects of the church. This project is not an attempt to be relevant, even though relevance might be a by-product of exploration and innovation. Instead, it seeks a more meaningful way of existing, as the Body of Christ, in a local context. Therefore, walking the road of discipleship together that puts us in places of exploration and innovation.

### *Of humble exploration...*

Humble exploration involves a church's internal ethos of action. It sets itself on a trajectory of exploration to help find solutions to the ills in the world. It requires humility because it places itself in a spot of genuine curiosity and learning. However, it cannot be tangibly identified. For example, how can one gauge another's humility? Therefore, a deep awareness must be present within the congregation to ensure it is genuine about the questions it is asking. Often churches think they know what they should do with little regard for how it is interpreted by outsiders and/or other parishioners. Humility allows congregations to be in a position to learn and respond in contextualized ways to the things around them.

### *And responsive innovation.*

Responsive innovation happens when solvable issues have been identified in the exploration process. The task of innovation is in direct response to identified needs and opportunities.

Breaking down the NPO statement has helped shape the final project to insure an original and thoughtful contribution is made in the conversation of exploration and innovation within congregations.

### *Resource Findings*

The formal work will begin with the assumption that the user believes the church is in unstable times of change and must anticipate healthy ways of navigating the future. Therefore, little time needs to be spent framing the cultural realities that presently exist in the world which was highlighted in *The Agile Church* and *The Innovative Church*.<sup>71</sup> The concerns raised have only exasperated by the

---

<sup>71</sup> Zscheile, Dwight J., *The Agile Church: Spirit-Lead Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014.

COVID-19 pandemic. Few people need to be convinced of why churches need to have healthy systems of exploration and innovation after experiencing the immediate shut-down that occurred around the world and in churches. Churches with systems of adaptation have been able to survive and thrive in the rapidly changing environment. Others have not been as fortunate.

The point that continues to need clarification is that these realities are not just a cultural expression in response to various issues that spring up. Instead, nurturing a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation is part of the ongoing mode of creation. Simply put, we are made to explore and innovate as a church. A church's response is not just because the world is changing but instead because it is the foundational element of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, the specific contribution lies in the project's ability to be anchored by an understanding of the church's identity as an explorer and innovator within the mission of God (*missio Dei*). This is not an optional part of a healthy church, instead, it is a natural outcome of a system focused on the ongoing work of God's Kingdom. Healthy cultures naturally create systems that are eager for improvement.

Based on my research, two resources that balance the task of innovation into the church (and not just to senior leadership/pastors) are: *The Agile Church* by Dwight J. Zscheile<sup>72</sup> and *The Innovative Church* by Scott Cormode<sup>73</sup>. These books offer a resource to churches to help establish a system of innovation. They were both recommended by Tod Bolsinger<sup>74</sup> who has himself written extensively on how churches can have more adaptive qualities. Many resources are focused on how leaders can develop and consequently drive innovation but fewer approaches exist for how churches can create such systems of exploration and innovation.

Both of these resources have a strong focus on establishing the need for a church to be innovative. They convincingly argue that change is upon our culture and church. Therefore, the church is encouraged to innovate about its strategic goals because the change is already upon us. In each book, there is a chapter titled "Organizing for Innovation." The practical application in both circumstances is both helpful and timely. However, as previously stated, I am going to begin my project with little arguments as to why a church must establish a culture of exploration and innovation. My project will begin under the assumption that the church must continue to innovate. One of the consequences of COVID-19 is that little rationalization needs to be given for why churches need to keep exploring and innovating at healthy levels.

---

<sup>72</sup> Zscheile, Dwight J., *The Agile Church: Spirit-Lead Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> Cormode, Scott. *The Innovative Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 151.

<sup>74</sup> Bolsinger, Tod. 2022. Scott M. Shelton. Phone interview. April 4, 2022.

It is exactly here, at the point of exploring and innovating that I hope to create sound justification for establishing a culture that naturally produces ideas to address the needs in and outside the church. One of the challenges to writing such a project will be the desire for the church to be relevant. Henri Nouwen elaborates on the temptation to be relevant. He says, "The leaders of the future will be those who dare to claim their irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows them to enter into a deep solidarity with the anguish underlying all the glitter of success, and to bring the light of Jesus there."<sup>75</sup>

This project is less about relevance and more about aligning our steps, goals, and strategy with God. For example, the act of exploration and innovation actually take a distinctively non-relevant tract as it focuses on journeying with people into deeper spiritual formation. In *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail*, Robert Webber speaks about how movements in Protestantism away from liturgical practices has actually created greater longing for many of its own values (reading of scripture, orthodoxy, trusting in God's work and grace).<sup>76</sup> Nurturing cultures of exploration and innovation allow congregations to look backward and forward with the genuine hope of knowing Christ and the mission Dei fully.

### *Workshop*

To foster a greater sense of root causes and ways of addressing the NPO, a workshop during the fall of 2021 was commissioned with a diverse group of attendees. All of the participants have a keen sense of local churches needs in a variety of contexts. Each person was able to ask detailed questions of the NPO. After questioning, they were given opportunity to evaluate the NPO. Given their varied experiences within local congregations, they were asked to describe their personal experiences dealing with local churches reluctance to pursue cultures of exploration and innovation. These findings from trusted and professional sources have help ground this project and the target audience to churches.

One of the conversations that spiked my interest is that they know few churches that seem to operate in cultures where exploration and innovation are fully embraced. Most of the participants have experienced systems that are reluctant to change based on established longstanding systems of operation. However, they expressed hope because churches seem to be waking to the realities of loss and social isolation. The desire to reach the community becomes a motivation to re-think how the church system can function in today's world.

### *Assessing Root Cause*

---

<sup>75</sup> Nouwen, Henri, *In The Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Webber, Robert E., *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*. (Waco, TX, Word Books Publisher, 1985) P. 168-169

Assessing the root causes of NPO was vital so that the final project can intentionally address the foundational elements. The first central finding in root causes was a failure to recognize we are beloved by God. This is a backwards way of understanding why groups do not choose exploration and innovation because it addresses one's theology, self-esteem, and fears about the future. A failure exists in people's unwillingness to embrace the imago Dei in others. In so doing, ideas are killed, exploration is extinguished and people are tamed in favor of something more easily controlled. In this sense, a church's lack of innovation and exploration may be a litmus test to the overall discipleship aspects of the church. If the natural outcome of health is a renewed sense of vision, expectation of exploration, and innovation then the causes of stagnation may be bound to the limited understanding of Christ's activity in our lives and others.

Normalizing the struggle around exploration and innovation is an important finding based on another root cause of fear. There are no easy answers in the process of change. To influence culture, leaders must know when to turn up and down the heat because the values will drive the culture. It is called "the productive range of distress."<sup>77</sup> If fear is not combated in its system, then it will be a driving force for how a church operates. In the church, there are few days that are filled with black and white truth. Most are filled by the fuzzy grey that binds our real life and the mystery of faith. This reality reveals why more conversations of exploration and innovation are needed in churches. This exercise is not limited to new programs or buildings. Instead, exploration and innovation fills conversations with fresh ideas of pursuing Christ in the fullness of daily existence. Often, the most creative ideas are spurred on by someone who is trying to discern how they can better implement Christ into a particular area of life. This is why it is paramount that exploration and innovation become a part of the cultural identity of churches. It is a breeding ground for discipleship and spiritual formation.

Another root cause of a church's loss of exploration and innovation is failing to translate properly. Teachers understand the difficulty of translating the ancient world of the scripture into truths practical for today. For some, it can seem like a daunting task if the truth is being force-fed into boxes of previously known certainties. However, with open hands we receive the gift of openness to new approaches, new ideas, and new thought-patterns in our explorations with Christ. Exploration and innovation are inward and outward realities for individuals and congregations.

There is a passivity in some churches that gets unfairly assigned a dimension of spirituality. It is masked in the idea that God is independent of our actions, thoughts, and knowledge. In this sense, we are docile spectators in God's work in the world. It sounds close enough to the truth to be convincing. Especially, if you are looking for a reason not to explore, innovate, and wrestle with best practices. However, to know Christ is to know the invitation of God to become active participants

---

<sup>77</sup> Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*. (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2002) p. 108.

in the work of redemption. A proper way of interpreting the scripture into modern society is vital to a healthy sense of exploration and innovation.

Another identified root cause of churches failure to properly explore and innovate was poor corporate training. This can encompass the training that clergy receive in the discipleship process, theological education, and/or mentoring programs as they develop into pastors. However, for the purposes of this project, it is also the congregation that needs proper training in exploration and innovation. One approach of addressing this came out during my one-on-one interview with Dr. Mike Stroope of Truett Theological Seminary who is pioneering a program that takes layperson into a seminary context for one year and guides them through a process of establishing a healthy theology of work. The program will give them a Master of Arts in Contextual Witness and Innovation<sup>78</sup>. The trainings intent is disciple people who want to learn how to live into the domains that God has given them.

Often ministry leaders do not delegate exploration and innovation to others. The most revealing truth of this problem is when ideas from parishioners are squashed because of the perceived threat or critique to establishment that change often carries. However, we must do a better job of helping our churches discern God's leadership. Part of that will be giving them room to explore solutions to perceived problems and opportunities. Church leaders must learn practical ways of influencing the culture of the church in the direction of exploration and innovation.

Inviting others into the exploration and innovation process should happen in all forms of decision making with the church. One way to explore ideas with people is leverage brainstorming sessions, regardless of their importance, through simple strategies that prevail in business leadership literature. One example that has been extreme helpful to several congregation is Edward de Bono's *Six Thinking Hats*<sup>79</sup> where each person in the room is invited to answer prompts to a leader's questions in hopes at arriving at more thoroughly and creative solution to issues. This resource will be paramount to much of the projects because of it's ease of use, participatorily style, and success in a variety of contexts.

### Final Thoughts

After a variety of root causes were determined, the group moved on to possible ways of addressing the NPO given the resources and time involved in tackling such a wide topic. It was determined to focus on three different projects that would go through other revisions based on one-on-one interviews, readings, and the processing of information. It was in this sifting that the above prototypes were explored in greater depth.

---

<sup>78</sup> Stroope, Michael. 2021. Scott M. Shelton. Phone interview. December 1, 2021

<sup>79</sup> De Bono, Edward. *Six Thinking Hats* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1999), p. 13-25.

It is with high hopes that I believe churches are eager to do that which God is inviting them into. The established churches that continue to view these aspects as optional in a world of competing interests and influx of change are not the focus of this project. However, this resource can become helpful when a church does decide that change is necessary for a healthy culture and future. The hope is that new questions will emerge that help churches properly discern the will of God.

#### Most Viable Prototype (MVP)

Based on the above research, time consideration, and contribution to a widening conversation, the writing project listed under prototype 2 was determined to be the MVP.

While conversations dealing with church innovation will always need refinement based on society-church relationships, my desire is that this project would help churches focus on establishing ways of embedding this within the culture of a church. This can be a catalytic moment for churches that have lived off previous good works, dissolving community relationships, and growing skepticism of institutions in society.

The writing project hopes to hold the example of businesses that developed over time to remain profitable and also the spiritual components necessary for churches to explore and innovate as a calling from God. Merging these systems can be a convincing tool for business-oriented people who need an example from the “real” world and those who need the belief that it will produce a spiritual growth.

There are a few hurdles as I perceive this project starting. First, is the time required to write a thorough project will be enormous. However, I feel like I have a good handle on respected sources and people so I am able to make distinctive contributions to previously stated points. Synthesizing the information in a coherent fashion will be the biggest difficulty for me.

With that said, the second challenge will be editing the scope of the work as I begin writing so I am able to stay focused on the main task. In my interview with Tod Bolsinger, he cautioned me on making this project too vast. He mentioned that there will likely be entire chapters that need to be removed to insure it stays on focus. Those chapters can be an entirely different project and/or discarded completely.<sup>80</sup>

Overall, I am hopeful that this writing project will make a unique contribution to churches that see the need to establish a way of exploration and innovation into the culture of church. A supplemental benefit will be my own, continued, experimentations with systems in my local context and church.

---

<sup>80</sup> Bolsinger, Tod. 2022. Scott M. Shelton. Phone interview. April 4, 2022.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1:

One-On-One Project Ideas – Mike Stroope

12/1/21

NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

What parts of the NPO most resonate with you?

How can this be addressed?

- New master of art at Truett – In Contextual Witness and Innovation
  - For non-clergy
  - Real people...that want to learn how to live into what God has created them to be. To do it in the domains that God has given them. To be innovators for God in their domains.
  - Models and Practices of Innovation – how to think about anomalies...how to create new answers. That God has created you for this situation.
  - We have a bad understand a theology of work...
  - One year – 38 hours...in summer they go mentor with someone who is doing creative things.
  - Innovation in your domain...how do you think different about your job. You are meant to create in that space for the KOG. School teacher is their calling.
  - Vocation and work? Why did God put you into that domain? More than making money? More than serving a CEO? God gave you abilities
- A GOOD theology of work.
  - A calling to be the people of God.
- When people talk about innovation...attempts to get people into the church.
- A culture that frees people to it...
  - How do you count as success? Numbers? A new index of success?



## Appendix 2:

Tod Bolsinger Meeting – April 4, 2022

NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

Your work both affirms what I have been working towards and challenges me to keep pushing. **I'm wondering what gaps you perceive need to be addressed.**

- Find how it demonstrated the traits within the church. Apply it to the church...Bolsinger is applying it to resilience. How can you apply it to traits within the church.
- Pete Scarrarzo
  - He uses the idea of "emotionally healthy" – how does this show up in your research
- Dwight Zscheile – Lots of stuff on innovation
- Scot Cormode
  - Innovation from human center design and applying it to the church
- His current work: discipleship as an adaptive
- Doctoral dissertation – seminary presidents that came and brought change Amy Drenna
- There are attributes that bring change
- How many threads to go down?
- Do I have to have an open theism to believe that a church can be innovative and adaptive? This is a theological question that might bog down the project.
- Cultivate attributes...

If I took your work and thought of it like a big umbrella covering the wide nature of the church and calling it into a healthy adaptative leadership tract, what specifically would you say are the areas that still need to be addressed?

In *Tempered Resilience*, "Stress, when handled well, makes the leader stronger" (p.57).

In the section on being attuned and speaking about the mirror neurons, Bolsinger says, "When humans feel similarly, they begin to think together" (p.63).

Leaders are formed in leading. A very difficult part of leading is getting people to think creatively. Getting people to envision something that could be is a process that requires extreme self-awareness, humility, openness, refinement.

Thinking creativity demands the best of us. It is this HOW TO that I hope to write on.

# Appendix E—Project Appendix Documentation

## APPENDIX 1

Breakdown of NPO: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

NPO:	<b>A healthy church...</b>	<b>...nurtures a culture...</b>	<b>...of humble exploration...</b>	<b>...and responsive innovation.</b>
Comments	Exploration and innovation are aspects of a healthy church. This is not intended to be an exhaustive statement on church health.	Exploration and innovation are not one-time occurrences. Instead, it is nurtured by leaders until it becomes a part of the culture of the church. It can take root within the framework and impact all aspects of the church.	Humble exploration involves a churches internal ethos of action. It sets itself on a trajectory of exploration to help find solutions to the ills in the world. It requires humility because it places itself in a spot of genuine curiosity and learning.	Responsive innovation happens when solvable issues have been identified in the exploration process. The task of innovation comes about as a direct response to needs. Churches innovate in response to the identified needs/problems/opportunities.

