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HOW A MINISTER COPES WITH A POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE CONGREGATIONAL ISSUE

A PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context of the Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Case Study of Pastor Jeff</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions and Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul's Appeal</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Eucharist</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idolization and Following of Specific Leaders</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luther Restores Worship</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music in the Mass</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Preaching</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confession .................................................. 100
Apology .................................................. 102
Loyalty .................................................. 104
Categorization of Research Data for the Lay Members .......... 106
A Pastor Is Responsible .................................. 106
A Pastor Is Loyal to God .................................. 107
A Pastor Should Not Share His or Her Emotions With The Congregation .................................. 108
Concluding Thoughts On Analysis .......................... 109

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................. 111
Summary .................................................. 111
Findings .................................................. 112
Conclusions .............................................. 113
Worship .................................................. 113
Prayer ..................................................... 116
Sabbath .................................................... 118
Recommendations ......................................... 120

WORKS CITED ........................................... 124
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I regard it a privilege to offer this study to the glory and honor of God with prayer that it may be a benefit for any individual in his or her ministry to the Church.
ABSTRACT

This study investigated how an ELCA pastor copes when worship becomes an issue that can create a potential division in her or his congregation.

Even though the ELCA is considered by many to be a liturgical denomination, many ELCA congregations use various styles of worship. These varied styles: blended, contemporary, traditional, or any other format or combination, can bring about questions, frustrations, and moments of confusion for a pastor and his or her congregation. In fact, some congregations have split due to a worship style conflict. Also, several pastors have had to leave either their current congregation, or the ministry as a whole.

The ELCA is not the only denomination with this concern. As one studies the history of the early church, Paul wrote several bits of advice to beginning and floundering congregations, especially to the people of Corinth, who were going through this same conflict. Martin Luther, with the sounds of Reformation encircling him, offered letters urging and warning lay members and pastors leaving the Roman Catholic Church to continue to place their focus on the death, resurrection, ascension, and coming of Jesus Christ.

However, with history behind us, a pastor still finds himself or herself faced with the challenge of having to cope when a conflict situation pertaining to worship arises. Questions flood one’s mind as to whom one should show loyalty, can forgiveness take place in the midst of division, and should one continue in the ministry when the joy is gone.
In addressing the problem statement of this study, I researched Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as well as works of Martin Luther. I sought contemporary authors and web sites that shared accounts of this conflict situation. I interviewed three ELCA pastors who had personally experienced a conflict situation pertaining to worship. I asked questions as to how they had coped through the situation and what they had learned about themselves and the church. I also distributed three questions to fifteen lay members from various denominations who had witnessed a pastor, or had seen their own pastor and congregation, work through a conflict situation pertaining to worship.

I found numerous pastors who believe that to lead a congregation in worship is one of the greatest opportunities and privileges they have. However, when the style of worship becomes a burden, these same pastors feel drained, frustrated, and weary. Therefore, are there tools that pastors, or worship leaders, can use so that they feel confident when a conflict arises pertaining to worship? I believe there are.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

"Why did he do that?" "What was she thinking?" "How could she proceed that way, or make that decision?" One might expect to hear those types of comments at a baseball game, basketball game, football game, a soccer match, or other sporting events. Fans often express their negative opinions, either at home or at the stadium, protesting the decision a coach, a captain, an umpire, a referee, or a player makes during a game. A parent may express such concerns as he or she listens to the decisions already made by his or her son or daughter. Students may overhear a teacher express such quips under his or her breath as a test is being graded at the front of the class. In all three of the scenarios described above, I have asked similar questions.

Yet, there are times when such concerns are the internal reaction made by a pastor when looking at a decision made by his or her congregation. I have done that, too.

Context of the Problem

For the past twenty-two years, I have served as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Throughout those years, my ministry has been with two congregations in Northwestern Ohio. My first call was in a rural/small town congregation in Hamler, Ohio. I ministered there for seven and one-half years. In
January 1991, I received and accepted a letter of call to serve as the Associate Pastor at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, Findlay, Ohio. In 1996, I was called, and currently serve, as the Senior Pastor of that congregation.

The ELCA is a mainline denomination consisting of nearly eleven thousand congregations, divided into sixty-five synodical areas, from coast to coast. The denominational headquarters of the ELCA is located in Chicago, Illinois. Presiding over the nearly eleven thousand congregations and sixty-five synodical areas is an elected Bishop. To assist the Bishop, a Council made up of clergy and lay individuals is elected. Many duties and responsibilities are placed in the lap of the Bishop and the elected members of the ELCA Council. One of the responsibilities of the Bishop and ELCA Council is to lift up issues, discuss social concerns, and establish social statements that give guidance and direction to the ministry of the congregations in the denomination. Statements are published for pastors and congregations to review and discuss. These published statements, alone, are not the “solve all” for conflicts and differences of opinion in congregations. People are not mere puppets. Their history and surroundings put a strong dent into their actions. For various reasons, hearts with convictions develop.

Members in a congregation sometimes suffer hard ramifications because of intense debate over a social issue or an internal choice of the workings of their particular congregation. Believers can get caught up in foolish fighting. Let us recognize that even in our own personal families and homes perspectives and views may vary. Therefore, let us also realize that in our larger family, our church family, there undoubtedly will breed disagreements and different opinions. What concerns me is the intensity of the
disagreements.

In developing a picture to illustrate my point, I would like to use the analogy of the ratings that are provided by weather reporters in categorizing hurricanes and tropical storms. A level one or a level two storm may knock us around a bit, but rebuilding and repair come quickly. However, if we reach the category of a level four, the storm is going to be very nasty and create plenty of damage. The thought of a pastor coping with a level four conflict in his or her congregation is unsettling.

It is when given disagreements, like a level four hurricane, begin to develop that our ordained ministry, with all of its glory and divine bliss, can somehow turn into divine madness. With numerous published works dealing with congregational issues that have been thoroughly analyzed, and with the Scriptures placed before us, we, as ordained clergy, are often in the wilderness as we look for maturity in God’s people. Even when congregational disagreements and bickerings seem to have come to an end, the hatchet handle can still be visible. The phrase, “if you agree to bury the hatchet, don’t leave the handle sticking out,” is not always accomplished. Just when a pastor thinks healing has begun, another debate or battle may arise. There is no doubt that a wholesome, love-filled community of servants for Jesus can be like a drink of fresh water for a pastor. Those drinks are refreshing, cool, and satisfying. They are also available when a pastor looks at his or her journey with a congregation. However, such drinks may also come sporadically.

Therefore throughout this project, I have devoted the majority of my attention on one particular issue of conflict that has festered and has become viewed as a level four
hurricane by some congregations and pastors. That hurricane is the choosing of the style and format of the worship service. Worship styles have often divided congregations. The style of the worship service has split the oneness of the church community. With that disagreement hovering around, a pastor, as he is shepherding his congregation, has decisions that must be made. Does he let the hurricane ride itself through and do nothing about it? Does he protect the congregation, bringing them together, despite the congregation’s differences, to ride out the storm? Does he, through careful conversation, instruction, and education, help the congregation prepare for a storm as he foresees a hurricane approaching but wishes to ease the brunt of it? Or does the pastor simply buckle down for the storm, knowing it will happen, and be willing to pick up the pieces after it is over?

Statement of the Problem

As one can see, a pastor has moments in his or her calling that bring periods of joy and excitement, and in the same breath windows of anxiety. We love God’s people, but find ourselves, as pastors, sometimes losing the bravery and stamina we need to face the storms of dissent among the people we serve. Unfortunately, there are no perfect answers.

Therefore, as I personally deal with one specific issue, worship in the congregation, and speak with other pastors and congregations contending with this issue, I am left with a question that can be formulated into a problem statement for this project: How does an ELCA pastor cope when worship becomes an issue that can create a
potential division in her or his congregation?

The Case Study of Pastor Jeff

This problem is not an easy one to answer. To illustrate, Pastor Jeff accepted his first call. He was determined, coming fresh out of seminary, to be the best pastor any church could have ever dreamed of calling. His high ideals, his warm personality, and his jovial character were attractive to the call committee of St. Bob’s Lutheran Church. Since the previous pastor had resigned under tense situations, the call committee had high expectations for their new young minister. Jeff’s expectations were even higher. It was obvious to him that St. Bob’s was a congregation that needed someone who would be compassionate, confident, and yet be, as they stated in his interview, like “one of the locals.” Jeff was eager and determined to show St. Bob’s congregation that they had not made a mistake and that their confidence in him was justified.

However, such confidence lasted for the first six months. During those months, everyone seemed to be welcoming, enthusiastic, happy, and eager to help. As Pastor Jeff reflected on those first six months, he recalled thinking that, “This is what the communion of saints is like.”

Yet, such a communion did not last very long. Shortly after those first six months of Pastor Jeff’s ministry, tension and unrest began to rumble. Pastor Jeff recalls one afternoon when one of the call committee members, who was a newer member of St. Bob’s, stopped by the office to have a chat. She admitted that she had not been a member of the congregation for a long time like the other members on the committee. In fact, she
was pleasantly surprised that she had been asked to serve and not her husband who had been baptized and confirmed at St. Bob’s. The conversation was good-natured with the member concerned about how Pastor Jeff was feeling with his first six months under his belt. After acknowledging that, in his opinion, things were going well, the individual suggested that maybe he, meaning Pastor Jeff, would be willing to change a few things at St. Bob’s. She stated how a non-denominational congregation had formed a few years earlier and that they had incorporated some new concepts, ideas, and programs that were “drawing people from everywhere.” “Maybe,” as Pastor Jeff recalls the female member stating, “it was time for St. Bob’s to do some of those new things so that we could increase in membership.” “Everyone will like it if it comes from you, Pastor,” was the final comment Pastor Jeff remembers coming from the member before she left his office.

Pastor Jeff politely thanked the individual for coming and for sharing with him. “I guess she must know the people better than I do. Maybe I should listen to her,” Pastor Jeff thought to himself after she left. “Yet, I don’t want to upset anyone. So, to keep peace and to not stir up too many problems, I will only change a few things.”

The next Sunday, the first changes took place. First came the bulletin with a new format. Pastor Jeff thought that by printing the entire worship service out in the bulletin the people would find that the service more user friendly. The congregational members would no longer need to use the hymnals. The next week, Pastor Jeff decided that if the members, as this woman stated, wanted something like the non-denominational congregation that he needed to introduce some new songs. “Let’s start using something more upbeat and modern,” Pastor Jeff recalls mentioning at the Worship and Music
committee meeting to the organist and choir director who had both been members of St. Bob's for over fifty years. The organist and choir director did not appreciate the remarks made by Pastor Jeff. So that evening, quite abruptly, the two of them resigned.

Matters did not seem to be going very well, but Pastor Jeff continued forward with this "new style of worship" for members at St. Bob's. "Within a few months they would all get used to the changes," recalled Pastor Jeff, "and everything would be back to normal."

But, as Pastor Jeff recalls, something else was happening. Some of the older members of St. Bob's, along with their extended families, were no longer attending. The church council members were becoming concerned. Offerings were beginning to decrease. Bills were not being paid on time. Attendance was gradually nose-diving. Tension was mounting. A few of the members, mostly middle-aged, including the woman who had spoken to Pastor Jeff, were in favor of all the new songs. This group wanted to go further with the changes. They next suggested that the congregation should do away with the position of the organist totally and insisted that a band, consisting of a drummer, guitarist, and a keyboard player, which had been implemented when the organist resigned, should be kept. However, others, predominantly the elder members who had been born and raised in the congregation and even some of the newer members, young families who had joined since Pastor Jeff's arrival, were upset and wanted to return to the original format. "What was I going to do?" recalls Pastor Jeff, "Six months into the ministry, and I have chaos on my hands. Who should I listen to? Should I listen to those who want the changes? Should I listen to those who have always been members
of the congregation? Should I listen to myself? God, what in the world should I do?”

Therefore, how does Pastor Jeff, and other pastors, cope when worship becomes an issue that can create a potential division in a congregation? Certain aspects that will be highlighted in this project will be: loyalty, forgiveness, and the loss of joy in ministry.

Purpose of the Study

It was the purpose of this study to explore methods and tools used by an ELCA pastor when he or she copes with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation.

When such an issue arises, a pastor needs to seek methods and avenues that he or she can apply in order to bring calmness and cohesiveness. This study sought to identify tools that a pastor can use to implement a sound Spirit-filled response, both internally and publicly.

In identifying tools that a pastor can implement, this study explored three separate types of material for its project. The first type focused on biblical and theological foundations. Primarily the focus on this material dealt with the reactions of Paul and Martin Luther as they confronted contentious issues within worship. Such issues were: celebration of the Eucharist, favoritism of leadership, music, and the importance for all to participate in and understand the Mass.

Secondly, a focus was placed upon contemporary Christian authors who have dealt with congregations and pastors struggling over worship issues. These authors come from all different denominations. Therefore, some suggested measures will not be
available or advantageous for an ELCA pastor. However, in examining different methods and tools, one can explore new avenues of help and support when this conflict situation arises.

Finally, a third type of material focused on a personal response. Through interviews and questionnaires, this material explored the feelings of ELCA pastors, including myself, when worship created a quarrelsome and possible division within a congregation. Physical and emotional stress which may, or may not, occur in the pastor's own personal life along with the well being of his or her family has been studied.

Research Methodology

This study endeavored to seek how an ELCA pastor copes with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation. The category of study used for this project was the “basic or general qualitative study” defined by Sharan B. Merriam.

The basic qualitative study in education typically draws from concepts, models, and theories in educational psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and sociology. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. Findings are a mix of description and analysis – an analysis that uses concepts from the theoretical framework of the study. The analysis usually results in the identification of recurring patterns (in the form of categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data or in the delineation of a process. In these studies the analysis does not extend to building a substantive theory as it does in grounded theory studies. Neither are these case studies; there is no bounded system or functioning unit that circumscribes the investigation. (1998, 11)

In using the “basic or general qualitative study” approach, this study was able to explore the factors and themes used by Paul and other New Testament letter writers as
they addressed issues that were creating a division in the early church.

Secondly, this research methodology enabled me to interview and observe three pastors. One pastor survived the conflict situation in the congregation that involved a worship style. The second pastor self-destructed in the conflict situation and was removed for his own personal sake from the congregation served. The third pastor “weathered the storm” and remained in the congregation where there was conflict; however, the ministry was never the same. Also, a poll was taken of congregational leaders, via e-mail, of circumstances and outcomes of conflict pertaining to worship they encountered which created, or could have created, a division in the congregation where they served.

Thirdly, in using the “basic or general qualitative study” approach, I was also able to identify any recurrent themes or patterns that heightened the possibility of a division in the congregation. My primary focus on this part of the study dealt with the style and format of the worship service.

Research Questions

In addition to the problem statement, how does an ELCA pastor cope with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in her or his congregation?, additional questions have been brought forward. They include the following:

1. What worship issues created, or could have created, divisiveness in the early New Testament church, particularly during the time of Paul?
2. What worship issues created, or could have created, divisiveness in the church during the time of Martin Luther?

3. What ramifications and effects spill over onto an ELCA pastor when worship becomes a divisive issue in the congregation?

4. What ramifications and effects fall on the congregational leadership when worship becomes a divisive issue in the congregation?

Question one investigated the biblical perspective of how worship issues that created conflict in the early New Testament church, primarily in the church in Corinth, and how Paul dealt with them in the writing of his first letter to the Corinthians. Topics pertaining to one's understanding of the Eucharist, one's welcome or acceptance to the Lord's Supper, and one's favoring a particular worship leader over and against another were highlighted.

Question two looked at the theological perspective of how worship issues created conflict in the time of the Reformation, primarily with Martin Luther. Topics pertaining to the format of the Mass, music in the Mass, and the importance of preaching God's Word were examined.

Question three internalized the study as it examined the reactions, feelings, and possible turmoil endured by clergy when a quarrelsome issue dealing with worship was brought up in the local congregation. Identifying such emotions may enhance the use of this study for clergy in any denomination as it exemplifies techniques used by fellow clergy when a divisive issue has arisen.

Question four attempted to collate the different reactions voiced by other
congregational members; such as congregational presidents, congregational council
members, active and inactive individuals of congregations, and committee chairs as they
encumber the consequences and reactions of individuals in the congregation of which
they were a part. The result of this question could be helpful for any pastor in listening
to the viewpoints outside of their colleagues.

Except for the references made about myself, no name or situation in this project
reflects a particular individual, and none should be inferred. The main theme of conflict
in congregations based upon worship, however, is valid.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to help answer the question of how an ELCA
pastor copes with issues that could create a possible division in his or her congregation.
Though pastors may not always agree upon what particular issues can or will create a
conflict or division in the congregation, many pastors have internally dealt with the
aftermath of an issue. Being tolerant is not an escape to which a pastor can always turn
to. Ryan Dobson writes, “Moral relativism doesn’t work. It’s a broken system, a bankrupt
philosophy, a world view at war with itself” (2003, 35). For Dobson, if a pastor is only
being tolerant of an issue, he or she is creating a larger division than possibly would have
been created if a stance was taken. Dobson goes on to state, “If you’re a Christian and
you think there’s a way to make moral relativism and biblical Christianity work together,
I’ve got news for you: They won’t” (35-36).

Therefore, the results of this study can support and help pastors as they cope with
divisive issues in their congregation. One result of this study is to emphasize to pastors that they are not alone. Pastors may agree or disagree on particular issues. However, that does not mean that they do not need to deal internally with the aftermath or outcome. Therefore, for the health and well-being of a pastor, he or she needs to realize that he or she is not a “Lone Ranger” when it comes to dealing with issues that can create a possible division in the congregation he or she is serving. Frank Minirth states, “Especially in times of stress and crisis, ministers need to care for themselves, and they need to surround themselves with others who will help them do it. They need others to listen to their frustrations and to hear their ideas” (1997, 200). This study can be used by pastors to see what other tools, support, and thought processes were used by clergy as they dealt with divisive issues.

Beyond the use for pastors, this study can be used by congregational leaders, councils, boards, and concerned members in giving aid and support to their pastor when he or she is dealing with a divisive issue. An organization in the Roman Catholic Church entitled “Voice of the Faithful” has been instrumental in giving support to Roman Catholic priests when they are facing issues that can create a division in their parish. The organization states, “In support of priests of integrity, we pledge to listen to all priests, to their concerns, needs, hopes, fears, perspectives, and to their counsel” (Voice of the Faithful, 2005).

Thirdly, this study can be used by synodical leaders and administrators as they listen to pastors dealing with issues of worship creating division in the congregation. A synodical leader may suggest this study for possible reading when he or she hears of a
pastor who is dealing with these issues. Or, this study may be used in a group setting, led by a synodical leader or administrator, in leading discussion in a group of clergy when said issues are being discussed. Synodical leaders and administrators can also use this study so that they can be made more aware of the physical and mental health of the clergy in his or her synod or jurisdiction.

Finally, the significance of this study can be used to help clergy of all denominations. All clergy face issues that can create a division in their congregations. The issues may or may not be the same, however, the consequences, the ramifications, or the internal struggle of the clergy over a particular issue can be the same. This study can be used by any pastor, congregational leader, those who counsel and support pastors, and other judicatory officials who are concerned with the physical and mental health of clergy who are internally dealing with issues.

