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SEEKING THE WILL OF GOD: THE INFORMATION SEEKING EXPERIENCES
OF THE LEADERS OF NOVA SCOTIA CHURCHES IN TRANSITION

by

David Hendrik Michels

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

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Halifax, Nova Scotia
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Janice and my children Elizabeth, Victoria, and Benjamin for their understanding and patience when “Dad had to do his homework,” and to my parents Hendrik and Rebecca Michels who took me to church each Sunday.

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Abstract

Christian Churches in Nova Scotia are facing economic, social, and theological stresses. In response many are engaged in processes of restructuring and renewal. Leaders are initiating and managing these change processes, and they are seeking information to make their decisions, and “God’s will for their churches.” Very little is known about how church leaders seek, gather, evaluate, and use information in their decision-making. In this study I asked the question: “Of the Nova Scotia churches in transition, what are the information seeking experiences of their leaders?” Using ethnographic methods at three church sites, I explored this particular everyday life information-seeking context. I gathered data on church information sources and leaders’ source selections, identifying critical themes such as the impact of new technologies, prayer as a source of information, and the theology of information seeking. I developed a model of church information seeking behaviour that can be used as a foundation for further research on information seeking in church contexts.

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I finally thank the church leaders who participated in this study. More than research subjects, you are my brothers and sisters in the faith. "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers."

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Research Problem

Christian Churches in Nova Scotia, like churches across Canada, are facing economic, social, and theological stresses. In response to these stresses many churches are engaged in significant processes of re-visioning, restructuring, and renewal. Leaders, both clergy and laypeople, on behalf of their communities, are initiating and managing these change processes, and to do this effectively they need to access information to make decisions. Despite the apparent prevalence and importance of these change processes for many Nova Scotia churches, very little is known about how church leaders seek, gather, evaluate, and use information in their decision-making.

1.2 Background

This study is, in part, the story of Nova Scotia's Christian Churches navigating change. Nova Scotia's churches share in common the region's economic and demographic stresses: the out-migration of young families, urbanization, and a greying population (Niven & Sable, 2006). Woodhead (2013) has identified a number of ways religion in the West has changed and "will never be the same again." The West generally has experienced the growth of the "no religion" demographic (Pew-Templeton, 2012, pp. 24ff), with Canada also seeing the growth of the "none" category (Statistic Canada, 2013, p. 20). Additionally, although the majority of Canadians continue to identify with Christianity (67.3%), (Statistics Canada, 2013, p. 21) one-third of new immigrants to Canada (33%)

are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist. Epp Buckingham has described a number of changes in Canadian social values around marriage and family, gender equality, and religious accommodation that have brought churches into conflict with government, and each other (2014). The congregations in this research project are, in this respect, representative of many of Nova Scotia's Christian congregations.

Nova Scotia Christian churches at the beginning of the 21st century face significant challenges and opportunities. In the 1980-1990s, Sociologist Reginald Bibby described worrisome trends for Canadian churches (1987, 1993), such as a decline in attendance by baby boomers (1993, p. 18) and the impact of immigration (1993, p. 22ff) on Canada's religious mosaic. Secularization appeared to be having a significant impact on the local church. In *Restless Gods* (2002) and *Restless Churches* (2004) Bibby presented a different picture in which he saw "the early signs of a renaissance of religion in Canada" (p. 18). National surveys had found that despite the dropout from churches, the majority of Canadians still believed in God (80%), believed in a God who cares for them personally (75%), one in two adults said they had experienced God, most prayed privately at least occasionally (75%), and most had asked the big spiritual questions about the origins of suffering, seeking happiness, and what happens after death (p. 14-17). Bibby also identified four indicators of new life in established churches: re-involvement by teens and young adults, reports of growing churches especially conservative Protestants and Roman Catholics outside Quebec, and a rise in national weekly attendance statistics (pp. 18-22).

Further, nationally 55% of those not regularly attending church were receptive to greater involvement (p. 47). The caveat is that these potential attendees have expectations of their churches: they want caring ministry and engaging relevant programs (Bibby, 2002, pp. 220-224; Bibby, 2011).

In response to the challenges and potentials described above, many Nova Scotia churches are wrestling with how to rejuvenate both their organizational structures and ministry directions. Examples of these revitalization processes on a denominational scale would be the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax's New Evangelization emphasis (Mancini, 2011), the restructuring and incorporation of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches (Atlantic Convention of Baptist Churches, 2010), and the ongoing United Church of Canada's *Wonder Café* media campaign described as the most expensive marketing strategy ever employed by a Canadian Church (Haskell, Flatt, and Lathangue, 2010).

Although it was tempting to approach this as a study in organizational change, I was mindful of the words of two of my respondents (from congregations on different places on the Christian spectrum): "We are not the Kiwanas club."

Most churches function as incorporated charitable societies in Canada, with established organizational structures, audited financial statements, and annual members meetings. But unlike other corporations their existence is rooted in their sense of divine mission or calling that informs their structures and activities. Compare, for example, the *United Church of Canada's* "Guidelines for Incorporated Ministries" which outlines the legal requirements of the society (2008), and the "Basis of Union" (1925) document that sets forth the theological

foundation of their association. Other examples would be *The Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches' Church Incorporation Templates* (2012) that guide churches in their own incorporation process, and the theological document "The Basis of Union" (2009) that describes the common beliefs, shared values, and history that distinguish them as a distinct group of religious societies. Change then must be consistent with their theological callings; to use terminology I frequently heard in these churches, in their processes of renewal they are searching for the "Will of God" for their church. Their experiences may bear similarities to changes many Nova Scotia businesses and charities are grappling with, but I would argue that for these churches this engagement concerns more than corporate restructuring.

Rather than a broad institutional perspective, I focused specifically on the change agents, the leaders, in the three churches. These individuals were called to be faithful, knowledgeable, and wise servants and they felt that responsibility. I wanted to understand from the perspective of human information behaviour how they sought, gathered, evaluated, and used information to make strategic decisions for their congregations. How do these leaders of Nova Scotia Christian churches help their churches answer that question: "What is God's will for our church?"

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline my research question and the critical sub-questions that arise from it, and define my terms and the scope of this study. The informants in this study frequently framed their information seeking theologically as "seeking God's will," and in order to understand what this means

for the informants, I briefly describe the theological-historical framework that informs their perspectives.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 “What is God’s Will for My Church?”

There is evidence that many Nova Scotia churches are currently in significant transitional phases, engaged in processes of re-visioning, restructuring and renewal that appear to involve the “God’s will” question. These processes can be validly explored from a variety of disciplinary perspectives such as theological, philosophical, anthropological and sociological; however, I chose to investigate them as opportunities for complex information seeking behaviour. Those with the responsibility to wrestle with this question would be, potentially, highly motivated information seekers and users. I assumed that the congregational leaders, ordained and lay, would be chiefly responsible to seek, gather, assess and use information toward the end of answering this question. I chose to capture those information activities principally through observation and the self-described experiences of these leaders. The research question I asked in this study was: “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’”

1.3.2 Two Critical Sub-Questions

1.3.2.1 Corporate vs. Individual

There were two important sub-questions that arose from the research question. First: “how do these leaders perceive the process of information

seeking to discern God's will for their church as different from how they would gather information to seek God's will for themselves?" This sub-question explored information seeking for personal versus leadership decision-making. Earlier research on clergy information use has suggested that both theological backgrounds and work roles influenced clergy information source preferences. Phillips (1992), for example, found that clergy were more likely to use formal information channels when in the preaching role, and more informal channels in administrative roles. Wicks (1999) found that there was an inclination toward print sources, such as the Bible, for preaching and informal sources for other work roles such as caregiver and administrator.

It is important for this study to recognize that although for clergy church leadership is part of their work role, many lay leaders serving on church boards, councils, and presbyteries, are unpaid volunteers. This latter group has been neglected by previous research. There is a growing body of literature (McKenzie, 2002; Savolainen, 1995) that examines information seeking in everyday life contexts distinguished from work or school contexts. One important life context is leisure. This can include recreational activities, or what has been described as serious leisure (Hartel, 2005), and hobbies and volunteerism that might require high levels of commitment and skill. Church volunteerism would fall into this category, and might involve different kinds of information seeking than needed to meet personal spiritual needs. By asking this sub-question I intended to explore both the impact of roles on information seeking, as well as context.

1.3.1.2 Technological Change

The information world is changing; new communication technologies and the growth of the Internet has allowed for the rapid production and dissemination of information. Religion appeared online from the earliest days of the Internet UseNet (Helland, 2007), and religion, in orthodox and popular forms, remains a significant presence online. Sermons are streamed, Bibles downloaded, and tithes paid through Paypal. The world's religions are now a few keystrokes away. It is unlikely when Toffler (1970, p. 350, Weinberger, 2011) first introduced the idea of information overload to the public consciousness that he realized the exponential growth of online information and the challenges that it would create. Research in religion and new media has raised questions about the impact of the online activities on religious faith and practice (see Campbell, 2007; Helland, 2002, 2005, 2008; van der Laan, 2009). Informants in the pilot phase raised concern themselves about information overload, doctrinal confusion and challenges to traditional theological authorities. Accordingly, a second critical sub-question was: "how do these leaders perceive new digital media impacting both their information seeking process and its outcome?"

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 Church

On the face of it this term seems not to require definition, but "church" is often applied in different ways. "Church" may refer to "a building for public worship", "the worship performed there", "the whole body of Christians collectively" or "a particular Christian body, community, or denomination, distinguished by special features of doctrine, worship, etc., or confined to

geographical or historical limits” (OED, 1989). In the New Testament tradition “church” is used in the latter two senses: church is an organization, having formal structure, performing rituals, and exercising its mission, and is an organism, a community of individuals with shared beliefs (Erickson, 1985, pp. 1025-1034). The term applied to the worldwide community of Christians (The Bible, Matthew 16:18) and to local congregations (The Bible, Acts 14:23). In Nova Scotia there is a legal component as most churches are registered societies, with articles of incorporation, and not-for-profit and charitable statuses. Schreiter (1998, p. 23) referred to “congregations” as places where members congregate “to discern what is happening to them and to the world today, and to listen for where God is leading them.” For the purpose of this study, I am focusing on the church as local congregations, being both a faith community and a legal entity. I limit my study to leaders, both salaried and volunteer, who have an official role through employment, appointment, or election.

1.4.2 Churches In Transition

For the purpose of this study, I defined a church in transition as one that is engaged in intentional processes of restructuring or renewal. The catalyst for the transition process may be a specific crisis or simply a desire for change to become more relevant and effective. Potential transitions might be financial restructuring, congregational mergers, facilities construction or renovations, leadership changes, or governance structure changes. The transition process may be instigated from an external source such as a denominational authority,

government agency, or financial institution, or by an internal decision by a church clergy person, leadership team or the whole congregation.

1.4.3 Church Leader

I have defined “church leader” broadly to include all individuals who have been invested with authority to make decisions on behalf of the congregation. The authority may be legal authority as trustees, delegated ecclesiastical authority as clergy, or authority as appointed/elected congregational representatives. In an early meeting with a Roman Catholic diocesan leader, my conceptualizations of Church leadership structures were challenged. I needed to broaden my framework of elected boards and presbyteries to include bodies such as pastoral ministry teams and parish councils. More broadly defined, leaders in this study could include church staff such as priests, ministers, pastors, and directors, and volunteer officers such as trustees, deacons, elders, board members, and councilors.

1.4.4 Information

This study is about the seeking, gathering, evaluating, and using information, and consequently it is important that we define information as a concept, although this is by no means a simple task. It is instructive to note that the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) offers a variety of definitions of *information* that represent information as communication, teaching, and capacity of informing. It can also be understood as knowledge communicated concerning some particular fact, subject, or event, or the fact or circumstance of which a person is told. So in common English usage, Information can be both a thing transmitted

and the process of transmitting. It also has the sense of being instructive, so the impartation of knowledge has impact on the receiver. Information Science researchers have also wrestled with the nature of information. Dervin (1977, see also Case 2007) has suggested three types of information: 1. *Objective, external* information is that which describes reality, 2. *Subjective, internal* information represents our picture or cognitive map of reality, the structures we impute upon reality, and 3. *Sense-making* information reflects the procedures and behaviours that allow us to move between internal and external information to understand the world. Dervin (1983) proposed that a shift has occurred in our understanding of information as a “brick” to be thrown into an empty bucket, the user, to the idea of something constructed by the user to make sense of their world. Buckland (1991) argued that the term information is widely used in different ways to refer to processes of informing, as knowledge, and as something that is somehow informative. Anything then, in the correct circumstance, can become information.

Case (2007, pp. 49-50) identified five issues in defining information based on earlier attempts to define information: *Utility* - must information, in order to be information, be useful for humans? *Physicality* – must information always take some physical form (be observable), such as a book, sound waves of human speech, or a natural object embodying data? *Structure/Process* – must information be structured in some way, like an image, or is it a process; *Intentionality* – is it necessary to assume that someone or something intends to communicate to another entity? *Truth* – must information, in order to be information, be true or if it is false is it misinformation? These definitional issues

become relevant to this study as I address questions of belief and divine communication (prayer). For example, if prayer lacks physicality, i.e., is not observable then is it information even if the study participants treat it as such?

For the purpose of this study I would define information as that which informs and instructs a person, communicated either intentionally or unintentionally, through both formal and informal sources, that met an information need whether previously identified or not. In this study I accepted as information: facts, beliefs, and insights that the respondents believed enabled them to make sense of their world.

1.4.5 Information Seeking Behaviour

Throughout this study I make reference to *Information Seeking Behaviour*. In this study I follow Wilson's (2000, p. 49) definition: "Information Seeking Behavior is the purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. In the course of seeking, the individual may interact with manual information systems (such as a newspaper or a library), or with computer-based systems (such as the World Wide Web)." Wilson distinguished this term from *Information Behavior* defined as the totality of human behavior in relation to information; *Information searching*, also referred to as *Information Retrieval* (Courtright, 2007, p. 275), describing the micro-level interactions with the information system; and *Information Use Behaviour* relating to the incorporation of information into the person's knowledge base (Wilson, 2000, p. 50). This study concerns itself with *Information Seeking Behaviour*.

1.5 Theological Excursus: “The Will of God”

I have intentionally adopted this theological terminology as part of my research question as representing an important perspective of my respondents. What does it mean to say an individual or a community is seeking the will of God? Why is this significant, particularly as an information-seeking problem? How should we understand this theological construction that informs the perspectives of both the researcher, and the participants in this study?

1.5.1 Measuring the Interest

Is there evidence of a demand for information on seeking God’s will? Kovach, in his doctoral work on Evangelicals’ preoccupation with the will of God, proposed that at the deepest level “seeking to know the will of God may reflect a desire to be accountable to Christ with a profound concern to accomplish something significant for Christ and his kingdom” (Kovach, 1999, p. 2). He traced this preoccupation back through the 1960s and cited a wealth of literature that offered guidance in finding guidance. A cursory survey of *Bowker’s Global Books in Print* (January 15, 2009) found sixty books published after 1999 for the Canadian market on the subject of discerning God’s will. A general unlimited search for the phrase “Will of God” in the Amazon database retrieved more than 10,000 hits (December 5, 2013). The majority of these works are written for the popular market with titles like *Handbook for Discovering God’s Will* (Jackson, 2008) and *God has a Plan for your Life* (Stanley, 2008). The authors include many evangelical heavyweights such as Charles Stanley, J.I. Packer, Elisabeth Elliot, R.C. Sproul, Henry Blackaby, and Tim LaHaye. Best-selling author Rick

Warren's (2002, p. 22) *Purpose Driven Life* asks "what on earth am I here for" and *Purpose Driven Church* (1995, p. 393) asks what is "God's purpose for your church?" Roman Catholic authors were also represented with titles such as *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making* (Gallagher, 2009) and *Finding God's Will for You* (de Sale, 2008), both reflecting a long history of exploring this question.

A survey of print literature only hints at part of the interest. A cursory search for the phrase "will of God" in online video sharing site *GodTube* (2009) and music service *iTunes* (2009) (January 17, 2009) resulted in over eight hundred videos and one hundred fifty podcasts. A search conducted two years later (October 20, 2011) found more than one thousand videos, and six thousand podcasts. The most recent search (July 17, 2014) of the phrase "the will of God" in Godtube returned the maximum results of one thousand videos, and in Youtube the search returned nearly one hundred forty thousand videos. The iTunes podcasts store had over five hundred episodes. The podcast reflected a wide range of Christian theological traditions including Protestant teachers such as John Piper, R.C. Sproul, and Jill Briscoe. Catholic teachers were also strongly represented with speakers such as Fr. Robert Young, Fr. Timothy Gallagher, and Jim Thorndill. This preoccupation Kovach described has not yet abated, and is taking on new dimensions in the digital age.

1.5.2 Exploring the Theology

There are, not surprisingly, differing positions within Protestant Christianity about the nature of God's will, and how, and even if it can be known. As my

participants are all Christians in good standing within their respective traditions, I will focus on interpretations within those streams. Erickson (1985) and Berkoff (1941) both argue that any discussion of “knowing the will of God” is predicated on the assumptions that there is a God (Erickson, pp. 271-272; Berkoff, pp. 76-79), that God is a person (pp. 268-271; pp. 64-81), and that God possesses intent, a will (pp. 277-278; pp. 76-79). Other related doctrines presented by Erickson (1985) would be God’s omniscience (knows all things), omnipotence, (all-powerful), (pp. 272-278) and immanence (God is present and active in history) (pp. 302-312). The last doctrine is important for understanding God’s will in the mainstream Christian traditions, and is emphasized in both the Old Testament: “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? Says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth” (Holy Bible, 1984, Jeremiah 23:24) and the New Testament: “Yet he is not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being...’” (Acts17:27-28).

Will, in relation to God, is used in a variety of ways in the Christian biblical tradition. Berkoff (1941, pp. 76-77) identifies five different ways that the term “will” (translating three Hebrew terms and two Greek terms) is used: God’s whole moral nature, his faculty of self-determination, the product of God’s activity (the plan), the power to execute the plan, and the rule of life laid down for rational creatures. Relevant to this discussion are two senses of will that Erickson (1985, p. 361) refers to as “God’s general intention, the values with which he is pleased” and “God’s specific intention in a given situation, what he decides shall actually occur,” or per Berkoff (1941, pp. 77): God’s conditional will and absolute will.