## APPENDIX 2 - Introduction and Part 2 of *Idea Explosion!*

### INTRODUCTION

How often have you heard someone say, “I have an idea!”? Their voice is raised with a sense of ambition, their body leans forward, and their eyes are wide and alert. Ideas are the groundwork by which we gather our best solutions to the problems that we are facing as a people. In a rapidly changing culture, a church must learn what it means to adapt and change within the context of its abilities, calling, and values. Ideas are where it all begins. There are unique moments in ministry where, if leveraged correctly, they can significantly impact a church's future direction. However, these moments can be missed by a congregation and its leadership if they are not primed and able to distinguish ideas from the superficial opinions of others. Ideas are dreams filled with imagination and hope. It gives a group of people a sense of excitement and adventure. Ideas lay the groundwork for a community to actively engage in God’s mission. The premise of this book is that *a healthy<sup>81</sup> church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.*

The weight of this last sentence is in opposition to the fact that many leaders generally believe two things about themselves and their church. First, they believe that their church is already innovating. Second, they do not think their church can innovate. Both statements may be honest based on the experiences of triumph or failure. A belief that has guided several denominations says: “Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda.” Translation: “The Church reformed, always reforming.” It is a way of understanding their history and motivation to reach into the future. Sadly, the barriers often seem insurmountable to churches experiencing such beautiful cooperation with God. Congregations’ unwillingness to explore, coupled with hesitant leaders who are ill-equipped to guide in thoughtful and contextualized approaches, creates an atmosphere of stagnation.

There is more! This does not have to be the fate of your church. There is a world filled with beautiful possibilities. We must find ways to tap into the abundant reserve of opportunities to foster a culture that genuinely seeks the will of God through generating ideas. How, then, can we help produce the changes God desires in our churches, communities, and world? In some mysterious way, the answer is found in the ideas we can create.

Before we begin, it is perhaps helpful to break down the following sentence: A healthy church nurtures a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.

---

<sup>81</sup> There are many parts that help foster a culture of health in a congregation. For the purposes of this project, exploration and innovation are aspects required for a church to move forward productively in healthy ways. While it is not intended to be an exhaustive statement on church health, it is vital to the current and future aspects of church wellness.

### *A healthy church...*

Exploration and innovation are aspects of a healthy church. This is not meant to be an exhaustive statement about the health of a congregation. In a dynamic and ever-changing society, nurturing a culture of exploration and innovation must be a critical determiner of a congregation's overall health.

### *...nurtures a culture...*

Exploration and innovation are not one-time occurrences. Instead, it is nurtured by leaders until it becomes a part of the church's culture. Then, it can take root within the organizational structure and impact all aspects of the church. The intent of developing a new process for ideation is that this will go beyond just a meeting tactic. It will instead address a problem that the church is facing and provide a way of thinking that informs, empowers, and allows individuals to see themselves as image bearers of God's creative works in the world.

### *...of humble exploration...*

Humble exploration involves a church's internal ethos of action. It sets itself on a trajectory of exploration to help find solutions to the ills in the world. It requires humility because it places itself in a spot of genuine curiosity and learning.

### *...and responsive innovation.*

Responsive innovation happens when solvable issues have been identified in the exploration process. The task of innovation comes about as a direct response to needs. Churches innovate in response to the identified needs, problems, and/or opportunities.

We were meant to create! God has given each of us a mind, leadership gifts, and opportunities to improve things. You are being called to do more than maintain the status quo. Through passion and curiosity, you help foster a culture that seeks to produce results for God's ongoing mission in the world. However, many pastors and church leaders struggle to embed a discovering mindset in their congregations. I cringe whenever I hear a pastor say, "I am not creative." This pains me because it undermines God's invitation to be workers in the harvest (Matthew 9:35-38).

Before we begin, it is important to note that I am not speaking about ego-driven innovations that fuel a senior leader's need to be admired. The gain is not about personal achievement. Instead, it is a leadership responsibility to include others in a process of experiencing the power of God through acts of creation. This is not a visionless exploration into uncharted territory. Instead, it is about being equipped with tools to guide a process of brainstorming so you can be responsive to needs and opportunities. As with all things in the pastoral ministry, this is not only a task for ministerial staff. Instead, it is one of the building blocks to foster a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation that begins with you and filters throughout the congregation.

This book will give you, pastors and church leaders, the tools to create effective brainstorming through the Gather-Discern-Decide Process (GDD Process). Together, we will find that ideation is *not* just something we do. Instead, it is established in our church's culture through a new way of openness. This book is structured in three sections. Part one will explore how the GDD Process' groundwork is infused with its biblical, theological, and values-driven principles. A proper biblical and theological understanding is central to exploration, innovation, and discernment in a faith community. Part two details the GDD Process and the potential pitfalls of participants. Part three deals with the challenges and strategies leaders should expect once the GDD Process is implemented in the church.

The key to the successful implementation of the GDD Process is that you must be willing to assume some responsibilities for your vital role in building your church's culture. A widely shared understanding of culture building reminds us that *culture is caught, not taught*. As a senior leader, you can establish culture by the way you live, explore, and innovate. Over time, your values, good or bad, will influence the church. Therefore, a leader must take responsibility for two critical areas for the GDD Process to move from a tactic into a culture-building exercise. The two requirements are tolerance and curiosity. Both of them must become high values for a culture of flourishing ideas to be established.

The first requirement is tolerance. To properly present the GDD Process, you must have a high tolerance for wild ideas. This is especially true during the gathering phase (chapter 3). It is helpful to remind yourself to be playful in the gathering phase of the process. People are accustomed to cutting down ideas before they are ever able to gain traction. These acts of cutting down ideas must be intolerable for you. In fact, tolerance requires unfounded rejection to be an abhorrent quality. Embracing all ideas must become a principal value. Once a group's tolerance builds, ideas have a way of manifesting in other areas. A group will most naturally follow your emotions. Some will inherently question the reasonableness of such an exercise. Therefore, you must be able to tolerate the impatience of others and guide everyone to the desired target.

In a spiritual sense, the tolerance required is categorized in Brennan Manning's discussion of religion. He describes our attempts at achieving religiosity with a grasped hand. Manning refers to it as "white knuckle religion."<sup>82</sup> This type of religion is exhausting in its attempts to control people and circumstances. Instead, Manning suggests an open-handed religion that seeks to be open instead of controlling. Holding tightly in fear is replaced by your ability to freely receive and explore new experiences with God. This imagery is precisely the mindset that you will need to venture into the GDD Process. It attempts to explore ideas with others, believing that something profound can happen together. The tolerance we bring to a moment is an act of faith and prayer. As people bring ideas to the surface, there will be good, extravagant, and unreasonable concepts. With open hands,

---

<sup>82</sup> Manning, Brennan, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000). p.204.

the GDD Process allows your tolerance to build. This experience, on repeat, for people will permit them to become participants in the mission of God.

Second, as a church leader, you must nurture a deep sense of curiosity. Based on empirical evidence, many leaders and congregations believe they are already being creative. They think everything is fine and nothing needs to be addressed. This lacks the genuine curiosity we see in other successful people and organizations. A healthy church never stops exploring for improvement. An important note is that this *begins with you, the leader!* To do this successfully, humility will be required. An unhealthy leader often takes ideas as a form of criticism. A healthy leader sees ideas as a way to lead people effectively. No one can have all the answers, so you must learn to leverage the creative abilities of everyone around you. The GDD Process thrives in a culture of shared trust and engagement. If you have ever been around professional athletes, you know that they constantly tweak their daily rhythms. A deeper understanding of their nutrition, exercise, mental focus, and knowledge of the game are among the areas they often explore for the slightest improvement. Also, think of the most intelligent people you know; are they not also some of the most curious? A deep sense of curiosity can be the fuel that drives the GDD Process *and* establishes a culture of exploration. Failure can even become an opportunity to improve and understand what works in a church system. Be the most curious person in the room!

The book is focused on churches of 400 or fewer members in a congregationally led church. These churches are often bound to limited budgets with no large endowments. The financial limits require an element of creativity. In addition, having a wide breadth of leadership requires the senior leaders and staff to report to the congregation reasonings for shifts in strategy. It is this type of cooperation between members, volunteers, and staff where the GDD Process thrives. Throughout the book, different terms for leader are used. For the context of this book, "leader" can refer to the senior pastor, lead pastor, ministry minister, head volunteer, or whoever is identified as the person in charge, paid or otherwise.

If you have ever witnessed a traffic accident, you know that there are two types of people. In the moment of crisis, some pull over to run toward the wreck, and others stop for a moment before moving along. It is not that the second person is uncaring, but they do not see themselves as able to help at the moment. The person running toward the accident sees themselves able to help in whatever capacity. They may have no special training in trauma or healthcare, but they see themselves as an active participant in the situation. The same thing can be said about ideation. Churches, and its leadership, have often taught passivity instead of active participation. The truth of scripture is clear; God created you for these moments. God will never leave you or forsake you. Therefore, explore with hope. The GDD Process will help you run toward issues with confidence.

## **PART 2: THE PROCESS - CHAPTERS 3-6**

### *Scenario 1: A Church that Explores*

*There was nothing extraordinary about the nearly 200-year-old church. It was traditional by ordinary judgments. The four giant white pillars welcomed visitors as they entered the First Baptist Church*

*just a block off the downtown square of this southern county-seat town. About an hour and a half outside of Dallas, the community posts a few Dallas retirees, but most people have lived in the community their entire life. It appears to be a common church until you investigate the rhythms of ministry, leadership, and idea exploration. Everything about this church runs through a process meant to achieve health, power-sharing, and maximizing creativity. There is nothing off limits to evaluation and innovation. They gather ideas and run them through a process to help them achieve positive results. Simply put, they are a church willing to explore ideas and innovate as needed. A brief list of how this church thinks creatively about all items is as follows:*

- *Website Domain: They have changed their website domain to reflect their beliefs about God's love for the world. Consequently, it is a talking point for people. It started because the staff needed help with how to verbally express their email addresses. The typical name@churchname.org was confusing to outsiders to follow. After an evaluative process and gathering ideas phase, they landed at a domain that expressed love rather than self-promotion. Consequently, it has challenged others in the church and community.*
- *Mission Trips: The church found that people who went on mission trips came back more committed to the church, more significant financial contributors, and spiritually changed. After evaluating the full impact of a person's involvement in an international trip, the church decided, along with the finance committee, to subsidize trips by \$1,000/per person. This change highlighted one of their principal values: everyone participates in the mission.*
- *Decision-Making Speed: The staff and leadership were increasingly frustrated with the speed needed to make healthy decisions versus the time required. All committee chairs were summoned to a 6:30 am meeting on a Thursday morning. To everyone's surprise, there were nearly thirty people in the room. They reviewed the processes and determined they should have a weekly meeting open to all committee chairs, staff, and members. This drastically sped up the time from idea to implementation. A side benefit was that it offered anyone in the church a spot to voice an opinion or concern. The meeting continues to meet weekly at 6:30 am.*
- *A Slide: The church is built on the side of a hill. The design requires three stories of building on the backside of the church. This area is dedicated to children's ministry space. For security purposes, parents must pick up younger children from their Sunday School room and walk three flights to the sanctuary level for corporate worship. They gathered ideas on how to make arriving at church more fun for the children. They finally settled on a three-story twirly slide that begins indoors, travels outside, and drops off next to the sanctuary entrance. It is a hit! In addition, its architecture reveals the importance of children to the church.*

*As you can imagine, this type of thinking has taken hold in many other ways around the church. Some further examples are: How they recruit staff, handle members who have been absent for three consecutive weeks, welcome newcomers, and communicate church announcements. They have chosen to explore ideas with different groups of people, which has helped establish a culture of*



*freedom. Their willingness to explore started in many low-risk situations. As trust was built, so did the risk they were willing to tolerate because the processes were in place to explore and innovate healthily when a large-scale endeavor was required.*

*A few days after Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana in 2005, the little east Texas community was notified that they would be inundated with refugees seeking shelter. City officials were scrambling. The church's ability to think quickly, adaptatively, and openly allowed it to be in the perfect spot to respond affirmatively when requests for help came. Their gymnasium and surrounding rooms and bathrooms were quickly transformed. Within 24 hours, a local steel company was building additional shower units behind the youth facility. Plumbers ran the water lines, and the city code enforcement approved all designs. This happened within a week! I argue that they would never have been able to respond to the natural disaster and influx of refugees had they not been willing to explore the name of their website domain or how to get more people on mission trips or a slide for children. They had a creative curiosity for relatively low-risk endeavors that allowed them to dream. They exemplify what it means to be ready in a changing world.*

*As a culture, this church is always looking for ideas. As new problems arise, ideas are sought from a group and vetted through a process. They understand that one idea can trigger fifteen other ideas. In the process of gathering ideas, the best and most crucial arise and are implemented. Getting to the ideas that seem off the map or unattainable is the beginning point for a church seeking to nurture a healthy culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation.*

---

The above story can be inspiring and overwhelming if you already feel the burden of a culture that demands a rapid response. Often, you are required to innovate with no formal process to guide and discern an idea's viability. The GDD Process is part of a broader system that helps you nurture a culture of exploration and innovation. When generating ideas is a problem for you, the GDD Process can help. Having leadership teams that can quickly process through ideas, can put your church in a position to respond to problems and opportunities with creative intentionality. Nurturing this over time creates a culture within the church that will be ready to respond to needs or opportunities. Therefore, having the GDD Process in place is helpful because it will allow your congregation to execute from their values, utilize the best strategies, and build the congregation's culture.

Much of the language around the GDD Process may lack the spiritual fervor that you may desire. Rest assured that this process of ideation is most effective when your group is spiritually healthy and focused on the Kingdom of God. I do not distinguish between the Kingdom of God language and secular for brainstorming new ideas. In this process, they must be seen as the same. You are being invited into a system of idea exploration, communal discernment, and decision-making that gives witness to God's creative abilities within every person. The great news is that the GDD Process can be implemented at different degrees depending on the issues at hand. Becoming a leader who is familiar with the process means you will be able to guide a group through the phases of gathering, discerning, and deciding to make responsive innovations in moments of need.

## The Gather-Discern-Decide (GDD) Process

The shape, outline, and phases of the GDD Process (See Figure 1) seek to clarify how ideas can be generated, discerned, and decided upon in a corporate setting. The GDD Process requires everyone present to use their creative abilities to nurture an environment where everything can be explored. This word, creativity, is used sparingly in the research and report because so many people do not see themselves as creative. Their reluctance stems from a fear of being misunderstood, too extreme, or having time limitations. With training, you can learn that being creative does not necessarily require a large time commitment, and you will grow in confidence the more it is practiced. Part of the importance of the GDD Process is to help your church understand its creative abilities! I am shocked to enter meetings with pastors who verbalize that they are “not creative.” This self-understanding of so many leaders grieves me for the future of many churches. These leaders stand before intelligent people, exposit ancient texts into current times, and lead us into worship, but they do not see themselves as a creative force. As I press into these pastors and leaders, I am reminded that our overly-critical view of self can limit our performance. Therefore, this process has been created to show you exactly how to lead a brainstorming session within your church to establish more ideas! Before the ideation phase, we must understand a healthy system of narrowing ideas.