Healthy clergy, both physically and mentally, are essential in proclaiming the Word and encouraging the faith of all believers. When a pastor internally copes with an issue or issues that can create a division in his or her congregation, such involvement and concern can "inevitably deplete one's resources and rob one of his or her vitality, energy, and finally the ability to function" (Minirth 1997, 203). Therefore, the focus of this study was to enable all clergy, no matter what denomination he or she may be in, to find healthy avenues in dealing with those issues.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

In taking up research on the problem statement of this study, it is my assumption
that there are issues in the church that can create a possible division in a congregation. Some may suggest that issues, in general, are not divisive. Instead, that which is divisive is the way the issue is interpreted by an individual. "If the church would take a stand," is a comment that I have heard numerous times from pastors and lay individuals. Hence, in one making such a comment, that one is expressing the feeling that the church should put everything in black and white and, therefore, assume no conflict or division would ever take place.

A second assumption that is primary to this study is the assumption is that the issue of worship, its style or format, would have the capability of creating a division in a congregation. This assumption is not to pass judgment on any clergy or congregational leader. However, some may view the issue as non-divisive. Instead, the issue is a topic that should simply be handled by only a few in the congregation and that others should simply tolerate it because that is the way society is currently heading and the church needs to accept it.

A third assumption is that pastors, primarily those in the ELCA, desire to deal with their opinions, emotions, concerns, and ramifications when dealing with issues that can create a division in their congregation. "Feelings are perceived by some pastors as irrational, dangerous, and as disruptive or destructive," states Gary Harbaugh, professor at Trinity Lutheran Seminary (1994, 87-88). If the majority of clergy deal with their feelings as Harbaugh suggests, then divisive issues would be simply another hurdle in which they may, or may not, acknowledge but deem ridiculous to waste effort and ministry upon because the pastor does not want to deal with the issue. "Why ruffle the
feathers?” “Why should one get involved?” “What affect, if any, does it have on the congregation that I am serving?” Those comments are frequently made and support Harbaugh’s statement. Therefore, for the pastor who expresses those questions, divisive issues are seen as a waste of energy, time, and emotions. In following our culture today, it is easier and more simple to keep quiet and say nothing.

One of the limitations of this study is brought about in the problem statement. This study solely focuses on the feelings, emotions, and internal struggles faced by a pastor. Many lay individuals face the same struggles when facing divisive issues in the congregation. This study does not deny that fact. Lay individuals could easily adapt the contents of this study to their own personal lives.

Another limitation is focusing only upon the one issue. Other issues and topics of discussion in a congregation could have been listed. However, this one issue of worship was the most recent and has created the most dialogue, controversy, and divisiveness, in my opinion, in ELCA congregations.

A third limitation of the problem statement is its focus on an ELCA pastor and his or her internal feelings with an issue that can create a division in his or her congregation. It is with little doubt that other pastors in other denominations have had to cope with issues that have, or possibly could have, created a division in their congregation.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used as a part of this study. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) gives specific definitions to words used for its mission and
ministry.

1. Bishop - an ELCA pastor elected by a churchwide assembly to serve as chief judicatory official of the ELCA, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois

2. Blended worship - a form of worship that tries to combine contemporary music, or contemporary format, with a traditional style of worship, for example, having a liturgical worship service played with a band and assorted instrumentation versus the specific use of a pipe organ

3. Contemporary worship - a free-flowing style of worship that primarily includes praise or contemporary music

4. ELCA - abbreviation used for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consisting of nearly eleven thousand congregations, comprised of sixty-five synodical areas

5. ELCA Council - council made up of clergy and lay individuals whose duties and responsibilities are to lift up issues, discuss social concerns, and establish social statements that give guidance and direction to the ministry of the congregations in the denomination

6. Liturgical worship - a deliberate, structured, and formalized style of worship primarily using the format used in the Roman Church

7. Synod - legally incorporated ELCA judicatory, primarily in a particular geographical area, representing an average of 170 to 200 congregations partnered in ministry and mission
Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters with the following headings:

Chapter One: Introduction to the Project

Chapter Two: Biblical and Theological Foundations

Chapter Three: Literature and Other Sources

Chapter Four: Research Methodology and Procedures

Chapter Five: Analysis of Data

Chapter Six: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Chapter One provided a statement of the problem, the significance of the study, and a review of the research methodology used. Terms have been defined so that the reader will be able to comprehend the problem statement, and be able to incorporate the study to his or her setting. Finally, a brief outline of the study’s organization was presented in this chapter.

Chapter Two gave a biblical and theological view on the problem statement. This chapter focused on the relationship of Paul and the early church leaders and specifically the Corinthian congregation as they dealt with divisive issues pertaining to worship taking place in the early church in Corinth. All Scripture passages were taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless noted. Along with examining Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, this chapter examined the writings of Martin Luther as he focused on the importance of worship in the German church. What arenas of conflict did Luther face from the people of Germany as he evaluated the mass?

Chapter Three offered other literary resources that have dealt with pastors facing
conflict in congregations. The primary focus of the conflict being worship. Throughout this chapter attention has been directed on the value of loyalty and listening in the midst of conflict, the willingness to forgive and recognizing one’s own sin during the conflict situation, and the saddening outcome if the joy of ministry is lost because of the conflict situation.

Chapter Four involved a detailed description of the research methodology used in this study. Definition of the research methodology, and the use of a case study and research questions, as stated in the section Research Methodology, developed the majority of this chapter.

Chapter Five compiled all of the data received from three interviews with three ELCA pastors who have faced conflict in their congregation caused by a worship situation. Also compiled in this chapter were questions and answers received from active and inactive lay members who have witnessed or been involved in a conflict due to a worship situation in their congregation.

Chapter Six summarized all of the material of this study. Findings, conclusions, and recommendations are also a part of this chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Scriptures have provided many incidents where issues have created a division between two individuals or groups. For example, in the Old Testament, one could cite the following incidents: Lot and his family in the area of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), Moses and the people of Israel in the receiving of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 32), or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).

The New Testament also provided us incidents where issues create divisiveness. Jesus and his discussion with the woman at Jacob’s well over the issue of where one is to worship (John 4:19-26), Jesus and the Sabbath (Matt. 12), and Jesus chasing out the money changers in the Temple at Jerusalem (Mark 11) are just a few one could list.

Later in history, the church continued to struggle and deal with issues that have caused conflict between various groups. Throughout the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, and even up to today, divisive issues have either caused growth or separation in congregations.

However, the purpose of this project is not to state the fact that there have been, and will continue to be, issues that can create a division between two separate groups. Instead, this project’s statement of purpose focuses on how a minister, and I would also insert the term “leader,” copes with an issue pertaining to worship that can
create a potential division in his or her congregation.

Paul’s Appeal

In narrowing this project to such a focus, I have chosen to look at Paul and the letters that are accepted by many authorities to have been written by Paul’s hand. My primary focus will be on Paul’s letters to the early church in Corinth.

To begin, one needs to look at the community with which Paul is dealing. Corinth had become the freshly Romanized city of importance and appeal that the city of Athens had claimed to be in Greece. Corinth became the place of trade and wealth. Robert M. Grant quotes the geographer Strabo (Vol. 8, 378) when he says that Corinth is called “wealthy” because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, one opening to Asia and the other to Italy, and it facilitates the exchange of good from both, so far distant from each other. (2001, 14)

Grant continues to quote Strabo (Vol. 8, 382), that “the city of the Corinthians was always great and rich, well provided with men skilled in political affairs and craftsmen’s arts both graphic and plastic, while its lands were unsuited for agriculture” (19).

But along with all of its notoriety and grandness Corinth also became a hotbed for many diverse groups and religions. Religious cults, especially those from Egypt, Greece, and Rome filled the region. For example, many temples in the area of Corinth, especially on the mountain of Acrocorinth, were dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Isis. At the very top of that same mountain, one could worship at a temple dedicated to Aphrodite (Blegen 1930 Vol.3, part 1). Along with the diversity of religions came perverse and strange practices. Prostitutes, both male and female, were a popular and valuable
commodity for the various religions. The verb *kórinthiazesthai*, "to corinthianize" became a well-known saying when one was speaking about lewdness or licentiousness (Growcott 2006).

Therefore, this brief background helps one to understand the numerous religious, social and moral problems in Corinth. Such conditions caused the early church followers of Jesus to live in a very difficult situation. In fact, as Mark Roberts asserts, "No church in Scripture is more ridden with disagreement and controversy than the Corinthian church" (2005). In fact, as Roberts goes on to state, it took Paul multiple visits and letters to sort out all of the problems in the church (2005).

Confirmation of that attitude and atmosphere comes in the very beginning of Paul’s writing in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul wrote,

> For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” (1 Cor. 1:11-12)

The Greek word, *ēris*, which the New Revised Standard Version has translated as “quarrel” can also be translated as “argument” or “strife.” Later, in his third chapter in the same letter, Paul used the same term, “For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh...” (1 Cor. 3:3).

For Paul, divisions, arguments, and quarrels were important issues that needed immediate attention. K. S. Latourette expands on Paul’s concern when he asserts:

Actually, as the writers of the New Testament clearly recognized, the Church was far from fully attaining this ideal. It was badly divided...Even in the first generation of its existence the church was torn by dissensions. In one local unit of the church, in Corinth, there were factions between those who professed
adherence respectively to Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ, and between rich and poor. (www.voiceofjesus.org, 2006)

However, in dealing with these divisive issues, the manner in which they were dealt with was just as important. Kenneth Chafin writes that, “Paul’s attitude and approach...is so remarkable. His words and his actions reveal that he is speaking as a Christian brother in behalf of Christ” (1985, 32-33). Therefore, Paul’s concern, as he is faced with a church that is being torn apart, not by one simple controversy, but by multiple conflicts, was “that all of you be in agreement, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose” (1 Cor. 1:10).

As one reads through the first letter to the Corinthians, one can pick up on the various conflicts that Paul faced. Included are: choosing, or taking sides, of leaders (1 Cor. 1:10-13); pride in one’s own spirituality, especially in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 4 and 11); sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5 and 6:12-20); lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:1-11); marriage and divorce (1 Cor. 5 and 7); worship of idols (1 Cor. 8); and selfishness (1 Cor. 12 and 13) (Roberts 2006). In fact, Bruce A. Winter says that “the percentage of space given over to Corinthian issues suggests that spiritual gifts, loyalty to former leaders in the church, food offered to idols and questions surrounding the resurrection of the body are the problems to which Paul devoted the most space” (Burke 2003, 140, quoting Winter). The irony, one might point out in reading both of those lists, is that the church still faces these same divisive issues today. However, because the issues may be similar in scope today, one can learn from Paul’s writings as to how such issues that can create division need to be faced and dealt with accordingly.
In reviewing all of the subjects listed above, I would like to focus on only two of them. The two that I have chosen are: understanding the Eucharist and idolization and following of specific leaders. I have chosen these two primarily since the thrust of this project is based upon the conflict that can take place in area of worship.

Understanding the Eucharist

The first topic is the understanding of the Eucharist. I have selected this particular subject due to the conflict Paul saw developing between the various groups in the church. The issue is found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34:

Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other
things I will give instructions when I come.

From these words, and those earlier in this letter, one can surmise that the Corinthians did meet together on a regular basis, most likely weekly, suggested by 1 Corinthians 16:2: “On the first day of the week....” with such a gathering including the Lord’s Supper, suggested by 1 Corinthians 11:20. Also, men and women were free to participate together, as suggested by 1 Corinthians 11:2-26. David G. Horrell states that “such gatherings included prayers, psalms, prophecies, revelations, tongues, interpretations, etc., as well as teaching and exhortation, perhaps through the reading of scripture or of Paul’s letters” (2004, 80).

Where the conflict surfaced, however, was the actual meal. First of all, in reading chapter eleven, one can resolve that Paul was not simply instructing the Corinthian followers of Jesus to come together regularly to have a common meal. Rather, Paul emphasized that the Corinthian believers were to understand that this “meal” was an imitation of the meal Jesus had with his disciples “on the night in which he was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23). Specifically, this meal was to include the sharing of bread and wine, understood as a sharing of Jesus’ body and blood (1 Cor. 11:23-25). The importance of the meal was to be the proclamation of Jesus death and resurrection “until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26).

Yet, such importance, as one reads Paul’s concern within this particular chapter and in other chapters of this letter, was often times overlooked. What became important for some of the Corinthian believers was not the significance of this “meal” imitating the meal of Jesus and his disciples. Rather, some of the believers felt that the importance
should lie on the type, or status, of the individual who was partaking of the meal. As Horrell (2004) writes, “Paul’s stern words are addressed to those who turn the communal meal into an occasion characterized by a class-based division between the wealthy and eognos (152). Now some individuals may view this concern from Paul as simply a minor inconvenience or, at least, a bit of jealousy raged by the believers who were less fortunate financially because of the treatment they were receiving from those who were wealthy. Paul, however, did not see this concern in such a haphazard manner. For Paul, when the communal meal was served, all divisions, especially those based upon class or wealth, needed to be vanquished. Paul even instructed the believers that they needed to “wait for one another” (1 Cor. 11:33). The word that Paul used and is translated “wait for” in the New Revised Standard Version is ejkdevcomai (Crosswalk.com, 2006). Horrell quotes P. Lampe as he argues that what Paul meant by the words “wait for,” is to “welcome, accept, referring to the character of the time together, or both, it is the division and distinction between those who have plenty and the have-nots which must be overcome” (2004, 153). Therefore, as I interpret this passage from Paul, I hear him stating that the conflict that needs to come to an immediate halt is the barrier that has been built due to finances and prestige. That is why, in my opinion, Paul stressed prior to his comments on this conflict between these two sides, “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be liable for the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27).

Therefore, how did Paul deal with this issue that created this divisiveness in the community of the Corinthian believers? Granted one does not have the ability to
interview Paul one on one in trying to come up with an answer that question. However, one can examine the choices and use of vocabulary utilized by Paul in the writing of the letters to the Corinthians, specifically chapter eleven, to get a feel as to the tone Paul tried to get across to these believers.

For example, one way Paul handled this divisive class based issue in the eating of the Lord’s Supper was by drawing on the early church’s Jewish tradition. A. J. B. Higgins believes that Paul called one to return to the time of the Exodus as the people of Israel are freed from the Egyptians. In making such a connection, Higgins says that Paul placed emphasis on 1 Corinthians 10:3, “and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.” For Higgins, as Paul spoke of the “supernatural food” what he was referring to was the manna which God provided for the people of Israel (Ex. 16:4, 14-18). There are two reasons why Higgins believes such bread is considered “supernatural.” One reason is because it came from heaven. The second reason given by Higgins is because it is this bread that is used for the Eucharist. As Higgins notes, in Paul returning the Corinthians’ thinking to their tradition and heritage, he reminded them that the “emphasis is laid on all having partaken of the same supernatural food and drink because both the few who were saved and those who ‘were overthrown in the wilderness’ had taken it, and also because at the Eucharist the whole body of believers receives the same bread and wine” (1952, 66).

The same reasoning, for Higgins, holds true when one looks at the wine that is used in the Eucharist. Exodus 17:6 shared how water gushed out of a rock in Horeb supplying the people of Israel with water to drink. “I will be standing there in front of
you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.” The reference to the rock in the passage above, as Higgins shares his views of Paul’s argument to the people of Corinth, is Paul’s way of identifying Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul wrote, “and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.” Therefore, the drink also was supernatural for Paul because it was supplied by the “supernatural rock,” Jesus Christ, and was the type of the Eucharistic wine.

A second way Paul handled this divisive class based issue in the eating of the Lord’s Supper was to go back to the very the meal itself as shared by Christ with his disciples as a healthy reminder for all of the Corinthian believers. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul shared with his readers how it all started as well as its original purpose.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

For Paul, the meal itself, the Last Supper, was a significant piece of the church’s tradition. It needed to be passed on from believer to believer faithfully. Therefore, Paul, in trying to overcome this particular conflict, used that tool, the bringing back of the meal’s original meaning, to reminded the Corinthians and to dissolve the division that had been created among them. Chafin writes that in chapter eleven Paul used four
different statements to remind the Corinthians of the meal’s true meaning (1985, 143).

First, the Lord’s Supper was rooted in history. “It was a certain man, the Lord Jesus, and it was a certain night,...and it was a certain event in which he took real bread and wine and instituted the sacred rite” (Chafin 1985, 143). For Paul, this historical event was just as vital, just as important, and just as valuable as the Passover meal had been, and continues to be, for followers of Judaism. Therefore, its meaning, its historical importance, was to be remembered by the Corinthians rather than being used to create such a conflict.

“Second, the Lord’s Supper is about God’s gift” (Chafin 1985, 143). Paul lifted up for the Corinthians how Jesus on that night said, “this is my body which is broken for you” (1 Cor. 11:24). By reminding the Corinthian believers of those words, Paul shared with them that this meal is a meal where one remembers the death of Jesus and how his death brings life, a life in which there is unity and not discord.

Thirdly, as Paul reminded them of this historical meal, he shared with them how this Supper celebrated a new covenant. Israel’s history was based upon the covenant relationship that God had established with them since the time of Abraham. Such a covenant relationship involved God’s acting on the Israelites behalf and, in return, asked only for their obedience. As Jesus lifted up the cup and states, “this cup is the new covenant” (1 Cor. 11:25), he announced that he was entering into a relationship with those for whom he endured the cross. It is a relationship, as Paul reminded the Corinthian believers, “with God through Jesus Christ that had demands connected with it” (Chafin 1985, 144).
Fourth, the Lord’s Supper brings about a proclamation. It is a proclamation of oneness, a proclamation of unity, and a proclamation of “the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). This is not the only place that Paul spoke of this proclamation of unity. Paul stated later in this same letter that one is brought into this “one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). However, it is this meal, Paul said, the Lord’s Supper, that unifies this one body. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” The sharing together of the bread and wine personified in a concrete manner the Corinthian believers’ common membership in the group. All were seen as one in Jesus Christ.

Higgins agrees with Chafin’s (1985) final point as he writes, “The breaking and eating of the common loaf is a means of fellowship with one’s brethren in Christ, and confirms believers as members of the one body of Christ, the Church into which they were baptized (1 Cor. 12:13). This oneness is demonstrated and reaffirmed by sharing in the common loaf” (1985, 69).

Robert Jenson affirms this final point brought up by Chafin (1985). Jenson remarks that Paul is faced with a situation where individuals were confused as to what makes this meal, the Lord’s Supper, different than any other meal practiced by idol worshipers in Corinth. Both, according to the time Paul was thrust into, were seen as sacrificial meals. Jenson writes, “Paul regards the Supper as phenomenologically of the same sort as pagan sacrificial meals; he takes participation in the cup and table of the Lord and in the cup and table of idols as self-evidently alternatives” (1978, 86). However, for Paul, according to Jenson, the difference and importance for the ones eating the
Lord’s Supper was the “community of believers with Christ and with one another” (86). As Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 10: 16-17, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” For Jenson, as Paul referred to the “bread” and “cup” he was stating that “we are in a community that is the Lord’s. So far, of course, that community might be with the Lord only” (1978, 86).

Paul strengthened that understanding, according to Jenson (1978), in adding verse seventeen, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Jenson believes that for Paul the “body” of Christ was not the bread. Rather, the “body” of Christ was the church, which is “a unitary entity in that its members are brought together in the sharing of the bread. The crucified Jesus – “body and blood” – and the believers all make one body, one object-entity, in the world, by virtue of what happens in the Supper with the bread and cup” (1978, 86). Therefore, that unity, that oneness, that incorporation of believers is unmatched with any other unity (86).