This second sense refers to God's ability to do what God plans; citing the Hebrew Bible, "Our God is in the Heavens; he does what he pleases" (Holy Bible, 1988, Psalm 115:3). In the Biblical tradition this would include God's work as creator, saviour, and sovereign. God's general intention/conditional will/rule of life may not be followed by God's creations; "the former is always accomplished, while the latter is often disobeyed" (Berkoff, 1941, p. 77).

How does one discover God's conditional will in the Protestant Christian tradition? This is a point of disagreement. Among some groups of Evangelicals the will of God is pictured as a general moral code and an individual life plan: "[God] has in mind a good plan for your life, a plan that fits exactly your unique personality. His plan complements the calling He has in mind for you, with all he wants you to do and be" (Myers, 2000, p. 2). Several methods and tools for discernment are usually associated with this approach. Myers, above, is similar to well-known author Rick Warren (2002) in linking discernment to Bible study: "God has not left us in the dark to wonder and guess. He has clearly revealed his five purposes for our lives through the Bible. It is our Owner's Manual, explaining why we are alive, how life works, what to avoid, and what to expect in the future" (p. 20). Friesen (1980, pp. 45-57) lists other tools of discernment in the Evangelical tradition: circumstances (providence of God), witness of the Holy Spirit (an inward leading), personal desires, common sense, and special supernatural guidance. Depending on a church's doctrinal position, different tools might be emphasized. Baptists, for instance, who do not believe in contemporary prophecy, might de-emphasize special supernatural guidance,

while Pentecostals who believe in prophecy would be open to seeking miraculous leading.

Although Myers is careful to warn against extremes, some groups have taken this teaching of God's individual plan to mean God has all the details worked out. Evangelical authors Friesen (1980, pp. 23-28) and Waltke (1995, paras. 16-42) both cite examples of individuals seeking very specific information such as: the name of the husband God had chosen for her, the career God wanted him in, or the specific place God had called her to serve as a pastor or missionary. In each of these cases there was an over reliance circumstance or special supernatural guidance as means of discernment. Waltke, who comes from a Reformed Protestant tradition, challenges many of these approaches as unbiblical: "God is not a magic genie. The use of promise boxes, or flipping your Bible open and pointing your finger, or relying on the first thought to enter your mind after a prayer are unwarranted forms of Christian divination" (para. 98). Waltke is an example of the wisdom approach to discernment. He argues that in the Biblical tradition, after the founding of the New Testament Church in the book of Acts, all supernatural forms of discernment ceased. The preferred method then is: study the Bible, develop a heart for God, seek wise counsel, look for God's providence, and common sense. Waltke rejects divine intervention in response to seeking God's will (para. 1363ff).

I claim no expertise in Roman Catholic theology although at a basic level I identified several common themes in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993) and writings of contemporary Catholic scholars. *The Catechism* (Part

One, S. 1, Ch.1, Part ii.35) describes how, “Man’s faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God.” The Catechism describes the Personhood of God, God’s will to reveal himself to man, and man’s ability to seek and know God. Other passages explain the affect of God’s will in respect to salvation (Part 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1, IV, 257), seeking God’s gifts (Part 4, Sec. 1, Ch. 3, Art. 2, III, 2737), and living faithfully (Part 3, Sec. 2, Ch., 2, Art., 9, I, 2518).

Waltke’s emphasis on developing a spiritual relationship as foundational to discernment is similar to the writings of Fr. Timothy Gallagher (2009). Gallagher is an American Roman Catholic priest and a best-selling author of books on theology and spirituality, particularly discernment and wisdom. In *Discerning the Will of God*, Gallagher sets out a process of preparation that precedes discernment that includes the spiritual exercises, the study of Scripture and the Teaching of the Church, silence, the use of spiritual directors as wise counsel, and reflection. The process of discernment itself involved three components: clarity beyond doubt (para. 862), attraction of the heart (para. 1030), and preponderance of reasons (para. 1267). These components mirror in most respects the earlier methods of the witness of the Holy Spirit (an inward leading), personal desires, and common sense/reason.

In God’s Voice Within (2010, para. 53), Mark Thibodeaux begins with the question, “What should I do?” and offers “an easy-to-use guide to help us make these big, overwhelming, life-changing decisions – and the small ones too.” (para. 57). Thibodeaux bases his approach on the life and teachings of Saint

Ignatius Loyola that employs both human reason and “learned intuition” (para. 139). Thibodeaux explains how to discern “true spirits and false spirits” that results respectively with feelings of consolation or desolation (para. 167ff). Understanding this, and preparing one’s heart, allows the seeker to make decisions. Thibodeaux also includes an index of Bible passages related to choosing and decision making. Discernment in Thibodeaux’s approach does not require miraculous or extraordinary signs, but it is a product of discipline and preparation. Thibodeaux also stresses that there is not an easy system of clear steps, but a process “we must learn, apply and learn some more.” (para. 88)

I am mindful of the limitations of my understanding of official Catholic doctrine, and the discernment practices of the Catholics. The contemporary authors cited above represent one tradition within the Catholic Church, Ignatian Spirituality, and there are undoubtedly other approaches to discernment. I also recognize that individual practices are informed both by official doctrine and people’s own beliefs.

It is important to consider these theological perspectives on seeking God’s will, for whether hidden or explicit, these beliefs can potentially play a role in the information activities these church leaders engage in, the sources they choose, and the way they evaluate and use the information they collect.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

1. It is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to all churches, or even all Nova Scotia churches. There are too many variables to account for such as the diversity of religious perspectives and organizational

structures. There are also significant variations among those called as leaders, whether they are professionals or volunteers.

2. The limited period spent with leaders in each church means that only a limited number of change processes could be considered. It is therefore difficult to know how the same leaders might have behaved in different kinds of transitions.
3. These transition processes are by their nature extraordinary, and although it might be assumed that leaders' information seeking may be similar for everyday decisions it was beyond the scope of this research to consider everyday contexts.
4. Leaders of churches are expected to model appropriate Christian behaviour. It was possible that leaders may feel obligated to answer interview questions in keeping with what they believe is expected of them as Christian leaders. For example, a Christian leader might wish that Bible study would be the dominant tool for discernment. It was hoped that document analyses and participant observation would identify any discrepancies between belief and actions.

1.7 Significance

Nova Scotia churches find themselves in a period of significant social and economic change. As a result, many find themselves engaged in change processes for which they may have little experience. The leaders of churches are actively seeking information that will help guide these processes. Information seeking research has long identified context as being an essential element in

understanding information behaviours (Case, 2002, pp. 13-14; Dervin, 2003). Everyday Life Information Seeking research has focused on non-work/ non-academic contexts such as leisure and volunteerism (Savolainen, 2005), but the contexts of organized religion have been neglected. This research will address a significant research gap by identifying several key contextual elements that will provide a basis for further research into information behaviour church contexts. One result of this research will be an adapted model of information seeking in church contexts.

In chapter five I will discuss a significant theme that emerged in the research: the use of external consultants, and tools/resources from denominational sources. Often these resources had been adapted from secular sources. By examining how the leaders in these churches perceived and used these resources, more effective institutional change resources can be developed for leaders who are guiding these churches through change processes. It is my intent to return these findings to these churches, and other churches considering change processes.

1.8 Assumptions

Assumptions of this study included the following:

1. Although every church is unique as a community, the participant churches are not extraordinary in respect to their denominations' theology or religious practice.
2. Religious organizations are founded in part on their religious beliefs and values, and these will influence change processes.

3. The technological skill levels and online access of the church leaders in this study will be similar to those of the general population.
4. Leaders are not intentionally acting in a manner that undermines their church's change process but rather are doing their best to address the tasks before them.
5. Leaders do not all have the same levels of general education and theological training.
6. Not all change processes will end successfully.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

In this research study I asked: “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’” This was an inquiry into human information behaviour and that was where the examination of the scholarly literature began, with a consideration of key information models and theories. Rather than information seeking in school contexts or solely work contexts, church involvement is also situated as volunteerism or serious leisure activity, and I considered the literature of Everyday Life Information Seeking, as well as the literature that informs the study of information and religion. Human information behaviour research has only begun to address information seeking in religious contexts, and has yet to consider the impact of religious groups’ engagement with new media in information seeking. The second part of the literature review examines sociology of religion and media research. This research helped me understand how information was being used and offered valuable theories relevant to my study. The final part of this literature review briefly considers the literature on ethnographic research in information seeking research and the sociology of religion and media.

2.2 Human Information Behaviour

This study is informed by a constructivist meta-theory where knowledge is social in origin, and “that individuals construct knowledge in interaction with the environment” (Sanna, Tuominen and Savolainen, 2004, p. 85). In Library and

Information Science research, two major proponents of the constructivist approach are Carol Kuhlthau and Brenda Dervin (Bates, 2006, p.11). Kuhlthau's Information Search Process and Dervin's Sense-Making methodology were important to my own thinking and are described below.

2.2.1 Models and Metaphors

2.2.1.1 Kuhlthau's Process Approach

Kuhlthau developed her process approach to seeking meaning based on the belief that “we each construct our own personal worlds...the process of construction is dynamic and driven by feelings interacting with thoughts and actions” (Kuhlthau, 1993, p. 29). Kuhlthau identified patterns in people's processes of information seeking. She described six stages in these processes: Initiation, Selection, Exploration, Formulation, Collection, and Presentation. At each of these stages people experience thoughts, feelings, and actions as they move through time from uncertainty and anxiety to certainty, relief and closure (Kuhlthau, 2006, pp. 231-232). This model focuses not on the problem but the processes. It recognizes that the Information Search Process is more than a cognitive process, but feelings are also engaged as the seeker moves from uncertainty to a sense of accomplishment. This is significant as faith and faith building in the Christian tradition engages both the mind and heart. It is anticipated that leaders will experience this same process as they first recognize their information need, identify means to meet the need, seek and gather appropriate information, and finally resolve the information problem.

Table 1 – Kuhlthau’s Model of the Information Search Process (Kuhlthau, 2004, p. 82, Image, Kuhlthau, 2013).

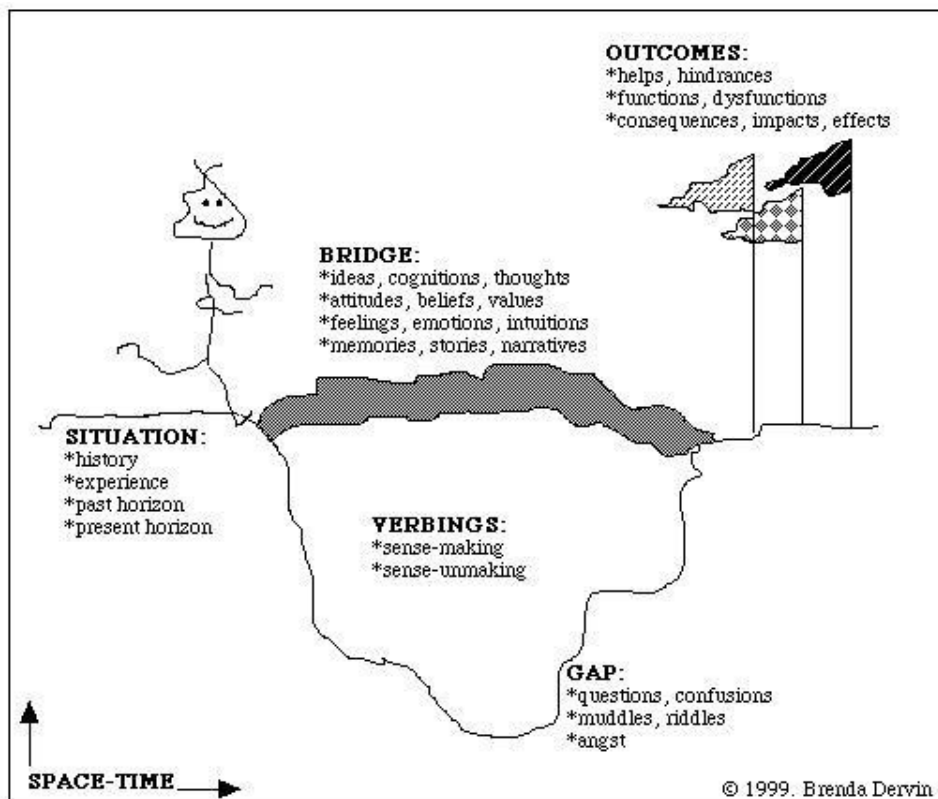
Model of the Information Search Process							
	Initiation	Selection	Exploration	Formulation	Collection	Presentation	Assessment
Feelings (Affective)	Uncertainty	Optimism	Confusion Frustration Doubt	Clarity	Sense of direction / Confidence	Satisfaction or Disappointment	Sense of accomplish- ment
Thoughts (Cognitive)	vague	→			focused	→	Increased self- awareness
Actions (Physical)	seeking	relevant Exploring	information	seeking	pertinent Documenting	information	

2.2.1.2 Dervin’s Sense Making

Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2001) has been developed, “for assessing how people make sense of their worlds and how they use information and other resources in the process” (Dervin & Nilan, 1986, p. 20). The methodology focuses on the user in their individual context so it can be used to explore the information activities of diverse groups of people. It is based on the idea that life is ever changing and people face information-needs “in which the individual’s internal sense has run out” (p. 22). Dervin spoke of SITUATION-GAP-USE, where SITUATION is the constraining contexts in space and time that creates the information need, where GAPS are the questions the user faces, and where USES are “the ways in which people put answers to questions to work” (p. 22). The steps they take in this sense making process are discernable. Sense making “is proposed as a generalizable approach to thinking about and studying human sense making and sense unmaking in its various

forms” (Dervin, 2006). To understand the steps people take to make sense of their world, the researcher needs to understand the context where the need arises, and will need to understand the steps by which the user first conceptualizes their information need and then develop means, tools, and methods to address that need and bridge the gap.

Chart 1 – Dervin’s Sense Making Metaphor (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2003, p. 238)



I assumed in my study that sense making is gap bridging, an ongoing process that is both a personal, and a social process occurring within community, in my case the congregational and denomination communities. Religious faith is comprised of both beliefs to which a person gives cognitive assent, and trust in the Divine and the community. I assumed feelings, and intuitions play a role in

the sense making process, as well as the ideas and cognitions, and that sense is being made and unmade over time (Dervin & Frenette, 2001). It follows from this understanding of the constructed nature of knowledge that “context is a necessary source of meaning” (Dervin, 2003) and this was an important assumption throughout this study where all the participants were engaged in information seeking within personal and institutional religious contexts.

2.2.1.3 Other Models

Several other theories about human information behaviour were also helpful. Congregations are organized communities. Chatman’s *Life in the Round* theory suggested that information seekers in a small community, a “small world” can self restrict information seeking to familiar and safe sources (Chatman, 1999, p. 213), which serves as a relevant theory to understand information seeking in a congregational setting. Savolainen brings together both the theories of “information grounds,” places where useful information can be unexpectedly encountered, and “small world” to consider how social spaces allow information sharing (Savolainen, 2009). I expected to find that information seeking by these lay leaders relies on passive as well as active gathering modes. Passive modes include unintentional or accidental finding of useful information. Examples might be a friend unexpectedly forwarding an interesting news article, or discovering a website while surfing for another purpose. Foster and Ford’s have considered the role of serendipity (2003) and Erdelez (1997), Williamson (1998), and Ross’s (1999) have investigated incidental information encountering, and these studies have also been considered. Another significant concept I explored through this

study was that of trust within the social organization. Huotari & Chatman's (2001, p. 353) concluded in their study of everyday life information seeking "members of a small world accept information from those they know and can reasonably trust."

2.2.2 Everyday Life Information Seeking

Information seeking research studies have considered behaviour in a variety of life realms: work, school, and non-work or everyday life information seeking (Savolainen, 2009). It has been argued that although most research into human information seeking has examined work, research and school contexts, "much of human effort expended when seeking information is for non-work-related, non-research-related, or non-school-related purposes" (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005, p. 143). Everyday Life Information Seeking has been defined as "the acquisition of various informational (both cognitive and expressive) elements which people employ to orient themselves in daily life and solve problems not directly associated with the performance of occupational tasks" (Savolainen, 1995, pp. 266-267). Work and academic information seeking occurs in "a controlled environment with a definite end product that has some paradigmatic quality to it" (Spink & Cole, 2001, p. 301) while everyday life information seeking is more fluid as in every day contexts people have a wide variety of motivations, skills, and educations that impact their seeking. Everyday life information seeking is unsystematic by definition and allows room for what Spink and Cole described as "counterproductive-type behaviour" and emotional factors.

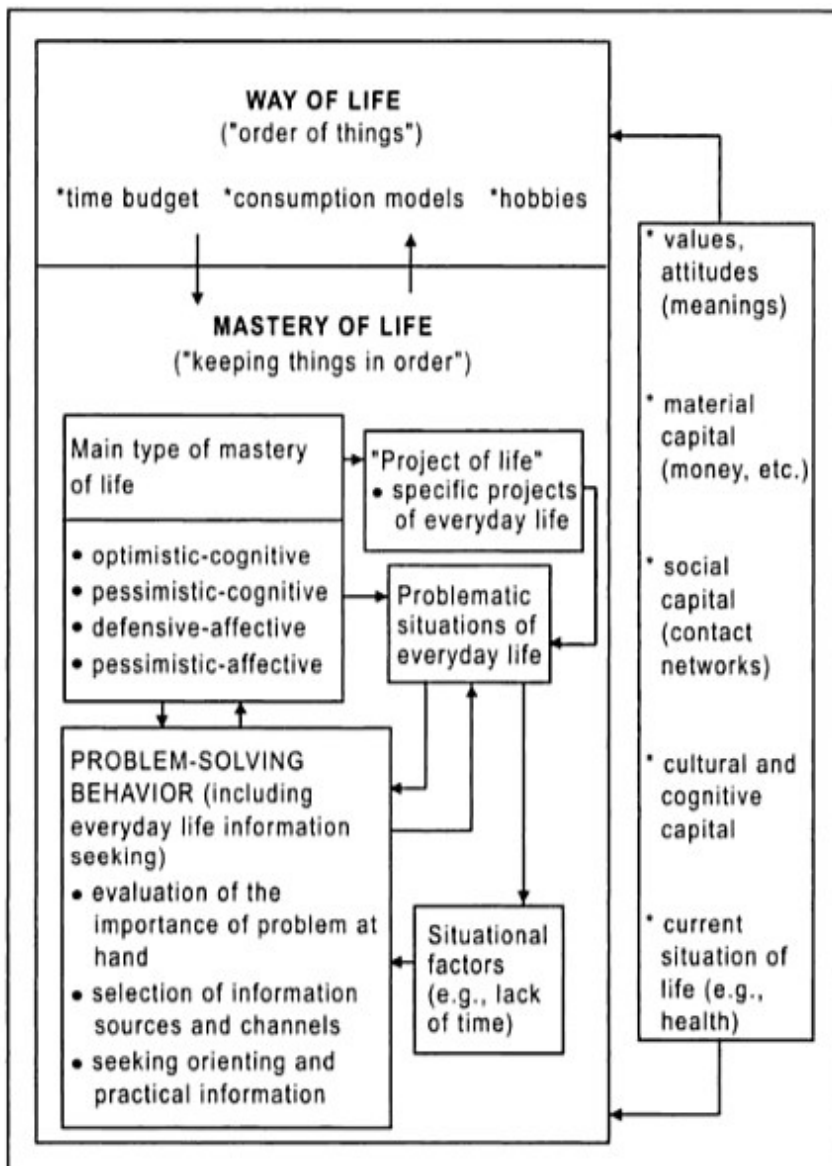
The participants in this study included both professionals and volunteers so for some this was a work context. However, churches, like most charitable societies, are volunteer-driven institutions founded on particular belief systems. The professional participants spoke of their roles as religious vocations rather than simply jobs. Studies of professional clergy's information seeking were included, but based on the characteristics of churches described above I approached church leaders' information seeking also from the particular context of everyday life information seeking.