### Narrowing - The Triangle Shape

People often immediately grow frustrated at the gathering phase guidelines because it roars against so much of our understanding of logic and efficiency. Asking people to suspend critique and reasoning so that everyone can remain open to new ideas is very difficult for some people unless they learn the power it can create within a group. However, knowing there is a process to narrow ideas will give you the emotional reassurance to engage with the

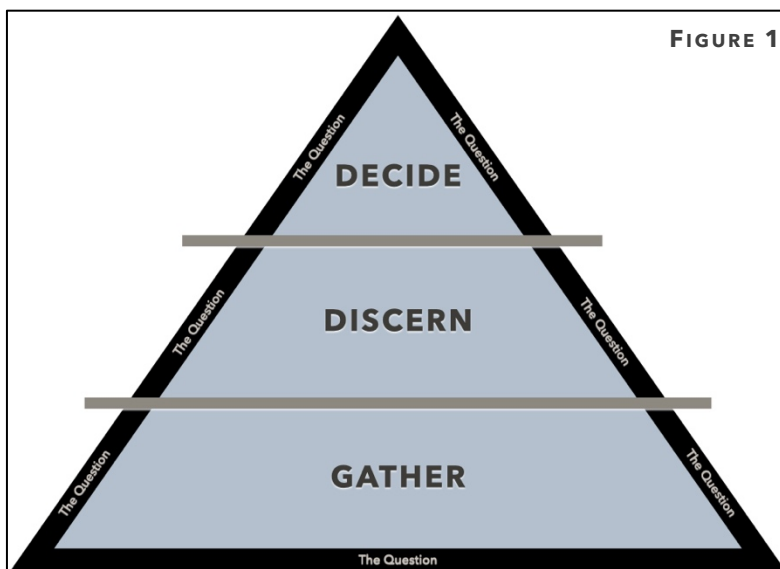


FIGURE 1

GDD Process. The triangular shape reveals the scope of ideas at each phase of the process. In gathering, you attempt to list all the ideas, no matter how crazy or impossible. This phase is at the bottom because it is meant to be the most inclusive and foundational to all the stages. Ideas begin on the ground level and work their way up through the progress. You limit your efforts when you start with an insufficient number of ideas. Next, the group will begin to discern which ideas are rising to the top for a voting process that eliminates a portion of the generated ideas. Finally, conclusions will be drawn, and a plan will be developed in the decision phase. When a set of ideas

reaches the decide phase, everyone in the group can figure out each idea's risks, rewards, and opportunities.

When individuals in your group struggle with any phase of the process, it is helpful to draw a picture of a triangle so they can understand where the GDD Process is headed. This is not aimlessly brainstorming. Instead, it is leveraging a group's collective power to better understand what a church needs to do.

#### Guidelines

- Draw the triangle along with the three sections (see Figure 1)
- Continue to remind the group of the narrowing effect of the GDD Process

#### **The Question - Getting on the Board**

Getting to the right question is like a dart board. For anyone to score, you have to get it within the rings of the board. The better you get at finding the correct question, the closer you will be to a bullseye. If you want the maximum effect of the GDD Process, you must first make sure everyone is brainstorming the same question. While this may sound simple, it is the initial barrier to creativity. As you will experience, ideas grow from other ideas. The challenge is making sure everyone is trying to solve the same question. Getting to the right question is getting everyone to play on the same dartboard.

Nothing is solved without a clear understanding of the pressing question. Unfortunately, in a dilemma, a group can unintentionally start trying to list ideas around different or competing questions. This is natural because there are often multiple reasons for how someone interprets the reasons for a problem. Consequently, their solutions are targeted at solving their interpretation of the issue. Therefore, you must be able to generate the most pressing question for ideas to flow.

An example would be a church that hosts two services, one featuring traditional music while the other has a band, screen, and casual attire. The church is contemplating returning to one service because the contemporary service has been hemorrhaging people. The pastor, aware of the loss, comes into the staff meeting and asks: "should we go back to one service?" People's answers range from "never" to "yes, we need to be one church," but how does the staff hear the question? The contemporary music minister may hear, "We are doing a horrible job with the music, so how do we get rid of the contemporary service?" The young adult minister interprets the question as, "We are not focusing on young adults anymore." While the senior adult minister hears, "The contemporary service is failing, just as I predicted, let's get back to how things used to be." Obviously, these are generalities based on stereotypes about how someone would handle this question, but the truth is that people interpret questions based mainly on how it will benefit them. Finding the right question and tone is essential and surrounds the entire GDD Process because of its importance. The question will give fuel to the brainstorming. The wrong question will send people into stress and anxiety instead of exploration and innovation.

You can consider how to interpret the current situation. For example, if the door to the children's area cannot be opened just before Sunday services, you can gather a group and ask, "How can we get children into the building?" However, the more exploratory question may be, "Given that we cannot open the outside doors, what is the most fun way we can get children into their rooms?" One question asks how they can get children inside, while the other seeks to find a memorable way to enter the building. Both questions will foster different answers according to the presented question.

It is fair for you to stop the process and ask a different question if the ideas being generated seem off-target. However, the focus should be on making sure everyone is (a) answering the same question and (b) answering the pressing question. These two statements should be the filters in your mind as you begin the GDD Process with a group.

Once the targeted question is highlighted, it should be written down so everyone can view it. As groups improve at the GDD Process, they will often learn to correct themselves if they start providing ideas not targeted at the highlighted question. Then, when a group begins policing itself, you know you have arrived at a mature GDD Process.

In summary, after a problem or concern is presented seeking potential solutions, you will clarify the question until an agreement is reached within the group. Then, the question to be explored is written down so everyone can locate the discussion question.

#### Guidelines

- The leader clarifies the presented question and ensures everyone is brainstorming around the same question.
- The question is written so everyone can see.

Establishing an overall picture of where the GDD Process is headed is important. Like Moses, you may lead a group that vocalizes frustration and impatience. This spirit can dampen the mood and shut down creativity. However, knowing the positive outcomes can help you to keep pressing for ideas. Even seemingly minor attempts in the GDD Process can have lasting ripple effects in the life of a congregation. Developing a healthy culture of exploration and innovation will take time and energy, but it does not have to lean solely on enormous projects, vision statements, and massive shifts in strategy. It will require implementing brainstorming strategies, like the GDD Process, in all areas of your church, staff, and volunteers. Now, we will break down the three phases of the GDD Process. The descriptions have personal examples of how the guidelines can be implemented into church life.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Phase 1: Gather**

The gathering phase is the most essential phase of the GDD Process. It is also the most unclear phase to you because it is so rarely effectively practiced. Brainstorming carries little weight in many

church systems, and when attempting to generate ideas, it is often plagued by people who too quickly and unfairly offer criticism. As I will show you, this kills the process. All the other phases and structures support ideation. Your confidence and trust in the process will create an atmosphere of exploration and innovation. The guidelines can sometimes feel uncomfortable but they will help you position yourself as the monitor.

One of the largest mistakes that leaders make in brainstorming is prematurely allowing space for critique, verbal and non-verbal. As will be discussed, believe it or not, generating ideas rails against many of the rational parts of our humanity, yet getting all of the ideas out in the open is essential to developing more and better ideas. Many reasons drive people to limit the ideation process in this phase. Without intentionally doing so, they are drastically altering the involvement of others and all the possibilities of God's work. While they may not be ill-intentioned, their actions frustrate the ideation process. It might not be an overstatement to say that critique is the enemy of ideas in the gathering phase. This is why you are needed to lead the process!

In addition, you must include as many people as possible in the gathering phase. The number of people may vary depending on whether it is a pop-up meeting to deal with an immediate situation or a longer-term issue that requires a scheduled meeting. Pop-up meetings can include anyone present. In fact, this is preferable and helps add to a culture of equality. If the need is not as pressing, you can be more intentional about who is involved. The necessity is that a group of people is engaged in gathering ideas. In this sense, diversity of thought can be beneficial to helping the church arrive at clearer ideas.

In the Golden Ticket episode 1 of *The Office*, Michael Scott decided that he had a good idea. During the episode, Michael was trying to stimulate sales and, in the spirit of Willie Wonka, put five golden tickets in paper boxes, offering 10% off the customer's next order. The concern hits when one of their largest clients notifies salesperson Jim Halpert that they received a golden ticket. Michael immediately runs to accounting to see the impact on overall sales. To which Oscar, the accountant, says, "10%! They are our largest clients. It's going to hurt." In further consultation, the client found all five 10% off coupons, and nowhere on the notice does it say, "one per customer." Therefore, it is a 50% discount to the largest customer. The golden ticket idea needed more vetting. More people in the room would have appropriately vetted it during the next two phases. However, if this idea had been presented under the question, "How do we stimulate more sales?" or "What can we do to say 'thank you' to our customers?" Another idea with as much surprise and excitement could likely have been presented. One idea, made in isolation, can have catastrophic results.

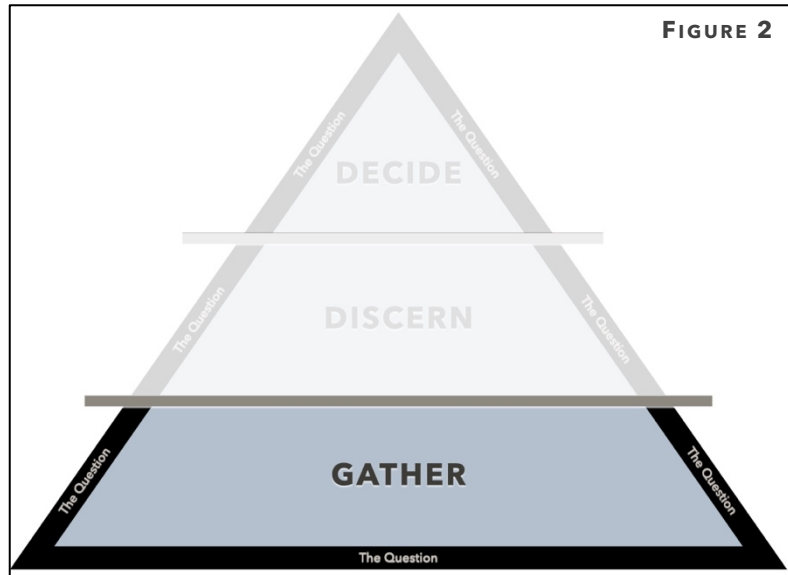
The gathering phase allows your group to work in unity to create as many ideas as possible around a topic. The guidelines help foster a unique environment that, early on, may feel uncomfortable. If you embrace a guide-like mentality you will be in the best position to create a healthy environment of openness and curiosity. The gathering phase is at the bottom of the triangular diagram (Figure 2) because it embraces the widest sense of mental openness. The other phases of the process will

help narrow it. The gathering phase is *only concerned with generating as many ideas as possible*. To foster this type of environment, you must be a guide who encourages, challenges, and gently corrects.

*Ideas are verbally submitted.*

Have you ever been in a conversation when someone mentions something that triggers a deep memory? Conversationally, this is how many of our relationships are built. I say something, and then you say something in response. The back-and-forth continues to build. Arguments are compounding conversations that, when done healthily, add to both sides' understandings of events. The same is true of a group brainstorming session. The most exciting effect of oral submission of ideas is that someone is never sure what a particular idea might plant in someone else. This is why it is key that the ideas be vocalized freely. For example, if you are attempting to figure out how to get senior adults from the far part of the parking lot to an outdoor event, someone might voice the outrageous idea of a hot balloon picking them up and dropping them off. Sharing this idea might remind you how much your grandmother loved hot air balloons, which will remind you that she owned a golf cart. So, you say, "what if we had golf carts to pick them up." Now, you know the church does not have golf carts or nearly enough to get everyone back and forth timely. However, another minister on staff has a neighbor who owns the local golf course and has offered golf carts for the church to use. So, an idea, however seemingly outrageous it is, might be the thing that stimulates a memory in someone else.

Verbally submitting ideas to the group is like throwing lighter fluid on a fire. Ideas have a compounding effect in a healthy church culture that genuinely seeks to nurture an environment of humble exploration and responsive innovation. In addition, there is energy and playfulness that helps create an atmosphere of hope. Sharing out loud reminds the group that they are on a journey of exploration instead of stagnation and defeat. Finally, these shared ideas remind everyone that they are not alone.



With that in mind, idea sharing can take enormous courage for people who are used to having their ideas shot down. Much less an outrageous idea like a hot air balloon picking up senior adults from the far part of a parking lot! Therefore, you must approach the gathering phase of the GDD Process with sensitivity and seriousness. The rules must be understood so everyone is on the same page.

*Each idea is written down for everyone to see.*

Part of affirming the shared ideas is giving them the legitimacy of being written down in the sight of everyone in the room. Every shared idea must be written down. If someone has offered a similar idea, write it down anyways. There is a time in the discern phase for you to merge similar ideas. There is a negative psychological effect when someone vocalizes an idea but it is not received. It shuts the person down. However, upon clarification (which happens in the discern phase), the ideas may have significant differences, which would only have been known if you had written the idea down. Reminder, during the gathering phase, you are attempting to generate as many ideas as possible. Nothing else. Writing down each idea helps you to foster a meeting of exploration.

Writing down ideas requires space and intentionality. For the GDD Process to become a value, your congregation must assess meeting spaces, physical needs, and resources. At one church I was a part of, our staff meeting room was called the Idea Lab. In it was an oval table large enough to fit the entire staff, a projector, and walls painted with high-end dry-erase paint. Everything about the room screams, "BRING YOUR IDEAS!" This space allowed us to enter the gathering phase rapidly. After moving to a new church, I obtained a large dry-erase board for my office as soon as possible. I always have several different marker colors available and chairs surrounding them. In addition, I purchased several moveable dry-erase boards to quickly bring them into meetings in areas without a stationary panel.

A slight variation to this but with a similar scope was when my congregation was between music ministers. As you know, conversations about music style, choir demands, and desired staff skill sets were far-ranging. We decided to have a town hall meeting after Sunday church. Everyone was invited to bring a dish (one of my congregation's spiritual gifts is potlucks). We had questions for people to discuss at their tables while they ate. I, the senior pastor, planned to facilitate the meeting. I had each minister present on a different aspect of our Sunday worship liturgy. Afterward, each table was asked to list as many items that had been experienced during Sunday morning worship. Prelude. Scripture reading. Offertory prayer. Baptism. Lord's Supper. Responsive reading. Blessing a departing family. Choir. Children's choir. Youth choir. Special music.

The list went on and on. Finally, I stood to ask what everyone had come up with. I wrote each one down. Each table added elements to the list. There were many reminders of things that we have done. Some older adults mentioned things they did growing up that were valuable. Once everything was on the wall (I used sticky notes), we had over fifty elements of worship on the wall. The point was clear, each Sunday, our liturgy is formed with the best intentions and hopes of facilitating the corporate worship of God. The visual was a powerful reminder to several nay-sayers who did not fully grasp the number of choices we, the staff, have each Sunday.

Seeing all that can be done has a powerful effect on people. It gives people hope! I cannot count the times my church has been in a seemingly hopeless situation until we can write down all the ideas and see the possibilities. There is a level of peace that is created when you display all the ideas. There is hope because we have options!

*No idea is rejected.*

Can it be put any more clearly? All ideas are accepted. No idea is too elaborate, expensive, or time-consuming in this phase. Everything is to be embraced with open hands. To be clear, the worst thing you can do in this phase is let someone shut out an idea. Your responsibility is to receive all ideas and write them down as described through the GDD Process.