Therefore, Paul, in verses twenty-seven through thirty-four, used an historical event, the Lord’s Supper, to remind the Corinthian believers what this meal truly meant. As Chafin writes, “His main point was that the observance ought to cause everyone who participated to stop and examine himself or herself” (1985, 145). In using the Lord’s Supper, Paul enabled the Corinthian believers, in the midst of their division, their abuse, and their conflict, to recall “that there is forgiveness for the sinner and strength for the
weak and weary. But the warning is not to come to it when we are insensitive to his presence, unloving to our fellow church members,...If we truly enter into the spirit of the Supper we will have a heightened sense of our own unworthiness and of God's grace.
This awareness of God's love for us ought to make it easier for us to love one another” (145).

Idolization and Following of Specific Leaders

However, Paul not only used an historical situation and its basis, specifically the Lord's Supper, to help diffuse some of the divisiveness that was taking place in the church in Corinth. In another area, as Paul dealt with individuals choosing which leader he or she preferred to follow, Paul reminded the Corinthians who were creating divisions as to who needed to be at the center of their life. With sides being taken and factions developing, Paul shared these words in the beginning chapter of First Corinthians:

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. (1 Cor. 1:10-17)

For Paul, the manner in bringing together these divisions created by disagreements among the believers in Corinth was to emphatically remind them to focus
on Christ. "I appeal," Paul stated. Such a word, *parakaleo*, can be used to share a positive note of encouragement, or a negative exhortation. In looking at the context with which Paul was dealing, it is generally accepted that the latter, a negative exhortation, fits best. Paul charged the Corinthians to have a united testimony, "be in agreement."

The way in which such a united front could happen was by placing Christ at the center.

Clive Marsh (2006) writes,

*Given the apparent Christocentrism of Paul's theology as a whole, it is not difficult to conclude that he undermines these disagreements christologically. The mocking rhetoric of 1 Corinthians 1:13 is both possible and powerful because of the emphasis upon Christian unity in Christ to be found throughout Paul's letters. Difficult though it may prove to tease out in detail the nature of Paul's corporate Christology, there can be little doubt that disagreements which end up in division amongst Christians are to be seen as countered and crushed by the conviction of Christ's capacity to unite. Paul does not say 'whatever happens: do not divide', though the thought may well have entered his head. The issue of actual, physical division is simply anathema. Christians are not to do that kind of thing. (170)*

To place this in a contemporary case, with the focus of this project being on worship, hypothetically I could envision Paul dealing with three factions, or parties, that developed in a congregation over the styles of worship. I will call the one faction Apollos. This particular faction, or party, would be extremely energized in getting the congregation to move to the next technological level. Being modern would be of the utmost importance. "Out with the old and in with the new," would be this party's motto. Computer music, big screens, Power Point, and video clips, just to name a few things, would be the way the congregation needed to go in order to grow.

The second party, I will call Cephas, would be steadfast in the denominational tradition. "Out with the new and keep the old," would be the motto of this party.
Hymnals cost money, and, therefore, needed to be used in every format of worship that would be offered by the congregation. Now the hymnal, mind you, would not be the latest developed and approved by the denomination. Rather, the hymnal of choice would be the “old one,” with which grandfather and grandmother grew up. That hymnal would have the proper response and hymnody for a worship service. Liturgy and tradition would be the staples for the growth of the congregation.

The third party, I will call Paul, would prefer the contemporary style of music offered by the first party, Apollos, but also like the organization, the liturgical style, offered by the second party, Cephas. “Old and new can blend,” would be the motto of this party. They, meaning the third party, would know in their hearts that the other two groups would never compromise, let alone accept each other’s views, therefore, they would be the correct party because of their willingness to come to a middle ground.

Now, I have not tried to equate the three groups that Paul wrote to in his first letter to the Corinthians with three groups that could develop in a congregation over the style or format of a worship service. However, I believe that value can be attained by looking at the method Paul chose to make use of with this division in the church at Corinth. For Paul, the cohesive ingredient that was able to bring these divisions together was for them to be “in Christ.” Marsh states that what he interprets Paul to mean by that phrase, “in Christ,” is “knowing oneself to be part of a body of believers to whom one is committed and with and amongst whom one works out one’s salvation in ‘fear and trembling’” (2006, 172). Gaebelein would agree with Marsh as he writes, “Paul quickly destroys the validity of such distinctions. Christians are all one in Christ. He teaches this

Therefore, in looking at how Paul dealt with this issue of choosing leaders, as one may choose worship styles in today’s world, and as I have chosen to examine a segment of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, I have surmised that Paul accepted the fact that there would be, and could be, divisions, disagreements, and even factions with the community called Christian. However, for a community to be viable in the mission of sharing the gospel message to others, such a community of believers must be united following the summons of Jesus Christ. Such unity must override divisions. Such unity would be lived out among the members of the community as a whole. And thirdly, such unity was not “uniformity of thought and action but for oneness of spirit” (Chafin 1985, 36). Chafin writes,

Those who have for a long time observed with a loving eye the actions of different churches have seen congregations deal with grave matters on which there were vigorous and differing opinions and come through it as stronger churches with a more loving fellowship. On the other hand, such observers have also seen the fellowship of other congregations torn and permanent scars inflicted over matters so trivial that in years to come the participants would have a hard time even remembering which side they were on in the argument. The difference between the two is that the first were able to preserve a oneness of spirit in the midst of differences. (36-37)

It is true that later on in his first letter to the Corinthians, especially chapter twelve, Paul lifted up the diversity of gifts bestowed on the Corinthians and others in the church. However, to ease, and erase, the divisiveness that was forming in this early church, Paul, in words and actions that revealed that he was speaking as a Christian brother in behalf of Christ, reminded the members of the early church in Corinth of the oneness in which they all shared in the Lord’s Supper and the oneness that was brought
about in the community of believers centered in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, in enabling the people to remember the essence of the Lord’s Supper, and to focus on what is to be at the center of their lives, meaning Jesus Christ, Paul, in my opinion, would state that that is an answer as to how a pastor, or leader, is to cope with issues that can create a division in his or her congregation. For when there is unity the primary function of the church is accomplished - sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

*Luther Restores Worship*

Charles K. Moss writes, “One of the most significant events of the Renaissance was the religious movement of the Sixteenth Century. This milestone, known as the Protestant Reformation, was the most serious upheaval in the Christian community since the introduction of Christianity into Europe. It divided the Western world into two opposing factions and produced the various evangelical branches of Protestant Christendom” (2006). In reading Moss’s comment, I am struck by two intriguing phrases. Those two phrases are “serious upheaval” and “opposing factions.” The reason those two particular phrases jump out at me is due to the fact that I still hear them resonating in the church of the twenty-first century. Yet, before examining their usage in this century’s church, which will take place in a later chapter, I believe it is important to see why Moss states these two phrases in relationship with the Protestant Reformation.

As one examines the Protestant Reformation, it is impossible to ignore the work of Martin Luther. As Moss explains, “The German Reformation was directed by a man
of considerable genius and great energy, Martin Luther” (2006). Luther was born November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. The son of a prosperous miner, Luther was brought up in the strict religious teachings and atmosphere of the German Church. Luther’s father had high expectations that his son would become a famous and affluent lawyer. However, as the story is told, all of those ambitions came to a screeching halt one night during a terrific thunderstorm when Luther, in sheer panic, prayed to St. Anne that if she would save him from that terrible ordeal he would devote his life to God and enter the monastery.

Even though it would be true to say that while Luther was a student in the monastery, and throughout his entire life, he experienced many internal conflicts, it is after his ordination as a priest in 1507, along with his appointment as Professor of Philosophy at Wittenberg University in 1508, and his Doctor of Theology degree in 1512, that his conflict with the Roman Church began. As Moss states, “Since Luther’s theology was based on the Scriptures rather than on Church traditions, conflict with Rome was inevitable, and Luther was eventually branded a heretic and was excommunicated for his radical defiance of Papal authority in the Bull, *Exsurge Domine*” (2006).

Although Luther’s writings created a great deal of conflict during the time of the Protestant Reformation, areas of division were already percolating. One of those areas involved the surrounding culture. The sixteenth century, according to Robert E. Webber, was a time of great upheaval in the church as well as in the world. “The old medieval synthesis of church and state achieved in the thirteenth century had cracked and fallen apart by the beginning of the sixteenth century” (1994, 109). A new way of seeing
the world prevailed. In that context, Martin Luther and John Calvin desired to strip the church of its “unnecessary traditions and return it to the purity of the early church, both in doctrine and worship” (109).

Therefore, Luther began with the central element of the Roman Church: the Mass. In “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” Luther called the Mass an “abuse” that brought

an endless host of others in its train, so that the faith of this sacrament has become utterly extinct and the holy sacrament has been turned into a veritable fair, tavern, and place of merchandise. Hence participants, brotherhoods, intercessions, merits, anniversaries, memorial days, and the like wares are brought and sold, traded and bartered in the church, and from this priests and monks derive their whole living (Luther's Works Vol. 36 1955, 35-36)

For Luther, the divisiveness that was arising in the church was due to the carnival-like atmosphere the Roman church was creating. Worship became a show. The Roman church, in order to create financial assistance, had transformed the Mass from being a setting of repentance, respect, and admiration to God to purely a means where one would expect some sort of benefit or perk, such as a healing, a release of a soul from purgatory, or some other magical ritual. “The Mass, Luther charged, had lost its original focus as a thanksgiving and had become a propitiation to please God” (Webber 1994, 110).

Everything the Mass had become, for Luther, stood against the Scriptures. In fact, the Mass, in Luther’s opinion, had lost its idea of communion and community. An individual no longer needed to be present at the Mass. The Mass could be simply said by a priest on one’s behalf. Therefore, an individual could buy his or her salvation by simply paying the priest a certain amount for saying the Mass. For Luther, such a idea was an abomination
as it broke from the true sense of worship.

In that context, Luther began to dissect portions of the Mass that he felt were offensive. Such “dissecting” was not appreciated by the leaders of the Roman Church. As history records for us, Luther made many enemies due to his commitment in trying to reform the Roman Church. History also provides for us the fact that not all of the other reformers, for example, Ulrich Zwingli, agreed with Luther’s opinion. Therefore, with the changes that Luther proposed, conflict arose.

Music in the Mass

One particular area of the Mass that Luther lifted up for examination was music. Moss says, “Luther’s early training and experience with music had a profound effect upon his musical reforms” (2006). As one looks at Luther’s history, it is noted that he was trained in music performance and was himself an accomplished composer. Helen Pietsch writes, “As with most music students of his time, Luther had a grounding in both singing and the lute and was recognized as a skilled lute player with a pleasant tenor voice” (2006, 160). For Luther, music was not a ‘dark art’ but rather something that should be grasped by any educated individual. Music, for Luther, had the power to move the emotions. Luther wrote,

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\text{Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to terrify the happy, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate, or to appease those full of hate – and who could number all these masters of the heart, namely, the emotions, inclinations, and affections that impel men to evil or good? – what more effective means than music could you find? (Luther’s Works Vol. 53 1955, 323).}
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Therefore, with Luther’s understanding that music had the power to move
emotions, music took on a crucial role in the reformation of the Church. That is not to say that music was never encouraged or used as a part of worship. “However, music had been to a certain extent relegated to ‘professionals’ and taken away from the people” (St. Onge 2006, 2). For Luther, the divisiveness that was taking place in the church was the fact that music was segregating. All were not welcome to participate. Luther felt that music in the church was to be a tool that involved all people in their worship of God, not only a few. Carl Schalk, a Lutheran hymn writer, states, “Luther’s desire for the active participation of the congregation through hymnody was a result of his concern that the people participated actively in the singing of the liturgy” (2006, 41). Hence, there appears the division that Luther saw. On the one side of the spectrum, the side of the Roman Church, the view was that music was to be presented solely by the leaders of the church. Only priests or trained soloists were capable of and permitted to sing the Latin chants at worship. However, the other side of the spectrum, Luther and others looking for musical participation by the entire congregation, felt that the gift of music in worship should not be relegated to only professionals. Therefore, when Luther presented changes in the Mass, his primary focus was on the style of music and the language used to perform it. Those changes came in what is known as the Deutsche Messe. Through the Deutsche Messe, a new understanding concerning worship was introduced. Moss writes,

_Deutsche Messe_ was not designed to be a choral masterwork for the priests and choir to sing. It was conceived purposefully as a musical work for the congregation, priest, and choir. Luther's musical reforms were centered on the inclusion of all believers in corporate worship, not just for skilled musicians and their _musica reservata_ that was common before the Reformation. (Moss 2006)

Luther drew inspiration for this concept of congregational music from three distinct
resources. "The first was Latin, or what is commonly called Gregorian, chant" (St. Onge 2006, 2). Luther recognized that the chants had a long history in the church. However, with Luther's emphasis being upon congregational participation, such chants needed to be adapted into a more common form so that parishioners would be comfortable in singing them.

A second distinct resource where Luther drew his inspiration was from what was referred to as a unison type of singing provided in some congregational settings. These tunes, even though considered to be singable, were very dull and lacked the enthusiasm and praise that Luther was looking for coming from the congregation.

However, it is the third resource that Luther used for inspiration that elevated the divisiveness that was beginning to develop in the German Church. That resource was the use of familiar folk tunes. Leaders in the Roman Church saw that these types of tunes only possessed a secular nature and, therefore, had no religious origin at all. With that in mind, the leaders of the Roman Church viewed such music as abominable and should never be permitted in the church. Nevertheless, Luther felt, as expressed earlier, that music in the church needed to be sung by all. Therefore, if such a melody or tune could be sung in a religious manner or with religious and Scriptural backing, it was seen as an effective and theological tool to be used by the congregation. Friedrich Blume writes,

In view of this, it was not important, at least in the first half of the 16th century, whether the text generally associated with the music was sacred or secular. In contrast to the humanistic thought affecting the educated classes ever more strongly in the course of the 16th century, Protestantism preserved the medieval classification of the world, with secular art subjected to an intellectual discipline characterized by piety and churchliness. Under these conditions the disparity
between sacred and secular music could at first hardly become a problem. (1974, 29).

So, both sides stood firm in their beliefs. Martin Luther, and other reformers, especially John Wesley and John Calvin, took the stance that both secular and sacred tunes could be used in worship and needed to be sung in the vernacular by all in church. The opposing side, the leaders of the Roman church, remained firm in stating that the church must only regard sacred music sung by appropriate professionals. Therefore, how did Luther deal with this division caused by music in the church?

One way Martin Luther dealt with this conflict was by creating the Deutsche Messe. The Deutsche Messe was not created to be a choral masterpiece for only the learned or professional musician to handle. Rather, as Moss states, the Deutsche Messe’s “main value lies in its idiomatic use of the German language and the impetus it gave to congregational song. It was prepared largely for the uneducated laity, the village volk, in Churches where there were no trained choirs capable of singing the traditional Latin chants” (2006).

However, a second means that Luther used to deal with this division caused by the type of music one used in worship was, in many ways, similar to a method mentioned in the previous section of Paul. Luther reminded the people of the history.

Luther’s intent was to retain and expand upon a tradition that was already in existence in German Churches, rather than to destroy musical and liturgical practices outright. He was not the founder of congregational singing as some believe, but there is no doubt that Luther established the practice of congregational singing of hymns and the Mass as a regular means of worship. Luther set about to gather music into the service of the Church. He wished to retain the richness and drama of the ancient Mass. However, it was in a gradual process that he found sweeping changes necessary, but in the end the heart of the
Mass was preserved in Lutheran worship. In both his Latin and German Masses, Luther continued the basic liturgical tradition of the Medieval Church, changing only that which he found contrary to his understanding of the Gospel. (Moss 2006)

As shown earlier in this chapter, Paul felt that the Lord’s Supper was a part of the church’s tradition and needed to be passed on from believer to believer faithfully. In a similar manner, Martin Luther felt that music in worship also needed to be passed on from believer to believer. As stated before, the Church, specifically the leaders of the Roman Church, needed to hear that music and singing was not for a select few in the congregation, the professionals. Rather, music and singing involved the people. Therefore, music in worship, for Luther, was to be sung by all people in the vernacular.

At the same time Luther felt that the Mass and the music in the Mass should be in the language of the people, he also used the argument of tradition to remind the people, the common folk, that the music used in worship was not to “destroy the liturgical practices outright” (Moss 2006).

Edward Plass brings out Luther’s viewpoint,

They (meaning the Roman Mass) do indeed possess many admirable, fine musical compositions and songs, especially in the cathedral and parish churches. But they have adorned them with many foul, idolatrous texts. Therefore we have removed these idolatrous, dead, and nonsensical texts, have divested them of the fine music, and have used this for the living, holy Word of God, to sing, to praise, to glorify therewith, so that this fine ornament of music might be put to proper use and serve its dear Creator and His Christians, that He might be praised and glorified and that we might be bettered and strengthened in the faith through His holy Word, driven into the heart with sweet song. (1959, 981)

Therefore, even though Luther pushed, to the dismay and anger of the Roman Church leaders, for secular tunes to be used in worship, he also stressed that the music of
worship was not equal to barroom lyrics or whimsical folktale song, even though the tune might be similar. Rather, a requirement for the music of worship was that it carried the historical message of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

On a personal note, it is this argument that makes me feel negative toward some of the contemporary worship music and styles used in churches today. Let me first state that some contemporary Christian music is well written. I find that statement especially true in the aspect of praise and thanksgiving to God. However, I also find that the majority of contemporary Christian music carries very little weight when it comes to grappling with the message of Jesus’ suffering and death, along with the suffering of God’s children. That aspect of Jesus’ life, and one’s personal life, seems to be ignored, or pushed aside. Hence, when such music ignores that aspect of life, one loses a true perspective of what Jesus endured, along with a true perspective of the Christian life. The life of a follower of Jesus Christ is not always filled with joy and excitement. Therefore, and I believe Luther would agree, when one only focuses on one aspect of music, such as praise and thanksgiving, the full message of Jesus Christ is lost.

The Importance of Preaching

Yet, music was not the only area of the Mass that Luther felt was creating problems and conflict. A second was preaching. Fred Meuser shares:

For Roman Catholicism, preaching was either instruction about God whom one really meets and receives in the sacraments, especially the Mass, or it was instruction in the law of Christ, which showed how to live once one had received God through the holy sacrament. But pre-Reformation Catholicism had no sense of a drawing near or actual self-giving of God (the real presence of Christ) through preaching. That was Luther’s contribution. (1983, 13).
Meuser supports his view by quoting Harold J. Grimm,

The Protestant Reformation would not have been possible without the sermon. Regardless of how the reformers gained their new theological insights, they used the sermon to bring their doctrines directly to their followers in the vernacular and to apply those doctrines to the immediate and practical religious needs of the people. Since the pulpit was one of the most important means of communicating information in the sixteenth century, the role of the sermon in making the Reformation a mass movement can scarcely be overestimated (1983, 13-14).

For Luther, the sermon was not simply an apparatus used to communicate information. Rather, the sermon was also used to introduce religious reforms. In fact, Luther himself felt that the office of preaching was the most vital and indispensable action taken within the Reformation. For without it, Luther felt that the ideas of the Reformation would have never reached the ears or the attention of the people.