2.2.2.1 Savolainen – Way of Life and Mastery of Life

Everyday life information seeking researchers have identified a number of useful characteristics of seeking in these contexts relevant to this study. Savolainen's model of everyday life information seeking (1995, 2008) was particularly useful for the concepts of "way of life" and "mastery of life". Savolainen's beginning concept was "way of life" that he defines as "the order of things, which is based on the choices individuals make, ultimately oriented by the factors constituting habitus" (2006, pp. 143-144). In this model "things" stood for the various activities taking place in the daily life world including work, home and family tasks, as well as leisure activities, and "order" was the preferences given to these activities. Individuals are motivated to maintain this order but it requires active effort to produce and maintain. This effort or care is described as "mastery of life" and Savolainen identified four major types: Optimistic-Cognitive, Pessimistic-Cognitive, Defensive-Affective, and Pessimistic-Affective (2006, p. 145). There are many interacting factors that determine the individual's approach

to mastering life that include personal values and conceptions, as well as the resources and tools available both to seek and use information. The “way of life” then influences how information is sought and used. This would be significant as church leaders negotiate theology and culture in order to determine God’s will for their church.

Chart 2 – Savolainen’s Everyday Life Information Seeking Model (2006, p. 145).



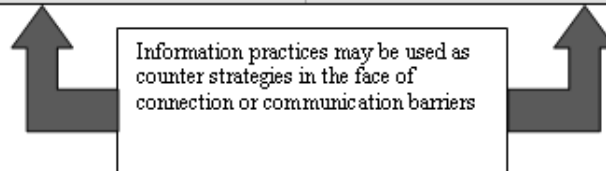
2.2.2.2 McKenzie's Model of Everyday Life Information Seeking

McKenzie considered models of information seeking behaviour that might be applied to everyday life contexts and identified several limitations (McKenzie, 2002). She noted that many models focused on more directed information seeking, and overlooked passive and non-directed information seeking (p. 19) described above. Other models considered the information practices of scholars and professionals, and as noted above would not be reflective of the diverse contexts that comprise everyday life (p. 20). Finally she argued that most models use a cognitive approach to model building, and proposed that a constructionist model would better “capture the richness of information as constructed through the interaction of the individual and the sociocultural context” (p. 20). Her study of Canadian women pregnant with twins allowed her to develop a two-dimensional model of their information practices in context that considered both the mode (active seeking, active scanning, non-directed monitoring, by proxy) and phase (connecting or interacting).

Chart 3 – McKenzie's Two Dimensional Model of Information Practices (p. 26).

Individual-in-context

Phase → ↓ Mode	Making connections <i>Describes both practices of identifying and locating potential sources of information, as well as the barriers involved</i>	Interacting with sources <i>Includes descriptions of the barriers and practices involved in the interaction with the identified information source</i>
Active seeking <i>the most intentional or active form of information seeking</i>	Actively seeking contact with an identified source in a specific information ground (see below)	Asking a planned question or making lists
Active scanning <i>a heightened awareness in the individual of possible places or people who might provide information.</i>	Identifying a likely source, browsing in a likely information ground	Identifying an opportunity to ask questions; actively observing or listening
Non-directed <i>coming across useful information while watching television, talking to friends or reading</i>	Serendipitous encounters in unexpected places	Observing or overhearing in unexpected places, chatting with acquaintances
By proxy <i>information gathering through referral</i>	Being identified as an information seeker, being referred to a source through a gate-keeper	Being told



In this model the “non-directed” and “by proxy” modes are significant in everyday life contexts where people as information sources are expected to be important in faith communities, and questions have previously been raised about the ongoing role of traditional authorities as information gatekeepers. In McKenzie’s study of women pregnant with twins, health professionals played an important role as sources of information, but so did family and friends, and even strangers who had experiential knowledge as parents of twins.

I have demonstrated that there are meta-theories, theories, and models appropriate for the exploration of information seeking in religious contexts. There

are also everyday life information practices models that can be used to develop a contextualized model of information seeking in religious contexts. The next topic to explore in this review is the state of information seeking research in religious contexts.

2.2.3 Information Seeking and Religion

In a survey of the everyday life information seeking research I found that analysis of religious issues and contexts has been largely neglected until very recently. However, when one reviews earlier research on information seeking behaviour, hints of religious information contexts can be discovered. For example, in well-known studies such as Harris & Dewdney's (1994) research on battered women, clergy, like physicians, were a formal source of help, often accessed by women in abusive situations. Clergy/ministers were mentioned 11 times in their work, and they note that some ministers are reluctant to trust shelter workers, one calling them "radical feminists" and "anti biblical Scripture." Consequently, they, like many doctors, preferred to counsel battered women themselves (p. 108). In Chatman's ethnographic study "The Information World of Retired Women" (1992), religion is referenced twenty-four times, respondents describe their faith, the practice of Bible reading and prayer, and the use of information sources such as religious TV, radio, and inspirational books. In her study of janitors' information world she noted, "...insiders' lived-experiences are shaped by the fact that they share a common cultural, social, religious, etc., perspective" (1996, p. 194). Information about religious groups was considered valuable in one situation when evaluating news. In a recent study of "information

grounds”, noted above, Fisher, Landry & Naumer (2007) noted that several respondents indicated that church/synagogue/temple was an important context for unexpectedly encountering useful information. It is significant that in these and other studies, religious contexts are noted, but not fully explored.

It is appropriate here to pause and consider some of the earlier work by Fisher et al. on ‘information grounds’ as place is an important aspect of context, and particularly relevant to my study. Fisher, Landry & Naumer contend that the majority of researchers in information science “only include shades of setting as ambient factors in the study of overall context” (s. 1). They based their work in part on Pettigrew’s original definition of “‘information grounds’ as a synergistic environment temporarily created when people come together for a single purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social environment that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information” (1999, p. 811). They added to that definition these prepositions:

1. People gather at 'information grounds' for a primary, instrumental purpose other than information sharing.
2. Information grounds are attended by different social types, most if not all of whom play expected and important, albeit different roles in information flow.
3. Social interaction is a primary activity at 'information grounds' such that information flow is a by-product.
4. People engage in formal and informal information sharing, and information flow occurs in many directions.
5. Information grounds can occur anywhere, in any type of temporal setting and are predicated on the presence of individuals.
6. People use information obtained at 'information grounds' in alternative ways, and benefit along physical, social, affective and cognitive dimensions.
7. Many sub-contexts exist within an 'information ground' and are based on people's perspectives and physical factors; together these sub-contexts form a grand context (2004, Introduction).

These propositions were tested in a series of qualitative and quantitative studies. Their findings “included that most everyone has at least one information ground, people’s top information grounds are places of worship, the workplace and activity groups (e.g. fitness groups or playgrounds)...” (2004, Introduction).

In the past decade, two new research areas have emerged that offer new perspectives on information and religion studies: serious leisure, and spirituality and information. In 1982 sociologist Stebbins coined the phrase “serious leisure” (p. 251), which he defined as “uncoerced activity undertaken in free time” (p. 15). Hartel introduced Stebbins’ work to information science, and defined serious leisure as “a constellation of insights about activities that happen within leisure time” (2006, p. 313). She distinguished between serious and casual leisure and argued that serious leisure implies concentration and dedication, and proposed that serious leisure has three varieties: amateurism, volunteering, and hobbies (p. 314). She saw that serious leisure was “highly informational and involves knowledge acquisition” and thus is a valid area for research exploration. Hartel’s research considered hobbies, but religious volunteerism would also fit into this framework, and Hartel contends that a consideration of serious leisure “opens up an exciting and virtually unexplored frontier for the library and information studies field” (p. 316).

Despite the opportunities for research, Kari and Hartel (2007) argued that information science research has been largely problem focused, addressing “lower contexts,” and neglecting what they call “higher contexts” (p. 1133). Lower contexts involve people’s everyday life, its problems and routines. They

explained “problems are an integral part of the everyday paradigm in that they are customarily regarded as complicating life, as upsetting the state of harmony” (p. 1132). Although Kari and Hartel acknowledged the value of this kind of research, they wished to draw attention to the “higher things of life... positive human phenomena, experiences, or activities that transcend the daily grind with its rationality and necessities” (p. 1131). They categorized these “higher things” into the pleasurable (art, beauty, play, hobbies, humor, relaxation, sexuality, etc.) and the profound (altruism, betterment of the world, ethics, religion & spirituality, meaning of or purpose of life, emotions, volunteering, wisdom). They identified several examples of research exploring profound issues such as Kari’s own study of paranormalists (2001), Smiraglia’s research on theological works (2002), and Gibbs and Linley’s project on volunteerism training for librarians (2000).

In conjunction with this research, Kari developed a bibliography of peer-reviewed research on information and the paranormal (2010), and in an accompanying article analyzed 31 articles. Kari’s definition of “spiritual” included transcendent reality, higher powers, beliefs, and the sacred. He identified related concepts such as esoterica, magic, mystique, New Age, occult, paranormal, religion, supernatural, and superstition (p. 936). He does however distinguish religion as qualitatively different from the spiritual and paranormal that is linked to the personal and informal, while religion is linked to formal structures (Kari, 2007, p. 936). The differences he identified were characteristics of religion such as leadership structures, sacred literatures, doctrine and practice; categories essential to the questions examined in my study. Although Kari’s work did not

focus on religious contexts, his analysis did identify 11 key themes that are relevant to my study on leaders' use of information sources:

- “(1) information can be about the spiritual (e.g. mysticism);
- (2) information itself can be reckoned holy (e.g. Bible);
- (3) information can be supposedly acquired by spiritual means (e.g. trance channeling);
- (4) information can originate from a source considered as a spiritual entity (e.g. God);
- (5) an information actor can be an expert in spiritual matters, or a spiritual community (e.g. spiritual advisor);
- (6) an information actor may claim to possess spiritual abilities (e.g. medium);
- (7) an information actor can feel him/herself develop spiritually (e.g. spiritual horizons expanding);
- (8) an information process can be simultaneously experienced as a spiritual process (e.g. library work as ministry);
- (9) information systems can be believed to parallel or even replace asserted spiritual methods (e.g. internet as omnipotent tool);
- (10) information phenomena can be influenced by a spiritually oriented environment (e.g. spiritual happening); and
- (11) information processes can be allegedly affected by a spiritual agent (e.g. providence)” (p. 957).

These last two studies approach the topic differently from earlier research, and consider fundamental questions about how information is perceived in particular contexts. They begin to explain the lack of work in this area and the challenges that are faced in exploring religious and spiritual information contexts.

As suggested in chapter 1, religion is still important for many Canadians. The examples above of earlier research, demonstrate the relevance of religious contexts and the need to explore these more fully. One important area of information seeking research that has been considered is the role of clergy, not in the context of everyday life information seeking, but rather in their work roles as information professionals.

2.2.4 Clergy Information Behaviour

Historically, research into religious themes was isolated and sporadic. Most early work considered clergy as information users and occasionally information disseminators. Thomas Tanner's dissertation of clergy as information professionals published in 1992 identified only a handful of studies since 1944 (1992). Tanner categorized these studies as reading habits, and information needs and uses (p. 21). When considering reading habits, studies had found that clergy spent, on average, 18.5 hours a week reading (Lancour, 1978), were influenced by professional interests most in reading preferences (Hawkins, 1954), and seldom used public libraries (Erdel, 1982) but had sizable personal libraries (Tanner, 1994). A study by Allen (1987) examined information behaviour of Central American Baptist pastors and concluded that increased church leadership responsibilities and education were the strongest predictors of the use of printed materials and mass media. Porcella (1973) surveyed Protestant ministers to identify information-gathering habits in preparation for preaching, seeking to determine how doctrinal stance influenced information source use. He developed a series of questions to determine ministers' doctrinal positions. He concluded that doctrinal stance directly correlated to reading habits and the use of institutional libraries. Doctrinally conservative clergy tended to use the Bible and Bible related materials more, while doctrinally liberal clergy were more interested in books of current significance and issues, and professional concerns, with varying degrees of interest in biblical materials (p. 98). Porcella found weaker correlations between doctrine and use of other

information media such as journals, magazines, and radio.

Considering these previous studies, Tanner found that the use of self-administered questionnaires and surveys was inadequate to fully understand these practices, perhaps envisioning a more qualitative approach (p. 25). He used interviews and case studies with 62 clergy persons in 58 churches to explore three research questions: to what extent do pastors function as information professionals, why and how do pastors gather information, and in what ways do pastors disseminate information? He considered the pastors as information gatherers and disseminators. As gatherers, pastors used a wide range of formal and informal sources, but informal sources were most dominant (professional conferences, personal networks, ministerial associations). This led Tanner to surmise that this related to a preference of people over paper. Personal libraries were also highly valued for information gathering.

In "Pastoral Clergy: A Study of the Interaction of Their Work Worlds and Work Roles", Don Wicks (1999) also provided an excellent survey of earlier research. He divided the literature into four categories: background material on the religious scene (church yearbooks, surveys of religion etc.), references to clergy in library and information science literature, studies of the pastor and his reading, and finally four doctoral theses that were major studies of clergy and information-seeking behaviour (Allen, 1987; Phillips, 1992; Porcella, 1973; Tanner, 1992) (p. 207). Wick's summary of the reading studies was similar to Tanner above, noting that pastors read 14.5 to 18.5 hours per week, they preferred buying their own books (with libraries around one thousand volumes),

and seldom made use of community libraries. Personal theological stance influenced their choice of periodicals; they rely on colleagues for information, and they are most likely to use a computer for sermon preparation and administration (p. 207). Wicks demonstrated that in three of the four major studies work roles as preacher, administrator, and counselor influenced information seeking behaviour. He particularly noted Phillips who found that “different work roles did make a difference in both the type of information channel and the method of information retrieval chosen. Formal channels were preferred when in the preaching role and informal ones in administrative activities” (p. 208).

Don Wicks' research focused on clergy work worlds and roles. In his own study he proposed that the pastor operates in a closed system when world and role are significantly dependent upon each other and in an open system of information seeking when world and role are less dependent upon each other (p. 205). He surveyed 378 clergy about their denominational affiliation, church demographics, and theological positions. These criteria were contrasted with the information sources clergy identified as useful in pastoral roles such as preaching. Wicks found that the more extreme the theological position, either liberal or conservative, the more likely the clergy person is to stay within his or her theological world when selecting sources for preaching (p. 211).

Denominational world did not strongly influence information seeking when in the preaching role though Baptist pastors were found to be more open to materials from other theological traditions (p. 212). There was an inclination toward print sources for preaching and informal sources for other work roles such as

caregiver and administrator (p. 215). Wicks found that the Bible was repeatedly identified as the first source in the role of preacher and that they preferred institutional libraries own their own. This suggested a preference for easily accessible materials (p. 218). Wicks found that pastors used computers for word processing and Bible resources (p. 219).

Two more recent cases studies examined information behaviour in the context of sermon preparation. Daniel Roland (2007) conducted a single case study of a clergy person's sense making behaviour in sermon preparation. Using a series of interviews and analysis of sermons texts, Roland sought to determine how Scripture texts or topics were selected for preaching, the factors that affect how this clergy member interprets Scripture, and the clergy member goals for the Sunday sermon. The respondent limited himself to official denominations sources (lectionaries) for text selection, and denominational affiliation, theological training; interest in social action all played a role in interpretation (pp. 96-98).

Important themes identified were the use of the Lutheran Book of Concord in interpretation, Scripture as authority, and collaboration with the Holy Spirit for sermon preparation. The respondent did not indicate any specific use of Internet sources in sermon preparation in Roland's study. In contrast, Michels' study considered the use of Internet sources for sermon preparation (2009). He asked "what is the pastor's experience of this engagement with the Internet for preparation for preaching?" In my earlier research I proposed four phases of sermon preparation: text selection, textual exegesis, thematic study, and lesson application, and identified different sources that were used in each phase (p.

170). Many of the characteristics of information seeking offline (Roland's study) were similar online seeking in Michels' study, as similar tools were used in similar ways, only in different formats. Like Roland, Michels analyzed one preacher's sermons over a period of several months, and conducted an in-depth interview about preparation and source use. He found that the preacher conducted online information seeking for preaching carefully and critically, and Michels proposed that social media allowed greater possibility to have a greater discourse as part of the sermon development (p. 175).

Roland & Wicks (2009) in response to the dissertation on sermon preparation, later analyzed the role of the interviewer as a religious insider, and considered the researcher with the metaphors of learner, skeptic, confessor, inquisitor, and sympathizer. They concluded "the potential gain in the depth and breadth of understanding the informant's world far outweighs the concern for objectivity, especially when the design of the research project addresses the concern in a systematic manner" (p. 263). A later paper by Roland (2012) moved to a quantitative model of sermon analysis, and proposed research collaboration between theological librarians and researchers to analyze what he described as "the production, distribution, and utilization of intellectual products (i.e. sermons) on a much larger scale using digital recordings posted online."