When an idea is immediately rejected, it becomes personal. People do not dissociate themselves or their feelings at this point in the process. It is hurtful to ask people to generate ideas and immediately dismiss them. Depending on the situation, it may be something that the sharer has been dreaming about for a while. In this case, rejection of an idea can also reflect how a team views that person. Detaching personal feelings from an idea comes in the discern and decide phases. The more ideas that are presented, the easier it is to separate and lose track of who offered the idea. This disassociation will give you a greater ability to process the ideas in the other phases. Therefore, more idea helps you remove ideas without the emotional impact of rejecting ideas too early in the process. If there are many contributions, there is a greater tendency to recognize it as a team exploration process.

You likely sit in meetings where you are not the identified leader and need help to foster a spirit of openness to exploring ideas. You may serve on boards, community action groups, and volunteer coaching staffs where you have no formal authority. Naturally, that means you do not retain control of how a meeting can properly function. Being a person who loves to create new ideas, think through a situation's problems, and extensively study ideation, you might think you are equipped to overcome a rejected idea. Start paying attention to this as you sit in other meetings. Watch how you feel shut down or the body language of others as their comments, questions, and ideas are readily dismissed. It hurts when someone asks for ideas, and you experience your ideas being minimized, rejected, or dismissed. It's frustrating, and it shuts people down.

Next time this happens, try to communicate your frustration after the meeting. Often, it seems they think you have an ego problem because you were not heard. Call it whatever you want, but your frustration is valid and it grows because rejecting ideas is denying you access to solutions. As you lead the GDD Process you will learn how little time and energy it takes to sit with someone's idea and say, "That is good. Let me write it down," before anything happens. What is lost by letting an idea be expressed? These brief interactions can offer dignity and respect while keeping people open to sharing! Who knows, the best idea might be proposed by them.



*No idea is verbally or non-verbally critiqued, attacked, or accosted.*

There are many ways that people communicate a dislike of an idea. While some assume that it requires a verbal critique, it is more often a nonverbal gesture that causes people to withdraw from freely sharing ideas. In the gathering phase, we are concerned about creating space to generate as many ideas as possible; consequently, no idea is to be critiqued by verbal or non-verbal means.

Therefore, you must be aware of threats to suppress ideation through verbal and non-verbal critiques and direct attacks to suppress. Vocalized comments that drastically limit ideation come from someone who, ill-intentioned or not, might say, "I'm just the devil's advocate" or "I'm a realist." In either case, it is your responsibility to make the correction and get everyone on track. For example, if someone in a staff meeting comments after a shared idea by saying, "Yeah, but we cannot do that...." You can immediately and politely say, "Reminder, everyone, we are in the gathering phase," or "Hold on, let's gather ideas for a minute. That's a good idea to get things rolling." In correcting the "truth-teller," you have also affirmed the shared idea. If they are persistent, you might counter their argument by saying, "Well, we could do that if we had enough money and time." Usually, these defenses are received well if you have enough trust. This is why a healthy relationship culture is vital to the GDD Process. Trust is one of the greatest igniters of generating more ideas.

However, there are times when this phase needs to establish boundaries, especially when it is new. One incredibly creative and open pastor thinks several phrases should never be spoken during this stage. Comments such as, "We have done that before...." "Well, we have always done it the other way..." attempt to shed light on an idea's weakness prematurely. As people learn to trust the GDD Process, they can better withhold critique before it is requested. You, however, may decide that such statements must be put in the "never say" category. Besides hurting the ideation process, they also reveal stagnation that can hinder progress. Not to mention that results are often different based on various factors. This is especially true if there has been a recent leadership, culture, or financial shift. Essential to this discussion is the ongoing culture of exploration that needs to be fostered by leadership. There are many historical examples when something was attempted and failed, only to be successfully instilled later. However, many projects have been halted in congregations because they did not think it worked the first time. Instead, the idea should be held once again with open hands and vetted through the GDD Process.

As previously stated, non-verbal body language is harmful to ideation. Non-verbal cues are (but are not limited to): Eye-rolls, exhaustive breaths, spitting liquid out of mouths, deep sighs, pushing the chair back, head in hands, and irritated glances at others in the room. These are just a few examples of what may be defined as a non-verbal cue. Therefore, you must stay aware of what everyone in the meeting communicates through their body language. These factors can have as much weight in stalling the gathering process as a verbal critique. Non-verbal can be more challenging to correct, so everyone must know the guidelines. In this way, you can guide without directly confronting someone communicating their dislike or critique. Ultimately, you may need to call for

a quick break in the meeting and pull the person aside. Whether non-verbal communication is known or not, it drastically impacts the amount and quality of submitted ideas.

One of the hardest to determine non-verbal cues is laughter. Sometimes the playfulness of gathering ideas creates a genuine sense of amusement. Other times, it is a form of ridicule. If you are hoping to create an atmosphere of playfulness and expectation you must walk lightly with laughter. Your relationships with the participants in the room may shed some light on how the sharer will also receive the laughter. However, with confidence, you can guide past the laughter so that it is not an overwhelming distraction.

In the movie *Dead Poet's Society*, the English professor, John Keating, consistently challenges the established systems to think more imaginatively about the required literature and poetry. The students inside a traditional prep school are also confronted with their adolescent desires for acceptance and adventurous spirits. In one scene, Mr. Keating has a student stand before the class to imaginatively share a poem.<sup>83</sup> The reluctant student is asked to create something from an image of a seated Walt Whitman. He is hesitant to describe his view of the old, bearded poet. The professor covers the student's eyes with his hands. The other students start laughing. He passionately keeps the student on track by asking questions with zeal. The replies are first generic as the others continue chuckling. He continues to focus as Mr. Keating asks progressively more abstract questions about his feelings and thoughts. He elaborates on his interpretation of the image, then gives him action and words. The students laugh harder, and the professor yells, "forget them! Forget them!" The student continues, and the room grows silent as he finishes his thoughts. Looks of amazement are on the faces of the room, and then everyone starts clapping in approval. The professor leans forward and whispers to the students, "Don't you forget this." Laughter can be a way of easing what feels like an awkward moment. However, if you can help people push through the uncomfortable, something beautiful can be created.

*No idea is defended or justified.*

Think about it, what is someone doing when they feel like they must justify an idea? Are they trying to bring clarity so everyone grasps the general idea? Are they attempting to ease the sting of embarrassment? Maybe there is a self-confidence concern – am I good enough? Or, was that idea bad? The guideline to offer "no justification or defense" is meant to be the remedy for all the questions and statements listed. The goal of the gathering phase is for ideas to be shared, written down, and the group moves on. The rapid-fire nature of gathering contributes to more ideas being presented. Explanations or justifications require thought to articulate and time for the group to consume.

If someone is providing too much explanation, you may need to remind them of the guidelines by saying, "we will get to talk through the ideas in the next phase. Just ideas right now." Naturally,

---

<sup>83</sup> *Dead Poets Society*, Students Poetry Scene,  
<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/fullcredits>

there are some ideas that may need brief clarification so you can properly list it on the board. That is common but it needs to be brief. Because you are not in the evaluative phase at this point, people should be encouraged to share without hesitation. This allows everyone's minds and imaginations to explore freely. If you think about ideation like building a brick wall, you do not justify the reasoning why each brick belongs. Instead, a good bricklayer can fall into a rhythm of slapping down mortar, brick, and edging. By the end, a wall is up! In the gathering phase, we are laying down bricks.

*Seek outlandish ideas.*

Imagine you are gathering ideas around this question: How can you cross a street? Responses start forming: Check both ways and walk. Grab a bike and ride. Crawl. Hop. Skip. Drive in an automobile. Four-wheeler. Helicopter. Build a zip-line. Tight rope. Unicycle. Wheelbarrow.

Questions like this often start by listing obvious responses and build to the more outlandish ideas. If you let them, ideas always compound and grow. My question for you is, what of these ideas triggers your imagination? What makes you smile and dream? What takes you from the world of mundane to a place of excitement? People think they are being practical and down to earth, but what if these attempts at practicality are squeezing the wonder from participation in the Kingdom of God? There are good reasons to do the most reasonable, practical, and cost-efficient strategy. However, embracing outlandish ideas, if only for a few minutes, helps create an atmosphere of hope and playfulness that is difficult to achieve if you are only concerned with the most obvious or logical idea. The church should not be limited to the status quo. Why can the church not be the source of ideation in your community? It can be a place where music, art, and dance give way to hospitalities, dignity, and intentionality. It begins with your embracing ideas!

What happens when someone says, "that's impossible," or gives a big eye roll and sighs as they push their chair back? As mentioned, these can be stumbling blocks to gathering ideas. This type of action is not just a hindrance at the moment but a culture that is being created. Therefore, someone must be willing to jump in and offer a wild idea that forces the imagination to be activated. This helps to re-center the group and not let the agitator take over. It is nice when a group has experience in the gathering phase because you often have others immediately jump back in to share. Other times, you must be prepared to offer the "tight rope over the street" type of idea. Once a group trusts the GDD Process, they are more apt to embrace outlandish ideas. Until then, you must probe the group with "what are we not thinking about" and the ideas that force everyone to "use your imaginations, forget about practicality and money." To get into the outlandish idea headspace, you might ask everyone to think about what a third grader might say. This displaces the idea being generated away from the people, who may fear sharing for unexplained reasons, onto the hypothetical third grader's mind. In all this, you are working with the people in the room to gather more and better ideas. Embracing outlandish ideas helps foster a culture of exploration and innovation.

*Everyone in the room is a contributor.*

Ideas can reinforce the values of equality in convenient ways. The simple act of asking someone, “what do you think?” can bring someone from the outside in. The genuine curiosity where ideas are formed creates a nature humility among your group. Hard questions are met with possibilities as ideas are shared. The GDD Process is a way of inviting more people to the table of leadership and ideation. Simply put, it is a way of bringing people to the places where God is working in and through them. Getting people from silence into sharing is a sacred task.

There are two important points to recognize about allowing and requiring everyone in a room to participate in the GDD Process. First, silence can communicate that someone does not feel valued. Second, silence can demonstrate frustration with the process or leadership. Depending on several circumstances, silence can communicate many other things. However, for the GDD Process, these two items are essential to the gathering phase of ideation.

Silence may reveal deep feelings that their ideas do not matter, make a difference, or they are unimportant to the process. This is especially true for someone who may experience disenfranchisement in other areas of life. You must understand that there can be racial, socio-economic, educational, and staffing hindrances to someone’s full participation in idea sharing. Being aware and taking proactive steps to eliminate barriers is your responsibility. There is a deeper reality that you are ushering into congregations that center around equality. If you embrace a diversity of thought you will experience success in generating more and better ideas. Realizing everyone is a contributor is critical. Let’s say, for example, that you are having a conversation with the youth minister about the prospect of putting a new board at the entrance of the youth area. As you are talking, a youth ministry volunteer who is dropping off supplies for Sunday walks up. You say, “Hey, you have a second? Can you help us gather some ideas about what we could do to better welcome students?” The youth minister, sensing that you need more people to generate ideas, gets Judy, the custodian for the youth ministry area. Within a few minutes, the meeting went from two people who likely hold similar positions to doubling the group and its diversity of thought. As a reminder, this is not just good practice but essential if a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation is going to take place within your church. Everyone is a contributor; if there are not enough contributors present, you gather them to achieve maximum ideation.

You must also pay attention to the circumstances around someone’s silence because it can reveal a problem. Silence can signify burnout, frustration with the time allocated to brainstorming, or annoyance with the job. In all listed circumstances, the individual needs to be appropriately addressed. Because the entire brainstorming group cannot decipher the reasoning behind a person’s silence or the negative impact on the GDD Process, you need to appropriately address the situation with the person on the side. In almost all circumstances listed, the person should be dismissed from the meeting rather than for their negativity to persist. It will be up to you to determine the boundaries that are needed.

It should be noted that repeated dismissal of a staff member from a meeting involving the GDD Process can have a negative impact. As the leader, you must attempt to convince other staff and

volunteers of the importance and power of a group unified around an idea. The process is part of team building.

So, how do you get someone quiet to speak up? As previously stated, there are reasons why someone may not be sharing within the group. It is worth pointing out that some of the circumstances may be outside of their control. Perhaps they are dealing with a private family matter, sickness, or other anxiety. Often these folks can be drawn into the process by a genuine question of curiosity explicitly directed at them. "Hey Bill, I am really curious what ideas you have around this question." This intentionality brings the person into a place of acceptance and value. This is often all someone needs to turn a day around.

Ultimately, bringing people from silence to sharing is about generating as many ideas as possible. More ideas lead a group to better ideas. Your congregation can better thrive when questions are thoughtfully examined through the GDD Process. Staying within these seven guidelines helps establish a base to brainstorm ideas freely within a group. As will be discussed next chapter, even though there are many nuisances to each guideline, they can be easily and quickly taught with a competent leader. This ease helps establish a culture of exploration and innovation as ideas are gathered around low-risk and high-risk options.

#### Guidelines

- Ideas are verbally submitted.
- Each idea is written down for everyone to see.
- No idea is rejected.
- No idea is verbally or non-verbally critiqued, attacked, or accosted.
- No idea is defended or justified.
- Seek outlandish ideas.
- Everyone in the room is a contributor.

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give your congregation is permission to dream. Ideas can become our dreams about the future and the possibilities of change. Not every idea is *the* idea that will change the circumstances. However, you never get to *the* idea unless you are willing to explore in an open environment of trust. Put everything out on the table! Simple enough, right? Yet, surprisingly, so many struggle with the gathering phase. Once all the ideas are in front of us, we move up the triangle to discerning how a group can collectively work together to narrow the available options.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Phase 2: Discern**

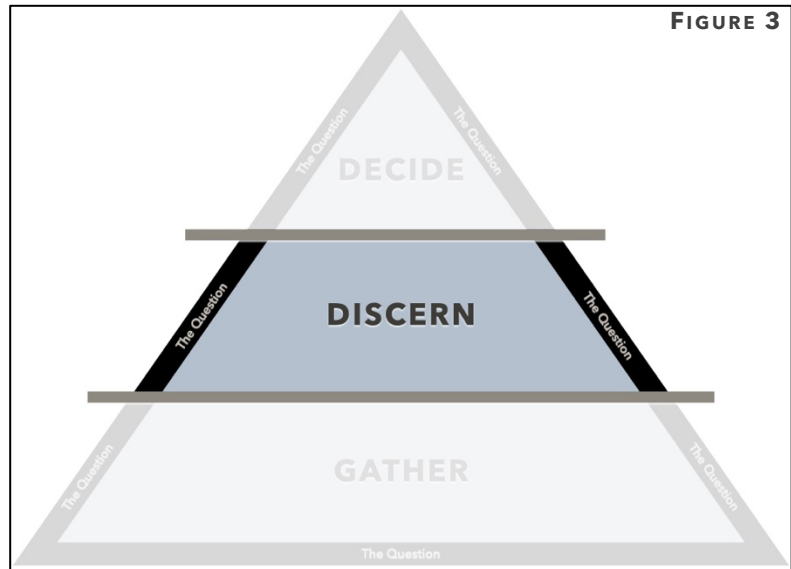
A grieving family enters your office. A few weeks prior, their beloved father died after a long road of Alzheimer's. It was a grueling journey toward death, filled with losing the family's patriarch before he was physically gone. The family stayed strong. Their commitment to faith had never been

stronger, and they were seeking a way to honor their father's legacy. They heard you speak about the leaking steeple during a congregational meeting. The church overwhelmingly supported the trustee's plan but wondered how they would pay for a new steeple. During several rounds of discussions, it was decided to make maintenance repairs so that the church could have more time to develop a thorough plan of assessment, replacement, and stewardship goals. The grieving family in your office wants to know how much a new steeple would cost. You quickly get on the phone with the chair of trustees and a local contractor to determine that a safe estimate is between \$80,000-\$100,000 for a complete replacement. One of the sons speaks up and says, "that sounds too conservative. Pastor, we have agreed to donate \$120,000 in our father's memory for a new steeple. We are hopeful that it was able to buy the most beautiful steeple in town." Stunned, you make plans for a follow-up meeting to assess goals and arrangements.