However, because of Luther’s strong emphasis upon preaching, problems began to surface within the church. One problem Luther faced was similar to the incident that Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 1:10-17. Luther noticed that individuals began to chose, or only support, favorite preachers that they wanted to listen or have preach in their midst. Preachers were being lifted up simply because people liked what they had to say no matter if the content was accurate or not. In fact, “Preacher-ships were established in large measure because of local dissatisfaction with the irregularity and low quality of the preaching of the local secular clergy and the unpopularity of preaching mendicants” (Ferry 2006). Therefore, reform-minded preachers were highly sought after by individuals in the various Post-Reformation congregations. Preachers strongly in favor of the Reformation were asked to preach one hundred to one hundred and fifty sermons a year. “There was frequently friction between preachers and priests, or preachers and
monks, and the people would generally rush to the support of their most popular
preachers” (Ozment 1991, 40-42). In fact, “The ejection of an acceptable preacher by
unsympathetic magistrates could even result in rebellion” (Scribner 1994, 238).

Therefore, how did Luther deal with this conflict that was surfacing in the
church? As Luther saw that individuals were beginning to take sides as to what preacher
they wanted to follow or listen to simply due to what came out of the preacher’s mouth,
he first emphasized the importance of the office of preaching. If one, according to Luther
was to ascend to the pulpit and share the good news message of Jesus, that one was to be
authorized. It is true that Luther upheld the priesthood of all believers. However, when it
came to the proclamation of the Word, Luther emphatically stressed that the one
delivering the message should be called by God through the deliberation, authority, and
approval of the congregation (Ferry 2006). For example, two individuals, who were
popular among the people, yet vehemently opposed by Luther, were Thomas Muntzer
and Andreas Carlstadt. Luther is noted as saying, when asked about these two men and
their style and format in delivering sermons, especially on the issue of the Peasant War in
1525, “If Muntzer and Carlstadt and their comrades had not been allowed to sneak and
creep into other men’s houses and parishes where they had neither call nor command to
go, this whole calamity would not have happened” (Luther’s Works Vol. 13 1955, 64).
Luther was so adamant about the importance of the call by God to the preacher that he
would often refer to those who simply felt that they were led by the Holy Spirit to preach
as “sneaks,” or “false preachers.” “No one should let them in or listen to them, even if
they were to preach the pure Gospel, nay even if they were angels from heaven and all
Gabriels at that!" (Luther's Works Vol. 13 1955, 65). In fact, Luther also stated that those
same individuals who claimed to be led by the Spirit should "Go preach to the geese.
You are a devil. Don't molest and confuse me with your spirit. Christ does not want me
to listen to you" (Luther's Works Vol. 23 1955, 175). Later, Luther stated, the preacher's
mouth and the words that I hear are not his; they are the words and the message of the
Holy Spirit [through which] He works within me and thus He makes me holy" (Luther's

Now many, particularly the Anabaptists, did not like Luther's comments about
the office of preaching. In fact, some believed that what Luther was trying to do was have
control over who was to preach and what was to be preached. In fact, as Ferry writes,
"Anabaptists considered the Lutheran retention of the rite of ordination and insistence
upon the call an abandonment of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and a
means of suppressing opposing points of view" (2006). However, Luther remained
emphatic on his belief of the preacher being called by God. In doing so, Luther could be
seen as mirroring the same comments made by St. Paul that choosing favorites was not
an option. In fact, Luther himself stated,

It is not lawful for me to forsake my assigned station as a preacher, to go to
another city where I have no call and to preach there... I have no right to do this
even if I hear that false doctrine is being taught and that souls are being seduced
and condemned which I could rescue from error and condemnation by my sound
document. But I should commit the matter to God, who in His own time will find
the opportunity to call ministers lawfully and to give the Word. (Luther's Works
Vol. 26 1955, 18)
Yet, picking a preacher just because one liked what he had to say was not the only divisive issue that Luther was faced with when it came to the preaching of God’s Word. A second issue within the arena of preaching that Luther had to face was the subject or content that was being preached. Similar to St. Paul’s dealing with the conflict in the church of Corinth, Luther also needed to remind the preacher, and the congregation, that the focus of the sermon needed to be on Jesus Christ. For some, during the time of Luther, preaching was the opportunity to expound on one’s own ideas or agendas. In taking and using that opportunity to focus on one’s own agenda, and sharing it from the pulpit, Luther claimed that those individuals were “obnoxious spirits who had little sense for spiritual matters” (Ferry 2006). No one, Luther claimed, including himself, should use the preached word to uplift one’s own merits and values. Rather, the only One that should be lifted up was Christ. As Luther stated,

Cursed be every preacher who aims at lofty topics in the church, looking for his own glory and selfishly desiring to please one individual or another. When I preach here I adapt myself to the circumstances of the common people. I don’t look at the doctors and masters, of whom scarcely forty are present, but at the hundred or the thousand young people and children. It’s to them that I preach, to them that I devote myself, for they too need to understand. If the others don’t want to listen, they can leave...we preach in public for the sake of plain people. Christ could have taught in a profound way, but He wished to deliver His message with the utmost simplicity in order that common people might understand. Good God, there are sixteen-year-old girls, women, and farmers in the church, and they don’t understand lofty matters. (Luther Works Vol. 35 1955, 235,383)

Therefore, Luther emphatically stated that the preached word was the “viva vox Dei-to live God’s voice” (Ferry 2006). As Luther wrote,

The Word is the channel through which the Holy Spirit is given. This is a passage against those who hold the spoken Word in contempt. The lips are the public
reservoirs of the church. In them alone is kept the Word of God. You see, unless 
the Word is preached publicly, it slips away. The more it is preached, the more 
firmly it is retained. Reading it is not as profitable as hearing it, for the live voice 
teaches, exhorts, defends, and resists the spirit of error. Satan does not care a hoot 
for the written Word of God, but he flees at the speaking of the Word. (Luther’s 
Works Vol. 18 1955, 401)

Once Luther was asked, “Won’t preachers who think their words are God’s 
words become arrogant and domineering? Won’t they forget that ‘God’s thoughts are 
higher than our thoughts and God’s ways than our ways?’” To such questions, Luther 
responded, “Nihil nisi Christus praedicantur - ‘Nothing except Christ is preached,’” by 
which he meant, “Nothing except Christ is to be preached” (Meuser 1983, 16). The 
emphasis of every sermon was to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. For in preaching 
Jesus Christ, the preacher realized that he was a servant of both the word and its hearers. 
The focus was not to be on one’s self, or achievements, or way of thinking. Rather, the 
focus and content of the message was to be on the passion and resurrection of Jesus. The 
preacher was to take a subservient role.

Whoever, therefore, does not know or preach the gospel is not only no priest or 
bishop, but he is a kind of pest to the church, who under the false title of priest of 
bishop, or dressed in sheep’s clothing, actually does violence to the gospel and 
plays the wolf in the church. (Luther’s Works Vol. 36 1955, 116)

On Easter Sunday in 1521, Luther was even more deliberate in feeling that the 
importance, or focus, of the message from the preacher was Christ alone. Meuser shares 
this portion of Luther’s Easter Sermon:

The priests have no other office than to preach the clear sun, Christ. Therefore, 
preaching is a dangerous thing. Let the preachers take care that the preach thus or 
let them be silent. A bad preacher is more dangerous than a thousand 
Turks....Whoever does not preach about God’s kingdom has not been sent by 
Christ....Now to preach God’s kingdom is nothing else than to preach the gospel
which teaches faith in Christ – through which alone God dwells in us. (1983, 17)

Therefore, Luther, in dealing with this divisive issue, was emphatic to all who preached that the only message that should come out of their mouths was that “Christ was to be preached, only Christ, Christ in the details of his earthly life and not merely in doctrinal form” (Meuser 1983, 17). By stating such Luther brought forth that in preaching Christ as he lived his daily life, people would be able to see that Christ was a part of their daily life and would always be a part of their daily life. “Through the Christ of the Gospels God is made known and in that life God stands at our side and comes to our aid” (Meuser 1983, 17).

With such a strong emphasis, Luther’s critics were just as eager to bring criticism and division. Many believed that because of Luther’s strong focus on “Christ only” the only biblical support he ever looked at was Paul’s letters and ignored the remainder of the New Testament. But such a belief is nonsense. Meuser quotes Emanuel Hirsch,

In truth he (Luther) pulled the Gospels out from under the bench just as much as he did Paul. He... bound the whole life of faith into them. It is no accident that [the church which bears his name] as in no other, the humanity of the Lord has become the center point of all theological work, and that his church has sung about the Lord and his death in a fashion unheard of before that time. (1983, 17)

It is true that when Luther stressed that the preacher should preach “Christ only” that he was not referring to simply using Jesus’ name over and over again in the sermon. In only mentioning Jesus’ name, such preaching was only dealing with an emotional outcome from the people because it was evident that the preacher would only focus on Jesus’ suffering. In fact, Luther felt that in heavily stressing the name of Christ that one was using a method that was a “conscious or subconscious way to cover up shallow
preparation" (Meuser 1983, 19). Meuser goes on to write that Luther "was not one who had to say "Jesus" every two minutes on schedule in order to assure himself that he was preaching Christ" (19).

Rather, preaching Christ was telling the message of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. For Luther, Christ was and is "our brother, substitute sin-bearer, atoner, deliverer, liberator, and victor" (Meuser 1983, 20). Everything, in some manner, shape or form, from the beginning of Jesus coming out of Mary’s womb to the joyous resurrection on Easter, found its way in Luther’s preaching. Meuser quotes that Luther even noted, "If in a text I find a nut with a shell too hard to crack, I fling it on the Rock (Christ) and I get the sweetest kernel (out of it)" (20).

So what was Luther’s reaction to those who did not preach "Christ only?" Luther explained that such preaching was only "clarifying the place, function, and character of good works" (Meuser 1983, 21). As Meuser writes concerning Luther’s feelings on such:

Couldn’t he (meaning the preacher) think of anything else to say? Were they really so big a problem that no matter what the text, he had to go off on a tangent on the value or lack of value of our efforts and actions in the sight of God? Whether he (Luther) was preaching on the Wise Men at Epiphany, the Magnificat, the stilling of the storm, "Peace I give to you" on his way to Worms, who is to receive the sacrament, or the last sermon of his life (at Eisleben in 1546) on “I thank thee, Father...that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” – whatever the text, he (Luther) made God’s way of salvation crystal clear: not by our efforts, but by God’s gift. (21)

In Luther’s mind, if “Christ only” was not being lifted up by the preacher, there was no sense or message of assurance for the person who was listening. “Comfort and assurance were high priorities for him (Luther), not only for the bereaved, but for those who were
burdened, tempted, or, like Luther, crushed by their own unworthiness” (Meuser 1983, 23). By not preaching “Christ only,” the preacher left his hearers with emptiness, confusion, and heartache. Such preaching gave hearers the impression that God was threatening, demanding, critical, and distant. In fact, as Luther would later say, such preachers only caused people to “run to Mary and the saints as compassionate intercessors” (23). Preachers who painted God in that manner were only lifting up a “law-centered” message instead of a “gospel-centered” message because only through Christ is one saved, not by following the law. In fact, in his Ascension Day sermon in 1534, Luther preaches:

If you preach faith [and assurance] people become lax....but if you do not preach faith, hearts become frightened and dejected....Do as you please. Nothing seems to help. Yet faith in Christ should be preached, no matter what happens. I would much rather hear people say of me that I preached too sweetly...than not preach faith in Christ at all for then there would be no help for timid, frightened consciences....Therefore, I should like to have the message of faith in Christ not forgotten but generally known. It is so sweet a message, full of sheer joy, comfort, mercy, and grace. I must confess that I myself have as yet not fully grasped it. We shall have to let it happen that some...turn the message into an occasion for security and presumption; others...slander us... and say [that by preaching so much of Christ] we make people lazy and thus keep them from reaching perfection. Christ himself had to hear that he was a friend of publicans and sinners...We shall not fare any better. (23)

Location of the Sermon in the Mass

Finally, a third issue that Luther dealt with creating some conflict and division in the congregation was the place, or location, of the sermon in worship. Luther insisted that the sermon be one of the major focal points in the Mass. Hence, the location, primarily, was to be in the center of the Mass. Historians will confirm that lengthy chapters of
Scripture were traditionally and faithfully read from the lectern. However, without the aid of the sermon, the preached Word, the people would be unable to find the Word in the words (Vatja 1958, 81).

It is true that during the time of the Middle Ages the sermon was a common element in worship. However, it was optional. There was often no relationship between the sermon and the Mass. “The best that could be said of medieval preaching is that it sought to direct the people to the benefits of the mass by expounding the law” (Vatja 1958, 82).

Therefore, Luther found it important to recover the early Christian focus of sermon and sacrament. For Luther, when Jesus instituted the words, “This do in remembrance of me,” Jesus was not only speaking about the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, Luther felt that Jesus was also saying, “As oft as you do this sacrament, you shall preach of me” (Vatja 1958, 82). The sermon itself was the remembrance. To support his feelings Luther used three passages from Scripture: Luke 22:19: “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying, “This is my body which is give for you. Do this in remembrance of me”; Psalm 102:21: “that men may declare in Zion the name of the Lord, and in Jerusalem his praise”; and Psalm 111:4-5: “He has caused his wonderful works to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and merciful. He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant.” Vatja sums up this thought when he writes, “Luther identified the remembrance with the sermon because he understood the remembrance as a part of God’s redemptive work, rather than as a work of man” (1958, 82).
The conflict that was in the church, which caused Luther to deal with this issue, was due to those called the "Enthusiasts." Vatja, in his research on the "Enthusiasts," points out that this particular group in the church understood remembrance as "an inner effort on the part of man, an ascent of the individual soul to God" (1958, 83). Luther was so appalled with this type of thinking by this particular group that he referred to this understanding as *im Winkel*, meaning, "in one's own private corner" (83). If one adhered to this type of thinking, Luther felt, he or she was expected to secure his or her own rendezvous with God detached from the congregation.

But the argument of remembrance was not the only reason Luther pressed for the central location of the sermon. Luther also felt that the sermon was the exposition of the Mass. The sermon, for Luther, was not only a tool to explain the liturgy, as was already a customary nature of the sermon in the Middle Ages. Rather, the sermon was to be the evangelical spotlight of the liturgy. Luther was so adamant in his insistence of the restoration and spotlight of the Word that he issued instructions in a pamphlet entitled *Concerning the Ordering of Divine Worship in the Congregation*. His instructions concluded with these remarks,

This is the sum of the matter: that everything shall be done so that the Word prevails....We can spare everything except the Word. We profit by nothing so much as by the Word. For the whole Scripture shows that the Word should have free course among Christians. And in Luke 10, Christ himself says: "One thing is needful" -- that Mary sit at the feet of Christ and daily hear his Word..." (Thompson 1980, 98)

Therefore the role of the preacher and the purpose of the sermon was to expound and present the gospel message as an alternative to the preaching of the law, which had
been customary in the church. With the sermon being located in the center of the Mass, it placed the focus and gave center stage to the Word which enhanced “the righteousness of faith versus the righteousness of works, of Christ versus the devil” (Vatja 1958, 83).

There is no doubt in my mind that, as Vatja affirms, “Luther’s greatest concern in the reform of worship was the restoration of the Word to its rightful place” (1958, 67). In many ways like Paul, Luther would answer the question, “How does a pastor cope with issues that can create a division in his or her congregation, with the focus being on worship?” by first emphasizing that one should always remember that the focus of worship must be on Jesus Christ. Secondly, when separating the arena of music apart from the Mass as a whole, not only should the music convey the good news message of Jesus Christ, but it should be sung by all and not by only a few. Thirdly, in examining the art of preaching, one needs to look at the credibility of the one who is preaching and how that message of good news is being preached. This is not to be a message that is filled with one’s own agenda. Rather, this is a good news message lifting up the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And finally, the central focus of the Mass should be based on the sermon with its location at the focal point of the worship service. As Christ is the center of our lives, the sermon mainly lies in the center of the Mass.

All four of these issues weighed heavily on Luther’s heart. As he witnessed them being either pushed aside or even ignored by the leaders of the Roman Church prior to the Reformation, Luther felt it was his responsibility to bring all aspects of worship back to its original foundation: expressing the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. As one is well aware in looking at the history of the Reformation, such efforts by Luther
in dealing with these four issues brought about conflict not only within the Roman Church, but even among the other Reformers. Nevertheless, Luther remained steadfast in his beliefs. In fact, I believe that Luther’s steadfastness in his convictions, remaining true to the Word, and his loyalty to his heavenly Father, were the tools he used to cope with the conflict that he faced.

Therefore, Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, and Luther, throughout the Reformation, saw how issues pertaining to worship could create a potential division in a congregation, as well as the body of Christ. However, such issues, in researching these two individuals, could be avoided if our focus were always on Jesus Christ.
CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE AND OTHER SOURCES

Issues pertaining to worship that could create a potential division in a congregation were not only dealt with by Paul, Luther, and others in the past. Contemporary authors have written about pastors and congregations facing the ugliness of anger, resentment, frustration, and separation due to a division created by a conflict over worship styles. Let us be honest that any conflict situation between a pastor and her congregation is an unfortunate happening. However, when a conflict is created because of a disagreement or in-fighting over worship styles, such a potential division is devastating. I have personally witnessed ELCA congregations splitting into two separate groups, talked to individuals who have left the church, and heard horror stories of ELCA pastors being “thrown under the bus” all because of dissension over worship styles.

Therefore, how does an ELCA pastor cope when worship becomes an issue that can create a potential division in his congregation? This problem is not an easy one to answer. In fact, as William Willimon emphasizes, “Pastors are interesting characters on whom hands have been laid, a burden has been bestowed, and communal care is expected” (2002, 299). I find Willimon’s comment to be true. In the eyes of many, congregational members in particular, because the pastor has been ordained, there can be an unwritten perception that the pastor has the definitive word to any spiritual issue.
However, when a controversial or divisive issue arises, such as the format or style of a worship service, the expectation of the pastor having the definitive word or “answer,” whatever that “answer” may be, can be applauded, challenged, refuted, or even ignored by members of his congregation. Hence, Willimon titles it, the “bestowed burden.”

Therefore, when such a “burden” of conflict is laid upon a pastor’s shoulders, where does one find the fortitude to go on? In examining other forms of literature, two elements seem to be underlining factors in providing a pastor focus when she is dealing with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in her congregation. The first element is loyalty and listening to God.

_Loyalty and Listening to God_

Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (12:18). But how possible, or impossible is Paul’s comment? Where or what is the strategy to “living peaceably with all” when conflict has arisen? How much does a congregation depend on the pastor to keep the peace? How would any other pastor caught in a conflict situation handle Paul’s words if it were to come up in the lectionary for the upcoming Sunday? Would she simply ignore or bypass them?

There is no doubt that any clergy person can relate to the discomfort and anguish another feels when he or she is forced to choose between the role that some congregational members have placed upon him or her as spiritual leader and shepherd of the congregation and the demands of others who believe that his or her primary role
should be focusing on and being a promoter of attendance, income, and enthusiasm.

There is also no doubt that the pastor has a relationship with his congregation as well as a relationship with God. Both of these relationships are formed in the heart and involve a sense of loyalty and conviction to serve both. However, when “living peaceably” is not present, disharmony is strong, clashes of opinion flare up at a moments notice, and everyone is staring at the pastor for the ultimate answer, what, or to whom, should one listen to? To whom, or to what, is the pastor to remain loyal?