Lambert's study "The Information-Seeking Habits of Baptist Ministers" (2010) was slightly different from the research above in that while it considered Southern Baptist clergy in both their preaching and administrative roles, he emphasized the administrative role. He examined their selection and use of

sources, how those activities changed in their different roles, and significantly for my own study, how they determined when they had enough information.

Lambert considered most of the same studies described above, and his findings did not differ from earlier research.

In 2012 the Barna Research group released a study for the publishing industry entitled *Pastors Love Books* (2012) examining U.S. Christian leaders book buying habits, and e-reading practices. Reflecting earlier studies considered above, they found that pastors were avid readers, rely heavily on their personal libraries, and purchased on average 3.8 books per month, three quarters related to their ministry or professional interests. They found that 98% of pastors in the “Buster” demographic (ages 28 to 46) purchased books, slightly more than “Boomer” (ages 45-63) or “Elder” (ages 64+) pastors suggesting that online access to information has not diminished interest in reading (p. 13).

Leaders of larger churches purchase more books per month. Barna found that as of May 2012 44% of pastors used a digital e-reading device (22% Kindle, 22% iPad), more than double the previous year, with similar adoption by both Boomers (49%) and Busters (51%) (p. 18). The majority of pastors (57%) have a Bible on their cell phone with Busters strongly adopting digital Scriptures (71%).

Barna also considered the penetration of social media into ministry and found that 64% of churches used Facebook in their ministry, while blogging and Twitter were only beginning to be used. This was considered significant for publishers as social media provides a means for pastors to research new book purchases, locate reviews, tables of contents, and commentary. This potentially

may delay acquisition. "Social media", argued Barna, "makes books both more accessible and more distant (pp. 24-25). Pastors, unlike the general population, prefer specialty Christian stores to chain bookstores, followed closely by online purchases (p. 32). Pastors chose their information channels based on three criteria: convenience (29%), price (27%), and selection (23%) (p. 38). Trust played a negligible role, suggesting that pastors were confident in their own ability to locate appropriate books. They were more likely to select a book based on topic rather than author. Pastors read broadly on topics such as spirituality, theology, leadership, and prayer. It was noted that one-third of pastors read business books (p. 46). Word of mouth was the most important means pastors used to learn about new books, with 81% of pastors saying they received peer recommendations (p. 54). Online research was also an important discovery tool. Pastors were also important promoters of books with 91% of pastors saying they recommended books from the pulpit (p. 62).

It is noteworthy that the majority of these studies focused on clergy information activities, and particularly within the preaching and counselling roles. Only a few studies considered clergy in administrative or decision-making roles. These studies frequently cite the same sources, and their conclusions generally support each other. These studies are valuable because they begin to create a baseline for general clergy information seeking behaviour. The earlier studies also offer a longitudinal view of certain information behaviours from pre- and early computer periods. These patterns can be used to identify changes in clergies' information seeking in the digital age. Only a few studies considered

laypersons' information behaviour in religious contexts, and none in leadership roles. Most of the clergy studies have focused on Protestant clergy. Only two of the studies considered above included Catholic clergy, and these were broad quantitative surveys.

2.2.5 New Directions in Information and Religion

Since 2011 the Annual Conference on Information and Religion at Kent State University has had numerous papers presented on diverse aspects of information and religion. A number of these papers have explored information seeking in religious contexts in Christian contexts. Curran and Burns presented "A Methodology for Studying the Information Seeking Behaviors of Catholic Clergy" (2011) addressing the lack of research on Catholic clergy information seeking. Their approach is also novel in that they focused on decision-making rather than information seeking, but the study was ongoing at the time of this report.

Other papers considered clergy information needs and activities. For example Layton et al. (2011) examined the role of clergy as first contacts for mental health information, and the paths they took to locate appropriate information and make referrals (p. 10). They found that clergy used a wide range of resources preferring people (doctors, health professionals, and colleagues), the Internet, and traditional sources such as books, magazines, and journals. Clergy served as "gatekeepers because they monitor the path of treatment for their parishioners," and were more likely to refer to mental health professionals who shared their religious beliefs (p. 14).

Clergy online information seeking was considered in “Googling the Scriptures” (2012). Kapoun reported on a series of workshops on online Bible sources for sermon preparation. Clergy participants indicated that Google was a fast, convenient, and seemingly infinite resource for sermon preparation. The diversity of viewpoints was also considered valuable. One outcome of this workshop series was an effort to encourage clergy to use academic libraries for sermon preparation.

Information seeking and religion among lay people has also been considered. Kazmer et al. (2013) examined how the religious beliefs of caregivers of loved ones with dementia influence their information seeking, evaluation, and use related to their caregiving. They also found that a “mismatch in religion between providers and [care-givers] can reduce the level of rapport in the relationship and perhaps decrease trust as a result” (p. 12). This suggests that more religious lay people may be suspicious of secular information sources. Guzik (2013) examined the social construction of religious knowledge by considering information seeking practices in religious conversion. Her research considered the construction of religious identities, and Kari and Hartel’s “higher things” opening up new avenues for research beyond clergy experiences. Vamanu’s paper considered the types of information used in the creation debate, highlighting the conflict between the “science discourse” and the “theology discourse” (2014). These last two papers highlight different ways of knowing, and the ways religious beliefs impact the social construction of knowledge.

Information research has also explored experiences of non-Christians.

Cohen (2013) considered the “clash of cultures between the world of the rabbi and the mass media environment” (p. 2) and the role that the rabbi’s personal theology played in engaging the media. Information seeking in preparation for the Muslim pilgrimage, the Hajj has also been considered by Nadia (2014). Again these studies demonstrate that personal faith influences information selection and use in other religious groups as well as Christianity.

Several themes were identified in the emerging literature. Theology was important to information practices, and shared religious beliefs allowed the building of trust. However, in the case of secular sources, some sources might be considered suspect if aspect appear to conflict with personal or community beliefs. Internet and new media were valuable sources of information, and were the focus of a number of studies. For clergy and lay people these sources were important. However, ways of knowing influenced by religious belief will impact how information is selected and evaluated, and the seekers often approached these sources with care.

2.2.6 Health Information and Authority

Valuable insights for this study came from an unexpected context: health information needs and uses. As suggested above in Harris and Dewdney’s study (1994, p. 108), there are similarities between the relationships among doctors and patients and clergy and parishioners. Both doctors and clergy have roles as experts and trusted information sources, but in the new media age patients and parishioners have access to other information sources. In both cases professionals’ authority might be challenged, and this became an issue for

respondents in my study. Three studies are briefly considered below that address cognitive and affective authority.

McKenzie (2003) builds on Wilson's work on Cognitive Authority (1983) that argued that we all develop cognitive strategies for determining whether information sources are authoritative (p. 13). McKenzie considered how pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenting are useful contexts to investigate authoritative knowledge. She notes that in high-risk pregnancies, such as carrying twins, there can often be a tension between medical and natural understandings of pregnancy. Doctors have expertise but experienced mothers have an understanding of their pregnancies. McKenzie summarizes the key points: authority is a relationship between two people; authority is a matter of degree; authority is relative to a sphere of interest; and cognitive authority is a kind of influence (pp. 263-264). Through a series of interviews she explored the construction of authoritative knowledge in biomedical and experiential forms to arrive at "the best for me" (p. 282), that is, information that suits the individual's personal situation best. It was significant that experiential knowledge did not preclude biomedical knowledge, but both played roles in addressing personal needs.

Genuis (2011) investigated individuals' everyday life experiences as they used formal and informal sources to interact with uncertain health information. Her survey of the literature found that women are active information agents interacting with health information for themselves and others, accessing many formal and informal sources, both in the context of a visit to a doctor or apart from

it (p. 2). She found that in situations where health information is uncertain, women's information behaviours are complex. She concluded that "health literacy education should move beyond an emphasis on 'good' vs. 'bad' information sources and instead teach generic assessment skills, including helping women to understand that different forms of knowledge (or *evidence*) are valuable for different information needs" (p. 4).

Neal and McKenzie (2011) considered the use of lay-authored blogs as a source of collaborative information sharing among patients about the medical condition endometriosis. As Neal and McKenzie describe, patients with chronic health conditions face major barriers in finding information that specifically applied to their situation. They tend first to seek help or information from interpersonal sources, especially from people in similar situations. They found that these online information-sharing sites were valued for their ability to create a supportive community. Patients also valued peer sources of information that emphasized personal lived experience and wisdom over professional or biomedical knowledge. Patients valued the stories shared online, and these personal perspectives lent weight to the authority of the blogger. Neal and McKenzie examined how cognitive and affective authority was constructed and challenged health care information professionals to consider how communities construct authority. They conclude "while peer support tools such as health blogs may not meet librarians' traditional standards for authority, they might provide both the social support and the affectively authoritative and situationally relevant information that information seekers value." (p. 133)

These three studies raise interesting questions about how authority is constructed, and how information is chosen to meet both cognitive and affective needs. Patients valued medical expertise but also saw value experience. Using both types of information patients arrive at the solution that best addressed her or his needs. In Church contexts respondents are engaged in the construction of theological authority. However, concerns expressed by doctors and health professionals about “good” and “bad” information sources, were also expressed by clergy. How might lay church leaders use official information and experiential knowledge to arrive at a solution best for them?

2.3 Sociology of Religion: Religious Organizations, Traditional Roles & New Media

In order to understand the impact of new communication technologies and digital media on information behaviour in my participant churches, I turned to the literature of sociology of religion, informed by the interpretive approaches of Weber (1968), and Geertz’s interpretative anthropology (1973) where religion gives meaning to the experiences of life (1999). In order to situate the following discussion of the interplay between religion and online information sources, I began with an examination of some of the sociological research on the construction of authority in religious organizations. This was important in understanding why information sources are preferred, and the new roles of the traditional gatekeepers of religious information, the clergy. I then turned to a discussion of the research on new media and religion, focusing on three issues that arose in my pilot study: the theological or philosophical bases for online

engagement, the role the online plays in building community, and the ways the online undermines and affirms religious authority.

2.3.1 The Boundaries of the Sacred and the Construction of Religious Authority

In order to evaluate the appropriateness and usefulness of information sources, and I distinguish the two categories intentionally, one must have some understanding of the framework against which the seeker measures. In a religious context one might ask whether religious standards have been constructed and employed. In these contexts what factors would inform those measures? Certainly, the ideas of the sacred and secular versus profane may be relevant, along with the usual criteria of availability, convenience, familiarity, etc. What does it mean for something to be sacred? Who makes that determination and why do they have the authority to do so? How does the structure of the religious organization (congregation and denomination) change the nature of that authority? To explore these questions I turned to the works of Durkheim and Weber, and then to contemporary authors to trace the development of these ideas.

2.3.2 The Sacred and Profane

Durkheim defined religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden...” (1912, p. 47). He argued that all religions, “presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred*” (p. 37). Sacred things were more than gods or spirits, but

Durkheim argued that anything could be sacred. Certain rites, words, and even movements can be set apart as sacred. Accordingly since in Durkheim's view anything might be sacred, it is the religious community itself that determines what is sacred, and in turn is characterized by that body of sacred things. The profane world is that space outside of the sacred, and there exists a conflict between the two realms of existence (p. 40). "The Sacred" for Durkheim was not a metaphysical category, but a social representation (Paden, 2009, p. 33). Durkheim's dichotomy has certainly been challenged. Renate Barber for example pointed out the "fuzziness of the borders between sacred and profane," with his example of the gold cross worn both as a religious symbol and a piece of fashion jewelry (1965, p. 46). Paden argued that the distinction Durkheim should have made clearer was "that the sacred/profane is a class not of things, but of relationships to things" (p. 34). These relationships are negotiated and protected within communities. Though contested, Durkheim's dichotomy provided a useful framework to consider leaders' own understanding of the boundaries of religious information and how they might cross those boundaries when seeking information.

2.3.2.1 Authority

A sociological discussion of religious authority appropriately should begin with Max Weber and his three types of legitimate rule (1961). Weber defined authority simply as "the probability that a specific command will be obeyed" (p. 4). Weber postulated three different grounds on which to base legitimate authority: legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. The first, legal

authority, is derived through the enactment of laws and regulations, changed through proper processes, and managed by the “public authorities” through officials appointed by the ruler (p. 5). Authorities are paid specialists who act impersonally to fulfill the duties associated with the office, and follow the rules. Churches in Canada are legal entities with obligations to the state, but the authority that clergy possess is not legal authority.

Traditional authority, alternatively, “rests on the belief in the sacredness of the social order and its prerogatives as existing of yore” (Weber, 1961, p. 7). Communal relationships are central to the functioning of this kind of authority, and the ruler’s commands are based in tradition. The leader acting outside that tradition endangers the legitimacy of his or her authority. Those personally loyal, as faithful servants, make up the ruler’s administrative staff. Weber identifies Patriarchy as the purest form of traditional authority.

Charismatic authority “rests on the affectual and personal devotion of the follower to the lord and his gifts of grace (charisma)” (Weber, 1961, p. 10). The charismatic leader possesses personal power whether it is magical, heroic, or power of mind and speech. Weber pointed to the image of the prophet, warrior hero, and the great demagogue, and described the operative relationship as between the leader and disciple (p. 11). The obedience is given directly to the person because of his abilities rather than his position. This is the least permanent form of authority and the most difficult to maintain, especially “if the masses lose faith in his leadership capacity” (p. 11). A contemporary researcher Dawson has developed these concepts in the context of new religious

movements. He argued, "Charisma is a mainstay of religious life. Its manifestation is praised in pastors, preachers, and mystics" (Dawson, 2006, p. 5). But like Weber he has observed the challenges faced in maintaining charismatic authority, defending its legitimacy, and the ramifications of mismanagement of that authority. Dawson considered psychosocial factors in the development of charismatic authority, but concluded charismatic relationships "often tap into a primary urge for greater meaning in life through self-transcendence" (p. 22).

Hoffman and Dawson reviewed contemporary research on what they described as the "mystery of charisma" (2014, p. 349) in a wide variety of disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology, religious studies, political science, and management studies. They described how charisma is coveted and rewarded, but conversely how the term is used colloquially (the rock star, the celebrity, the politician) to such an extent as to be nearly meaningless. They attempted to return to a meaning more useful as an analytical tool. They argue, "Charismatic authority tends to be intimately tied to religion" (p. 351), but researchers uncomfortable with the rhetoric of religion often neglect this aspect of charisma, seeking instead some social or psychological understanding. However, Lorne and Dawson take exception to Weber's characterization of charisma as a "certain quality of an individual personality," focusing instead on his idea of validation. They argue, "Charismatic authority is validated by others who recognize certain qualities associated with charisma in a leader" (p. 351). The research they reviewed focused on the relationship between leaders and

followers, and the mutual exchange of benefits. They also identified situational factors that lead to the emergence of charismatic authority: an acute and ultimate crisis, the threat or actual breakdown of existing forms of authority, and societies that encourage their appearance. Two strategic factors are a message that resonates with a mass audience and the leader's confidence in their ability to resolve the crisis (pp. 352-353). The churches I studied faced significant crises, and were turning to their leaders for guidance. It would be instructive to consider the role charisma played in acceptance of certain information sources and experts, as well as the role of the leaders' authority in the "seeking of God's will" for the church.

Some researchers in sociology and religious studies have raised concerns that traditional forms of authority have diminished. In his study on the social role of the clergy, Hoge (2009) identified an important trend in religious leadership: egalitarianism, and a corresponding loss of authority. Tracing the historical development of Protestantism, he argued, "Protestant ministers today are perceived to possess limited authority solely based on their ordination. Instead they need to win personal authority from their flocks through their own actions" (p. 592). But he noted that this is unique to Protestants, and that surveys of American Catholics reveal that less and less authority is being accorded by laity to clergy. A second relevant topic was globalization (p. 593). Hoge proposed that new communication technologies have brought different religions into contact, and citizens are encouraged to learn about and be tolerant of different religious traditions. Hoge asked, "In a situation of prolonged cross-religious

contact, the theological issue of universalism rises higher than ever. How shall one religion relate to others, while keeping its identity?” (p. 593) Relativism and increased education levels of the laity were considered important factors in challenging the opinions of clergy. Hoge identified these as important areas for further study.

2.3.2.2 Congregational Structures

It can be argued that churches, as institutionalized religion, can be fruitfully studied from the perspective of organizational theory. That was certainly an early methodological consideration. However in this study, my focus has been on individuals, though individuals interacting within the private and leadership structure of a church, and sometimes the wider denomination. Ammerman raised several important considerations about churches that do set them apart from other organizations (2005). First she notes that religious organizations, churches, are both “private” and “public” at the same time, and an important generator of social capital (p. 353). As will be described below, the churches in this study were engaged within their communities, and desired to play both a social as well as a spiritual role. Conversely they also saw themselves as separate from even other non-religious social agencies. This leads to Ammerman’s next observation that although religious organizations, “have a moral and spiritual dimension that distinguishes them from other voluntary organizations” this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that religious institutions constitute a unique institutional form (p. 353-354). They share some common characteristics but are defined by their individual cultural contexts. Like

most organizations they have adopted bureaucratic structures and processes, and studies had shown that they “were not isolated from the social and cultural world in which they existed” (p. 356). Citing earlier research, Ammerman described how unspoken values such as honouring ancestors or maintaining social status have guided congregation decision making “as surely as any theologically informed mission statement” (p. 356). Studies have demonstrated that access to both human and financial resources play a role in the churches ability to meet its goals, as well as their ability to innovate. Ammerman stressed studies that presented the human dynamics of congregational life, and particularly the role these play in congregational conflict. She contends that although sometimes churches do fight over ideas and theologies (she notes the issue of homosexuality), “they also divide when spaces for innovation are not sufficient, when members do not agree on modes of governance, and when members hold different understandings about the basic institutional models of congregational life” (p. 357). Ammerman goes on to describe studies that suggest an “organizational templates” that churches choose to adopt including legal structures as charitable statuses for tax purposes, as well as cultural expectations like listing their organization in the yellow pages (and contemporarily I would add having an online presence) (p. 358). Churches are also expected to offer certain services and functions like children’s programs. “The culture”, Ammerman concludes, “provides an organizational blueprint, even if the materials are highly variable” (p. 358). Another essential role identified for congregations is the transmission and preservation of sub-cultural identities,

even in the mundane activities such as eating together, teaching songs, and wearing traditional clothing (pp. 358-359). Congregations, as well as being cultural spaces, were found to be important places where relationships and trust bonds are formed (social capital created), and civic skills are developed (pp. 359-360). Ammerman also identified research that explored change within congregations, including external stressors like population shifts, the rise of new forms of congregational life like the mega-church, and competition among community churches (p. 361). This review highlights the opportunities local congregations offer to understand organizations and organizational change.