As with large private donations, it can be tricky to navigate dealing with the donor's requests, church opinions, and the required budgetary limitations, so you call a special meeting to evaluate the question: Once we get multiple steeple designs, what is the best way to pitch it to the church? The assembled team begins to openly and freely brainstorm. Large notepads filled the room. One idea is to find one steeple that the staff preferred and pitch it to the church. Another idea was a bus trip around several cities to see other church steeples. One person said, "we should do a sermon series on the use of different church architecture and how it impacts the church's witness. The same person suggested receiving ten different designs from the steeple manufacturer so that the church can vote on all of them. You are listening proudly to the ideas being bounced around the room. After about twenty minutes of gathering ideas, you help the group narrow the number of ideas by a ranking system. You give everyone in the room three votes. Each person secretly writes down a third, second, and first-place idea. One idea had all the first-place votes. It was clear that it had the most energy and traction. Even with a few modifiers, the present idea has the same framework of receiving several designs from the manufacturer and allowing the trustees and staff to make three to five recommendations to the church. Important to note: this church went from discerning to deciding quickly because of the clear cohesiveness and low-risk factor associated with the winning idea. If there were two or three more strong ideas, the process could have slowed down to properly clarify and discern each idea's intent.

Once several architectural renderings were received, the staff, in conjunction with the building committee, put together multiple tours that lay out the need for a new steeple by taking people to see the source of the problem in the balcony, laying out several potential options, and a short history of steeple architecture. This allowed everyone to have more informed opinions when they arrived at the end of the tour and were asked to share feedback about the five steeple designs through a weighted voting process. Throughout the steeple pitch to the church, those who had walked through the GDD Process were open to all suggestions. The input from members, staff, and the building committee were all considered when the final recommendation was submitted to the church. Collecting so many ideas and opinions in an open system where everyone could express feedback allows the process to go as smoothly as possible, especially considering the drastic change in church architecture that occurred.

Correctly discerning an idea can have as much impact on the culture of the church as generating ideas. There is an opportunity to think creatively, thoughtfully, and intentionally about finding the right vision for the church. Discerning is about hearing God through every person, their experiences, and their insights. God has uniquely equipped churches with healthy systems of discernment. As Figure 3 suggests, discerning ideas will naturally begin to limit the number of potential outcomes. Framed by the group's question and



balanced by the entire scope of ideas, the group can begin to discern how God is inviting them to address the issue. Each guideline walks with the group to ensure a congregation's values of ease, equality, efficiency, and fun. Over time, moving from the gathering phase into the discerning phase will feel like second nature. The seven guidelines for the discern phase are as follows:

*Each idea is briefly reviewed.*

This guideline serves as a breather for the group to look over the work they have already accomplished. When many ideas are present, it can feel like a successful brainstorming session. Think about it, someone came to a meeting with a genuine question, and they can see many potential ways forward. Hope and confidence build as the person sees a group of people surrounding a question or problem with so much concentrated brainstorming. The GDD Process will create optimism in your church system. The list of ideas is proof of that hopefulness.

For many people reviewing and critiquing ideas is similar. As you start filtering decisions, you need to ensure that you are not intentionally or unintentionally influencing the discerning phase. The lines begin to narrow, but the gathering phase guidelines still apply. You must be careful to distinguish and guide as neutrally as possible. Reviewing ideas is a matter of verbally listing all the ideas voiced and written down (which should be all of them).

While this process of verbally reviewing can be positive, it is also important to note that new ideas might spring up. It is normal to flow in and out of the gathering phase at this point. For example, as you are reviewing the ideas shared around a new sermon series title someone lists any additional title. Even though you are not in the gathering phase, you can place the suggestion at the end of the list and go back to where you were previously reviewing. If there are many interruptions, it may be a sign that you were not done with the gathering phase. The point is that by reviewing the listed ideas from the gathering phase, other ideas spring up that can help bring clarity to the final idea.

*Ask clarifying questions about ideas.*

After reviewing all the ideas, you should ask for clarifying questions. Again, there is a thin line between critiquing an idea and asking a question to collect more information. If the question is loaded or passive-aggressive, you keep order by saying, "remember, we are only asking clarifying questions right now."

So, what constitutes a clarifying question? This is likely a matter of opinion and specific to your group's culture. Generally speaking, the idea drives a clarifying question in the discerning process. From the previous example of your group listing potential sermon series titles, if someone asks a question about a particular word's meaning, they are asking a clarifying question. However, if they say, "What does that word mean? No one knows what that means," they have crossed the line between clarifying to critiquing. In this case, the question must center on the idea itself and not on its implementation or likelihood of completion. A clarifying question is meant to prevent misunderstanding. However, because the line is so close between clarifying and critiquing, there will be a learning curve to determine how to question. In many cases, it is appropriate to move relatively quickly through this section because there is a chance that a contested idea will not make it through the first round of voting later in this phase. Time and energy can be lost by clarifying too early.

As a church leader, you are familiar with loaded questions that stem from an opinion of how someone thinks something should go. Through time you learn to anticipate these questions from certain people. Likewise, you can often determine if a question has innocent intent depending on who asked the question. Unfortunately, some people seem determined to cut ideas down in any way they can. For unity, the group's culture, and the ideation process, you must find healthy ways of dealing with these idea-killers. Their questions reveal a lack of trust in the process and impatience that can create an unhealthy spirit of criticism. Be aware!

When your group gets to this point in the GDD Process, they probably have a general idea of each idea's focus. However, it is typical for the listed ideas to still feel premature. There are still several rounds of sifting before a final idea is decided. This is especially true in high-risk changes. The goal at the moment is to have a genuine sense of curiosity about each idea. Then, questions flow from that healthy place of curiosity.

*Very similar ideas can be paired together.*

Now that greater clarity has been reached, it is possible to have two similar ideas around a problem. When these ideas have the potential to be part of the same idea, it can be helpful, for discerning and voting sake, to merge the ideas. For example, if you are trying to determine where to put a temporary sign for your preschool, many ideas of locations might be listed. Ideas range from "the roof," "next to the permanent sign," "backside of the property," "under the permanent sign," "next to the street," and "along the side wall of the church." Due to the similarity of ideas, you might merge the ideas "next to the permanent sign" and "under the permanent sign" because the spot



they are determining is the same. If it is decided that the temporary sign is best near the permanent sign, you can attempt to figure out exactly where and how to hang it for maximum impact.

The guiding rule here is – if in doubt, leave them broken out. It ultimately does little harm, if any, to leave them separate. Two ideas often merge and grow together naturally, even after a decision. The knowledge of the various ideas of those who participated in the GDD Process can maximize the effectiveness of the final product. As final decisions are executed and adjustments made, the other ideas in the gathering phase fuel the adaptations. Nothing ever goes exactly as planned. So, the strength of an idea is often found in the process that helped create it. The other ideas your group generates serve as a frame of support. Those working with the implementations move more confidently, knowing that the idea has been through a rigorous process with lots of supplemental ideas.

*Add additional ideas that have come to mind.*

While repetitive, it is essential to give space for additional ideas that have been formed. As the ideas were being reviewed (guideline one), there may have been ideas informally shared and written down. While this is good, formally asking additional questions is a sign of genuine curiosity and exploration. The reality is that the creation of ideas should never be cut completely off. At some point, decisions must be made, but ideation can occur at each section and phase of the GDD Process. If additional ideas are presented, write them down and briefly review them with the group. Further ideas are often stimulated by clarification and pairing ideas.

Having a recognized spot for additional ideas can help create the proper space for those sensitive to interruptions and distractions. While many people are comfortable jumping in and out of different phases, it is important to recognize the order. Experience teaches that those who appreciate order can find the ideation process painful if it bounces around too much. Again, you must decide how stringent you will follow the guidelines. The ultimate point is to get every idea out so the group can shift the discerning process toward voting. While this puts you back in the gathering phase, it can contribute to more fully formed ideas. Do not be scared of too many ideas!

*Give everyone in the room time to process and privately list their top 3 or 5 ideas.*

Now that all ideas have been listed and clarified, the group can narrow the list. As figure 1 visually moves narrower in the triangular shape, so does the number of ideas being considered. There are various ways to help narrow the list with your team, but one strategy to help retain the spirit of openness, playfulness, and equality is to have each person write their responses privately before sharing them with the group.

Privately writing responses is a critical component, especially as the culture of exploration is being established so that an outspoken group member does not unfairly sway others. Again, just because you or a group member does not intend to influence the process unfairly does not mean their actions (verbal or non-verbal) will not sway feedback. A simple solution, especially as the group is learning, is to privately write responses before publicly sharing so everyone can be heard. Those

not accustomed to advocating for their ideas and thoughts will be thankful for your intentionality. For example, you are likely accustomed to trying to influence people toward your way of thinking. However, a part-time secretary may be less accustomed to speaking up on how they would do things differently. Still, they may have valuable input about how a congregation would interpret an idea. How you handle this part of the GDD Process can unfairly sway others toward what an outspoken group desires. The goal is more than just getting to the idea that everyone agrees upon. Instead, it is also about reinforcing your congregation's values and culture.

In this part of the discerning phase, a group member can be influenced by how they think others will vote. This is a genuine concern because you want them to arrive at what they believe is the best idea without interference from others. Depending on who is in the room, you may need to encourage everyone to express their thoughts about ideas. The freedom to disagree and challenge without being critical is important. If enough ideas are listed on the board, it is likely that the members are less attached to an idea and see the broader scope of work being done. Because the personalization of ideas has dimmed, it allows for a wider range to speak. Consequently, now is the time that you should start drawing some boundaries around expectations.

One of the more important key shifts in the GDD Process will be drawing these boundaries around the range of your church's staff and volunteer capabilities, so the ideas can begin to be narrowed. By doing this, you will foster a common sense of expectation so the group can more clearly narrow listed ideas. There will often be some incredible ideas mentioned that are outside the church's range of time and finances. For example, when considering ideas for an annual event, you might say, "let's keep dreaming, but we also must consider that our budget for this event is \$2,000, and it is in two months. Let's not unfairly limit ideas based on what we can do in this timeline but let's keep it in mind."

This is another thin line because some ideas are so good and have so much energy that you must consider attempting the idea because of the present and future momentum it would create. The leader will need to decide if more money can or should be expended because of the strength of an idea and its potential impact on the church. However, your limits help spur creativity. There are often times when expensive ideas have alternative solutions that help to create the same outcome. For example, a church was debating getting temporary car stickers for a big fall event. To generate interest, they created a simple website. It was determined that the car sticker idea would make lots of buzz in the small town if most of the church would put it on their automobiles. Unfortunately, the price of quality stickers was cost-prohibitive. However, someone mentioned writing the website on the back of car windows with window markers. It worked! To the staff's surprise, cars lined up and allowed people to write the website on the back windshield of about half the congregation's vehicles. There were thousands of hits on the newly formed website promoting the revival. They did not allow cost to disparage the premise of the idea. The boundaries serve as a way of helping the group decide between different ideas.

*List top ideas from the list.*

The goal of listing each person's top ideas has two points. One is to determine what the group thinks is most viable. The group is often composed of the people executing the plans, so they have a strong sense of the range of possibilities. This will grow, in time, as ideas continue to push them to explore and innovate. Second, it allows for the greatest buy-in and energy from the group. When ideas are generated and decided in private, corporate enthusiasm is lost. With all of the above in mind, we move toward discerning the best decision for the church.

One way to nurture openness is to vote only with their numerical selection, not their name. Giving everyone the same color pen and coming forward at the same time to vote can create additional anonymity to the process. It's important to note that you do not seek complete secrecy. Instead, you intend to create space for someone to enter the circle of decision-making and learn how to speak up for their thoughts and ideas. Voting with numbers, not names provides additional comfort for people to select ideas that might otherwise be left behind. Other voting strategies are:

Listing the Top-3 Votes: This is the most traditional and likely most straightforward way to achieve input from everyone in an ordered ranking system. Every person receives three votes and ranks from third to first place. As stated above, time is given for each person to decide independently. There will be members of the group that have to negotiate between ideas, so you need to be sensitive to time. Once the members have selected their top responses privately, they are asked to place a 3,2,1 next to the ideas they have determined to be the top three.

Everyone sits back down after placing their selections on the board next to the selected idea. It helps to take a moment and visually scan the board of ideas to assess appropriately. Then, verbally you can break the silence by asking a question like, "what observations do you notice about the votes?" Allowing the group to process the information verbally can help in the decision phase. Usually, because the process has been open and honest - free of criticism - that spirit lingers. However, someone's selections should never be criticized as dumb or irrelevant. This warning is in place because often, when a diverse group of people comes together, it can be challenging to understand other's viewpoint without a spirit of openness.

Discerning what ideas stand out can be subjective, so the assessment is crucial for determining why specific ideas stood out. Having the group verbally communicate will help create a sense of direction. When a group operates healthily, the conversation flows with surprising insights into people's minds. This process allows the team to begin negotiating for the final idea.

Weighted Voting: Searching the internet can produce several definitions of weighted voting. However, as described here, it is a way of attributing a numerical value to your top ideas. It moves beyond a simple first-place, second-place, and third-place system into attributing numerical weight to the tier of ideas. What you get is an actual scored value of each idea that was selected. Doing this is also less subjective because of the assigned grade.

How does it work? Like the top-3 format, each person is asked to rank their favorite ideas. However, each selection is given a numerical weight. One helpful way is giving a third-place vote 1 point, a second-place vote 3 points, and a first-place selection 5 points. When ready, the group puts a 5,3,1 next to their selected ideas. The overall score is tallied to find the top picks. This differentiates itself from the top-3 format because there is a potential for an idea to receive mostly third-place votes but still be at the top. For example, if the majority selects an idea as their third-place vote and scatters their second-place (3 points) and first-place votes (5 points) across the board, you might have the highest value attributed to everyone's third-place vote.

Having a voting strategy for your group can help add to the spirit of exploration and innovation. When your team is having fun and feel heard, they are more likely to give you their best efforts and ideas. These voting strategies are a way for you to add value to the camaraderie of working together to accomplish tasks.

*Review all ideas that receive points or votes.*

By this point, your group is likely starting to see their patience paying off as ideas rise to the surface. Therefore, it is a good idea to circle or highlight the ideas that have received votes so they stand out. There is no need to rank them according to overall votes. Instead, briefly review each idea again with a summary. This will help everyone narrow their focus on these specific ideas.

You might be asking, why so many review processes? First, it allows everyone to narrow their focus on the range of selected ideas. It is even more helpful to review selected ideas verbally when there are many ideas. In addition, giving each idea the validity of being voiced again is another way of nurturing a culture of equality. If everyone counts, then every vote should count. Someone may have been the only one to target a specific idea for points. Your review of that particular idea will give them a sense of legitimacy. Sometimes the outlier idea did not receive more votes because others in the group were too afraid to vote for it – even if it was a great and feasible idea. Someone advocating through voting is a simple act of courage and imagination. Narrowing the list to the available options will ease the flow into the deciding phase of the GDD Process.