Bob Sorge points out that, “Some ministries operate like a mini-military. Loyalty is defined as unquestioning submission to leadership. While this mentality may be present in some brigades, it is not the way of the Kingdom” (2004, 74). There is no doubt that Sorge makes a valid point. For example, if a leader asks you to drink from a vial and you drink from it and fall over dead, that is not loyalty; that is stupidity. Loyalty is not mindless devotion. Rather, the heart of loyalty is self-sacrifice and an honoring of the ones to whom we remain loyal. In true loyalty, there is a foundation of constant faithfulness, openness, and sincerity. Loyalty has to do with love. In fact, loyalty is a very intense form of love that believes in only good intentions to whom we remain loyal.

However, when discord takes place, when chaos emerges, and when conflict over any issue arises in the church family, loyalty becomes an emotion that is pulled on in various directions. Psychologists will even suggest that the most basic fear for any individual is the fear of abandonment (www.psychologytoday.com, 2006). Therefore, for a clergy person in the midst of conflict, there grows in the pastor’s heart some level of the fear of rejection and abandonment (www.religion-online.org, 2006). Without a doubt,
when I was coming fresh out of seminary, I wanted to be a people pleaser. I did not want to create any commotion. In fact, I recall sitting in a seminary class my senior year and was told by professors that when you become an ordained minister and are serving your first parish, do not change any facet of worship of the congregation for the first year. And for pastors who were like me, who were fresh out of seminary and wanted to be real people pleasers, church wars, church discord, church chaos, of any kind, can create major emotional pains and insecurities. For those pastors, in their daily conduct, there may be an outward appearance of confidence and dignity. However, inside there is turmoil and suffering. When emotions are sensitive and the conscience of the leader is afraid or in the abandonment mode, there is one big danger. That danger is manipulation. The consumption of concern for not making waves, of maintaining a good rapport among all the people, and showing loyalty for all creates the risk of others trying to control and artfully direct the leader to their side. The pastor needs to deal with the pangs of hurt for self-preservation reasons, therefore, preventing a loss of identity as the leader.

Before going any further, let me first state that being sensitive to another’s feelings, caring about what another may be thinking, and being loyal are all good and decent behaviors. However, it is also important to remember not to devalue one’s own emotions and instincts. God created our emotions. They are real and complex. Nevertheless, in a conflict situation, every person or group has some emotional stake involved. It is these warring emotions, in the midst of conflict, that can bring upon the scene the demons of manipulation and the urge for the power of control. It is in the midst of a conflict situation that a pastor may feel pounded upon and very victimized. Simply
treading water to survive this emotional barrage does not help. At the same time, being bombarded by all sides to the point of defeat is not a healthy choice for any concerned.

Therefore, self-inspection is needed. Hannah More, noted by her writings for her willingness to help others achieve a fuller and more abundant life, writes, “Self-inspection gratifies self-love” (1993, 124). More goes on to state that when harmful emotions consume our entire being, physically, mentally, and spiritually, one is thrown into a confusion of where one’s loyalties should be. Therefore, a self-inspection of what is poking at our emotional reactions is vital (124).

A wonderful example of what More is referring to can be found in the book of Job. Job, we know, was a righteous man who went through a huge ordeal of suffering. Job lost his wealth, his children, and his health. Truly, as one reads Job we see one who was in total despair. His emotions were carefully expressed for us: “Therefore, I will not restrain my mouth: I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul” (Job 7:11). Anguish and bitterness highlight our verse in looking at the emotional state of Job. In fact, Job had no difficulty, in his self-inspection, expressing his emotional state to God. He made it crystal clear. One could surmise that Job was dangerously close to suggesting that God did not care about him because his emotional woes were intense.

Yet, in all honesty, for a pastor it can be easier to refuse to listen to what More stated or what Job practiced. It is less frightening to put aside this self-inspection of one’s emotions than to deal with them. For some it is easier to be like a frog that sits on a log and thinks about jumping off but never does. There is no risk. There is no possibility of
hurt. It is safer. Emotions can be like shifting sand. Old emotions may be replaced with new emotions. That, in itself, can create fear and trepidation in any individual. Self-inspection of one’s emotions can be disturbing.

Yet, one can also turn the volume up or down on his or her emotions. Much like the analogy stated above, those frogs that do jump off the log find freedom when they jump. Giving one’s self that freedom, the freedom to self-inspect, enables a pastor to search out and recognize why she feels the way she does and then begin to steer those emotions into a more manageable direction. Some pastors feel that they need to analyze their emotions on their own. Either by reading the Scriptures, going on a self-made retreat for personal reflection, or simply working out in the yard are some avenues a few particular pastors who were interviewed for this project have used in enabling their self-inspection. However, more pastors have found that a trusted listener or listeners is more advantageous. Pastoral support groups, spiritual counselors, and ecumenical study groups have emerged as opportunities and ways for pastors to tap into for confidential feedback and pastoral care during a high emotional conflict situation. No matter what avenue was used, when a pastor considered jumping off the log and setting herself free from those fluctuating emotions, she was able to pour out and empty all of one’s grievances so emotional healing could take place.

Therefore, before a conflict can be resolved, a pastor needs to examine the foundation of where his loyalty lies. One’s loyalty, one’s reaching out as a shepherd to the flock, to the congregation, can get extremely complicated. Loyalty is highly important, highly valued, and, unfortunately, highly manipulated. Such a sense of loyalty
of manipulation can be seen in the brief case of Pastor Jeff that I presented in Chapter One. Pastor Jeff, to his own admission, did not want to step on anyone’s toes. He wanted his first call to go smoothly and not resemble some of the horror stories he had heard in class from previous students who had returned to the seminary after their first three years in the parish. Yet, in trying to be all things to all people, Pastor Jeff’s pampering began to slowly erode his own loyalty to himself, his church, and his Lord as well as erode the loyalty the members of St. Bob’s had given to him.

Pastor Jeff’s situation is not a unique one even for those clergy who have served several years in the parish. This is not to suggest that one toss away a “Good Samaritan” gesture of reaching out to help anyone at any time. But, spoiling and over-pleasing is not the type of loyalty one should embrace. Giving genuine applause and support for right choices is a loving loyal act. Giving applause and support when one recognizes a problem and simply wants to “keep the peace and brush it aside” is a pampering type of love and a cheap loyalty that is soon spotted and rejected.

For example, in returning to the case of Pastor Jeff and the different format of worship, one could easily ask the question, “What ingredients belong in the worship service?” In researching this project, I was hard pressed in finding an individual, clergy or lay, who did not have an opinion in how that question should be answered. Everyone likes to create her worship recipe on how worship should be done. However, the question that needs to follow the one stated above is “Will you, the pastor, be creating hundreds of different worship experiences for the congregation so that you, the pastor, can remain loyal to all requests?” Carolyn Bohler stresses, “The truth is that many attempts to keep
peace do not bring peace. The attempts become ways to avoid intimacy, which of necessity includes conflict. To achieve genuine peace, one must make peace, and the path from false peacekeeping to genuine peacemaking is through the risk of conflict initiated by taking stands” (1990, 32).

Realistically, taking a stand for the sake of peace is much better than pretending nothing is wrong. Lively conversations about styles of music, liturgies, visual aids, dramas, or time of worship services, and others are all issues with which clergy have had to deal with. However, in returning to the project’s statement, the question that surfaces to the top is how will one cope with it? Will the pastor pamper his or her congregation or, for the well-being of the congregation, take a stand?

Again, I need to state the fact that true loyalty involves love. A pastor’s peacemaking stand can be well tolerated if love appears in his words and actions. Although “stand taking” sounds hazardous, Luther once stated, “A person is glad and willing to risk and hazard everything he has for the sake of the object of love” (Plass 1959, 819). Therefore, where does one start in taking a stand that will not drive one’s listeners further away from the pastor, the congregation, and God, and yet show the depth of one’s care for peace and harmony?

Acknowledging that Conflict Exists

One place to start in taking a stand in a conflict situation is to acknowledge there is a conflict. Acknowledgment is far better than avoidance. Bohler states, “Churches can have two or more subgroups within their membership. The people know this fact but
resist naming the division for fear of splitting the church. Yet, the surest way to split a church is not to mention the subgroups exist until it is too late” (1990, 42). What Bohler later emphasized was that one needs to celebrate a victory when the conflict, the problem, the chaos is recognized and laid out on the table. In celebrating simply the recognition of the problem, one is able to counsel the fractioned parties by showing love and loyalty and at the same time work toward a peaceful outcome. Proverbs 25:11 states, “An idea well-expressed is like a design of gold set in silver” (TEV, 1987). As I hear the words of writer of Proverbs, I interpret them to say that by expressing the problem, by acknowledging it, by setting it out in front for all to see, is helpful, advantageous, and carries great value like gold set in silver.

Educate Self and Congregation

Acknowledging the problem, however, is only the beginning. A pastor in a conflict situation, as she takes a stand, also needs to educate herself, along with her listeners on her views of the issue. For example, in an interview with a pastor in a conflict situation pertaining to worship, she realized that her inability to educate the parishioners of the congregation she served was a piece of the puzzle that created some of the conflict. Regretfully she found herself listening only to one side of the issue of worship styles instead of educating herself on the tradition, the make-up, or the culture of the congregation. In lacking the ability to educate herself on the traditions of the congregation, it became extremely difficult for the congregation to listen to the changes that she was proposing for the worship service. Her ideas fell on deaf ears. The majority
of the members of her congregation, as they saw her taking a stand, believed that she had
already made up her mind and that a concrete decision was made by her without any
congregational input, education, or knowledge as to what was going on.

Taking a stand before the congregation does not mean that one has reached all
decisions. Instead, taking a stand can distinctly mean one has the intent to act upon the
problem and give it one's immediate attention. Therefore, as a pastor copes with a
conflict situation, he first needs to acknowledge that there is a problem. Secondly, he
needs to educate himself, along with the congregation as decision that needs to be made
concerning the conflict. However, in stating the second part of coping with a conflict
situation pertaining to worship, a pastor needs to be extremely careful. Let us face it,
people have the human tendency to be selfish. When a conflict situation arises, and
groups are divided, many times individuals do not realize that their own wishes and
desires as individuals can and will place a strain on the pastor along with the
congregation. Selfishness produces group disorder. Individuals have their own agenda
that they want to press.

For example, a person may want to change the format of the worship service. At
the same time she has no regard to outcome of the conflict. Rather, the key for that
individual is promoting her way of worship and succeeding. Her view of loyalty was that
the pastor needs to be on her side. Unfortunately, others, those in opposition to the
individual stated above, view the pastor's insistence to changing the format and style of
the worship as pampering those on the side of wanting to change.

Once again, it needs to be stated that taking a *stand* is better than taking a *seat*. 
The pastor needs to call to mind that his loyalty in taking a stand is to simply to act upon the crisis. By acknowledging that the situation exists and educating the congregation, he is able to express that this is a situation handled in love and used as a discovery for everyone.

The above may sound like a simple solution to every conflict situation. However, as a pastor faithfully copes with issues of conflict, as she acknowledges the problem, as she educates not only herself but the congregation, and as she voluntarily seeks ways to bring peace and honor to this group of God’s children, there still may be laity screaming, "Wrong play, Pastor!" Whether verbally or non-verbally, the pastor’s ministry will always be faced with getting a vote of approval or rejection. In the secular workplace, one can dialogue and negotiate one on one with the governing leader, CEO, board, or governing group in hammering out a solution when a conflict situation arises. In the secular world, an employee is faced with listening and remaining loyal to one voice, whether that be the company’s voice or his or her employer’s. But, when examining the call of a parish pastor, to which voice should one listen to? To which of the one hundred plus or minus voices; members of the congregation, denominational leaders, and others, is a pastor to listen?

Prioritize the Situation

With so many voices coming at the pastor, it is easy to understand why so many pastors are physically, mentally, and spiritually exhausted. Therefore, in researching this project a third piece needs to be added to the puzzle when a pastor copes with an issue
pertaining to worship that could divide his congregation. After the problem is
acknowledged and one’s self and the congregation are educated on the particular issue or
issues, the pastor needs to prioritize the ministry demands. The pressing question is,
“What will be left undone, and what will be given priority another day?” Raymond C.
Ortlund, Jr. tells the story about two donkeys harnessed to opposite ends of a cart. They
are pulling in opposite directions. Which way will the cart go? If one feeds the east
donkey and starves the west one, before long that cart is moving east. And if one feeds
the west donkey and starves the east one, before long that cart is moving west (Marvin
Phillips 1996,130). What Ortlund points out in his illustration is that when a pastor
shows his loyalty to one particular group, another group suffers. Hence, a pastor is left
with a situation that can undermine his ministry. When one places all of his energy, all
of his time, and all of his eggs into the group that screams the loudest, makes the most
fuss, or wants to change simply to change, everything and everyone else is neglected
because the pastor listened to one group’s insistence that “this (a change in worship
style) needed to be done immediately.” When there are many vocal shouts continually
trying to direct the course of the pastor’s ministry, the pastor is literally reduced to a
mere vehicle used only to drive at another’s beck and call.

Therefore, if prioritizing is a key in coping with a conflict situation, where does
one begin? What, or whom, does a pastor place first when an issue arises that could
divide his or her congregation? In Chapter Four, I refer to a number of e-mails sent to
active and inactive congregational members from various denominations. In
summarizing the e-mail answers, which one can locate in Chapter Four, what I found to
be interesting was the mention of "God" by the majority of the e-mail writers. It is obvious to me that many individuals believe when a conflict situation arises, the pastor should express his utmost loyalty to God and the teachings in the Scriptures. Remaining under God's perfect leadership is empowering and produces the greatest harvest in his kingdom.

With such empowering from God, it is with conviction that a pastor's journey is based upon her loyalty to God. The journey has everything to do with making God the divine employer of one's life. When one is loyal to God, she comes into relationship with him. One wants to know God's plans and God's purpose. Therefore, as one lays the foundation of her life in God's service, the way to seek peace and resolutions to conflict is by listening to what God is calling one to do. Sorge states it this way, "Loyalty to God, in the final analysis, comes down to whether or not we embrace His leadership style. God leads His family differently at times than we might expect" (2004, 54). Personally, I prefer the two ways Paul expresses loyalty to God. First, in his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul states,

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Eph. 4:15-16)

Paul expresses the unique privilege, the basis of one's loyalty, and the tension-filled responsibility of the believer to live in the present as individuals who await the age to

Yet, what pastor, thrown into a conflict situation, would jump up and down and agree with Briscoe in stating that such a life was thrilling? Instead, would not the pastor be more inclined to state that she, in a conflict situation, feels like she is lying open with wounds exposed taking hit after hit? What "thrill" is that? And yet, it is in such situations, when open, when exposed, in conflict, that one earnestly seeks the remedies that God can provide. Norman Vincent Peale recalls an incident when he was asked by a young gentleman, "Why can't we have a world that is peaceful and quiet?" Peale shared this answer, "In Northern Ireland we say that when there is trouble on the earth, it means there is movement in heaven. I always rejoice when there is lots of conflict and upset on the earth because I know that out of this turmoil a movement in heaven will bring something good" (1985, 40). As shepherds in our congregations, as pastors, one can trust God will bring goodness out of the unrest that can be taking place. There is no doubt that Satan would prefer that one would neglect his or her passionate loyalty to God. Satan wants pastors to weaken, to "be conformed to this world," and have congregational conflict create large crevices in God's kingdom on earth. However, as Paul emphasizes in Romans 12:2, as one's loyalty is founded on God, one's mind is renewed. The Greek word that Paul uses for "renewing" is anakainosis which means, "a complete change for the better" (Crosswalk.com 2006). As one places his or her loyalty in God and his purpose, there will be a "complete change for the better." Briscoe interprets that passage to mean "the mind renewed by the truth of God mediated by the indwelling Spirit
produces results as beneficent as the works of the flesh are malevolent” (1982, 216).

Later on in his commentary on Romans 12:2, Briscoe states that in remaining loyal to God, and I would state especially during the times of conflict, one is able to “experience the reality of the sweet will of God” (217).

Paul is not the only individual in the Scriptures who called others, or was himself was faced with the issue, to remain loyal in their relationship with God. Jesus was also thrust into the loyalty test, also. Matthew records for us in his fourth chapter the temptation Jesus endures from Satan. Three times Satan offers a chance for Jesus to switch his loyalties from God and follow his, Satan’s, deceptive plans. However, Jesus refuses each time. Rather, Jesus emphatically turns to Satan, as Matthew records it, and responds, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Matt. 4:10). In both examples, Paul’s letter to the Romans and Jesus’ temptation, there is no doubt that Satan will work on anyone to try and prevent him or her from listening to God and remaining loyal to him.

Therefore, for any pastor who is in the midst of a conflict situation, one foundational element that needs to be examined is where one’s loyalty is based. Let us all be honest, and I am a part of the “us” in that phrase, in stating that it is very easy for any pastor to fall prey to skimming over the surface of a conflict situation. There is a tendency for pastors to want to live peaceably, to keep everyone in the congregation happy, to not ruffle anyone’s feathers, and to not handle the bigger, deeper, and possibly unseen picture that one may know lies ahead. However, in only skimming over the surface of a conflict situation, a pastor does not only hurt the congregation that he or she
What are the results of such division that occurs "when we are most interested in getting what we want and not what Christ wants?" You know those results as well as I. When we are a part of those divisions we are inclined to justify ourselves and point the finger at the other. Distrust and disconnection are rampant. Sadness abounds. Love is replaced by hatred, anger, and resentment. Rather than "putting the best construction" on the actions of the other, we view them with suspicion and find fault at any opportunity. In short, we kill one another and betray our identity. When such takes place in congregational life, it’s no surprise that one will usually see little fruit in that congregation’s mission and ministry. Rather the congregation will turn in on itself and quickly assign blame to others for its current predicament.

As if such things are not bad enough, there are greater risks. In the process, although we will not usually acknowledge this truth, we may risk using our Lord’s name in vain.

When we participate in such division we risk separating ourselves from the very One in whose name we gather together, namely, Jesus, the Lord of the Church. And, that is deadly. (Copied from www.nwos-ela.org, 2006)

Two elements were underlining factors that provided a pastor focus when she is coping with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in her congregation. The first element was examining one’s loyalty and willingness to listen to God. The second is the willingness to forgive.

_The Willingness to Forgive_

All individuals, even pastors, have a difficult time forgiving someone who has gone behind one’s back, been deceitful, hurtful, deceptive, manipulative, and the list goes on and on. Still, when one turns to the Scriptures, the theme of forgiveness saturates both the Old and New Testaments. Paul is very direct when he writes to the people of Colossae, “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”(Col. 3:13). So, what does a pastor do when he or she is hurt by another when a conflict situation arises
in the congregation? Does one forgive?

What Forgiveness Is Not

In trying to answer the two questions above, it is important to look at what is meant by the word “forgive” or “forgiveness.” However, before trying to examine what it means to “forgive,” I believe it is valuable for one to first to look at what “forgive,” or “forgiveness,” is not. First of all, forgiveness is not approving what another did or has done. I have yet to find a portion of the Scripture which reads, “and God approved of their sin.” God hates sin. For example, in the very beginning God is angered at Adam and Eve because of their sin. He does not approve of their willingness to eat the fruit that he commanded them to not touch. Yet, despite his anger, God still makes garments for them for clothing (Gen. 3:12).