2.3.3 New Media and Religion

In my study I hypothesized that the Internet and new media would have an impact on the information activities of the respondent leaders, and their decision-making processes. Given the traditional nature of most churches is this a reasonable hypothesis? The literature on religion and new media would suggest that the online and offline have become increasingly enmeshed in everyday life activities including the private and communal practice of religion and spirituality. The literature further suggests that these online activities have the potential to impact religion offline as well.

Considerable research has been conducted in library and information science on the role of the Internet in information seeking behaviour in everyday life. Over a decade ago Haythornthwaite and Wellman (2002) sought to impress upon researchers that the Internet needed to be seen as embedded in everyday life and no longer on the fringes, or the domain of tech geeks. They

demonstrated that by 2001 the majority of North Americans were using the Internet. Drawing on survey research they looked at most popular Internet activities in the U.S. in 2000: including web surfing (81.7%), email (81.6%), finding hobby information (57.2), and reading news (56.6) (p. 7).

A wealth of studies on online activities and everyday life has since been produced exploring information seeking through search engines, information creation through blogs, social networking on Facebook, and even the non-use of the Internet and social media in the everyday. However, religion, as it relates to online environments, has fared no better in information science studies. The focus must shift from activities online to purpose of those activities. Published a year before Haythornthwaite and Wellman's study, a Pew Internet & American Life study (Larsen, 2001) asked what these Internet users were doing online. They found that 25% of Internet users said they had obtained religious or spiritual materials, and in that year more than 3 million Americans a day accessed religious and spiritual material. Following the September 11 terror attacks 41% of American Internet users sent or received online prayer requests.

By 2004, research (Hoover, Clark & Rainie, 2004) showed that 64% of Internet users had engaged in online activities that related to religious and spiritual matters. They also discovered that 26% of the online faithful sought information about other faiths. When considering more current Canadian data, Helland (2011, p. 375) found the World Bank estimate Internet penetration in Canada had reached 75%, while Statistics Canada estimated it closer to 80%. He argued that Canadians are often quick to integrate new technologies into their daily lives,

including for activities of a religious nature. He described how as early as 1984 the United Church of Canada had developed an online network for communication (United Church Computer Users Group). Although intended as a means of official church communication, he suggested, “the online members – who at this time were predominately community church leaders – were using the system to communicate, discuss issues, and share their thoughts feelings, and prayers. For many it became a form of electronic community” (p. 381). Other religious denominations began to use this technology for secure internal communication. Helland described how even at this early stage religious groups began to recognize that online communication could be used in different ways, both one-to-many and many-to-many communication, although the religious authorities remained in control of how the technology was used (p. 383). The development of the World Wide Web would begin to change that.

In 2002 Helland developed categories of religious activity online. The first category is religion-online, where an established religious group uses the Internet to communicate in a one-to-many fashion (e.g. www.vatican.va). The second category is online-religion, where interaction is many-to-many in online environments that might include chat groups, bulletin boards, etc. Helland noted that religion-online appeared to be the norm for official religion, a context that can be managed and controlled, while unofficial religion dominated in online religion (pp. 295-296). This is a significant distinction, for Helland (2005) argued elsewhere that although the technology exists to allow all groups to engage in a many-to many level, some groups did not choose to do so. He proposed, “Online

religion is in some ways reminiscent of the Protestant Reformation, in that the Church and the priesthood are no longer considered an intermediary between the people and their religious practice. Many-to-many communication does not need a hierarchy to function, but rather lies upon an open and equal level of participation by all members” (p. 4). Studies like the three above demonstrate that people are engaged in online religious activities and some forms of engagement have the potential to threaten or change traditional structures and authorities.

Similarly to Haythornthwaite and Wellman, Campbell (2005) made the argument to Internet researchers that religion needed to be taken more seriously “not just because it is an interesting phenomenon or a popular use of the Internet, but also because religion continues to be an important part of contemporary life for many people” (p. 309). She advocated, “because religion remains a factor, influencing public as well as private life, it is important to include its analyses focusing on social and cultural forces shaping Internet consumption and design” (p. 313), and she agreed with Haythornthwaite and Wellman that “online social networks are not simply “virtual” but are also embedded in the “real” or offline world (p. 310). Campbell’s later work surveyed existing literature but found that most research on religion, Internet and identity has focused on adolescents and minority religious groups. She called for more research on other age groups and majority religious groups (2006, p. 19). My study addresses this gap in the literature.

The reality that individuals are engaged in religious activities has been well demonstrated by research. That churches are reaching out in cyberspace is also apparent. However, what are the implications for churches that do (or do not) go online?

2.3.4 To be (Online) or Not To Be (Online)

In *When Religion Meets New Media* (2010), Campbell, building on Ferre's earlier work (2003), described three views of the relationship between religion and media. The first is "media as conduit" (p. 44) where media is perceived "as a neutral instrument that can be used for good or evil, dependent on the manner in which it is used." Religious groups who hold to this view, Campbell suggested, can adopt technological innovation with little ideological conflict, and use it to further the goals of the religious community. Historical evidence on such adoption can be seen among evangelicals and their use of television and radio (McCarthy, 2003), and the Roman Catholic Church's belief in the power of film for positive cultural change (Ortiz, 2003). Campbell (2010) noted, "Many religious Internet advocates have an idealistic view of the technology as an equalizing medium able to be molded for religious purpose" (p. 45).

Another perspective Campbell presented was "media as a mode of knowing" (p. 45). She posited this perspective understands media technology as being biased, and having values rooted in the very nature of that technology. An example that she offered was the concerns over the shift from print media to visual media, that promotes entertainment over information, and creates a growing interdependence on technology (p. 46). Grant (2003), in her

examination of religious television, explored Muggeridge's (1977, p. 41) objections to television, as a vehicle of fantasy, used as an evangelism tool. She wrote, "Religious users are encouraged to be suspicious of media lest they cultivate or unknowingly promote values through their interactions with media that run counter to their faith" (p. 46). An example of this would be Van der Laan's attack on preaching and the Internet (2009). He adopted Ellul's critique of the technological society: "The real religion is...the dominant forces of the technological society" (p. 276) and held that by becoming part of technological society and the values it promotes, the church loses its ability to critique the values of that society.

A middle ground between these perspectives is "media as a social institution" (Campbell, 2010, p. 48) where media, Internet or otherwise, are understood both in terms of their production, and the user's perception of the content. This is a highly reflective approach that seeks to understand the nature of technology and its long-term implications, but also understands the nature of socially constructed messages. *From the Garden and the City* (Dyer, 2011) is an example of an attempt to create a middle ground. Dyer, a director of web development for a large U.S. seminary, contended that most Christian critiques of technology are not based in theological and biblical principles but rather are rooted in where we sit on the technological timeline, "We question the young for the blind acceptance of the latest gadgets, but we do so driving our computerized cars to and from church sipping coffee grown on a different continent" (p. 28). He

offers a philosophical (following Heidegger) and biblical critique of concept of technology.

The works above exemplify some of the kinds of debates that have occurred in churches over the role of technologies. The churches in my study were active users of technology and would have had to wrestle with these questions.

2.3.5 Creating Identity and Community

A number of studies have considered how religious identity and community are constructed online. Hoover (2003) has argued that there has been a convergence of religion and media. The interaction between religion and media is important in how they are used to construct meaning and identity (p. 10). With reference to the work of Weber (p. 11), Hoover explained, “there seems to be a human tendency to invest concrete activity in the material sphere with a cloak of significance and importance” (p. 11) and an inquiry into this religion and media, must be an exploration of the shaping of self-identity. He proposed three important trends in religion: personal autonomy, transformation of religion into spirituality, and the marketplace of supply (p. 11-12). Media, from TV, DVDs and now the Internet, are changing, partly in response to these trends and the quest for personal spirituality.

This search for identity is picked up in Clark’s (2002) research on identity, media and the “funky” side of religion, where she explored the role of media in religious identity construction. She studied U.S. teens and the role of entertainment media in the formation of religious identity. An important finding

from her study was that the presence of unorthodox beliefs in self-identified religious teens that suggested that religious identity and beliefs might not be related to one's religious affiliation (p. 809). Media have a role to play in supporting and contradicting ideas about religion, and are important to teens' construction of their religious identities.

In their study of online religious identity, Linderman and Lövheim (2005, see also 2003) began by clarifying their use of the concept of identify, "the process whereby the individual related himself or herself to a certain collective" (p. 122). They proposed that religious beliefs and practices are the means by which individuals find belonging to the larger community, and are the values and norms of that community. Their study sought to compare how constructing identity and finding belonging occurred in traditional social settings with computer-mediated settings, and examined theories of social capital and how they might apply to online community building. They found studying online interaction offered potential insights into how trust and commitment are developed in offline communities. They found that these online relationships might not look like traditional (or ideal) religious communities, but they might not be dissimilar to the ways relationships are expressed in "real-life" (2005, p. 135). These online relationships might be more complex and flexible than offline relationships.

In *Exploring Religious Community Online*, Campbell (2005) described three conceptual models of the Internet as an information space where users produce text and can interact with data; a common mental geography, a way of

viewing reality; and an identity workshop or space to learn and test new ways of being (p. 22). She explored conceptions of community as sociological and theological concepts, focusing on the Christian Biblical tradition (*ekklesia* and *koinonia*) (p. 30-32), and images of the church as mystical communion, sacrament, herald and servant (p. 32-35). Against these images she explored the Internet as a social network, where people can find sacred space, create community, and be the church online.

Hoover argued that the line between religion and media has become blurred; through Clark's and Campbell studies we saw some of the ways that the online is being used to construct and reconstruct religious belief, and find belonging. Linderman and Lövheim demonstrated the connection between identity and community.

2.3.6 Challenging Authority Online

It was noted above that the Internet allowed fringe religious groups opportunities to interact virtually thus giving a voice to unofficial views. As a result researchers began to be intrigued by changes to authority in the online. In 2000 Dawson identified religious authority as a significant concern for the study of religion in cyberspace. He noted studies that demonstrated that the Internet was a boon to opponents of various religious groups. Campbell (2007) argued that although the idea had been raised in many studies on the impact of the Internet on religion (she found the concept of authority mentioned in 104 articles in the *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*), "there is a need for a more refined investigation and explanation of what is meant when the term

'authority' is used in reference to online contexts" (p. 1044), in this case, the context of religion.

Campbell proposed that there are "multiple layers of authority", and that authority is used in different ways across different religious traditions. It is then, according to Campbell it is insufficient to say that religion online challenges traditional authority, but rather "researchers must identify what specific form or type of authority is being affected" (p. 1044). In the 104 articles noted above, Campbell found that they used the term authority in a variety of ways usually in reference to official structures, systems, hierarchies, or roles (p. 1045). She found only one study that defined "authority" and concluded that there is no unified understanding of the concept of authority in relation to Internet studies. Campbell turned to the work of Weber (1947) and his three types of pure legitimate authority: legal (based on the legality of patterns and normative rule), traditional (established by a belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions), and charismatic (based on devotion to an individual who exhibits a particular characteristic, ideal or exemplary quality) (p. 1045-1046). In summation then Campbell understood "authority as grounded in a system, in a role, or as an embodied value-belief" (p. 1046). She added an examination of the authority of text, appropriate to a study of three "peoples of the book."

Campbell (2007) found that studies that considered authority in online religious contexts, tended to focus on new religious movements (Barker, 2005), non-mainline religious groups (Piff & Warburg, 2005), and extremism (Introvigne, 2005). Campbell's research was based on interviews from Christian, Jewish, and

Muslim respondents. Her study concluded that online activity impacted the three types of authority in different ways. For instance, she found that respondents from Jewish and Muslim communities tended to affirm the importance of local religious leaders as interpreters of religious knowledge. Christians were more likely to reflect critically on the place of religious leaders in relation to the Internet (p. 1055). How technology was accepted and understood within communities could reinforce or subvert traditional authorities (p. 1056).

Campbell later applied this framework to a study of Christian bloggers, considering how they “challenge and/or support traditional forms of religious authority through their blogging content” (p. 269). She found that bloggers frequently referred to traditional forms of religious authority. Some bloggers were found to critique leaders, structures, theologies and texts, however many used their blogs to affirm the authorities in line with their beliefs. This challenged earlier ideas about the role of the Internet and demonstrated that authority can exist both online and offline (p. 272). What the study did not do was to explore the differences between Protestant and Catholic bloggers’ critique or support of authority. Campbell’s work provided a useful framework through which to explore religious engagement with the online.

Another useful work on authority is by Campbell and Teusner (2011), where they focus on three ways the Internet is transforming the authority of religious leaders and institutions. The first position was “The Internet is changing how we understand Christian community and therefore how we gain and maintain religious identities” (p. 64); “The words and actions of religious leaders

are increasingly susceptible to scrutiny by alternative voices online” (p. 65); and “Internet culture is challenging traditional Christian structures especially those that appraise and correct theological knowledge” (pp. 65-66). They concluded it is not so much the presence of the Internet that challenges traditional religion, but how churches use those technologies in concert with cultural shifts in the roles that traditional religions play. “Yet the key challenge the Internet poses to the traditional structures of religious authority”, they noted, “is the democratization of knowledge online” (p. 67).

The studies considered above described how Internet technologies have given traditionally marginalized religious groups a voice that they previously did not have. Shifts in cultural values allow challenges to historically unassailable authorities, and new communication technologies while not being the cause of these challenges have been a means to their expression. Research has demonstrated however that Internet communications can be used to affirm traditional authority.

2.4 Ethnography in Church

In this study I chose to use an ethnographic methodology, because the question I asked sought “to grasp the native’s point of view,” Malinoski’s (1979, p. 5) goal of ethnography. Ethnography is an observational approach that “puts the researcher in the context of interest, requires the researcher to collect data or participate with others in data collection, and involves the researcher in the analysis and interpretation of those data” (Willis, 2007, p. 233). Further, Willis defined ethnography as “an umbrella term for fieldwork, interviewing, and other

means of gathering data in authentic (e.g. real world) environments” (p. 235). Hammersley and Atkinson have argued that the label ethnography as a research approach overlaps considerably with other labels, such as “qualitative inquiry”, and individual case studies such as auto-ethnographies, and even “virtual ethnography” based on online data (2007, p. 1). They identified the following features of ethnography: The researcher participates in people’s daily lives over an extended period, asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artifacts, and whatever data is available to through light on the emerging issues (p. 3). Perhaps most importantly, “the analysis of data involves interpretation of meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local, and perhaps wider, contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories...” (p. 3).

Ethnography as described above has not been used extensively in library and information science research, although there have been a number of notable studies, and the approach does have its advocates. The review below considers how ethnography has been used in information seeking behaviour research. The second part considers how ethnography has been used in sociology of religion and media, particularly to consider the impact of the online on religious identity and community.

2.4.1 Ethnography in Human Information Behaviour

Ethnography as a research methodology has been used sparingly in Library and Information Science studies, and the meaning of “ethnographic/

ethnography” is not always clear. Case (2007) in his survey of research in information behaviour, discussed ethnographic methods rather than ethnography (p. 193), and included some of the ethnographic studies considered below (e.g. Chatman, 1992) under the heading of “intensive interviews” rather than ethnographic studies (p. 214). Fisher, Erdelez, and McKechnie (2005), in contrast, did consider these studies as ethnographic. In content analyses of the literature, Jarvelin & Vakkari (1990) found from 1985-1990 that 6% of articles considered information seeking and only 1.6% of studies used qualitative methods, and observation was rarely used (p. 409). Julien (1996) analyzed the literature from 1990-1994 and found 4% of studies from 1990-1994 used ethnography as a methodology while survey methods continued to be predominant (56%) (p. 58). Julien did not define what she understood to be ethnography, though it is assumed that this was the researchers’ identification of their method. In reflecting on the growth of information seeking research, Julien argued, “as information-seeking behaviour is investigated from the point of view of the seeker, methodologies such as the detailed analysis of micro-moments used in Dervin’s sense-making research or Chatman’s use of ethnography may be more appropriate research methods” (p. 62). Despite this, Julien (2000) found in her longitudinal study of information needs and uses literature 1984-1998 that the use of ethnography declined from 3.7 percent in the period 1990-1994 to 2.1 percent during 1995-1998 (p. 306). Little change was found in an analysis of the literature from 1999-2008 (Julien, Recoskie & Reed, 2010, p. 21).

Williamson (2006) made the case for using ethnographic techniques in information seeking because of its compatibility with constructivist frameworks, focusing on the individual personal constructions of meaning, and the other on shared meanings through social construction (p. 85). She offered a number of examples of her own research (p. 89) that employed this approach: “Breast Cancer Information Needs and Seeking” (2002), that used interviews, focus groups, and demographic information of women accessing breast cancer information online; and “Information Seeking in Online Investment” (2006) that used surveys and extensive interviewing of individuals using personal information sources for online investing. Williamson applied the term ethnographic to a broad range of methodologies, and demonstrates that using ethnographic techniques, “[w]ays of thinking about issues, which may not have occurred to researchers may be revealed” (p. 98). McKechnie (2000) examined what preschoolers do in the library (p. 62) and employed ethnographic methods because she believed that traditional methods such as surveys and interviews were not appropriate for small children. She used a combination of methods such as participant observation (field notes), audio recording of naturally occurring talk, diary keeping by key informants (parents), and follow-up interviews of parents to gather data on the visits of thirty 4 year old girls. Although the data was particularly rich, the time frame for gathering data was limited, and McKechnie’s study may be closer to what Willis (2007) would call a micro-ethnographic case study (pp. 241-244).

Other significant examples of ethnography are Chatman's studies of retired women's information needs and uses (1992), janitors (1990), and prisoners (1999), all employing extensive interviews and participant observation. Chatman argued, "Ethnographic studies make known contextual meanings, cultural norms, and social interactions that are not possible with other methods" (p. 3). Chatman's research most closely approaches the idea of ethnography employed in anthropology, using multiple methods of data collection, including interviews and participant observation, conducted on site over an extensive period of time.