#### *Guidelines*

- Each idea is briefly reviewed.
- Ask clarifying questions about ideas.
- Very similar ideas can be paired together.
- Add additional ideas that have come to mind.
- Give everyone in the room time to process and privately list their top 3 or 5 ideas.
- List top ideas from the list.
- Review all ideas that receive points or votes.

Learning to discern as a group gives enormous clarity to your church's unity. The joint effort creates a unique sense of purpose and shared vision. For a congregation, staff, and volunteers to truly meld together, they must be allowed to dream big ideas and constructively work together to determine

how the Lord is directly on their path. It's a wonderful adventure where everyone gets to participate. GDD Process moves up the triangle to the final brainstorming stage to decide upon an actionable item. Many ideas have been explored, and there has likely been great energy in the room as potential solutions were shared. Now, you begin to shift from a guide to a decision-maker, but you do not have to do it alone! While the decision phase will once again narrow the list, you can process all the available information and opinions of others in the room.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Phase 3: Decide**

Many leaders have crumbled when faced with a variety of good solutions. One of the hardest parts of the GDD Process is knowing that a group can generate more ideas and potentially difficult decisions will have to be made. As people begin to voice their opinions, you may face a dilemma. Everyone knows that at some point, someone will need to make a decision and be held responsible. If you are spiritually, emotionally, and physically healthy you will be in the best position to make a wise decision based on available information and the shared thoughts of your group. There are, of course, unhealthy ways to make a decision based on the opinion of others, ego, or fear. The potential for two or three good options can cause competing emotions to rise up in you. However, the GDD Process gives freedom because the final determiner of success is not just about arriving at the best decision. Instead, it is about your people being invited to participate in the God-given task of exploring and innovating possibilities. Therefore, you are free to make decisions as you reflect upon the group's ideas, comments, and questions. The discernment phase is an evaluative point to help you and the selected decision-makers come to the wisest conclusion.

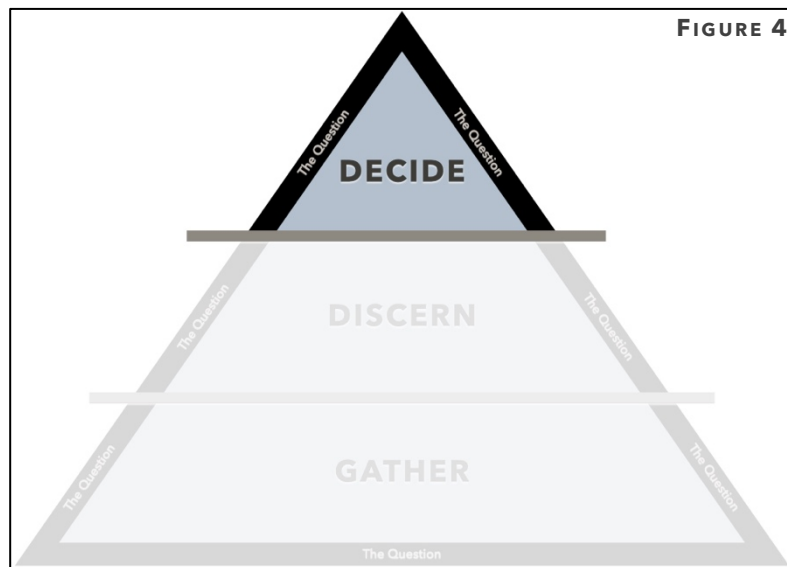
The seven guidelines for the deciding phase are undergirded by the reality that, ultimately, all decisions fall to a small group of people who will be held accountable for outcomes, budgets, and administrative concerns. In a healthy environment, there may be justification for you to express your rationale on final decisions based on your concerns (personal, strategic, or financial). Your ability to be transparent about determining the decision, which has been corporately negotiated up to this point, may allow greater grace to be extended and trust to be built within the group. Unfortunately, criticism may be unfairly leveraged against you for making decisions attempting to explore new areas of ministry or to deepen existing parts of the church. These decisions, made in good faith, are bound to be evaluated but the consequences are often redeemed in strengthening the culture of exploration and innovation.

In this phase, there may be a natural tendency to base final decisions on fear or judgment of others. Being aware of these emotions inside of you will be vital to the continued success of exploration and innovation. If outside forces unfairly control you, your people are likely to see the process as a formality instead of a culture-building exercise. The GDD Process allows you to lean into a system to generate, discern, and decide upon ideas. However, you must take ownership of the decisions made. Consequently, developing a plan to make final decisions with all the values of the GDD Process can be helpful.

The truth is, sometimes, the best brainstormers are not the best decision-makers because they see possibilities in every idea. This is an admirable quality to have, but it can be equally as exhausting if you or any leader is indecisive. Therefore, the GDD Process gives you an avenue to assist in decision-making. However, nothing can remove all the risks associated with decision-making. At most, you will do your best to collaborate, process, and execute and pray you are formed into the image of Christ along the way.

The decision phase brings to the point of confidence, knowing that all the ideas from members have been explored, processed, and evaluated. As figure 4 reveals, you are now in the top section of the triangle, surrounded by the proposed question, a firm base of ideas, and a healthy discernment process. There should be plenty of information and opinions available, but there is still some processing that needs to be done so that mature and healthy culture of exploration and innovation is reinforced as final decisions are made.

In this final phase, it is essential to shift toward exploring an idea's limitations and pitfalls. With all this brainstorming, it is still possible that you arrive at a bad decision. Sometimes, your group may find itself in the middle of these not-so-great ideas because it failed to step back for a moment and evaluate. Therefore, without being personally critical and understanding that there will always be a risk, it is important to ensure that the member of your group thoroughly explore the consequences of the selected ideas. The seven guidelines in the deciding phase give you, the leader, a strategy for finalizing decisions.



*Take a 5-minute break.*

Give everyone a break from the brainstorming session. Important to note that as a team gets better at brainstorming, the GDD Process may have only taken 15-20 minutes. However, the break gives everyone a mental break to come back with clear thinking. Breaks can be as simple as standing up and twisting. To make it fun, you can ask everyone to switch seats so they have a different perspective! The point, give everyone a psychological break, however brief, from the brainstorming.

The GDD Process can move very quickly. Without realizing it, you can be in the middle of competing ideas. Therefore, you want to ensure that you decide with a clear mind. Sometimes ideas can become an idol and the group fixates on what they are creating without considering its full impact.

Detaching, even briefly, from the emotions of an idea helps bring the group to a good spot of decision-making.

*During the break, a leader should erase the eliminated ideas*

To help gain visual clarity, during the break, a designated person should work to clean up the idea board. This includes erasing thoughts that have been eliminated and re-writing the selected votes. Note: It is a good idea to take a picture of the board before erasing and ensure the tallies from the ballots are marked appropriately.

It is helpful to have some record of all the listed ideas as they can contribute to the final product. Listing ideas thoroughly during the gathering phase of the GDD Process pays dividends in the final outcome. This is why, depending on what issue the generated ideas are addressing, there is a strong likelihood that some portion of the ideas may influence the final result. Through the ideation process, confidence is built into the group and ideas because all available options are being explored. As is often the case, the tweaking with wording or product can be aided by the broader list of ideas gathered in the process.

Once all the ideas that received votes are highlighted clearly, you can invite the group to enter the GDD Process again for the final sections of brainstorming. Once everyone is seated ask everyone to read over the listed ideas. As they reengage, utilize the power of silence to add importance to the decision-making process. Silence also gives the group space to contemplate how these ideas can be achieved. Important to note that you are also analyzing the ideas and the voting results at this time.

*Review ideas again.*

Regardless of the group's evaluative method to determine the top ideas, sometimes, based on votes or overall energy in the room, a clear winner emerges. However, each statement should still be reviewed so it validates all the brainstorming and sharing. A healthy repetition occurs in the GDD Process that helps bring clarity to the group and confidence in executing the results.

This repetition is essential in situations where the risks are heavy. For example, suppose your staff and influential youth ministry volunteers are considering how to make youth feel more welcome in the first five seconds after arrival to the youth area. Through the GDD Process, the group has gathered, voted, and narrowed the list to six great ideas. During the gathering phase, this group generated thirty-five ideas about how students can feel welcomed within the first five seconds of entry. The top six vote-getters were:

- Outdoor speakers mounted over the doorway, so they are immediately drawn into the environment of the room upon exiting their vehicle.
- A new set of glass entry doors so students can see inside the building before entry.
- Two student volunteers open and hold the doors for their peers
- Remove an outdated sign-in procedure

- Moving the couches from the entry so they have plenty of room to walk upon entering
- Two adults inside that charged with welcoming every student.

As the group analyzes the listed ideas, they observe that only two cost money, two require volunteer recruitment, and two are for removing or shifting items. They also notice that one idea has received all the first-place votes. After cleaning up the board and reviewing all six statements, it was determined that the clear winner was for a new set of glass entry doors during the discerning phase. However, review each idea again before scrutinizing the feasibility of ideas so that the group can obtain the scope of selected ideas.

*Test the feasibility by time, finances, people-power, and cultural implications.*

The overarching question in this section is, *how do we make these ideas work?* Some in your group have probably been craving this part of the process since the beginning. Certainly, as your group gets better at the GDD Process, you can arrive at this spot reasonably quickly. However, you must still guide this part of the process so that the group does not intentionally or unintentionally bash ideas. Likely every idea still on the board has some chance of feasibility. Filtering questions through four categories is helpful – more if required. The four categories and potential questions are as follows:

- Time: What is the timeframe for this idea? Do we have enough time to accomplish this? Do we need to add or subtract time from implementation?
- Finance: What resources are required to accomplish this idea? Do we have the available resources? Is there a creative way to test this idea before making a significant financial investment? Is this idea good enough for people to invest in it outside the regular budget?
- People-Power: How many people need to be involved in accomplishing successfully? Do we have the available people-power to achieve the idea? Whom do we need to include in the planning?
- Cultural Implications: How will our church receive this idea? How will our community interpret this idea? Does this idea unfairly promote our privilege or power? Does this idea misrepresent any group of people?

Questions such as, *is this a good idea? Does anyone like it?* Have already been answered in the discerning process of clarification and voting. Remember that each idea on the board has at least one vote to remain. Therefore, analyzing the idea around these four main categories can serve as a healthy filter for you to attempt to decide upon the solution.

The warning here is that people tend to take the path of least resistance. One of the chief concerns with idea generation is that it will create more work and cost more money. While this is often true, the ultimate goal is a more thoughtful approach to ministry. The goal is never finding the least resistant pathway. Instead, it is finding the path that your church is being asked to lead. Refrain from



forsaking the best and right idea because it will cost you time and money. Doing so will only fill you with regret. Not much is lost if you are able to lead your group to make an event, program, or church strategy 10% better. Ultimately, a church nurturing a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation values the pursuit as much as a result. You are building a culture, so go for it!

The last part of this section asks, *does anyone want to advocate for a particular idea?* This is where you can hear the passion around specific ideas. The ideas have likely been through so many filters that no one is personally attached to a particular idea. If that does still linger, it is essential to note that you have all arrived at these ideas together. Ideas breed other ideas, and no one person should be able to take full credit for the ideas. Therefore, the conversation at this point can flow freely with little guidance. The hope for you is that the group begins narrowing the list even further. However, there is a critical consideration before making any final decision.

*If needed, bring others into the decision-making realm.*

Depending on the risk level, some of the listed ideas may not be able to be evaluated honestly by people within the room. Some ideas require certain knowledge to be properly evaluated and implemented. Therefore, you must make efforts to contact trusted sources to gain more information about the feasibility of the selected idea. This does not have to drag the process out. Instead, it can be a quick phone call to gauge gut reactions to a brief summary of an idea. Sometimes simple tweaks to the wording or focus are suggested. Other times a different church committee will need to be advised. For example, installing new glass doors in the youth area may require approval from the property and grounds committee. Getting more people in the process aids, clarifies, and reinforces the strength of the idea. The process is strengthened by building and sharing ideas with others.

If others need to be consulted, it is important to seek them out and explain how the group arrived at the selected ideas. The most significant warning is not to let outsiders too quickly cut an idea. If this happens, it will hinder future efforts to encourage brainstorming in your group through the GDD Process. Therefore, you must make every effort to communicate the group's intentions and how they arrived at the selected idea. It is essential to give them lots of information upfront so they are aware of the intentionality, time, and effort of the group. Asking a group to help gather ideas, discern through the various options, and help decide upon an idea is a sacred task and should not be forsaken. You are listening for what obstacles you may encounter so that you properly address them. Healthy lines of communication are essential to establish a culture of humble exploration and responsive innovation throughout your congregation.

*The leader must be willing to bring finality to the GDD Process by making final decisions based on all available information.*

As a healthy and spiritually formed leader, you will be in the best possible situation to consider all the influencing factors and make a sound decision with all the available information. Unfortunately, many decisions are negatively influenced by ego or fear. Therefore, you must be able to assess all the information that has been offered. The information and decision filters should include the values

of the church, the work of the brainstorming group, staff abilities, volunteer talents, budgetary limitations, time factors, church history, cultural implications, and movement of God's Spirit. With all these factors weighing on the decisions, it is vital that you and other decision-makers pay careful attention to their spiritual, mental, and physical health to ensure you are making decisions following God's leadership.

There will be times when ideas need more time and information. If this is required, you must work to communicate with your group the reasoning for a delayed decision. This will require vulnerability but most staff members will respond favorably to being invited more deeply into the ideation process. This is an opportunity to show how seriously you, the leader, are taking their ideas. If delayed, it is wise to add updates to the weekly staff meeting agenda so everyone can stay informed. It is not helpful or kind to table an idea with no explanation to those who helped generate solutions. Unexplained delays will hurt future efforts in the GDD Process. However, proper communication is another opportunity to build trust with your group.

*Begin an implementation process.*

An implementation process is beyond the scope of this writing project. Still, it is important to know that many wonderful ideas are left in meeting rooms because of a failure to assign simple next-step tasks to people. Sometimes ideas will require a significant push to get the ball moving. When that is the case, it is even more critical to assign leaders tasks to get ideas moving. Ideas get left behind at this point because of poor management. Refrain from letting the urgent tasks of a day trump the important work of exploration and innovation. Creating a healthy and contextualized implementation strategy can be a task for the GDD Process!

### *Guidelines*

- Take a 5-minute break.
- During the break a leader should erase the eliminated ideas.
- Review ideas again.
- Test the feasibility by time, finances, people-power, and cultural implications.
- If needed, bring others into the decision-making realm.
- The leader must be willing to bring finality to the GDD Process by making final decisions based on all available information.
- Begin an implementation process.

Learning to decide upon ideas properly is important, so confidence in the GDD Process grows. It is in the execution of thoroughly vetted ideas that a leader's trust grows. Exploration and innovation have elements of risk and potential pitfalls. Still, substantial gains can catapult your church into the future as you nurture them into the fabric of your church's culture. You would be wise to celebrate the staff and volunteers working to foster a spirit of ideation. Make them a hero for their efforts so that others might be prompted to repeat their accomplishments of risk.

Churches willing to explore and innovate in low-risk endeavors are more prone and primed when big decisions need to be made. The GDD Process allows you to explore without being heavy-handed or controlling. Instead, by leaning into the GDD Process, you become a guide to bringing out what God is doing through your people. This is the church's task!