A similar message can be found in the New Testament. Jesus is challenged by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They bring him a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. As they question Jesus on what they should do with this woman, Jesus stands up and says, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). As John unfolds the account, he writes that all of them, the teachers and the Pharisees, leave dropping their stones to the ground. It is at the end of this account where we read the message of forgiveness. Jesus does not turn to the woman and state that what she did was acceptable or okay. Rather, he turns to her, after all have left, and says, “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11). As God grants forgiveness to
people without approving of their sin, so we can learn to forgive those that have hurt us 
and not approve what they have done.

Secondly, forgiveness is not excusing what another has done. It can be extremely 
easy for a pastor to excuse another’s wrongdoing. One could come up with reason after 
reason; such as, “He didn’t want to put more on my plate.” “She wasn’t really doing 
anything wrong. She just went too fast.” “He is young. He just got ahead of himself 
instead of going to the proper committees.”

Marcia Whitten analyzed dozens of sermons preached in the United States during 
the 1980’s. All of the sermons that she examined focused on the text Luke 15:11-32, the 
“Parable of the Prodigal Son.” Whitten writes:

The sermons do not respond to sin by naming it and then announcing either its 
forgiveness or retention. Instead, they do what most of us do most of the time 
with respect to sin. The sermons bear witness to various methods used by 
pastors to excuse or ignore sin, whether in the story or in the congregation...the 
sermons use an impressive array of creative rhetorical devices to deflect the force 
of notions of sinfulness from ‘zinging home’ (as one preacher puts it) to their 
audiences. (1993, 82)

Mary E. Hinkle agrees with Whitten (1993). She writes, “when sin has broken a 
relationship, we are farther along the way to reunion when we can speak honestly about 
the great distance that exists between us and the other than when we stop at merely 
excusing – that is, making excuses for – sin or ignoring it altogether” (2003, 52).

Thirdly, forgiveness is not being blind to what has happened. Being blind to sin is 
more than simply excusing or ignoring it. “Blindness is a conscious choice to pretend 
that a sin did not take place” (Kendall 2002, 16). An example of forgiveness instead of 
blindness is Joseph’s response to his brothers when they came seeking his forgiveness.
Joseph has revealed his identity to his brothers. The brothers were sure that Joseph will seek revenge for their jealousy and hatred. Therefore, the brothers approached Joseph and asked him for forgiveness. Joseph, as his brothers stand before him, did not say, “It’s okay brothers. We were all younger then. I know that I was hard to live with. Let’s assume that nothing ever happened.” Rather, Joseph responded to his brothers, “Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:19-20). This statement, made by Joseph, acknowledged that the brothers meant harm. He even stated that he realized that evil did not have the last word. Instead, God’s power was greater than evil. God had chosen to not abandon Joseph, and not to smite his brothers. Alternatively, God, and Joseph, had not turned a blind eye to the past, but rather many people had been saved as a result of the brothers’ hostile actions. Joseph did not state that sin had not taken place. He forgave his brothers.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians offers the same direction. In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul stated, “keeps no record of wrongs” (N I V, 1978). The Greek word that Paul used, and is interpreted “keeps no record,” is logizomai, which means “to reckon, count, count over, take account of” (Crosswalk.com, 2006). What I understand Paul to have said is, “love does not store up a wrong.” One does not store up in his or her mental capacity a wrong of someone and then brings it up for reckoning at a later event. This does not mean, or deny, that something is not wrong. A wrong has taken place. It is to be acknowledged. However, one is not blind to it. One does not state that it never happened. But, as one follows the example of Christ, he or she is called in
acknowledging such an act, to forgive the wrong. Hinkle states, "To forgive does not mean to ignore sin.... Instead, to forgive is to decree sin – that is, something real, damaging, and separation-effecting – does not and will not have the power to dictate the future relationships it has harmed" (2003, 54).

Examine the Situation

There may be other examples that emphasize what forgiveness is not, but these are at least a few of them. But if a pastor makes the assumption that those three examples are accurate, then what does one do when she is overwhelmed with all the pent up feelings that make it impossible, in one's mind, to forgive? I believe, before any thoughts of forgiveness can be brought to the forefront, one needs to examine the whole situation. For example, in the interviews that I held for this project I was flabbergasted that the terms "sin" or "evil" were never brought up. In fact, in the one interview, found in Chapter Four with Pastor Carol, she refused to state that what the other individual had done was sinful. Rather, she was more comfortable in finding excuses and, in her opinion, logical reasoning why the other individual went behind her back and tried to get a contemporary worship service installed without her knowledge, participation, or input.

G. Lloyd Rediger states, "The mainline church and popular culture essentially have discarded the concept of evil by labeling sin and evil as mental illness or human failure" (1997, 9). Rediger goes on to share, "Perhaps clergy, out of self interest and pastoral concern for their families, and the church, can lead the way" (144). Therefore,
Rediger suggests that before forgiveness is offered, one needs to look at the presence of evil and sin.

I believe that Rediger (1997) is correct. One must take seriously the fact that evil exists. There must be some validity to the belief of evil, as there are five hundred thirty five references to it in the Scriptures. Luther wrote in The Formula of Concord that one seriously needs to realize that the devil is the one who “creates no substance, merely corrupts it” and is “after our very lives” (The Book of Concord 1959, 469). Lyle Miller agrees with Rediger’s (1997) comment. Miller states, “the discernment of evil (in whomever and whatever shape it appears) is important, and that we need to address it, and if necessary exorcize it” (2006).

Before going any further, one needs to state that it is very easy for a pastor to succumb and blame every negative incident, or bit of conflict that comes in the congregation, by attaching a paraphrase of the whimsical words said several years ago by Flip Wilson, “The devil made him do it.” Miller states that one must avoid “the blame-game if it means the denial of our own role and responsibility” (2006). I want to be up front in stating that I have known some pastors who have jumped from congregation to congregation always blaming the previous members for their brief period of ministry.

And yet, it is also necessary to present the fact that many pastors have been “thrown under the bus” due to the sin and evil perpetuated by congregational members and, or, colleagues. According to Rediger, in Wisconsin and Minnesota alone, “sixty-three percent of pastors know of a colleague who has been seriously abused by a
congregation, colleague, or denominational executive" (1997, 13). In that sixty-three percent, Rediger states that the majority of those clergy have been destroyed because of selfishness and egotism of parishioners and colleagues.

Forgiveness Is

So, with the understanding of what forgiveness is not, along with the acceptance that sin and evil are two entities that are or can be alive and well, I would like to bring forward definitions of what forgiveness can entail for a pastor when he is feeling hurt and defensive. First, forgiveness can mean, "I refuse to indict you, you do not have to answer or be judged for an action you have performed. I have decided to allow you to go free" (Mahoney 2006). Granting freedom, or in "fishing" words, "letting him off the hook," is often times the furthest thing from one's mind. Yet, in pondering the definition above, such an understanding is evident in the gospels. Returning to John 8, Jesus stands before the woman who has been accused of being in an adulterous relationship. All of the religious leaders wanted to have a quick judgement passed upon her. However, Jesus, after the religious leaders have dropped their stones and left, simply responds, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:10-11). There is no indictment. There is no judgment. Rather, a sentence of freedom is granted.

Forgiveness can also mean, "You owe me a debt, and I have decided that you do
not have to repay it" (Mahoney 2006). One can turn to the Scriptures to see this understanding of forgiveness. The beginning of Jesus’ parable of *The Unmerciful Servant* is a prime example.

For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. (Matt. 18:23-27)

A debt of a substantial amount is acknowledged by the king. There is no doubt that “ten thousand talents” is a major amount of money. However, as the king initially grants his servant forgiveness, no payment is necessary.

Thirdly, forgiveness can mean, “I have the right to act in this situation, but I have chosen not to make use of that right” (Mahoney 2006). For a pastor who is hurting due to an issue of conflict, it may be easy to accept the first half of that statement, “I have the right to act in this situation.” However, it may be very difficult to accept the latter half, “but I have chosen not to make use of that right.” The interpretation of the first half of the statement is genuine and true. Because of one being hurt or angry toward another, one may want the other gone. However, inasmuch as one feels uncomfortable with his or her feelings toward another, choosing to use one’s rights may not be the answer to the conflict.

Luther, when confronted with the issue of forgiveness and the right to act upon a situation which caused hurt, said:
But what does the Gospel say? If God had also acted in this way, had maintained His right and said: I am doing right when I punish the wicked and take what is Mine, who would keep Me from it? What would become of all of us? All of us would have to go to the devil. Therefore, because God Himself his surrendered His right over against you, He wants you to do the same....So your possessions are now no longer your own but your neighbor's. God certainly might have kept what was His. He owes you nothing. Yet He completely gives Himself to you, becomes your gracious Lord, is kind to you, and serves you with His possessions; and what He has is all your own. Why, then, should you not want to do the same? (Plasse 1959, 524)

For Luther, if anyone had the “right” to not forgive, it would be God. Therefore, if God is willing to forgive his children, we, in turn, are called to share that gift of forgiveness with those that have hurt us.

Finally, forgiveness can mean, “the relationship between us has changed because of an action on your part. I chose to not base the relationship on a past wrong, but to set that aside and base the relationship on other things” (Mahoney 2006). It is this final definition that I believe is the most achievable. One’s relationship with another may be very tense and strained, to say the least. There even may be little doubt in one’s mind that the easiest and fastest way to cope with a conflict is to leave or have the other individual leave. However, instead of jumping into the situation with both feet and allowing one’s emotions to run rampant, one needs to evaluate all that had taken place, examine one’s own commitment and feelings to the congregation, and finally let go of the anger and frustration that was welling up inside. This process may take several weeks. I know it has for me. One may even wonder if the relationship between pastor and congregation can heal to the point it once had been? It cannot. However, what I have witnessed is that a pastor is still able to work with and communicate in a more deliberate manner than he
had prior to the conflict that had taken place, realizing that the relationship between the
two was different.

Are any of the definitions above for forgiveness easy? No, there are not.

However, as stated earlier in looking at the last definition, a pastor was able to work with
the congregation he was serving after a conflict situation because he was able to look at
himself, examine his feelings, deal with his uncertainties and fears, move his focus off
the angry thoughts he had toward the congregation, and place his focus on ways that he
could take on the responsibility in dealing with the situation.

In examining the definitions of forgiveness, a famous saying came to my mind
that has become popularly known as the “Serenity Prayer.” The prayer is: “God, grant me
the serenity to accept things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and
the wisdom to know the difference” (en.wikipedia.org, 2006). Unfortunately, I believe
there are many individuals who carry out the “Serenity Prayer” backwards. They are
individuals who try everything they can to change what is not their job or what is not in
their ability or power to change. They also accept plenty of things they could change if
only they were willing to take the responsibility. However, the one thing every individual
can change is one’s self. A pastor can say, “Even if no one else changes, I can do things
differently.” Creating that change, I believe, enables one to take on the responsibility, the
choice, to forgive.

A second way, and one that I have personally used, to work out a conflict so that
forgiveness could prevail was “by turning to the liturgy I say each Sunday at worship.”
Russell C. Lee was once asked by a pastor from another denomination, “Why is it that
Lutherans seem to have an obsession with sin and forgiveness?” (2006). Lee answered the pastor’s question by first stating that having been retired for nearly two years, he and his wife have been able to attend many different worship services in many different denominations. Lee writes, “Many of the church services we attended did not have a written order for confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness. It was a rare occasion, however, when a Lutheran service did not include it” (2006).

For Lee the news of forgiveness being heard at the local Lutheran church, or the words of forgiveness shared by a pastor with her congregation each Sunday morning, are not simple, fly by night, haphazard remarks that should be glossed over. Rather, receiving and sharing absolution was, and is, powerful stuff. It is life changing. Dennis Fakes pens,

The Brief Order For Confession And Forgiveness...ends with the declaration of our forgiveness by God and self, but this is just the beginning of our obligation to forgive. If the service stopped right here and went no further and if every Lutheran worshiping every Sunday could or would take to heart the implications of this part of the service, the world would see an incredible force for good and the grace of God. (1994, 55)

To illustrate his point, Fakes shares a story relating to Sir Walter Scott. The story starts with Scott being annoyed with a stray dog that continues to come into his yard. Finally, picking up a stone, Scott throws it at the dog intending to frighten it. However, in his effort to throw wide of the dog, Scott hits the dog and the stone breaks the dog’s leg. Instead of becoming vicious or running away, the dog hobbles over to Scott’s side and begins licking his hand, the hand that had thrown the stone. Fakes concludes his illustration with these words,

Such is to be our forgiveness of ourselves and others. As Confession is facing up to the reality of our shortfalls, Forgiveness is facing up to the reality of other’s
shortfalls with us and our own failures to live up to the highest standards. Forgiveness means sustaining all the hurt and injury of the past and accepting the person who did it. It means loving the person who committed the injury. Like the dog who had been injured, the forgiven person responds in grace. (1994, 55)

Therefore, in returning to the question, “Does one forgive?” the answer is yes.

With God’s help, leadership, fortitude, love, and mercy, in listening and remaining loyal to God, a pastor, when coping with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation, is able to accept the words which Paul shared with the people in Colossae, “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” (Col. 3:13)
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Designing the Study

Interviewing was the necessary means in achieving a structured outcome for this study. By using a case study method I was able to record the entire story of each pastor rather than having to prompt them with questions. Each pastor felt comfortable in sharing his or her story. Also, by using the case study method I was able to record throughout the case the pastor's emotions as he or she relived the conflict in retelling what had happened. One pastor survived the conflict situation in the congregation that involved a worship style (The Case Study of Pastor Jeff, Chapter One). The second pastor interviewed, Pastor Mark, self-destructed in the conflict situation and was removed for his own personal sake from the congregation served. The third pastor, Pastor Carol, "weathered the storm" and remained in the congregation where there was conflict. However, the ministry was never the same.

The questionnaire that was sent to fifteen lay members enabled them to reflect on insights they had ascertained when an issue pertaining to worship in their congregation could have created a potential division. The questions presented focused on the lay members' observations, comments and criticisms to how their pastor coped with the conflict situation.
Conducting the Interviews and Writing the Case Studies

When I contacted the three pastors to schedule the interviews, I requested one uninterrupted morning of their time. I also specified the location where the interview was to occur. Two of the interviews were conducted in the pastor's office at the congregation he or she presently served. The third pastor's interview was conducted at the office of a congregation he is currently serving as an interim. In each incident, the pastor made sure that we were left alone. Each participant was made aware, prior to my coming, as to what the purpose for the interview involved.

Instead of using a tape recorder, and because of using the format of case study, I shared with the participant that I would be writing down notes during his or her telling of his or her story. All three participants were comfortable with that procedure and agreed to begin the interview.

I began each interview with a prayer, followed by some pleasant conversation. Each participant was relaxed and felt comfortable at the location of the interview. All three participants stated that he or she was eager to share their story. Having known the purpose for my interview, I began with the same question to each pastor. "Can you share with me a time in your ministry when an issue pertaining to worship could have created a potential division in your congregation?" From time to time, I interrupted the pastor with questions of clarification or questions to enkindle further elaboration. However, for the majority of the time, I remained silent listening to the pastor share his or her experience.
At the conclusion of each interview, I invited each pastor to join me in prayer. I thanked him or her for their participation in the interview. After returning to my office to transcribe my notes, I wrote a case study on each participant and his or her story. After writing the case study, I sent a copy for the participant to examine and proofread. Each participant returned the case study dealing with his or her story stating that he or she felt that I had conveyed their situation accurately.

Following are two of the three case studies in their entirety. "The Case Study of Pastor Jeff," was in Chapter One.

The Case Study of Pastor Carol

Pastor Carol sat across from me with her arms crossed, her legs stiff, and a smirk on her face. She was angry. Furious would be a more accurate word as she retold her story. Ever since her assistant, Jim, had come to St. Anne’s and joined the staff, there had been problems. Carol had served St. Anne’s as senior pastor for nearly five years. As the congregation and ministry at St. Anne’s had grown, more staff was needed. Therefore, a call committee had been established to find an assistant for Carol. Three candidates had been interviewed. The top candidate was Jim, a recent graduate from seminary. Even though Carol was not familiar with Jim, she felt that their initial conversation they had had when Jim was interviewing was sufficient in giving her an adequate assessment of Jim’s talents and strengths. She truly believed that the two of them could work together.

However, all of those initial feelings came to a screeching halt six months into their ministry together. Never had Carol thought that such a warm, compassionate,
energetic young man could become so manipulative. The first clue came when Jim had contacted a few of the church council members, unknown to Carol, and persuaded them to allow him to develop a contemporary worship service to be held during the Sunday School hour. Jim shared, as Carol later found out and had shared in my interview with her, that such a worship service was needed in order to "draw more young families to St. Anne's." Carol had found Jim's statement to be inaccurate for St. Anne's had numerous young families attending worship every Sunday morning and enjoying the traditional format that St. Anne's was accustomed to providing. Secondly, Jim, during their conversation together at the interview, had agreed with Carol on the importance of Christian education and how vital it was for parents to stay and attend a Sunday School class instead of giving their children the impression that Sunday School was only for the youth.

Now, as Carol relived that situation, she was thrown into a situation that she never thought she would have to face. Jim not only had spoken to a few of the council members, but had persuaded them that introducing a contemporary worship service during the Sunday School hour was the right thing to do. Still without Carol's knowledge, Jim began asking certain members that he knew played instruments if they would be interested in beginning a praise band for worship. Now with the support of a few council members that Jim had spoken to, congregational members began talking about the "New Praise Service" that was going to be happening at St. Anne's.

Finally, the telephone rang in Carol's office. It was the chair of the Worship and
Music Committee asking Carol what all the “noise” was concerning “this praise service” that St. Anne’s was adding during the Sunday School hour. “Why,” Carol recalled the chair of the Worship and Music Committee asking, “wasn’t I informed that such a thing was going to happen? If I had known you were thinking of doing such a thing, I would have stomped on it and squished it like a bug.” Carol, after calming down the chair of the committee, informed her that she too had been unaware of this “new service.” However, she would get back to her as soon as she, Carol, had a conversation with Jim.

In all reality, Carol was uncertain as to what she was exactly going to do. She pictured in her mind a congregation divided into two parts. One part consisted of those who preferred the traditional worship service. This was the service with which Carol felt comfortable. It had worked for years at St. Anne’s and no one, up until now, really thought of having worship any other way. The other group consisted of Jim’s supporters, those who wanted a contemporary worship service. As Carol shared her stress and frustration in imagining a congregation split in half, she knew she first needed to calm down before doing anything. The factor that irritated Carol the most was that Jim had gone behind her back. “It was true,” Carol reflected, “I had heard that Jim, in the process of speaking to a few of the council members, criticized some of my priorities for St. Anne’s. Yet, Jim had never said a word to me about any of these matters.” Carol resented that.

Monday morning came. Carol recalled sitting at her desk trying to contemplate when it would be an appropriate time to confront Jim on the contemporary worship
service. She felt great panic and anxiety as a result of the frustration with Jim and the knowledge that she had to do something about it. She saw no way to avoid conflict. She felt that there would be no good solution available. In fact, as she thought about it long and hard, Pastor Carol shared with me, “I was the senior pastor. They should have listened to what I had to say and that was the end of it.” Instead, she sensed that the only thing that would be accomplished was a lot of heated words being exchanged by both parties. Finally, before going into Jim’s office, Carol remembered reaching for her devotional booklet that she was currently using and turning to the page appointed for the day. The suggested text to be read was Colossians 3:13, “Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” “Forgive?” Carol told me in an elevated voice during my interview with her. “How, on God’s green earth, was I ever going to forgive Jim for going behind my back? That was the last thing I wanted done. I simply wanted him to be gone.”