2.4.2 Ethnography in Sociology of Religion and the Internet

Although Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 1) raised concerns about the use of ethnographic methods in online environments, there is a broad literature in sociology and anthropology that employs this methodology in online contexts (Coleman, 2010). It also has been used successfully to consider online engagement in religious contexts for nearly two decades. Grieve, for example, in his 1995 study "Imagining a Virtual Religious Community: Neo-pagans on the Internet" explored online communities through posts to alt.pagan news groups. As noted by Campbell (2005) above, the earliest research engaged non-mainstream and non-Christian religions, and this included ethnographic studies.

Campbell's *Exploring Religious Community Online* was one of the earliest comprehensive studies of online mainstream religious community, and she employed ethnographic methods. She argued that online community was a next stage in the evolution of religious community, beginning with the social

movements like the “Jesus People” and then moving to community online (2005, xiii-xiv), the “electronic Reformation” (p. 61). To gather her data Campbell joined online religious email lists of three online communities, observing interactions and discussions, becoming what she described as a “professional lurker” the online non-participant observer, but later described deeper engagement through surveys, interviews and offline meet-ups of list members.

The communities she explored had diverse purposes that incorporated teaching, sharing personal struggles, requesting and offering prayer, and encouragement. One of her respondents, an online community founder argued that although it is “a ‘poor substitute’ for a real church that can intervene face-to-face in the lives of its members, online communities often create spaces where members feel freer to share personal needs and receive input” (2005, p. 93). The data she gathered was rich and opened up important dimensions of the religious lives of the list members both off and online.

Recent ethnographic studies have moved beyond email and newsgroups to explore other forms of online interaction, from Grieve and Heston’s study of religious cloud communities and *Second Life* (2012), Hutchings’ study of online churches (2011), Tan’s study of religious blogging and personal spirituality, expanding on Helland’s earlier work (2013), and Stewart’s study of the online activities of women members of Charismatic Christian churches through Facebook, blogs and Twitter (2012).

These studies demonstrate that ethnography/ethnographic methods are established in religion and the Internet research. The studies above considered

a wide variety of online expression, and ethnographic approaches generated good data that effectively described the activities that build community on and offline.

2.5 Summary

In this review I have considered meta-theories and theories of Information Science research that are appropriate for the exploration of information seeking in religious contexts, and the everyday life information practices models that I will use to develop a contextualized model of information seeking in religious contexts. I argued in my introduction that religion is still important for many Canadians, and that there continues to be the need to explore neglected religious information contexts. I explored the literature on clergy information seeking in their work roles and identified useful patterns that informed my research. I noted the gaps in information seeking research on clergy in decision-making roles, and I demonstrated the lack of laypersons' information seeking research for decision-making in religious contexts. It was significant that the majority of studies considered protestant clergy, and suggested the need for research into other Christian groups such as Roman Catholics. My study begins to address this gap. I considered briefly useful ideas on the construction of authority from health information behaviour research, and some applications to doctor/patient relationships that bear strong similarities to issues faced between clergy and parishioners.

When considering the sociology of religion literature, I argued that individuals and churches are regularly engaged in online religious activities.

Hoover proposed that the line between religion and media has become blurred, and the online has become a place for religious individuals and groups to communicate, build community, and even be the church. These engagements are neither insignificant nor uncritical, and the literature suggested some of the issues churches must engage with in being (or not being) online. I demonstrated from the literature that Internet technologies have given traditionally marginalized religious groups a voice, allowing historically unassailable authorities to be challenged. The Internet, research has demonstrated, also can be used to affirm religious authority, online and offline.

I explored the literature on ethnographic methods in both Information Seeking research, and Religion and the Internet research. Although the use of ethnographic methods is still novel in information seeking studies, there are examples of studies that generated good data using this approach. Ethnographic methods have also been used effectively to explore religious activities online for nearly two decades, with examples of current research engaging all kinds of online activities. There is good precedent for the adoption of this methodological approach.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In the Introduction (Chapter 1) I presented my research question: “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’” The study focuses on leaders’ experiences, and uses ethnographic methodologies to gather qualitative data appropriate for this kind of study. I have already made the case in chapter 2 for the appropriateness of this methodology. This chapter presents in greater detail my methodological approach, study design, data collection and management plans, and ethical safeguards.

3.1 Methodological Perspectives

I, and indeed all researchers, approach their research with particular beliefs about the nature of knowledge, how it is created, and how it is verified. These beliefs have shaped how I gathered, interpreted, and understood my data. In fairness to the reader, this should be made explicit. In my research my worldview includes four important and intersecting perspectives: a sociological perspective, an interdisciplinary perspective, a social constructivist or interpretivist perspective, and a theological perspective. These four perspectives guided the study, usually in harmony, but sometimes in tension.

3.1.1 Sociological Perspective

An important perspective informing this study was sociological. McGuire (1997) defined the sociological perspective as “a way of looking at religion that focuses on the human (especially social) aspects of religious belief and practice.

Religion is both individual and social” (p. 6). One important characteristic of the sociological perspective is that it is objective, meaning “that sociological interpretation of religion does not attempt to evaluate, accept, or reject the content of religious belief” (p. 7). Berger (1969) has argued, “Sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection, and by the same logic can have nothing to say about the possibility that this projection may refer to something other than the being of its projector” (p. 180).

As I constructed my understanding of my respondents’ world, I was confined to my observations of human behaviour, and how my respondents verbalize their experiences. I cannot, for instance, listen in on an answer to a prayer for guidance, but I must accept that my respondent believes that God has answered that prayer, and then I observe as they act on that belief. I accept that my respondents’ interpretation of their experiences has validity, and I do not approach the question of its veracity. Later in this chapter I will address my own religious position and what that brings to the study. This is not to say that sociological observation may not raise religious or spiritual implications. “Sociology” Berger notes “thus raises questions for the theologian to the extent that the latter’s positions hinge on certain socio-historical presuppositions” (p. 181). Apart from the brief discussion in Chapter 1, I tried to leave those questions to theologians.

However, as I discuss at greater length below, I am a Nova Scotia resident and a practicing Christian. In many respects I am an insider. This study was inspired in part by those identities, as I wished to provide local churches with

transition resources. It was a challenge to take McGuire's (1997) admonition to set my personal beliefs aside and to be objective (p. 7) and balance my insider role with the sociological approach. Narayan (1993) has described that historically anthropology distinguished between the "native" anthropologist and "real" anthropologist (p. 672). Natives were invaluable as informants to the foreign anthropologist. The "native" might complete the requisite professional training to become a "native" anthropologist, but "even if such a 'native' anthropologist went on to make pathbreaking professional contributions, his or her origins remained a perpetual qualifier" (p. 672). Admittedly the "native" anthropologist could provide unique perspectives that western trained anthropologists could not. Narayan, however, challenged the categories of native/non-native, describing how complex identity could be, and demonstrating how context transforms the identification as native. Quoting Malinowski's admonition to "grasp the native's point of, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (p. 676), Narayan asks, "who is this generic subject, "the native"? Does the "real" anthropologist, for example, who is engaged in long-term research at the same site year after year, remain in all respects a non-native? Conversely are there contexts when the "native" informant's understanding and experience may be incomplete?

I bring to this study theological knowledge and pastoral experience. I have led churches facing significant challenges and transitions. This background allows me to anticipate activities and processes, and interpret what I am observing. Informants do not need to explain many basic concepts and

practices. I have studied in non-denominational theological schools where I interacted with a wide cross-section of Protestant Christians. I served in Baptist, Plymouth Brethren and Lutheran congregations, and I am comfortable in these contexts. I understand how these leadership teams function, their ethical and professional restraints, and the politics within local congregations and regional bodies. On occasions in the study leaders asked for my input in decision making processes, recognizing my experience and training. However, every church community is unique, and I needed to be careful about the assumptions I made, and how their own history informed their contemporary situation. Although I was born into a Roman Catholic family, I was raised as a Protestant. I have had some opportunities to study Catholic theology and practice but it became apparent throughout my research that many of my understandings were superficial, often based in stereotypes common in Evangelical Protestantism. I had much to learn and unlearn.

Another tension is that I did not approach the congregations as a pastor but as an academic. Historian Mark Noll (1994) has documented the uncomfortable relationship between particularly Evangelical Christians and the academy. Often regarded with suspicion, academics have not always been welcome. Arnold (2006) picks up Noll's argument in relation to anthropology, referred to as "the most secular of the disciplines" (p. 266) where Christian missionary activity was often seen as a colonial practice. The idea of cultural relativism and biblical morality often seem at odds, although this is often more

perception than reality (p. 268-269). I needed to be aware of how my academic role might be perceived particularly among conservative evangelicals.

On a deeper level, I share a faith with my informants. Although the rituals may differ, we worship the same God, and share a relationship as “children of God”. That mutual relationship creates a relationship between my respondents and me. We are “brothers” and “sisters” in the faith. But that theoretical relationship still must be clarified and established. I was intrigued by Portelli’s (1991) comments on the nature of the interview as “an exchange between two subjects: literally a mutual sighting. One party cannot really see the other unless the other can see him or her in turn. The two interacting subjects cannot act together unless some kind of mutuality is established” (31). He described his own experience negotiating identity, introduced as a “professor” in a community often antagonistic to intellectuals, but where that status that might open up possibilities to be heard. He was considered politically open but not “a member of the party” (39).

The tension between my outsider/insider roles was most evident in my work among the Baptist churches. I am Baptist and I was welcomed as “one of them.” This I believe opened doors. But though I became a regular active participant, I was not prepared to become a member, and in one church this closed some doors. I wrestled with whether a non-Baptist might have been given greater access, as the membership question would not have arisen.

Sharing faith also meant, I believe for the leaders, that I would have a personal obligation to serve the churches. This placed on me another, and

perhaps higher, ethical obligation in addition to my institution's obligations. When engaging very private topics such as prayer and personal faith, I approached the topic objectively with respondents. Respondents however knew that I prayed and that I too struggled to build and rebuild my personal faith. This was an understood subtext that built trust when exploring the deeply personal. I benefited from countless conversations over coffee that will not be detailed below but helped me grow in my thinking. All these experiences challenged my thinking, and on occasion my personal faith.

3.1.2 Interdisciplinary Perspective

This an interdisciplinary research study. Interdisciplinarity has been defined in different ways but, I follow Repko (2008) who proposed that interdisciplinary research, "is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement" (p. 12). He identified four concepts in this definition: process, disciplinary perspectives, insights, and an interdisciplinary understanding (p. 12). He added that it also includes, "the notion of reflexive scholarship or self-critique" (p. 12). The concept of interdisciplinarity, as described by Repko (pp. 17-18) and Klein (2005) has been used in a variety of ways, but there are three dominant forms: instrumental interdisciplinarity focusing on methodological borrowing and integration, conceptual interdisciplinarity emphasizing integration of disciplinary knowledge, and finally critical

interdisciplinarity, “which aims to interrogate existing structures of knowledge and education, raising questions of value and purpose” (Repko, p. 18).

My study drew on disciplinary knowledge; primarily theoretical, from Library and Information Science, but as religious contexts have been largely unexplored, also from the discipline of Sociology of Religion and New Media. I also understand the research question itself as being deeply theological. As a result this study is a form of conceptual interdisciplinarity. Part of the challenge of this study was mapping the disciplinary frameworks onto each other and discovering similar ideas expressed in different terms. The methodology itself was borrowed from social anthropology, so it is also a form of instrumental interdisciplinarity. In the previous chapter I described how ethnography had been applied in both disciplines but also demonstrated that the methodology was still foreign. This was an exploratory study, and the results too preliminary to allow for significant disciplinary critique. The study itself does identify significant methodological and conceptual limits in Library and Information Science research, but falls short of critical interdisciplinarity.

3.1.3 Social Constructivist/Interpretivist Perspectives

I have touched on interpretivist perspectives in chapter two but reiterate my approach here. The mere statement that I believe my worldview shapes my research has already established my place within the Interpretivist (or as Lincoln and Denzin (2006, p. 22) labeled it: “constructivist-interpretivist”) paradigm:

...interpretivists assert that all research is influenced and shaped by the preexisting theories and worldviews of the researchers. The terms, procedures, and data of research have meaning because a group of

scholars has agreed on that meaning. Research is thus a socially constructed activity and the “reality” it tells us about therefore is also socially constructed. (Willis, 2007, p. 96)

The interpretivist rejects the notion that reality is external to the human mind and is “knowable” through objective scientific method, as the scientific method itself is not objective. This is particularly relevant when engaged in the complexities of human behaviour research. The goal of research is then not to uncover universal principles, but to reflect understanding of a particular situation or context (pp. 98-99). One consequence of this worldview is that, “there is no particular right or correct oath to knowledge, no special method that automatically leads to intellectual progress” (p. 109).

Holding this position creates in me a personal tension: as a Christian I do believe in absolute truth, embodied in the nature and character of God, and a reality external to the human context, communicated primarily through the sacred text of the Church, the Bible. However, from a philosophical hermeneutical (p. 104) approach, I recognize that this reality is communicated using human language, using socially constructed metaphors, and interpreted within particular ethno-cultural contexts. The act of reading Scripture brings the reader into a place of contact between the Ancient Near Eastern contexts of the texts’ original audience and my contemporary position (Fee and Stuart, 1982, p. 19). Application occurs in conversations among the individual, the community, and God.

3.1.4 Theological Perspective

I have commented above on the ways I balanced the sociological perspective with my own identity a Nova Scotia Christian “insider”. Here I make explicit what my theological background brings to the study. I am trained in theological and Biblical studies. I understand theologically the task these churches undertook to seek “the will of God” for themselves and their churches, and can unpack the practical implications of that task. I also possess the exegetical and analytical skills to evaluate the religious resources accessed by the participants. I do have a theological and philosophical position on the question of seeking God’s will and I attempted to be reflective and self-critical as I engaged with the data.

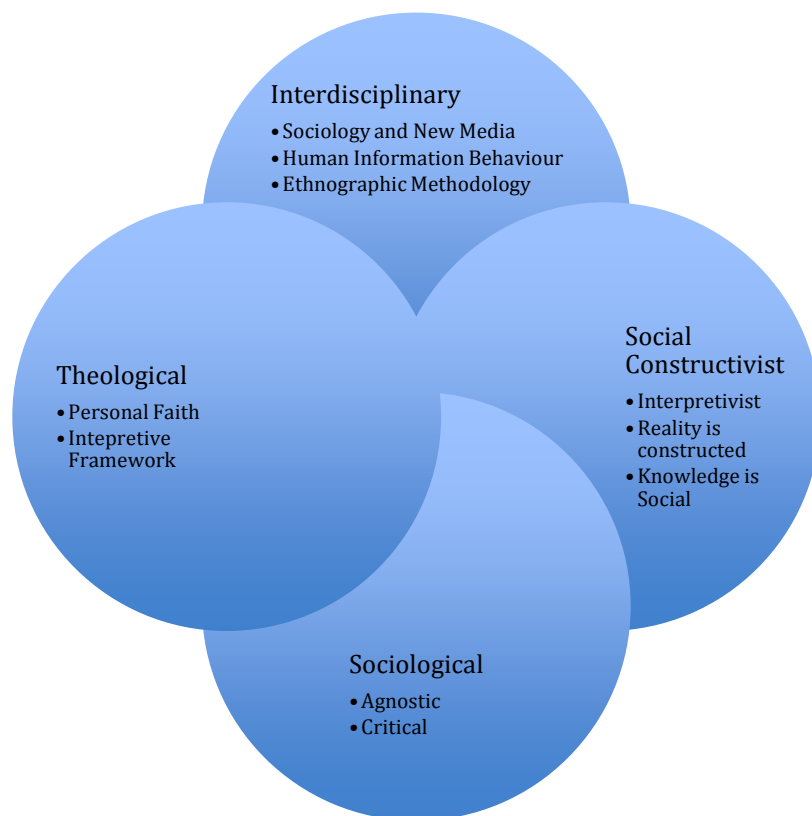
My professional ministerial background provided me with some background context to interpret the activities and experiences of my respondents. I can see congregational life from the perspective of a pastor. On several occasions during leadership discussions I was asked for my opinion on matters under consideration. In those situations I did offer my perspective but remained mindful of my role. As a pastor, I served under a code of ministerial ethics, and I recognized that these church leaders also would have ethical codes to follow. These ethical requirements are founded on the beliefs and practices of the individual religious denominations, and a familiarity with the foundations of these codes is valuable.

In the course of these studies I became a participant in the life of these congregations in various ways. To do so requires both ministry skills and appropriate theological understanding. Many of the activities I participated in

were non-theological such as running video equipment. Other activities such as preaching were intensely theological. My religious and theological background allowed me the opportunity to engage in this way, both beneficially for me, and I hope also for the churches.

The four perspectives and paradigms I described above all play a role in how I conceptualize my research problem, design my study, and interpret my data. The chart below depicts those interactions, and my effort to keep them in balance.

Chart 4: Intersecting Paradigms and Perspectives



3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is an effective method to investigate religious phenomena, the social construction of religious identity, and the processes by which orthodox knowledge and ways of knowing are determined (Khan, 2004).¹ In chapter 2, I offered a number of examples of ethnographic methods applied to information behaviour research, and sociology of religion and new media research. These studies demonstrated that an ethnographic methodology could generate data useful for understanding information seeking behaviour and religious engagement online. For this reason I employed an ethnographic methodology to gather data on the activities and perspectives of church leaders. Hammersley and Atkinson described the characteristics of ethnography: research in everyday contexts, data from a variety of sources but emphasizing participant observation, unstructured data collection, focus on a few cases for indepth study, and analysis of data involving interpretation of meanings, functions, and actions in context. The outcomes are descriptions, explanations, and theories, rather than quantitative or statistical analyses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). As I describe in detail below, I was a participant observer in everyday activities of church life such as worship services, congregational meetings, religion classes, and social events, as well as leadership events. Using descriptions, documentation, and interviews, I present a picture of leaders' information activities that enables me to offer a model of information seeking as it occurred in the context of these churches in transition.

¹ See e.g. Aisha Khan (2004). This ethnography is an examination of how power creates "religion" but demonstrates how religion is constructed in the day to day.