## **Chapter 6**

### **The People Pitfalls**

At the tail end of seminary, many students spend days reminiscing about their journey—days and nights filled with the study of scripture and dense theological material. Writing papers and studying for detailed exams are stress-filled. On the ministry side, seminarians learn the ins and outs of running churches, non-profits, and cross-cultural missions. There are too many important things to cover in the seminary, each area to be thoroughly explored. Therefore, the three-year crash course teaches prospective clergy how to think biblically, theologically, and practically. Courses in these areas seek to give students a firm foundation to continue learning. One difficult assignment at the tail end of my seminary career was given for each student to assimilate all of their learning into a short paragraph or statement. This reflective task forced many into the chambers of isolation so they could produce a profound statement of understanding. However, for me, it was something I was already reflecting upon. My statement of summarized learning is: *It's about people*. I chose a statement because one paragraph could never encapsulate all the academic knowledge and spiritual formation I walked through. In time, I have become more and more comfortable with this summary of my seminary years. It's about people.

I have experienced profound examples of patience that reveal a leader's proper understanding of Christ-likeness. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed ego-driven leaders intentionally push people away for minor infractions to retain control. I have always understood that leadership requires the best with whom you have. Pushing people out is *not* a strong sign of influence. Instead, learning to lead people and win them over is the task of your pastoral leadership. The GDD Process has three phases, and you can mostly control the conversation based on job title. However, you will never get the most from people if you must rely on your job position. The GDD Process is built on trust and the belief that everything you do as a church leader is about people. You are charged with guiding the people that are right in front of you. This theological and biblical summary also holds for the exploration of ideas and innovation. The GDD Process has within its strategy the belief that God is inviting you to participate in his ongoing work of creation in this world, but you cannot do it alone. You do it with others.

Now that the GDD Process has been thoroughly described, it is proper to advise you of four common people pitfalls that can arise within a group. The described people are likely not intending to be an antagonist to ideation. However, their actions can immediately shut down all brainstorming if they are not adequately advised and guided. The four examples serve as a heads-up to you. If you anticipate resistance to the GDD Process in these forms, you should meet with the individual to voice your concerns privately. Your intentionality will likely win them over and be a healthy leadership victory!

The examples listed below can be found in each phase, but they are most prevalent during the gathering phase. The GDD Process is a progressive approach to idea formation, discernment, and decision-making. Therefore, the entire process will be limited if the gathering phase cannot be healthily achieved.

People are prone to offer criticism quickly. They think they are helping by taking on these personas, but it has the opposite outcome. Instead, they are stalling the process. You will need to be aware of these potential pitfalls to get the most ideas out of your group. These four types of people are the devil's advocate, the everything-is-impossible person, the silent group, and the reluctant leader.

### *The Devil's Advocate*

The origins of "Devil's Advocate" comes from a Latin term, "Advocatus Diaboli," by Pope Sixtus V as an official position where the person established the counter-argument for the sainthood of proposed individuals. "His duty requires him to prepare in writing all possible arguments, even at times seemingly slight, against the raising of anyone to the honors of the altar."<sup>84</sup> The origins signal a stopgap between what should be allowed into the church and what is phony. Self-described devil's advocates are often far less noble in their pursuit of screening ideas. Instead, they become the judge of major and minor ideas. They have an uncanny ability to see something that might go wrong and use it as justification for criticism. Because this person intentionally or unintentionally keeps promoting themselves as the judge of ideas and framework, you must be willing to non-anxiously address this person so the group can keep expressing ideas.

As outlined in chapters three through five, this person needs to be encouraged to stay within each phase of the GDD process. If you choose, you are able to defer blame to the process when attempting to bring this person back into alignment. The ability to offer unoffensive correction is a side benefit of having a formal process for ideation. For example, if someone in a GDD Process meeting starts critiquing ideas in the gathering phase (covered in chapter 3), you can say, "the process requires us to wait to critique ideas until the next phases." The guidelines come from the process and not just your personal preference. To borrow a military term, the GDD Process gives you some cover to operate inventively.

While the devil's advocate may not intend to act in such limiting ways, they are contributing to an environment that subtly rejects new courses of action in the exploration of new ideas. While their actions may be accidental, you must address them directly or risk losing the desired openness within the group.

How do you tell if someone has the potential to be a devil's advocate? Two types of people stand out as prospects for the devil's advocate position. First, the person who has strong opinions in a

---

<sup>84</sup> Burtzell, Richard. "Advocatus Diaboli." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 18 Jan. 2023 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01168b.htm>>.

particular area. For example, children's minister may be more inclined to offer immediate criticism of ideas because they are the leader in the area of concern. When asked to explore ideas on how the church can better reach out to families who attended summer Vacation Bible School (VBS) they might immediately have a "we already did this" and "let me play the other side of that idea" type mindset. With a healthy and compassionate attitude, you can identify that the children's minister might feel like this is highlighting a failure in their ministry. They may feel and act this way even if they were the ones soliciting ideas. Regardless, they have turned from a willing participant into a stumbling block for ideation.

The second person likely to fall into the devil's advocate position is the person who has the most to lose in a new direction or format. For example, the music minister may be critical of ideas about how your church can better serve the community during the annual Christmas event. A concert featuring the choir, handbells, and soloists may have been an effective strategy for many years. Still, the church may seek to explore new ideas, including keeping the existing program format, or adding to it. The music minister, however, may have their identity in this event. Therefore, they will likely consciously or unconsciously cut down ideas.

In the proper context, a devil's advocate can offer a perspective that challenges your group's direction and potentially saves it from a large mistake. Likely, you have been in meetings where it only took one dissenting opinion to cause enough concern to avert an unhealthy idea from establishing itself. However, the tension is that it can also serve as the brake to forward movement. If the GDD Process is followed, there are sections where the devil's advocate can properly relay concerns. It is important to remember is that the devil's advocate position is not wrong. Instead, they are a valuable resource in the proper context and timing.

### *Everything is Impossible*

This person tends to use verbal and nonverbal means to communicate the impossibilities of a listed idea. "We don't have the money!" "Our people would lose their minds." "We cannot restructure the bylaws." These statements, and others like them, become this person's rallying cry to a group. They can be a powerful force in stuffing ideas before they have a chance to be thoughtfully considered. Therefore, you must be aware.

The everything-is-impossible person thinks they are saving people time and energy, but they limit ideation, equality, and fun. You will need to address the various ques that this person is sending others within the group. Depending on your official role, you may have to politely ask this person to remove themselves from the room or change their body posture. In this moment, your task is directing this person to focus on the values and culture rather than what they determine to be rational. Intentionally creating a culture of ideation will require you to work hard at addressing the everything-is-impossible group member gently. While this can create an interpersonal conflict, it will be worth it in the long-term cultural impacts you can foster. This is especially true if there have been minimal boundaries regarding how people react in brainstorming sessions. So, it is important to believe that an everything-is-impossible mindset will negatively impact your church culture that seeks to nurture an environment of exploration and innovation.

The everything-is-impossible member sometimes self-describe themselves as the realist. This is often done in a heroic stance of superiority. As with other people's pitfalls, it is wise to address these issues privately. Reassuring the self-proclaimed realist that the group will have time to process the ideas in the discernment and decision phases will hopefully bring them relief. However, they are likely accustomed to being immediately critical of ideas, which may have brought them professional success through shrewd decisions. While the everything-is-impossible person can have a general sense of wisdom through their self-limiting arguments, they fail to incorporate the full power of God's people, trust in a process, and God-originated adventure. The stifling effect on a strategy is suffocating.

An example of this was a church struggling with a decision about their food pantry as COVID sprouted. As the local government began to distribute restrictions on corporate worship and gathering sizes, the food pantry volunteers wondered what it would mean to the families it served. At the time, the unknowns of COVID, the risk to volunteers, and the potential for a mass spreading event drove every decision. Other factors were concerns about food supplies, financial resources, and parking lot limitations. The food pantry and pastoral staff came together to decide if they would be able to continue the food pantry, given the number of restrictions. In the meeting were several people advocating for to remain open – believing that the team could find a way to it. A few on the everything-is-impossible side immediately began to voice opposition. They advocated that the restrictions were too many and began playing on people's fears. They said, "what happens if we get in trouble?" "What happens if we cannot serve the number of people who might show up?" "What if we spread COVID?" However, the senior leader stepped in and asked that everyone enter the gathering phase to get all the ideas onto the table for consideration. In the process of gathering, the everything-is-impossible cohort was silenced by the passion and vision of several volunteers and the staff who went all-in on making the entire church available. So many ideas were offered because everything was available to them. Hence, volunteers had rooms available to organize food. The facilities manager helped create a plan for car traffic to enter, wait in line, and receive bags of food directly into vehicles without people having to exit.

Three of the everything-is-impossible people immediately resigned from their volunteer positions, and two others became convinced of the pantry's ability to function under COVID safely. The outcome is that the church continually became the only food pantry to operate during COVID. It was able to double its volunteer base of members from the community. Financial support for the pantry grew tremendously due to its willingness to serve during such a difficult season sacrificially. The food pantry created a culture of adaptability that continues to be a critical factor in its success. It was a team effort and strengthened this church's witness in their community.

As a visionary leader, you may find the everything-is-impossible member exhausting. At least with the devil's advocate, they are attempting to problem-solve. The everything-is-impossible person is often out to cut things down without creating ideas. As was the case in the example above, they determined an issue before it had been adequately explored through the GDD Process. There are several ways the everything-is-impossible mindset is displayed in groups through non-verbal means, but the verbal opposition can be heard through common phrases such as:

- “We’ve done that before,” is code for “it will *not* work.” Unfortunately, this fails to consider the lessons from previous failures and the potential for an effective brainstorming process to achieve better solutions.
- “No one will attend” is code for “I hate the idea.” This type of comment is driven by personal preference and fails to consider their limited viewpoint and inclinations.
- “Too expensive” is code for “I don’t think it’s a healthy risk versus reward.” This comment does not recognize that part of the GDD Process factors budgets during the discerning phase. In addition, limiting the ideas based on budget fails to consider other creative decisions that might mirror the expensive idea.
- “That makes me nervous,” is code for “I’m afraid.” Any comment based on fear does not help create an environment of ideation. On the contrary, fear is a horrible stimulate for ideas to germinate.
- “We can’t do that” code for “our rules don’t allow it.” Every established church should have formal and informal rules that serve as a healthy litmus test for activities. However, they must not hamstring future movement. This is one reason why a group is involved in the GDD Process.

Communicating expectations is critical for the leader with an everything-is-impossible member. If ambiguity abounds, they will continue in a disruptive pattern. Helping this person understand the power of a brainstorming session will take time and experience. Likely, there will be bouts of negativity that must be addressed as it surfaces. Ultimately, the everything-is-impossible person will need to learn the difference between negativity and realism. This type of person often does not realize how others perceive them due to their negativity. A healthy self-awareness will be a great gift that you can nurture. The everything-is-impossible person, like all people, can be an incredible gift to the GDD Process if they remain open and channel their thoughts at appropriate times.

### *The Reluctant Leader*

One of the most energizing experiences is having a staff or group of volunteers come together to help create solutions. The synergy is a beautiful reflection of God’s desire to sustain and co-create with his people. These experiences challenge everyone in the group to foster a passion for excellence and collaboration. Unfortunately, exploration and innovation can be perceived as taboo topics. The thought is that new ideas will create undue tension in the church. Research, however, suggests that staff members welcome the subject of exploration and innovation within established churches. Staff is often desperate for a fresh wind of creativity. There may be people that think the GDD Process is needed but fail to implement its guidelines for a variety of reasons. One of the major reasons the GDD Process fails to be implemented is senior leaders, like yourself, resist the process steps. The point is clear; if you resist, it will cripple the entire process.

So, what happens if you are a church leader with a resistant senior pastor? Is there a way around a resistant leader? The good news is that you can create a mini-culture of creativity within your area of influence. For example, a children's minister can meet with their volunteers to discuss creative options for Wednesday night programs. The missions minister can sit with trusted volunteers to brainstorm new strategies for getting people engaged with international missions. Remember, the GDD Process can better help establish a healthy culture of exploration and innovation when it begins with low-risk problems. So, begin there! Your area of influence is a great place to test the GDD Process. Hopefully, in time, there will be enough momentum that others will notice. Waiting to be seen will require patience. Your ability to articulate its effectiveness will be central to others joining you in experimenting with this strategy. To lead up the chain of command effectively, these attempts to experiment with the GDD Process must *not* be leveraged against your senior leadership. Instead, they are done as a way to establish a healthy ministry culture in your area of leadership. Then, find healthy ways of communicating how you came to the creative solutions. A resistant leader is hesitant for reasons they may not be able to communicate. Therefore, being patient with them and respectfully working within an existing hierarchy will be key to the GDD Process taking hold in other areas of your church.

Why might a leader be resistant? Often the most challenging phases for leaders to get their heads around is gathering ideas. If this is your senior leadership, be patient with them. Often, they may be balancing other areas that you are unaware exist or they are used to a system of ideation that focuses on other aspects. Like many people, they may not be accustomed to letting all the ideas surface before critique. In particular, the outlandish ideas can feel too much for them to imagine. While this can create an atmosphere of openness, it can also shut some people down. If the leader shuts down, the group is left with no guide on the GDD Process. There is a reasonableness to this type of leader that can make them incredibly gifted at leading churches. Often, they have a calming effect on anxious churches because of this reasonableness. However, this can also hinder the GDD Process that requires groups to embrace every idea before evaluation. With a reluctant leader, the GDD Process is almost certain to fail but you must still be patient with a resistant leader.

If you are a reluctant leader, it is important to know that you are not alone. Others on your leadership team may also resist the various phases, even if they have been vocal supporters of exploring new ideas and innovations. There are three things you can do to help you understand the viability of group brainstorming. First is to realize that the benefits outweigh the negatives. Imagine gathering not two or three good ideas but having twenty or more to consider. As ridiculous as it may first appear, the gathering phase pushes the critique to the end instead of when the idea is shared. Leveraging this small action creates an environment where more ideas can be shared. More ideas are better because they give your group more possibilities to be creative. Second, you need to believe that you are capable of being creative. Hearing pastors lament that they are not creative is incredibly heartbreaking. God made you to create! The GDD Process allows you to generate ideas with a team working on the same issue. In this context, everyone becomes part of creating. Lastly, with a genuine and humble spirit, ask your team for help. Most staff and volunteers would jump with excitement if their pastor said, "You are incredibly gifted, will you help me? I need you to help me generate ideas to make this program meaningful and impactful." Opening yourself to this



moment of possibility will help bring a true sense of communal participation among your leaders. This way of creating something will be a task for the pastor and everyone willing!