The Case Study of Pastor Mark

“I just want out of this,” said Pastor Mark. “I knew I should have never done this. I never wanted to be a pastor in the first place. I might as well go work at a sporting goods store. At least I would not have to deal with all the hassles and bickering that I have in church.” Those were the words that instantly came out of Mark’s mouth as I interviewed him. I had simply asked him a question about a recent conflict situation, and
Mark immediately began to spew everything out.

It became apparent why Mark stated his frustration because his background, as one could say, was “born, bred, and breathed a Lutheran.” His parents were both Lutheran. Mark had gone to a Lutheran church and Sunday School since the day he was born. He had three years of Lutheran catechism, and had attended and graduated from a small Lutheran college. When Mark was in the eighth grade, Mark’s hometown pastor approached him after a catechism class, put his arm around him, and mentioned to Mark that he should think about becoming a minister. Mark instantly blew off the comment made by his minister. But, unfortunately, he mentioned it in passing to his parents at the supper table. His mother was overjoyed and his father was proud. Within two weeks, everyone at Mark’s home church knew that Mark was going to grow up to be a fine pastor at some church.

Mark expressed that at first he was not thrilled with the thought of becoming a minister. However, the more he thought about it, maybe it was not such a bad idea after all. After graduating from high school, Mark enrolled at a small Lutheran college. At first he wanted to declare mathematics as his major. But then, remembering the joy his parents had first expressed, and currently their telling all of their friends about Mark and his going to become a pastor, Mark decided not to enroll as a mathematics major but as a religion major.

College went well for Mark. He enjoyed his major and thought he was feeling God’s call to attend seminary. Two months after graduating from college, Mark enrolled
in the seminary. Even though the class work was at times challenging, Mark recalled, seminary education went exceptionally well. However, during Mark’s internship year, his third year of seminary, Mark began to notice some frustration. He often found himself being tossed into the middle of conflict situations that were taking place in his internship congregation. The pastor, his advisor, would feel one way about a particular issue while the members of the congregation would feel a different way. Mark was instantly thrust into the situation by both sides asking and wanting his support for their particular side. At first, Mark was not concerned about being put in the middle of situations between the pastor and members of the congregation. He realized, as he stated, that he was “the new kid on the block,” and that everyone wanted him to be on “their team.” However, the whole “taking sides” issue did concern Mark. Yet, when he returned to the seminary for his final year of class work for graduation, Mark put all of the problems at his internship congregation behind him and concentrated on his studies.

Graduation finally came. Mark recalled how his parents beamed from ear to ear as he walked across the stage and received his diploma. In fact, even before receiving his diploma, Mark had interviewed and received a call to a small rural congregation. Mark accepted the call and was looking forward to “getting the ministry started at St. Jude’s.” As Mark sat across from me and reflected on his first year at St. Jude’s, he recalled how everything seemed to go smoothly. The majority of the members, when Mark arrived, were senior citizens. Mark guessed that the average age at worship on a Sunday morning was approximately sixty. Very few young families attended St. Jude’s. The majority of
young families that did attend were either third or fourth generation.

It was the second year, Mark recalled, when the ministry at St. Jude’s started to become “a little rocky.” “I felt that after the first year,” Mark stated, “that I had built a good trust level with the members of the church. One evening, at an informal gathering at a member’s home, some of the people present wondered aloud what needed to be done so that younger people would attend St. Jude. I stated that I felt that we could change the format of the worship service a little to attract younger families. Unknown to me that suggestion was my death knell.”

Two days after that informal gathering, Mark remembered telephoning the organist and telling her that she did not need to prepare for any music the upcoming Sunday. When Sunday morning came, the members of St. Jude were welcomed with Pastor Mark playing an electric guitar, a teenager from the local high school playing drums, and Mark’s buddy, who had come in for the weekend, playing an electric keyboard. All of the songs were placed on an overhead projector and projected onto the front wall directly above the altar. Mark recalled how, when he looked out into the congregation, he saw faces that were shocked. “But,” Mark remembers summarizing, “they’ll get used to it. It’s only the first Sunday that I have tried this. By next week, St. Jude’s will be filled with young families and everyone will be happy again.”

Mark was wrong. In four months the members of St. Jude were asking for Mark’s resignation. At the time of this project, Mark was serving as an interim minister, not able to receive an interview anywhere in the Synod where he was initially placed. With
frustration, shock, and denial written all over his face, Mark spoke of leaving the ministry. There was no joy. All he had witnessed, at his internship and at St. Jude’s, was anger, bitterness, and hatred. “Why would anyone want to live with this?” Mark asked me. “I just want out of it.”

Analysis of Interview Data

When the interviews were completed, I processed the notes that I had taken and compiled them into a case study format. All three interviewees were asked to proofread his or her case study when I had completed it. All three agreed and after reading their particular case study, affirmed my recording an accurate account of his or her story.

Designing and Administering the Questionnaire

Not only was it important for me to interview three pastors for this study, it was also vital to record the feelings and observations made by lay individuals who had witnessed a pastor, or their pastor, who had coped with a conflict situation. The method used to record these responses was a questionnaire. Fifteen individuals were given the questionnaire. Each returned their questionnaire with the understanding that their responses would be recorded in this study, but their identities kept confidential. Three questions were sent to each individual via e-mail. The following are the three questions asked, and the responses given to that question.
Question #1

“When a congregation is in conflict and dispute, with whom, or where, should the pastor’s loyalty be based?”

- "Like the saying goes, there is always two sides to every story. The pastor should not take sides based on whom he or she likes or dislikes in the congregation. After careful thought and prayer the pastor should side with the opinion which will benefit the church in years to come."
- "God and himself. You have to be yourself and follow your heart and the direction God is leading you toward. God will never steer you wrong."
- "The obvious answer is Jesus. The pastor is always loyal to Jesus. How do you know where Jesus is in the conflict? The place where you find grace, love for another not self. This may seem to put the pastor on one side, but he has to appear on no one’s side. Rather he needs to point to Jesus for others to find."
- "First, be loyal to the Lord and to yourself and family. In whatever possible way, stay neutral unless one side is going completely against the faith. I would want the pastor to do what he or she needed to do to take care of himself or herself and their family. Many times getting between arguing groups makes them both angry with you. The bottom line: be loyal to the Lord, yourself, and your family, then do what you can do to heal the church."
- "Be loyal to the teaching of the Bible. In other words "WWJD" (What Would Jesus Do?)"
- "Every second of every day, the pastor MUST remain loyal to his calling, the ordination vows, and himself."
- "The pastor is a member of a congregational community who is called to the caretaker of the Gospel. The pastor’s loyalty must be to Christ of the Gospel."
- "God, himself, congregation. In that order!"
- The remaining e-mails expressed their opinion with a one word answer, "God."
Question #2

"Is the pastor responsible for the “mood” of the congregation? Is he or she expected to be the “upholder of joy” for the parish?"

• "Happy people help to make others happy as well. Pastors have a great deal of influence over the mood of the congregation. Sometimes another person’s morale depends on their interaction with you."

• "Most times a pastor leads by example and hopefully the congregation will follow suit. If a pastor remains negative, then a congregation would be affected because of the ‘herd mentality.’"

• "The pastor is responsible for the morale of the church, but he cannot pull all the weight."

• "The tone of the church is set by the leadership."

• "It is helpful when the pastor is enthusiastic about the message he or she is sending and it ‘rubs off’ on the congregation."

• "The pastor is not responsible for the mood of the congregation. He is responsible for leading them to the Word. The congregation will doubtlessly go through many different ‘moods,’ and probably not in unison."

• "Staff and other lay leaders are to share in the responsibility of the mood of the congregation."

• "There are a lot of congregations in tension and division. Many are due to the pastor. Ideally, the congregation is in a good place when a pastor comes in and is more of a catalyst or leader for spiritual growth. Is a parent responsible for a child’s mood? To the extent that the parent provides a loving and nurturing home, yes. The pastor does impact the mood by his care. But he is not responsible for all the various moods."

Question #3

"Should a pastor try to appear joyful and upbeat even if he or she is hurting inside?"

• "I think there is a balance on this one. I do not feel that a pastor should have to hide his feelings especially just for appearances. I feel it is okay
to share your feelings and what is going on with those that you are comfortable with. Pastors are human, and I believe it is critical that a congregation remember that!

- "There was something that always bothered me about my pastor, and one day it hit me what the problem was. He is always happy – all the time!!! This drives me crazy. Because of this, I do not see realness in him. It is the pastor's job to keep our eyes upward and forward. But I do not expect him to obtain perfection. Life lessons can be taught through pain, struggles, and emotions."

- "I think whatever your occupation is, work is not the place to discuss personal issues. When you are hurting, talk to family, only close friends, or get professional help."

- "To a degree the pastor should try to appear joyful. His attitude sets the pace."

- "Anytime someone works with the public I feel that they should try and not show their personal feelings. Emotions need to be controlled. I realize that this a major undertaking for a pastor who is continually dealing with joys and sorrows of the members of the church. Pastors need an accountability partner. Someone who is outside of the church. This partner can listen and offer suggestions. If the pastor does not have this partner, I am sure adverse feelings are bound to affect the congregation. The congregation will have no idea how to help or be confused as to their role in aiding and supporting the pastor."

- "If in the presence of someone who cannot help, does not care (either by disinterest or by lack of knowledge or connection) and was not the cause, then there would be little benefit to show the hurt on the outside. If in the presence of the person who caused the hurt, it should be addressed."

- "Pastors are human. We all experience times when we are hurting and try to hide it from the general public. Jesus was not always cheerful when he was hurting. There are times when our hurt cannot be concealed. Prayer for guidance and strength will help pastors, as well as all of us, to know how to present ourselves during one of those times."

In designing the questionnaire, I wanted to ask questions that provided a simple, yet, concise answer from the lay individuals. Each of the fifteen provided the necessary information I was seeking for this study. The only similarity among the fifteen was that they had all been a part of a conflict situation pertaining to worship in their congregation.
However, even though I did not ask for their personal reaction to the conflict, each were willing to share how they saw, analyzed, and determined a pastor should cope with such a conflict situation.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Charles Knippel writes, “The worship of the church joyfully acknowledges and celebrates the presence of Jesus Christ and centers in and revolves around the Word and Sacraments because Jesus bids us to proclaim and hear his Word and to do with bread and wine what he has commanded” (2002, 17). I would like to focus on Knippel’s opening comment, “The worship of the church joyfully acknowledges....” (17). How hard is it, in the midst of a conflict situation pertaining to worship, for a pastor and lay members to acknowledge the presence of Jesus? The people of God, for many generations, have had the opportunity to profess the presence of Jesus. When a conflict arises, can we profess the graciousness and goodness of our Lord with a joyful expression? Was worship and our witness to Jesus easier, and even more joyful, years ago when one did not need to worry about different styles of worship services? Rather they were “set in stone,” delivered the same way, and one did not need to worry what type of music, the frequency of the sacraments, or any other matter because clergy as well as lay knew what was going to happen Sunday after Sunday? God’s Word, the sacraments, and his presence provide a satisfaction and purpose in our life. So, is it possible for the joyfulness of those three items listed above to remain in the front of all that happens in our church community when discontent and conflict brew? Why is
joyfulness diminished for any pastor who, through study and meditation, knows of the splendid joy of Jesus Christ?

Categorization of Research Data for the Three Pastors

In analyzing the biblical and historical data, case studies, and the answers provided by the lay member questionnaires, I began looking at ways to arrange and organize the information I had gathered. My first focus needed to be on the three pastors. By concentrating on the three pastors, I was not minimizing the value of the questionnaire answered by the lay members. Their observations were extremely beneficial for this project. However, the reason for initially centering on the three pastors, and personally relating to their situations, was because of the problem statement for this study. My problem statement was based on how an ELCA pastor copes with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation. The key to the problem is based on the emotions, feelings, and response of a pastor. Therefore, I have found three themes relating to all three pastors. The titles I have given the three themes are: confession, apology, and loyalty.

Confession

All three of the pastors, after their conflict situation had been settled or they had moved on to other positions, felt that they could have dealt with the situation in a more constructive and caring manner. Yet, at the onset of the situation, each felt that he or she
was in the right. They all agreed that as clergy they felt that if they were doing the work of the Lord everyone should be willing to jump on the bandwagon and follow their lead. For example, Pastor Carol remarked, “I was the senior pastor. They should have listened to what I had to say and that was the end of it” (The Case Study of Pastor Carol, Chapter Four, 92). Pastor Jeff shared the same sentiment. “Within a few months they would all get used to the changes and everything would be back to normal,” Pastor Jeff shared with me (The Case Study of Pastor Jeff, Chapter One, 7). Pastor Mark also offered the same feelings, “they’ll get used to it. It’s only the first Sunday that I have tried this. By next week, St. Jude’s will be filled with young families and everyone will be happy again” (The Case Study of Pastor Mark, Chapter Four, 96). All reflected on their position and attitude during the conflict situation, realized that they had succumbed to self-deceit.

Not only did all three feel they had acted in a selfish manner in the way they dealt with their respective conflict situation, but all three mentioned how they reacted as though they were being personally attacked. Words, or feelings, that filtered through each of the interviews were bitter, anger, resentment, revenge, hurt, upset and so on. Pastor Carol, in particular, later shared with me how, “It was hard being a woman minister and the senior pastor at the same time. I wasn’t going to let any young person fresh out of seminary take that away from me.”

It was at the conclusion of each interview that the pastors remarked how confession became a vital tool in order for them to continue in their ministry. Two of the pastors told how they had gone before the other clergy in their particular conference and
shared their conflict experience. One, Pastor Jeff, remarked how the other clergy placed their hands upon him and prayed for him. "It was like a huge weight had been taken off of my shoulders." In a similar fashion, Pastor Carol remarked how in saying the words of the *Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness* in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and having Jim, her associate, standing beside her made her realize all the "garbage" onto which she was holding. The following are the words of that portion of the service that touched Pastor Carol:

> We are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us so that we might delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. (*Lutheran Book of Worship* 1978, 56)

**Apology**

Going hand in hand with the previous theme, apology, or forgiveness, was also a theme that wove its way through each of the interviews with the three pastors. In a dialogue between a pastor and a colleague or a congregational member who are at odds, some hurts are known, and others unknown. Some wrong actions are admitted and confessed, while others are not admitted or denied. As pastors preach from God's Word the necessity of confession and forgiveness, we are, in my understanding, ambassadors whose lives reflect the gift of forgiveness, whether that involves two, two hundred, or more. Pride becomes a great defender when we are unwilling to admit that a wrong word has fallen from our lips or a wrong action from our hands and feet. It is very easy for any
pastor to fall into the trap of pointing out the specks that can be found in a neighbor’s eye, yet very uncomfortable when being candid concerning the errors and misfortunes that he or she may have carried.

Pastor Carol admitted to her unwillingness to forgive when she shared in the closing portion of her interview, “Forgive?” Carol told me in an elevated voice during my interview with her. “How, on God’s green earth, was I ever going to forgive Jim for going behind my back? That was the last thing I wanted done. I simply wanted him to be gone” (The Case Study of Pastor Carol, Chapter Four, 92). Pastor Mark mirrored the same feelings when he said, “Why would anyone want to live with this? I just want out of it” (The Case Study of Pastor Mark, Chapter Four, 96).

As all three pastors reflected on their particular situations, each remarked that forgiveness enabled them to continue in their ministry. By letting it go, Pastor Carol remarked that her relationship with her associate was not the same as it was in the beginning. However, despite their differences in worship style, they were able to compromise and work together on the ministry in the congregation.

Pastor Mark, even though he no longer serves a congregation, felt that forgiveness enabled him to let go of the hurt of “being used” and see that he could continue to be a pastor. Currently he is serving as an interim pastor in congregations waiting to call an individual.

Pastor Jeff, as he witnessed his congregation divide into two separate groups, continues to use the gift of forgiveness in enabling two warring sides to come together and
begin to heal from the hurt and pain both suffered.

Loyalty

The final theme that wove its way through each of the three interviews was the theme of loyalty. As each pastor struggled with his or her congregation, the following questions arose from each one of them: To whom is the pastor loyal? Is the pastor loyal to his or her own personal views? Is the pastor loyal to the congregation’s views, whether they agree or disagree with his or her own personal views? Does the pastor remain loyal to his or her convictions and make the final decision, letting “the chips fall where they may?” Does the pastor remain loyal to his or her family, not wanting to cause undo stress or anxiety for the family members, and even though he or she disagrees with the congregation’s views on worship, says nothing so that the family is not uprooted? Finally, does the pastor remain loyal to his or her interpretation of the Scriptures as he or she views its handling of issues creating division among people?

Despite what many of individuals want to believe, there is no way to block out the uncomfortable feelings a pastor experiences in human relationship controversies. The pastor’s deepest wish may be to yell, scream, cry, or run from the emotional turmoil. The flow of emotions that surface from the congregational members will certainly have an effect on the pastor’s emotional state. The courage to hear and listen is something that must be applied in a possible stormy environment.

Pastor Jeff struggled with the theme of loyalty the greatest as he recalled asking
himself during the interview, “Six months into the ministry, and I have chaos on my hands. Who should I listen to? Should I listen to those who want the changes? Should I listen to those who have always been members of the congregation? Should I listen to myself? God, what in the world should I do?” (The Case Study of Pastor Jeff, Chapter One, 7-8). Pastor Mark also wrestled with the theme of loyalty. His wrestling was not with a congregation. Rather his wrestling began with his knowledge of the joy from his parents when he mentioned that his pastor thought he had the gifts of being a pastor and his own sense of call. “Mark recalled how his parents beamed from ear to ear as he walked across the stage and received his diploma” (The Case Study of Pastor Mark, Chapter Four, 94-95).

The theme of loyalty was not only present in their own personal struggles with a congregation, a colleague, or self. The theme of loyalty was also prevalent, as each reflected on their situation, in their relationship with God. All three pastors remarked how they struggled with the questions, “God, where are you?” and “Why is this happening to me?” With such a struggle, each remarked how their own personal relationship and loyalty to God was strengthened due to the conflict situation they were facing. That realization did not come immediately. However, as they reflected on their struggles, the evidence of God’s hand was prominent in granting each one the guidance and direction he or she needed in coping with their situation.
Categorization of Research Data for the Lay Members

This study also included the answers provided by fifteen lay members who had observed a pastor or witnessed their own pastor cope with an issue pertaining to worship that could create a potential division in his or her congregation. To clarify, thirteen of the lay members were active in their congregation. Two of the lay members had become inactive due to the conflict situation they observed. Yet, in combining the responses of all three questions asked to the lay members, there are three themes that come to the surface. Those three themes are: 1) the pastor is responsible for the atmosphere of the congregation; and 2) the pastor should be loyal to God, and 3) the pastor should not share his or her emotions with the congregation.

A Pastor Is Responsible

Even though the majority of lay members interviewed would agree that the pastor does not “pull all the weight” (Question #2, Chapter Four, 98), that same majority would agree that the pastor’s attitude does splash over onto the congregation. In highlighting a few of the responses, many stated in one manner or another: “Pastors have a great deal of influence over the mood of the congregation.” “The tone of the church is set by the leadership.” “It is helpful when the pastor is enthusiastic about the message he or she is sending and it ‘rubs off’ on the congregation” (Question #2, Chapter Four, 98).