3.2.2 Study Timeline

The study was conducted in two phases. As this methodology had not been applied in an information study in a church context I proposed a pilot study to develop and test the data collection tools designed for this study. I received ethics approval for the pilot from the Dalhousie University Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board in February 2009, and I completed the pilot study with one Nova Scotia church in July 2010. I gathered the most detailed and general data during this phase. The second phase explored themes that arose in the pilot phase through two additional Nova Scotia churches. I received ethics approval for this phase in April 2011 and completed the study in March 2013. Two study sites, one in the pilot phase and one in the themes phase had to be abandoned and these false starts are also described below.

3.2.3 Recruitment

As I set out to conduct my research I first needed to consider the possible research population. How many leaders of churches in transition are there in Nova Scotia, and how can I locate them? In 2011 76% of the population or 690,490 people in Nova Scotia identified themselves as Christian (Statistics Canada, 2011). This is a decline of 11% (90,075) between the 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2001) and 2011 Federal censuses. The percentage of adherents to non-Christian religions has increased from 1.2% to 2% of the population, while the percentage identifying as having “no religion” has increased from 12% (106,406) to 22% (197,670). The population of other religions in Nova Scotia in 2011 was 18,035 (2,205 Buddhist, 1,850 Hindu, 1,805 Jewish, 8,500 Muslim, 385

Sikh, 570 traditional Aboriginal, and 2,720 Other). It is notable that although there have been significant population changes, Christians remain the dominant religious group in Nova Scotia. It is estimated that the percentage of Canadians who attend services on a weekly basis is 20%, and at least monthly 30% (Bibby, 2012, p. 9). This statistic suggests that on any given week, nearly 140,000 Nova Scotians attend services in a local church. There are currently over 400 societies registered in the Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stock Companies (2013) as churches under the Nova Scotia *Societies' Act* (RSNS 1989, c. 435). Without conducting a provincial survey, it is difficult to estimate how many Nova Scotia churches are engaged in some form of active and intentional transition (change) process, but it is expected that there may be dozens currently engaged in a change process or transition.

I began the recruitment process by first identifying churches that were in transition. In the pilot phase I began recruitment using my own networks of clergy contacts. I had previously served as a Baptist Minister and Deacon in several Nova Scotia communities. As a consequence I was aware of several churches in transition that would be prospective candidates for the study. In the themes phase I relied on informants to identify additional prospective candidates. I contacted denominational representatives from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax -Yarmouth, the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches - Fellowship Atlantic, Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, and the United Church of Canada - Maritime Conference. A Baptist Pastor of a candidate church also served on his denomination's local association executive, and he

identified two other potential candidates. These contacts are invaluable for identifying candidates but also generate candidate recommendations similar to existing candidates. One informant allowed me to identify potential Roman Catholic churches. In June 2011 I arranged to meet with a representative of the office of the Archbishop of Halifax and Yarmouth to seek assistance identifying contacts. He provided important feedback on my proposal that allowed me to reflect on the ways my own Baptist background influenced how I framed my research questions. We discussed at great length the advisory roles of parish councils and committees within the Roman Catholic governance structure, and the decision-making role of the parish priests. The conversation was valuable in helping me rethink how to make my approach relevant to Roman Catholic churches. He also raised important questions about the need for additional research in church and community education, and how my research might be relevant. He was able to suggest several churches that were potential candidates, both those that were engaged in successful transition and those whose transition was not progressing successfully. From these suggestions I identified two potential candidates.

Other candidates were identified through informal means. An acquaintance was a Pastor in a church beginning a transition or change process, and his church became a candidate. One church was located near my home, and I heard about their transition process through community conversations, and another pastor acquaintance. They were re-locating their Sunday services. I encountered one candidate through an article in a local newspaper, and was able

to follow up with members of my home church familiar with this congregation. I also posted a call for recommendations on Facebook to my own network of friends. Although some suggestions were made, no candidate churches were identified through social media.

Once I identified candidate churches in a transition or change process, I approached key informants in the church, usually a senior clergy person. The informant then brought my request to the leaders' group, whether it was the parish council, deacons' board, governance team etc. If the leaders were open to the study, I would meet with them to present the study, and to discuss confidentiality and non-disclosure. Eligible leaders to participate could include both ordained and lay leaders drawn from Christian congregations located in Nova Scotia, Canada. Ordained leaders for the purpose of this study are ministers of religion who have completed their denominational process of training and calling to pastoral ministry such as Priests, Ordained Deacons, and Pastors. Lay leaders are those who may or may not have theological training, but have been appointed or elected to an office of leadership within a local congregation. It was assumed that as leaders of congregations registered as non-profit organizations in the province of Nova Scotia, all the participants eligible would be mature and competent adults. It also was assumed that all leaders invited would be committed members of their religious organizations, and will have been placed in their office because of their leadership abilities. The participants in this study were those who have been duly appointed as leaders under the societies' bylaws/regulations. I was only concerned with those who were serving as

leaders at the commencement of the study, and not previous church leaders. There were other individuals who have leadership roles in the church but do not have the mandate to develop the future direction and vision of the church. In the event that a member resigned from the leadership during the study I planned to assess whether their data would be included in the analysis based on the point at which they resign. This did not become an issue.

My recruitment process, in retrospect was too haphazard, and much time was spent trying to contact potential research candidates. I believe a more effective approach would have been to work with denomination leaderships at a much earlier stage in developing the research plan. It appeared that most candidate churches engaged in transition were actively engaged with their denominations for guidance and resources. By working with denominational leaders I could more quickly identify churches in transition, and by partnering with denominational leaders, I believe I would have fewer trust issues.

3.2.4 Methods

After potential candidate churches were identified, I selected as my informant the most senior clergy person in each church and contacted them by email to invite them to participate in the study. I attached to the email a copy of the full letter of invitation, project description, and consent letter (Appendix D). If the informant indicated an interest in the project, I arranged to meet with them at a place of mutual convenience to discuss the project in greater detail. If the meeting was positive, informants were asked to present the project to their leadership team for their consideration. Most leadership teams met once a

month or less, and in most cases I found it would take several months for a decision to be made.

There were five meetings proposed with leaders. The first was a 30-minute information meeting where I would explain the study and answer any questions. Attending this meeting did not obligate the church or any individual leaders to participate in the study. They were given the opportunity to discuss the project without me present and determine whether as a team or as individuals they would participate in the study. If the leaders chose to participate they were asked to sign the consent form outlining what aspects of the study they agree to participate in.

If the leaders agreed to participate in the study, I requested a 60-90 minute meeting with the entire leadership team to conduct a semi-structured group interview about their corporate information seeking using an interview guide developed for this study (Appendix C). I also requested permission from the board/council to use church records to establish a timeline of the church's history and activities over the past fifteen years. I intended during this meeting to review some of the timeline information to ensure I have interpreted it correctly. In order to do this and elicit stories about the church, I had considered an adaption of a history workshop. Dubois (2005, pp. 133-157) described history workshops as "strategies for uncovering subaltern histories and silenced voices"

(p. 134). Meetings would be audio recorded and notes taken of leaders' answers and interactions.²

Following the group interviews, I asked to interview each leader individually. I indicated that leaders might participate in the group interview and decide not to participate in the individual interview. I explained that individual participation was voluntary, and individual participation would be kept confidential. I anticipated that most interviews would take place at the church, in leaders' homes or in a public place such as a coffee shop. If there were expenses such as travel or coffee shop bills, I would pay for these to a maximum of \$100.00 for the project. The goal of this interview was to gather information about individual leaders and understand their own personal information seeking activities. These interviews were also audio-recorded and I would take notes of the interview. These interviews would take less than sixty minutes. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a combination of manual coding and coding software.³ I researched the use of analysis software and was aware that the software I used was based on a grounded theory approach (Weitzman, 2000, p. 809). I was seeking to identify recurring themes in the transcribed data and considered these in light of the significant theoretical work done of information seeking for problem solving.

² I used two digital recorders for all interviews such as the Sony ICDSX68DR9 Digital Voice Recorder, the RCA VR5320R Digital Voice Recorder, or the iPad *VoiceRecorder* App with the *Blue Microphones Snowflake* USB Mic.

³ I used *HyperTranscribe Transcription Software for Audio and Video*, version 1.6.1, *HyperResearch Cross-Platform Qualitative Analysis Software*, version 3.5.2, <http://www.researchware.com>. *HyperResearch* is a code based theory builder that allows for the coding of text-based documents.

I requested the opportunity to observe a full leaders' meeting, preferably a regular business or planning meeting. Due to the confidential nature of these leadership meetings, I allowed audio recording of these meetings to be optional. Only one leadership group allowed me to audio-record the meeting. Notes were taken of these meetings and documentation circulated such as agendas were collected. I was an observer at these meetings, although in each church I was offered the opportunity to provide input as an outside expert. The leadership team determined the length of the leadership meeting, and meetings ranged from 90-120 minutes in length. These observations will help provide a context to the interviews.

I offered each church the opportunity to have a study results meeting for the leaders and/or congregation. It was at the discretion of the leadership team whether this meeting would be open to the congregation. If the churches requested a results meeting, I would record feedback from this presentation. It was not intended that I would revisit the conclusions drawn from the data, but this feedback would be useful for me in determining the effectiveness of this methodology. No leadership team requested a results meeting.

After consultation with the leadership teams, concerns were raised about the time required for leaders' participation. I offered the leadership teams the opportunity to opt out of some of the meetings. None of the teams chose to participate in the group interview.

As noted above, I requested permission from the leadership team to access and use church records pertaining to the history, membership, and

activities of the church. In the pilot study, and following Eiesland and Warren's guidelines (1998, pp. 44-70), I developed the congregational context through the creation of a congregational timeline and by conducting a physical tour of the church facility including the locations of information sources such as bulletin boards and literature tables. The demographic information I collected included general information about the church, its community, membership, and denominational affiliations. This information was obtained from the church, and through sources such as the Regional Development Agency and Statistics Canada.

In all the churches I collected general church documentation such as newsletters, bulletins, and magazines. Church libraries appeared to be an obvious source of convenient and theologically appropriate information, and each church had a collection of various sizes. In two of the churches I was able to review the borrowing records, and catalogued all non-fiction titles relating to leadership, decision-making, and theology in the two church libraries.⁴

As an important sub-question was the impact of technology on leaders' information seeking, I gathered general information about the online technologies used by the churches including websites and social media. I took screen captures of posts that were later anonymized.⁵ All the churches used software

⁴ To create library catalogues I used a mobile application for Mac: *Delicious Library 2.7*, version 2.7.6, <http://www.delicious-monster.com>.

⁵ To capture social media and web documents I used a software application for Mac *SnagIt 2.1.5*, Techsmith Corporation, www.techsmith.com.

for media presentations in worship services⁶ and to stream services online.⁷ Although they are not part of the original documentation capture plan, I did explore and collect several examples of digital media including streamed services.⁸ The documentation I collected enabled me to develop a picture of the church as a community that creates, uses, and disseminates information. In some activities, like services, where I was an active participant, I was limited in my ability to make notes. In those cases I recorded my recollections immediately following the event (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). Paper documents were preserved in binders, and where practical were digitized.

As part of this study, in each church, I attended a variety of non-leadership church events including worship services, congregational meetings, religion classes, and social events. Where there were services scheduled at different times I attended at least one at each time. In the pilot church I had the opportunity to preach and experience the service from the preacher's perspective. In two churches I was able to attend religious instruction events where members were instructed on seeking the will of God for their lives. I was able to attend church meetings where the church planning was discussed in all three churches. I was able to attend special leaders' events in all three churches where I was able to interact with external presenters/consultants. I volunteered in the library of one church for several months, and saw first-hand how leaders

⁶ The pilot church for example used *Easy Worship* Church Presentation Software, 2009. <http://www.easyworship.com>.

⁷ The pilot church for example used Livestream Original, <http://www.livestream.com>.

⁸ To capture streaming video I used a software application for Mac: Camtasia Studio 2.5.1, Techsmith Corporation, <http://www.techsmith.com>.

and the church membership were using resources. In another church I volunteered on the audio-visual team learning to use the software and engaged in discussions of its role in worship. I was invited to participate in an information fair and information luncheon in one church. These were all valuable learning events, and I collected a wealth of documents and notes on what I observed that informed my conclusions.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

3.3.1 Risks and Benefits

I expected that the process of discerning God's will for a congregation in transition might be difficult and potentially frustrating for these leaders. It was possible that some members would not wish to discuss disagreements or tensions in an effort to maintain working relationships or for fear of dredging up old or existing tensions. There was a concern for potential embarrassment and a fear of disclosing sensitive information or perceived prior errors in decision-making. I believed that the risks were minimal but took the following measures to minimize the risk to the participants. First, the study focused on the process of information seeking, gathering, evaluation and use rather than the outcomes of the decision making process. This emphasis helped diminish concern for exposure of particular decisions or outcomes. Additionally, the confidentiality commitments helped alleviate most concerns regarding exposure of problems or other sensitive materials. The risks for the church community were deemed minimal but provision was made to seek community approval for the study if deemed necessary by the leaders. Participation in this study created an

opportunity to reflect on how participants seek religious information and this may create opportunities for more effective seeking and discernment in future contexts. I provided a donation of \$250.00 to each church that I suggested could be directed toward the acquisition of leadership development materials. I provided the donation regardless of how many leaders chose to participate.

3.3.2 Informed Consent

As described above I met with each group of participants prior to data collection to explain the study and answer any questions. Study participants were provided with a letter describing in detail the study. The letter included a signature page where participants authorized in writing their agreement to participate in the study (Appendix D). This signature page included boxes for participants to indicate their willingness to be audio-recorded, and to have their quotations included in the study report. At various points in the study participants were verbally reminded that participation was voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any time. It was at the discretion of the leaders whether their participation in the study required the formal approval of the congregation. I was prepared to present the study, its aims and processes to the congregation either in a congregational meeting or through the normal church communication channels. None of the participating churches required congregational approval.

3.3.3 Data Collection and Management

The participants determined locations for interviews and observation sessions. I anticipated any group meetings would occur at the churches, as there would be concern for confidentiality around sensitive congregational issues.

The individual interviews I anticipated could occur in homes, a public place such as a coffee shop, or my office at Dalhousie University, but only one interview did not occur on church properties. The individual interviews were intended to share personal opinions and experiences and therefore I did not anticipate they would include confidential church information.

I collected some demographic data such as educational backgrounds and work experiences and although this data is personal data in nature, it was not considered particularly sensitive. Other personal data would include personal opinions and recollections of information seeking experiences. In the field, all digital audio recording devices and field notes were kept secure in a secured satchel. When I returned to Dalhousie all the audio recording devices, transcripts, field notes, written codes, consent forms, and signed documents were kept in a secure file cabinet in my office in the Sir James Dunn Law Library, Dalhousie University in accordance with ethics approval and guidelines. Any data for analysis was kept on my password-protected laptop, or password protected iPad. When this computer equipment was transported to my home it remained password protected and secure. Any software used for storage, collection, and analysis was also password protected. I plan to hold this data for at least five years post publication of any study results.

It was not possible to guarantee complete anonymity of all the participants since they represent a very small group and have many acquaintances within the community who might recognize their speech patterns in quotations and preferences/practices in the data. I did make an effort to maximize anonymity. I

have not attributed comments to specific individuals in this study and did not identify the particular congregation in the publication of the results. It was also possible that essential contextualizing information may identify this congregation to those familiar with the community. As noted above, written permission was requested to use quotations of participants, and I did not use any direct quotations from participants who did not provide that explicit permission. Efforts were made to anonymize the data. Two transcriptionists were used to transcribe audio files. The transcriptionists signed confidentiality agreements (Appendix E).

I notified the participants in writing and verbally that if in the context of this study I became aware directly or indirectly of actions that were deemed unlawful that I had an obligation to report these immediately to the appropriate agencies, the Halifax Regional Police or Child and Family Services.

3.3.4 Conflict of Interest

I knew one clergy person prior to this study but took care not to allow our relationship to place any undue obligations on the individual to participate. I had no relationship with any organization or association whose resources might be accessed by the participants. I was not a voting member of the congregations or denominations from which these participants are drawn. I did not exercise any senior leadership role in the organizations. I addressed any potential conflict by being particularly conscious of any concerns about confidentiality boards or councils might have if I had any future involvement in the organizations. I abstained from any congregational discussions or votes on matters that were

discussed in any confidential meetings I attended or in the interviews I conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the introduction I posed the question: “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’” I then presented two sub questions: “how do these leaders perceive the process of information seeking to discern God’s will for their church as different from how they would gather information to seek God’s will for themselves,” and “how do these leaders perceive new digital media impacting both their information seeking process and its outcome?” In this chapter I explored the information experiences of three groups of church leaders based on participant observation, document analysis, and interviews. I begin by providing an overview of the participant selection process and briefly describe two earlier abandoned research sites. I then present the three participant sites beginning with a portrait of the churches: contexts, histories, and challenges at the time of the study. I believed these backgrounds were important to understand the transitions considered in the study.

As will be observed, often the transitions faced by these churches have deep roots, and the critical decisions leaders wrestled with may have been many years in the making. For each of the narratives I present the churches as information places, where information is created, disseminated, gathered, and used in the daily lives of the churches. I draw attention to the impact of new technologies on the information activities of each church. This perspective is valuable as these are the specific information contexts in which these leaders

exercised their decision-making roles. In the third section of each narrative I focus on leaders' information contexts, where and how they gathered information, and how they evaluated and used it in the exercise of their duties as leaders and decision-makers. I conclude by identifying key themes that emerged from the three narratives. These themes are explored in detail in chapter five.

4.1 Overview: My Participants

In this section I describe all the churches identified as potential candidates for this study. I explain the characteristics that enabled me to classify the churches for comparisons, and provide a brief synopsis of each church. I also explain the two false starts that occurred in the study. My participants asked that I preserve their anonymity where possible so I use pseudonyms for the churches and where appropriate the individual leaders. My participants were aware that I would describe their churches and consequently people familiar with the churches may be able to identify them. This was a risk they were prepared to accept.

4.1.1 Classifying Participants

4.1.1.1 *Doctrinal Stance*

When gathering demographic data about the churches I considered a variety of characteristics that might influence leaders' information seeking activities. When considering churches as information places, as discussed in chapter 2, Porchella (1973, p. 98), and Wicks (1999) found that doctrinal stance was an important factor in clergy source selection in certain work roles so it was important to identify the religious affiliations (Anglican, Baptist, Catholic etc.) and

the doctrinal positions (conservative, moderate, liberal/progressive) of the churches.