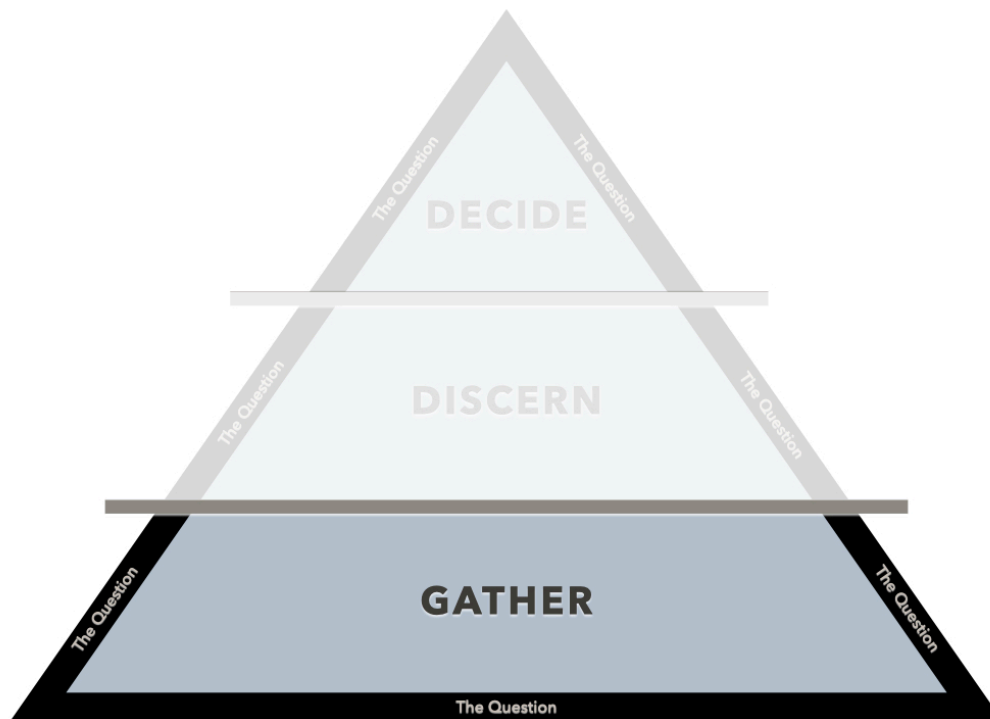
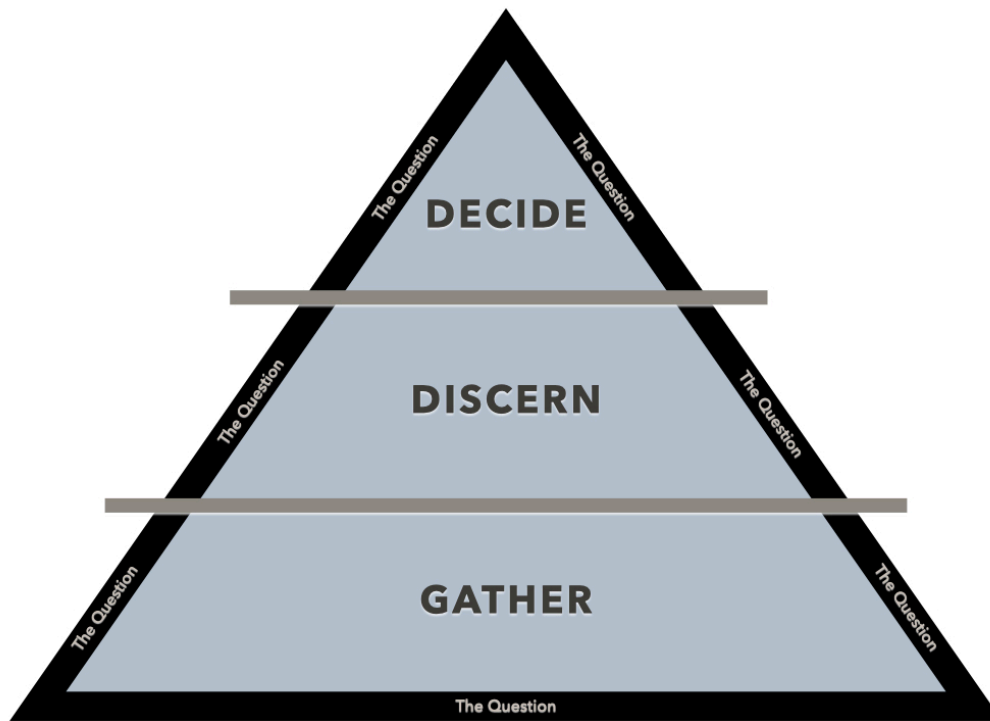
If you are hesitant because you do not feel capable of leading, you should voice this to the people in your meeting. Ask them if they are willing to experiment with you. Each group finds its rhythm of brainstorming through the GDD Process. There may be certain sections that you adapt to your context. That is good! Remember, guide this process through a lens of genuine curiosity. This will help shape your tone and questions. You do not have to force the process, and it's important to know that you should be gentle and aware. It is not about force or authority. When you feel uncertain, you can lean into the guidelines of the process to give you structure. Encouraging statements such as, "remember, we're not supposed to critique the ideas yet. We are gathering as many ideas as we can in phase 1." The guidelines can keep the group on track and allow you to defer to the process rather than their personal opinions. Experimenting in these ways can help your confidence develop in gathering ideas!

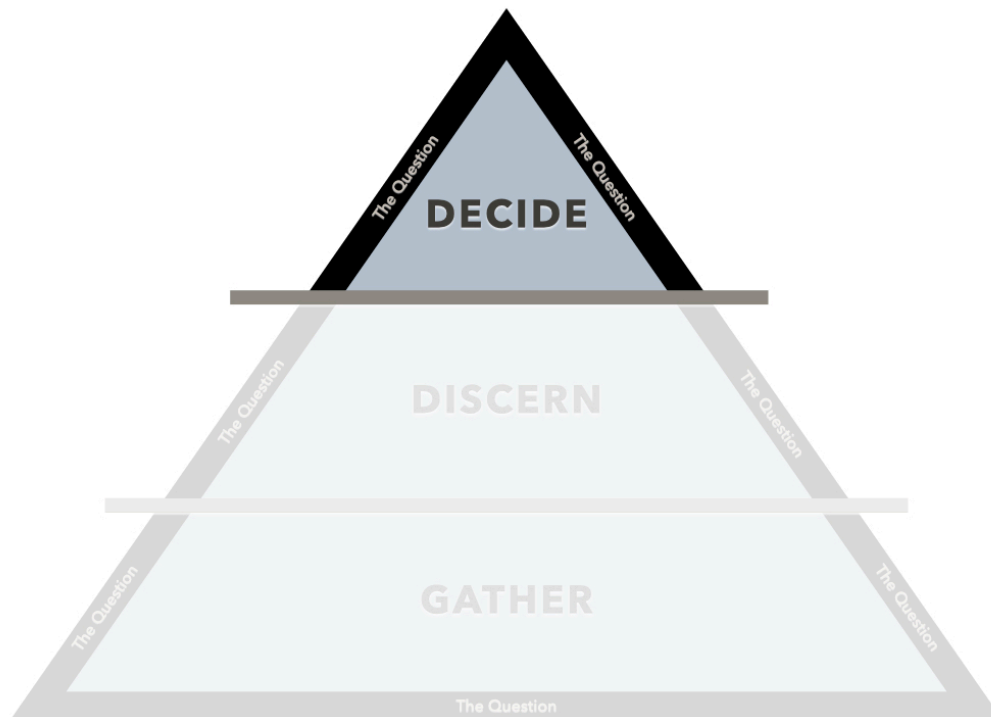
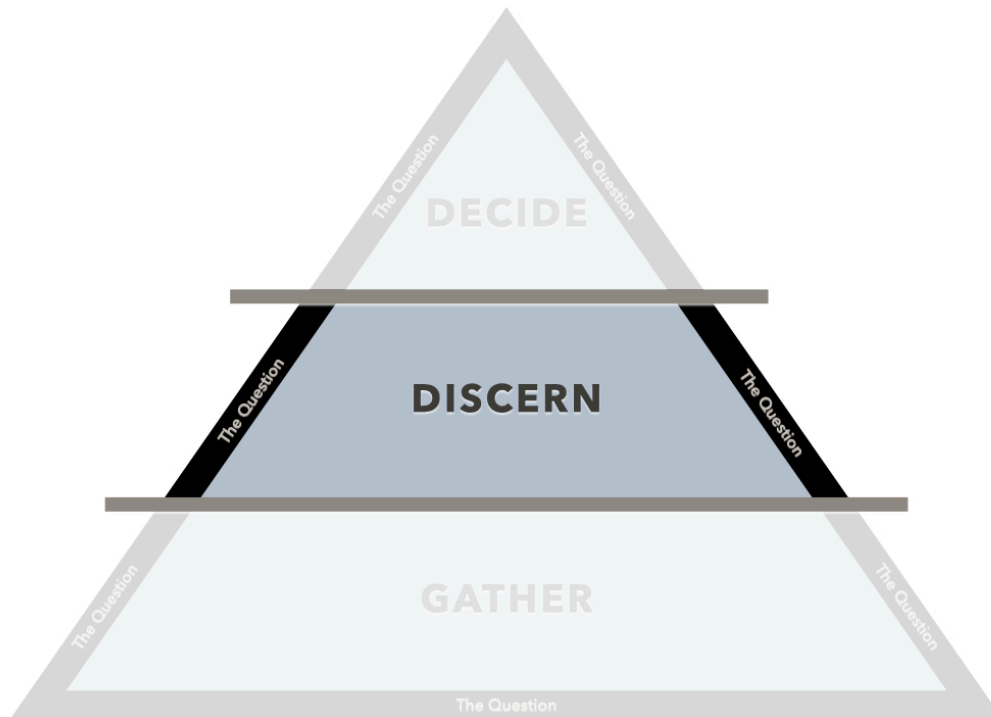
One of the greatest gifts you give your church is a willingness to be open to the ways that God is working. Closed-off leaders gain nothing. You can have a genuine sense of expectation and hope for the things ahead. Finding healthy systems to explore the possibilities and discern their relevance to your congregation is what the GDD Process helps to foster. Exploration can have a sense of adventure if you nurture it in your leadership culture. This moves from the management of people to an invitation for everyone to participate.

# Appendix F—Milestone 6 Project Launch Plan Documentation

## Appendix 1:

NPO:	<b>A healthy church</b>	<b>nurtures a culture</b>	<b>of humble exploration</b>	<b>and responsive innovation.</b>
Comments	Exploration and innovation are aspects of a healthy church. This is not intended to be an exhaustive statement on church health.	Exploration and innovation are not one-time occurrences. Instead, it is nurtured by leaders until it becomes a part of the culture of the church. It can take root within the framework and impact all aspects of the church.	Humble exploration involves a churches internal ethos of action. It sets itself on a trajectory of exploration to help find solutions to the ills in the world. It requires humility because it places itself in a spot of genuine curiosity and learning.	Responsive innovation happens when solvable issues have been identified in the exploration process. The task of innovation comes about as a direct response to needs. Churches innovate in response to the identified needs/problems/opportunities.

**Appendix 2:**



# Bibliography

- Almossawi, Hussain. *The Innovator's Handbook: A Short Guide to Unleashing Your Creative Mindset*. Dearborn, Michigan: Mossawi Studios, LLC, 2022.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- . *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation With Commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Ed.1 Christian Classics, 1981.
- Bennis, Warren, and Patricia Ward Biederman. *Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1997.
- Birch, Bruce C., Walter Bruggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Peterson. *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2015.
- . Phone interview with Scott Shelton. April 4, 2022.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954.
- Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Boyd, Gregory A., *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- . "Two Ancient (and Modern) Motivations for Ascribing Exhaustively Definite Foreknowledge to God: A Historical Overview and Critical Assessment." *Religious Studies* (2010): 41-59.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1982.
- Buechner, Frederick. *Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1979.
- Burtsell, Richard. "Advocatus Diaboli." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol.1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01168b.htm>
- Catmull, Ed, and Amy Wallace. *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand In The Way of True Inspiration*. London: Bantam Press, 2014.
- Cormode, Scot. *The Innovative Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020.
- Crum, Alia, and Thomas Crum. "Stress Can Be a Good Thing If You Know How to Use It." *Harvard Business Review: On Mental Toughness* (2018): 71-75.
- Davies, Brian. *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1992.

- Dead Poets Society*, Weir, Peter. United States: Buena Vista Pictures, 1989.
- De Bono, Edward. *Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970.
- . *Six Thinking Hats*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999.
- . *Thinking To Create Value*. Malta: Kite Group, 2015.
- Frankl, Viktor E., *Man's Search for Meaning: The Classic Tribute to Hope from the Holocaust*. London: Rider Books, 2004.
- Fretheim, Terence E., *Exodus - Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.
- Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. New York: Seabury Books, 2007.
- Giles, Richard. *Creating Uncommon Worship: Transforming the Liturgy of the Eucharist*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004.
- . *Re-Pitching The Tent: Re-ordering the Church Building For Worship and Mission*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004.
- Godin, Seth. *Unleashing the Ideavirus: Stop Marketing at People! Turn Your Ideas Into Epidemics by Helping Your Customers Do The Marketing for You*. New York: Hyperion, 2001.
- . *Purple Cow: Transform Your Business By Being Remarkable*. New York: Portfolio, 2003.
- . *The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and when to stick)*. New York: Penguin Group, 2007.
- . *The Practice: Shipping Creative Work*. New York: Penguin Group, 2020.
- Gonzalez, Justo L., *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, Vol. 2 Rev. ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1987.
- Gurno, Terry. *Leading Is Art*. Dexter, MI: Cedar Force Press, 2016.
- Hare, Douglas R.A., *Matthew: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993.
- Harvey, Jerry B. *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management*. New York: Lexington Books, 1988.
- Hays, Richard. "Learning Leadership from Moses: A Biblical Model for the Church Today." *Divinity* 12, no.1 (2012): 5-9
- Heifetz, Donald A., and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002.
- Heifetz, Donald A. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.



- Jones, L. Gregory. *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016.
- Jones, L. Gregory, Andrew P. Hogue. *Navigating the Future: Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021.
- Jones, L. Gregory, Kevin R. Armstrong. *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*. Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.
- Manning, Brennan, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2000.
- Nouwen, Henri, *In The Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989.
- Osborn, Alex. *How To Become More Creative: 101 Rewarding Ways to Develop Your Potential Talent*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.
- . *Your Creative Power: How to Use Imagination to Brighten Life, To Get Ahead*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.
- . *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.
- . *Wake Up your Mind. More than 101 Proven, Effective Ways to Develop Your Creative Powers and Imagination*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964.
- Pinnock, Clark, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Pressfield, Steven. *The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles*. New York: Black Irish Entertainment, LLC, 2002.
- Olson, Roger E., "R.I.P. Dallas Willard (and Was He an Open Theist?)" *Patheos*. May 15, 2013. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2013/05/r-i-p-dallas-willard-and-was-he-an-open-theist/>
- . *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999
- Scazzero, Peter, and Warren Bird. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Skylar, Marty. *One Little Spark!: Mickey's Ten Commandments and The Road to Imagineering*. Los Angeles: Disney Editions, 2015.
- Sprinkle, Preston. Interview with Greg Boyd. *Theology in the Raw*. Podcast audio. October 28, 2019. [https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl\\_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/episode/6FMK9omNpRdiSZF5FAsdxl?si=f-lojo9fTRaCohURvQcHXQ&dl_branch=1)
- Spurgeon, C.H. *Letters To My Students*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954.

- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.
- Sternad, Dietmar. *Solve It! The Mindset and Tools of Smart Problem Solvers*. Moosburg, Austria: Econcise Publishers, 2021.
- Stroope, Michael. Phone interview with Scott Shelton. December 1, 2021.
- Webber, Robert E. *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*. Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1985.
- White, James Emery. *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.
- Zscheile, Dwight J. *The Agile Church: Spirit-Lead Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014.