Only one individual responded that he felt that the pastor was not responsible for the mood of the congregation. His response was given in comparing the relationship of
pastor and congregation to parent and child. "Is a parent responsible for a child’s mood? To the extent that the parent provides a loving and nurturing home, yes. The pastor does impact the mood by his care. But he is not responsible for all the various moods” (Question #2, Chapter Four, 99).

A Pastor Is Loyal to God

In the same way as the majority felt that the pastor was responsible for the atmosphere of the congregation, the majority also agreed that the pastor, especially in a conflict situation, should place his or her utmost loyalty in God. All of the responses, except two, stated that God was the ultimate source a pastor should rely upon in a conflict situation. Some of the responses were: “The pastor’s loyalty must be to Christ of the Gospel.” “First, be loyal to the Lord....” and “The obvious answer is Jesus” (Question #1, Chapter Four, 97-98).

Only one response returned with no reference to God. That particular response came from the inactive individuals who had recently left their home congregation because of a conflict situation pertaining to worship. In this situation, the pastor introduced, with only a few members’ prior knowledge, a contemporary worship style, eliminating the traditional worship style that had been present in the congregation since its inception. Because of the animosity and anger this couple had toward their pastor in making such a dramatic change, they surmised that the pastor was only listening to a select group in the congregation and to no one else. Their response was one filled with bitterness and hurt as
they felt betrayed and kicked out of the congregation in which the husband of the couple had been baptized. Therefore, it is with that background information I understood their responses, "Like the saying goes, there is always two sides to every story. The pastor should not take sides based on whom he or she likes or dislikes in the congregation. After careful thought and prayer the pastor should side with the opinion which will benefit the church in years to come" (Question #1, Chapter Four, 97).

A Pastor Should Not Share His or Her Emotions with the Congregation

This final theme was the most interesting of the three. The reason for its interest was that there were many varied opinions from the lay members. Two responses, both coming from individuals with a business perspective, felt that the pastor should not show his or her emotions, especially those of hurt or anger, to the congregation. Their responses were emphatic to the point that, "I think whatever your occupation is, work is not the place to discuss personal issues." and "Anytime someone works with the public I feel that they should try and not show their personal feelings. Emotions need to be controlled" (Question #3, Chapter Four, 99).

Three of the lay members responded that a "balance" is needed by the pastor when he or she is suffering or hurting. It was alright with these three lay members that their pastor was human. However, his or her humanness needed to be guarded or encased in a manner that not too much was shown to the congregation. For example, the impression that surfaced from these three individuals was: "Pastors are human. We all
experience times when we are hurting and try to hide it from the general public. Jesus was not always cheerful when he was hurting. There are times when our hurt cannot be concealed.” “I think there is a balance on this one. I do not feel that a pastor should have to hide his feelings especially just for appearances. I feel it is okay to share your feelings and what is going on with those that you are comfortable with.” and “IF in the presence of someone who cannot help, does not care (either by disinterest or by lack of knowledge or connection) and was not the cause, then there would be little benefit to show the hurt on the outside. If in the presence of the person who caused the hurt, it should be addressed” (Question #3, Chapter Four, 99, 100).

Only one individual stated that she felt angered and frustrated that her pastor did not reveal his emotions of hurt or pain. In fact, her response showed her dislike that her pastor seemed always cheery and upbeat. In coming across in that manner to this particular lay individual, her pastor was phony and artificial. Therefore, her feeling toward her pastor was, “There was something that always bothered me about my pastor, and one day it hit me what the problem was. He is always happy – all the time!!! This drives me crazy. Because of this, I do not see realness in him” (Question #3, Chapter Four, 99).

**Concluding Thoughts on Analysis of Data**

As I assess the outcome of the interviews of the three pastors and the questionnaire responses from the lay members, I doubt if any of them would state that being in a
conflict situation pertaining to worship is a pleasant matter in which to be involved. I believe, however, that all would agree that the pastor and his or her attitude and behavior is a vital key in determining the atmosphere that takes place in the conflict situation as well as its result on the congregation. At the same time, the three issues that move their way through the interviews of the three pastors would stress that a pastor has a difficult time in finding avenues that he or she can implement in one’s personal life that would offer him or her peace and strength in a conflict situation.

Therefore, from the analysis of data in this chapter, the following questions are considered in the next chapter.

What methods or tools are available for a pastor to use in their personal struggle when he or she is coping with a conflict situation pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation?

Can a pastor find personal peace and strength when he or she is in a conflict situation pertaining to worship in his or her congregation?

How can a pastor find joy in ministry when he or she is confronted with a conflict situation pertaining to worship in his or her congregation?
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The ELCA clergy roster includes the names of 17,651 pastors (www.elca.org, 2006). At least once in his or her ministry, he or she has had to deal with an issue of conflict. The issues for this study focused on those pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in a congregation.

Using Merriam's (1998) basic or general qualitative study, I was able to study tools used by St. Paul and Luther when they were confronted with an issue pertaining to worship that could create a potential division in a congregation. Also, in using the general qualitative study I was able to reflect on the writings from other Christian writers the elements they provided in aiding a pastor who was dealing with an issue pertaining to worship that could create a potential division in a congregation. Finally, in order for this study to become authentic, it was necessary to interview three ELCA pastors, and survey fifteen lay members, who had experienced dealing with an divisive issue pertaining to worship in their congregation and see how that experience influenced the ministry of the congregation.

As Merriam defines the basic and qualitative study format, she says, "Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis" (1998, 11). Therefore, case studies using three ELCA pastors who had experienced a potential division in their
congregation were written. Also, a survey questionnaire was sent, via e-mail, to fifteen lay members. Thirteen of the lay members were active members in their congregations. Two of the lay members were formally active but have recently become inactive members due to a conflict pertaining to worship in their congregation. Two of the lay members were congregants at a United Church of Christ congregation. Two other congregants were members of United Methodist congregations. The remaining nine lay members were congregants at ELCA congregations. In order that confidentiality is observed, never in the study are real names or the listing of denominational affiliation given.

Findings

In examining the biblical and theological foundations, I found that situations pertaining to worship created, or could have created, conflict in the early church. Paul, in his first letter to the people of Corinth, dealt with issues concerning the Eucharist, and the idolization and following of specific leaders.

Martin Luther also faced issues pertaining to worship that created, or could have created, divisiveness in the church. The issues that Luther dealt with were music in the Mass, the importance of preaching, and the location of the sermon.

When worship becomes a conflict issue for an ELCA pastor today, there can be ramifications and effects that spill over onto his or her ministry. Some decisions about worship are met with joy and excitement. Other decisions create frustration and departure. As my internship supervising pastor once said to me, “Mark, I have four hundred bosses.
Each one holds a detailed job description for me that no one has yet to have the decency to show me.”

Therefore, a pastor needs to ask himself or herself where there loyalty is placed when the conflict situation arises. In doing so, a pastor is able to acknowledge that conflict exists, educate himself or herself along with the congregation, and prioritize the situation. Also, another ramification the pastor needs to examine is his or her willingness to forgive. When one forgives, he or she is able to examine the situation and deal with the conflict by granting forgiveness and not acceptance.

The same ramifications and effects hold true for any congregational leader. In using the term, “congregational leader,” I am referring to those who lead worship, presidents of congregations, elders of the church, and so on. Forgiveness and loyalty are vital concerns for all of these individuals during a conflict situation pertaining to worship.

Therefore, in combining all of the findings and research for this study, I recommend three tools so that an ELCA pastor can handle an issue pertaining to worship that can create a potential division in his or her congregation. The three tools are: 1) worship, 2) prayer, and 3) Sabbath.

Conclusions

Worship

Now I realize that red flags may be thrown up when a pastor is reminded of the importance for him or her to worship. In fact, it may cause one to ask, “Isn’t the gist of your project how does a pastor cope with an issue pertaining to worship that can create a
potential division in his or her congregation?” First of all, the answer to that question is, “yes.” However, in the three interviews I conducted with fellow clergy for this project, what jumped out at me is that pastors often times have difficulty in having a personal worship of God. Howard Rice writes, “Activities such as prayer and meditative reading of scripture may have become tools of the trade to the extent that these spiritual disciplines no longer nourish the souls of pastors” (1998, 158). Pastors will often “go through the motions of faith,” yet find it very difficult to deal with their own personal issues of belief. Rice goes on to state, “Cheapening the sacred is hard to avoid if what we commend to others is not a source of awe in our personal lives” (158).

In talking with numerous pastors over these past twenty-two years of ministry, I have asked several, “During a vacation, have you ever worshiped at another congregation?” The majority of responses have been, “Why would I do that? That’s like a factory worker touring various factories while he is on vacation. That is where he works. So why would he want to go to a place that is similar to where he works? Church is where I work. Going to worship when I’m off is the last thing I want to do. I end up critiquing everything, the sermon, the hymn selection, the music, instead of listening to the sermon, or enjoying the singing. Why would I want to do that?”

As I looked at the joylessness experienced by ministers caught in a conflict situation pertaining to worship, I found that one of the gravest problems was their inability to receive sustenance from the practices they invited others to be normative in their Christian walk. Rice further writes, “All pastors need to make some provision for their
own need for worship. Attending a church of another denomination that differs greatly from one’s own arouses the critical faculties less because we have less information and experience, and we are much less likely to criticize what is new and different” (1998, 158). On a personal note, I have found Rice’s (1998) statement to be true. Very few times, when I am on vacation, will I worship at another Lutheran congregation. I find that when I do worship at another Lutheran congregation I end up wondering why the pastor did not choose one hymn over another to make the point of his or her sermon, or why he did not use an illustration that I had used in a sermon to make his or her point stronger. However, when I worship at another denomination, at something totally different than a Lutheran format, I find that I worship more freely, more relaxed, and am more in tune with my feelings of that day. I listen to the singing of the hymns that I am not familiar with instead of feeling that I have to lead the singing. I reflect on the pastor’s sermon instead of critiquing the pastor’s sermon. The difference in setting helps me to worship.

By God’s own design, worship needs to stand at the very center of a pastor’s life and mission. Often times a pastor will read a passage in scripture and seem to feel that it is speaking to the entire congregation. Yet, I find that such passages are healthy reminders for the pastor himself. For example, Luke wrote, “They devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Or, later in Luke’s writing in the book of Acts he wrote, “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Even the writer to the Hebrews penned, “Let us not give up meeting together” (10:25). I do not feel that those passages
were only meant for a congregation. Their instruction was also meant for the leaders of the people, the pastors. I believe the “they” in Acts 2:42, the “we” in Acts 20:7, and the “us” in Hebrews 10:25 were not only describing the “lay members,” for lack of a better term. However, those pronouns were also meant for the leaders, the pastors, to make worship a part of their life.

For the pastor, especially one who is in a conflict situation pertaining to worship, worship can be used to nurture one’s faith and life in Jesus Christ. As one sings, as one hears, as one proclaims, and as one reads the Word of God, a pastor is given strength, direction, and sustenance to his or her heart in order to cope with that conflict situation. As one worships, a pastor receives rich supplies of God’s love and power for life.

Prayer

A second tool I have found to the problem statement above is to return to the One who has called us to this ministry. Again, in my interview with Pastor Mark, I asked him how he began his day. Mark’s response was, “I go to my computer and look at my e-mails. After that, I try to read, either the local paper, or the Internet news sites, to see what has happened in the world. Then I look at what needs to be done and any phone calls that I need to make. That’s my day in a nutshell.” I then asked him, “Mark, have you ever started your day off with prayer or a time of silent meditation?” Mark’s answer was, “I never thought of doing that.”

In piggybacking with the first tool, worship, I believe that a pastor who feels
trapped in a conflict situation pertaining to worship also needs to engage in some focusing through prayer at least at the beginning of each day. It is without a doubt that one can easily be distracted with the phone ringing, a disturbing e-mail, or a frustrated staff member who wants to vent their feelings immediately. However, as William Willimon states, “A day begun without focus, without centering, without daily renewed sense of vocation, is a day that is too easily wasted in busyness and distraction. Prayer and study become the principal means whereby we are re-called, re-collected for pastoral work” (2002, 327).

Paul wrote to Timothy, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayer, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4). I am sure a valid argument for this passage is that Paul was instructing Timothy to remind the people to whom he was ministering to make this a vital part of their life. However, I find it intriguing to look at this passage in light of Paul simply writing Timothy. Not only was Timothy instructed to share this message with those that he was ministering. Timothy was also, I believe, instructed by Paul to make prayer a part of his own personal life.

A great example of this practice was Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer truly believed that morning prayer made the difference in every single day of his life. He wrote:

Morning prayer determines the day. Squandered time of which we are ashamed, temptations to which we succumb, weaknesses and lack of discipline in our
thoughts and in our conversation with other [people], all have their origin most often in the neglect of morning prayer. Order and distribution of your time become more firm where they originate in prayer. Temptations which accompany the working day will be conquered on the basis of morning breakthrough to God. Decisions demanded by work become easier and simpler where they are made not in fear of [people] but only in the sight of God. “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not [people]” (Col. 3:23). Even mechanical work is done in a more patient way if it arises from the recognition of God and his command. The powers to work take hold, therefore, at the place where we have prayed to God. He wants to give us today the power which we need for our work. (1970, 64-65)

Prayer for a pastor in a conflict situation can become the principal substance whereby he or she is re-called and re-collected for pastoral work.

Sabbath

A third tool for a pastor in a conflict situation pertaining to worship is to observe Sabbath. Willimon addresses this point when he says, “The Sabbath is first presented there as a matter of our imitation of God. God rested on the seventh day; so ought we” (2002, 328). In Sabbath, one is commanded to take the time that is required for the reflection, rest, re-creation, refurbishment, and remembrance that is a requirement for faithful, accountable action in praise to our heavenly Father. Luther, in his document *Against The Heavenly Prophets In The Matter Of Images and Sacraments*, writes, “It is not necessary to observe the Sabbath or Sunday because of Moses’ commandment. Nature also shows and teaches that one must now and then rest a day, so that man and beast may be refreshed” (*Luther’s Works*: Volume 40 1955, 98).

I have found that this third tool can be the most difficult to comprehend and
follow. Worshiping is plausible as one examines her work schedule and notices that she has not had a vacation and can look forward to listening to another minister preach. Beginning each morning with prayer is also a possibility as when she arrives at the office, she has some time alone before the other staff members arrive. However, I have several ministers who find it very difficult in observing Sabbath, in taking time to rest and regenerate his body. Unfortunately, there are pastors who truly believe that the church would not function unless she was present. In these pastors’ minds, taking a day off, a Sabbath, is unheard of. In fact, one pastor shared with me that if he was not busy doing “church work” he felt as though he was betraying his congregation and his call.

Yet, Willimon’s response to clergy who feel as though busyness reflects faithfulness is, “Sabbath keeping is a publicly enacted sign of our trust that God keeps the world, therefore we do not have to” (2002, 329). He later writes, “It is crucial for pastors to carve out some means of Sabbath as a witness that God, not pastors, preserves the church. An overworked, busy and distracted, family-neglecting pastor is often a pastor with an inadequate theology of the Resurrection” (329-330).

To honor Sabbath is to trust grace. We do not have to do it all ourselves. In fact, I believe that rest is eschatological. When one is untangled from the stress and chaos of a conflict situation, a pastor is given the chance for reflection and recalling why he or she is in ministry. Let’s face it, we serve God. We are not gods. I applaud Paul’s words when after Barnabas and Paul perform a miracle of healing and the crowds want to smother them with accolades and wish to refer to them as Zeus and Hermes. Paul says, “We are
mortals just like you” (Acts 14:15). In fact, I recall my home pastor, Theodore Stellhorn III, saying to me shortly after my ordination, “Mark, God was confident after his work of creation that he was able to take a day off, so should you.”

Willimon quotes Gregory the Great saying,

In restoring others to health by healing their wounds, he (a pastor) must not disregard his own health....Let him not, while helping his neighbors, neglect himself, let him not, while lifting up others, fall himself. In many instances, indeed, the greatness of some men’s virtues has been an occasion of their perdition, in that they have felt inordinately secure in the assurance of their strength, and they died suddenly because of their negligence. (2002, 330-331)

Paul reflected the same thoughts as Gregory the Great. Paul’s words are crucial, I believe, for any pastor enduring a conflict situation as he wrote,

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have become to believe. (1 Cor. 15:10-11)

**Recommendations**

In Revelation, one reads a song that was sung by a loud voice, “Behold, the dwelling of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain (and I add, nor conflict) any more, for the former things have passed away” (21: 3-4). For a pastor who is coping when worship can create a potential division in his or her congregation, it is that song, sung through one’s worship, prayer, and Sabbath, that one is able to join in with a
full and joyous voice.

Yet, I believe there are moments when that song goes unsung. The reason why I possess that belief is the basis for my recommendations. I first recommend this study for all ELCA pastors. I have often come across pastors who feel compelled to submerge himself or herself into their work. He or she accepts the mind set that the pastor always has to be working, and if he or she is not, then they are not being faithful to his or her calling. However, this study shares that a vital part of a pastor’s calling is worship, prayer, and observing Sabbath. Therefore, this study can be used as a tool for teaching a pastor how one can incorporate those three items into his or her ministry without feeling guilty.

A second reason why I recommend this study for ELCA pastors is because every pastor, in my opinion, will face a conflict situation in his or her ministry. When such a situation takes place, a pastor may be overwhelmed and uncertain as to how to handle it. This study offers insights into examining one’s loyalty to God, to himself or herself, and to the church. The study also offers a perspective on understanding the definition and importance of forgiveness. Both, individually or together, could be considered as topics for personal examination and reflection or used in a group study with other pastors.

A third recommendation I would like to offer is for this study to be read by lay congregational leaders. Currently in the ELCA call process, a time of sabbatical is suggested for congregations to offer to their pastor after serving seven years. It is my understanding that the majority of congregations are unaware of this suggestion or do not
even understand the purpose of a sabbatical. Therefore, I believe this study shares with lay
congregational leaders the internal struggles a pastor may experience in a conflict
situation and the necessity to encourage their pastor to worship, pray, and observe
Sabbath. I believe that this study could be very helpful for a personnel committee, a call
committee, a church council, or even an adult Sunday School class, or Bible study,
considering ways a congregation can care for their pastor.

I also encourage this study to be read and examined by the ELCA Northwestern
Ohio Synod and other ELCA synods. The church does not give a clear cut method on what
a pastor should do in order to handle or cope with a conflict situation. I have witnessed
numerous times pastors being moved from one congregation to another because of a
conflict situation. Secondly, I have met pastors who have become totally withdrawn. They
literally seclude themselves from others so that they do not have to deal with their
situation. Also, I have met pastors who refuse to acknowledge that they have any
problems. Rather they keep everything inside and share it with no one. These pastors have
told me that if they share their conflicts they will be seen as weak and incapable of being a
minister.

Therefore, I believe this study can be a wonderful opportunity for the Synod and
its staff to be proactive instead of reactive. In applying this study, the Synod leadership
can use the format of a retreat where pastors would discuss the topics of worship, prayer,
and Sabbath. This study could also be a used as a checklist for a synodical staff member
to see if the pastors in his or her geographical area are taking the time to worship, pray,
and observe Sabbath. In offering these opportunities the Synod bishop and staff members would be seen by pastors and congregations as a ministers caring for the clergy in making sure the pastor was spiritually, physically, and emotionally strong.

A final recommendation would be for further research. Each of the items presented, worship, prayer, and Sabbath, could be looked at on an individual basis.
WORKS CITED