Statistics Canada listed nine major Christian categories, and sixty-three additional sub-divisions. The candidate churches came from three of these categories: Baptist (five), Roman Catholic (two), and Pentecostal (one). The prominence of Baptists, the third largest Protestant group in Nova Scotia, is a result of the researcher's own networks. It is noteworthy that the five Baptist churches represent two different Baptist denominations. Attempts to recruit United Church of Canada and Anglican churches, the two largest Protestant Christian groups in Nova Scotia were unsuccessful. Baptists represent 8.8% (n=80,815) of Nova Scotia's population, Roman Catholics 32.9% (n=298,275), and Pentecostals 1.1% (n=9,595).

4.1.1.2 Church Size

I believed that church size might be a relevant factor in leaders' information use as larger churches could potentially offer greater resources, employ larger staffs, and have a wider range of local expertise. In this study I hypothesized that Internet access is changing information behaviour in local congregations. Research has shown however that accessing information online can be impacted by a number of factors such as educational attainment, geographic location, and income levels. Noce and McKeown (2008, p. 462) found "An urban-rural digital divide persists in Canada with the odds of using the Internet being almost one-and-a-half times greater for someone who lives in an urban area." In considering churches demographic criteria such as

urban/rural/suburban were important to understand.

The Churches identified as prospective study sites ranged in size from under one hundred attendees to over two thousand attendees. I classified churches with less than 200 attendees as small, 200-800 large, and over 800 as very large.⁹ Churches with sustained weekly attendances over 2000 have been defined as mega-churches although the designation is usually only applied to Protestant churches and not Catholic churches based on additional criteria like charismatic senior leadership, large staffs, regional draw, and contemporary worship (Hartford, 2013). One Roman Catholic Church included in this study however meets most of these criteria, and could be considered as verging on mega-church status. There were candidate churches from all of these size categories, although the majority of candidates were medium size churches. I applied Statistic Canada's population centre definitions for my geographic descriptors: rural and small town (outside the commuting zone of urban centres) (Statistics Canada, 2006), urban centre, and suburban (Statistics Canada, 2008). There were prospective study site churches from each of these geographic zones, two rural and small town churches, two suburban churches, and four urban churches.

⁹ John Kaiser, a consultant engaged by one of the participating churches, used these size categories, and I have adopted them for convenience. See also Susan Beaumont (2011) who further divides large churches into additional categories: Professional Church (400-800), Strategic Church (800-1200), and the Matrix Church (1200-2000).

4.1.1.3 Theological Stance

Theological stance is a more subjective church characteristic and I discussed this at length in chapter five. For the purposes of this chapter, churches were classified as “conservative”, “moderate”, and “liberal” which were admittedly problematic descriptions. Churches, as communities of faith, have official theological positions, but may harbour a range of orthodox and unorthodox viewpoints among the members. I sought to classify churches by official theological positions. As will be discussed elsewhere, this was more problematic when considering Catholic churches that share a common framework of doctrine and practice. Individual parishes and parishioners however may be more conservative or liberal in their views but this is more challenging to identify.

4.1.1.4 Nature of Transition

The final characteristic I considered is the nature of the transition. A Church transition could be: physical (a new building), financial (budget changes), theological (change in beliefs or practices), or structural (changes in governance or leadership). I considered that different transitions might require different kinds of information, and accordingly, different kinds of information seeking processes.

4.2 Prospective Study Site Sites Brief Descriptions

4.2.1 Pilot Phase

Prospective Study Site 1 was a mid-sized urban church. It was a Baptist church in the evangelical Protestant tradition and was theologically moderate

having a strong focus on social outreach. This church had just completed a governance restructuring process and was now entering a re-visioning exercise as a precursor to a building program. This church was initially a study participant in the pilot phase but did not complete the study as will be described below.

Prospective Study Site 2 was a small suburban church. It was a Baptist church in the evangelical Protestant tradition and was theologically conservative having a strong emphasis of evangelistic outreach. This church was engaged in a governance restructuring and re-visioning program. This church was a study participant in the pilot phase and I referred to it below as New Governance Church.

4.2.2 Themes Phase

Prospective Study Site 3 was a medium size urban church. It was a Baptist church in the mainline Protestant tradition, and was theologically liberal having a strong emphasis on social outreach and justice. This church had taken a particular doctrinal stance on a social issue that was bringing them into conflict with their denomination. This church was initially a study participant in the pilot phase but did not complete the study as will be described below.

Prospective Study Site 4 was a medium size rural church. It was a Baptist church in the evangelical Protestant tradition, and was theologically conservative having an emphasis on evangelistic outreach. This church had completed a building campaign and was engaged in a significant outreach and growth program. I did not pursue this church as a candidate due to the logistical challenges of completing the study.

Prospective Study Site 5 was a medium size small town church. It was a Roman Catholic Church. It appeared to adhere to official Catholic doctrine and practice. As far as I could discern, the leadership appeared theologically conservative. This church had just completed a merger of two churches and a building program. I did not pursue this church as a candidate due to the logistical challenges of completing the study.

Prospective Study Site 6 was a very large Roman Catholic Church. It also appeared to adhere to official catholic doctrine and practice. I would characterize the parish priest as theologically conservative, although I would not characterize all the leaders I met as theologically conservative. The church had just completed a merger of churches, a building program, and was now engaged in a re-visioning process. This church was actively engaged in evangelistic outreach. This church was a study participant in the theme phase and is referred to below as *One Ship Church*.

Prospective Study Site 7 was a large suburban church. It was a Baptist church in the evangelical Protestant tradition, and theologically was very conservative having a strong emphasis on evangelistic outreach. This church had completed one phase of a two-phase building program. The church was re-evaluating an ambitious vision, and was developing a five-year strategic plan. This church was a study participant in the themes phase and is referred to below as *Big Vision Church*.

Prospective Study Site 8 was a small urban church. It was a Pentecostal church in the evangelical Protestant and charismatic traditions, and was

theologically conservative having a strong emphasis on evangelical outreach.

The church was outgrowing their current facilities and was using rental facilities for some services. After consideration this church chose not to participate in the study.

Table 2: Candidate Churches

Phase	Name	Size	Location	Denom.	Transition	Theological
1	--	Medium	Urban	Baptist	Vision	Mainline
1	New Govern- ance	Small	Sub.	Baptist	Govern- ance	Conservative
2	--	Medium	Urban	Baptist	Theology	Liberal
2	--	Large	Rural	Baptist	Vision	Conservative
2	--	Medium	Town	Catholic	Merger	Mainline
2	One Ship	Very Large	Urban	Catholic	Merger/ Vision	Mainline
2	Big Vision	Medium	Sub.	Baptist	Vision	Conservative
2	--	Small	Urban	Pent.	Building	Conservative

4.2.3 False Starts

In both the Pilot and Theme phases of this study I began collecting data in a church that did not complete the study. I describe the two churches below, the transitions they were addressing and the reasons (as far as I can discern) for not participating. Since these churches withdrew, interview data was deleted and only publically known information is referred to below.

Prospective Study Site 1 was the first congregation approached for the pilot study. It was a Baptist church of approximately 400 members with a long tradition in the community and a strong social conscience. This church had significant potential as it had been identified in a national study in 1997 as an

exemplar of effective church life based on a variety of criteria including spiritual vital signs, numerical growth, and a balance between personal faith and social concern (Posterski & Nelson, 1997). The research conducted here provided important background data for my study. In 1997, the year of “Future Faith” study, the church had voted to begin an ambitious building campaign, but experienced a series of setbacks. The church re-affirmed the plan to move in 2009, and employed an external consultant to assist them in that process. On the consultant’s recommendation, the church began a governance restructuring process, and re-visioning process as precursors to a building program. The re-visioning process was very much framed as a search for “the will of God” for the church. I met in 2009 with pastoral staff to discuss the research study and leaders I spoke with seemed receptive to participating in my study. My impression after the meetings was that tensions within the church regarding the changes would jeopardize my ability to complete the data collection.

Prospective Study Site 3 was an urban Baptist church that ministers to approximately 350 families. It had recently withdrawn its membership in its denomination. I became aware of this church originally through a news article in the regional paper published in 2008. This church had announced its willingness to perform same-sex marriages bringing it into direct conflict with its denomination. I began corresponding by email in 2009, and met with the senior pastor in September 2009. He was interested in the study and provided excellent information on their church discernment process, and the significant role the leaders played in shepherding their church members through it. I began

gathering general information about the church while the leadership team discussed their participation in the study. In January 2010 the leadership team responded that although a number of members were interested in participating in the study, they could not continue due to the many demands of their time.

4.3 New Governance Church

4.3.1 What is New Governance Church?

During the recruitment phase of the pilot study, I had the opportunity to discuss this project with the pastor of the church I have called New Governance Church. He indicated that his church might be a good candidate for the pilot study. In December, 2008 – January 2009 his church had gone through a consultation process facilitated by their denomination. The Pre-Consultation Report (November 30, 2008) proposed the goal of the process was that the church, "...will be able [to] see itself clearly, identifying key strengths and necessary growth areas, and then have the support and resources of the Fellowship as it works to be all God desires the church to be." At that time I had already begun working with a pilot church. After the false start described above, I approached this church again, and they agreed to become my new study pilot church. The significant preparatory work of the church for their consultation process was invaluable for the study. They had been asked to survey the history and activities of the Church over the past 20 years, and provide a collection of supporting documents to the church mentor prior to the consultation meetings held on December 12-14, 2008. Much of that documentation was provided to me by the church and informs much of the discussion below.

New Governance Church was a Baptist church located in a suburban community outside the Halifax Regional Municipality in Nova Scotia. In 2009-2010, at the time of the study, the best statistics suggested that the suburban community had a population of 7,700 people with an average age of 38.8 years, slightly younger than the average of the adjacent municipality (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Based on the Statistics Canada Census Tract profile this was a community of overwhelmingly English speaking families, with a median family income 54% higher than the regional average, and slightly higher levels of educational attainment. The community largely consisted of single dwelling residential housing with a small business district. It had elementary, junior high, and senior high schools that have all seen steady growth over the previous five years. The community had a number of stores and services including a major grocery chain, and a variety of professionals' offices. There was a community centre and the department of recreation lists many clubs, sports, and recreational groups (HRM, 2008). There were five churches in the community representing the Roman Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Baptist, and Independent Evangelical traditions. It was a picturesque growing family-oriented community within easy commute to the major centre. This contrasted with the struggles *New Governance Church* had in connecting with families in the community, and their concern for lack of growth in the midst on a fast growing and dynamic community.

New Governance Church has had a long and varied history in this community. According to its own records prepared during its restructuring and

re-visioning process, it was originally founded in 1872 with a membership of 19. For most of the period of 1902 to 1980, it experienced limited growth and was served by a Pastor from a Baptist church in an adjacent community. The church, with the financial and practical assistance of the denomination's mission board, called their first full time pastor in 1982. The church had five pastors from 1982 until the study began in 2009. There were several years during this period when the church was without a pastor and the Deacons led prayer meetings and church services supported by denominational staff. The church experienced rises and falls in membership ranging between 24 to 41 members, but had active children and music ministries. The church also experienced changes in its denominational affiliation leaving one Baptist denomination in 1991, remaining independent for a period of time before joining a more conservative Baptist denomination in 2004.

According to church records, in 2009, the church had 36 members and 25 adherents. Adherents regularly attended the church but for various reasons had not been admitted into full membership. They had no legal voting rights. The average age of the regular participants was estimated to be 55 years. The current pastor had been serving in this church since 2006. Until the governance restructuring process in 2008, the church had a deacon board of four elected deacons that provided spiritual leadership, a trustee board of four members responsible for the facilities, and a treasurer reporting to the deacon board. Following the transition the church had a governance team of five, with the treasurer and volunteers reporting to the pastor, who in turn reported to the

governance team. There was a mid-week children's program that averaged 50 children a week and 10 in the Sunday school program. Their youth program averaged 25 teens a week. Most of the children and youth, and some of the program volunteers came from outside the church, many from neighbouring churches. The church had a weekly prayer meeting, a men's Bible study, and a women's Bible study. The church supported eight missionaries (two couples and six individuals) in local, national, and international Missions projects. The pastor and a group of seventeen volunteers ran the programs of the church.

There were two churches in the area that impact significantly on this church. Within a kilometer was an independent evangelical church of approximately 200 members. Within nine kilometers there was a large Baptist church of approximately 800 members belonging to the same denomination. In one document prepared during the Church's restructuring process, it was suggested that having these two larger churches nearby limited the church's ability to attract and keep new members.

The facilities of *New Governance Church* in 2009 were comparably large and modern given the size of the congregation. The congregation had originally purchased 40 acres of land in 1980, and has over time sold lots for development, largely financing the construction of their current facilities. The church's building had been constructed in four phases beginning with an original building in 1983, a converted house. This housed an auditorium, a kitchen, four classrooms, washrooms, and storage. A renovation in 1992 added a new entryway and additional classrooms. In 2002 an auditorium with moveable seating for 158 was

added with a raised control booth, and new office space. It was a bright and modern facility decorated with colourful banners. The banners had some images but the central feature was Bible verses: "Give thanks unto the Lord for he is Good" one banner proclaimed. These banners were changed seasonally, and emphasized the importance of Bible texts in this church.

Along the front of the audio-visual booth was a row of frames pictures of the missionaries the Church supported. In 2008 an elevator was installed to make the second floor more accessible. The Church had a member in a wheelchair and a number of older members. The parking lot behind the church accommodated a maximum of 90 cars. The Church was fully wired for sound systems and data projectors, and a local area computer network, and a church wide wireless network had been recently installed. Members told a story of a phone call from a neighbor who asked if the church had an open wireless network. The neighbor explained that groups of teens from the nearby school were hanging around the outside of the church to access the open network. The church leaders decided to password-protect the network and all members had to request a password.

The church itself is Christian, evangelical, and Baptist. Baptists in Canada have been historically identified as having several central beliefs: the lordship of Christ, separation of church and state, sufficiency of the Scriptures as a rule regarding faith and practice, the priesthood of all believers, soul liberty (freedom of conscience), regenerate church membership (members must be regenerated or "born again"), ordinances as symbols of spiritual realities, fellowship with

others, and world mission (Jones, 1989, pp. 1-16). Individual Baptist denominations may have additional beliefs shared by their members but the beliefs above are characteristic of most Canadian Baptists. The New Constitution of *New Governance Church* outlined the beliefs and practices. It emphasized the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Bible as sole authority for faith and practice, the need for conversion, and the responsibility of members “to be zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of our Saviour.” It stressed regenerate church membership, fellowship with likeminded churches, and the independence of the local church.

4.3.2 *New Governance Church* as an Information Space

In the literature review above, the idea of “information ground” was defined as “as synergistic 'environment[s] temporarily created when people come together for a singular purpose but from whose behaviour emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information”(Pettigrew, 1999, p. 811). In a local church context people gather to worship, learn, and socialize, though in these contexts the members described it as fellowship (Vine, 1988, p. 90).¹⁰ Churches are also places where information is created, accessed, and used to support and enrich the common and individual lives of their members. I called these information spaces. I describe, below, the formal information channels and sources, and later in the interviews I considered the informal information channels within these churches.

¹⁰ “Fellowship” is from the Greek noun “Koivonia” meaning communion, fellowship, sharing in common. The term implies partnership, and communication.

New Governance Church was a consumer and producer of information for religious purposes. Like most small churches, New Governance used a variety of onsite communication tools. I found four bulletin boards at different places throughout the church. Two were located in the Sunday school area where they were used to create picture collages to promote the weekly Bible verse: “Do not transform, be transformed”¹¹ was one week’s verse. One was used to advertise youth events: “What’s happening,” and the fourth was a general bulletin board with notices and signup sheets for events like a church potluck supper and a call for nursery volunteers. It was located just inside the parking lot entrance in the main foyer. This entrance, rather than the front entrance, was the one used by most of the church members.

Inside the main office off the main lobby was a four-month calendar that served as the master list of weekly regular and special events in the life of the church. This was used primarily by the pastor and volunteers but was accessible by the whole congregation. The church, though small, was busy, and staff members used an abbreviation and colour coding system to record events on the calendar. There were also literature displays mounted on the walls and on tables in the main lobby promoting various groups and services like a local Christian school, a counselling service, and information on Church supported missionaries. The pastor approved materials displayed in the Church.

¹¹ “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Holy Bible, 1988, Romans 12:2).

The Church staff produced in-house print bulletins each week for distribution to the members. The ushers handed out bulletins to people as they entered the auditorium for the Sunday services. The bulletins included that week's Bible readings, a weekly schedule of church events, and weekly announcements such as denominational news, advanced notices, volunteer opportunities, and prayer requests from members. There was also contact information including phone numbers and email addresses. For special events, like children's club activities, the Church staff produced advertising bulletin inserts and posters.

The Church also communicated through its new website that had been redesigned that year. The website included general information about the Church and its programs. It also included an online calendar of events, and a Google map. The website also included a media page where visitors could access live and on-demand streaming video of the services, and archived audio versions of the messages. The Church had a Facebook page where the pastor and volunteers could post church news and inspirational materials such as Bible verses, and music and video clips, and permit friends and visitors to comment and interact. Approximately 30 of the Church members and adherents had liked the page. On occasion the Facebook posts might provoke discussion. One post at Christmas time was a Youtube music video called "It's about the Cross" (Go Fish, 2006) that initiated a discussion on the relationship between Christmas and Easter.

The Church disseminated print literature to the membership. Gospel tracts were available in a literature display by the door for members to take and distribute. Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelistic organization, produced the tract available at that time: "Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws" (Bright, 2009) and it has been widely used by evangelicals since 1956. Copies of a daily devotional guide, *Our Daily Bread* (RBC Ministries, 2009), were available for free on a table at the entrance to the auditorium both for members and visitors. It appeared to be actively used by many church members.

The church subscribed to several magazines that were available to church members. One was *The Evangelical Baptist*, the magazine of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada. The purpose of the magazine is "to enhance the life and ministry of church leaders and members in Fellowship congregations by providing articles, resources and news that reflect evangelical values, a common mission as well as a shared sense of identity and vision" (Evangelical Baptist, 2009, p. 3). One article in the issue circulating at that time was "Following God and Leading Change: Striking the Balance of Spiritual and Strategic" (pp. 10-11). The article sought to provide churches a framework "for living out the divine plan" (p. 10) by emphasizing concepts like the sovereignty of God ("He has already determined the outcome") (p. 10), the headship of Christ over the Church ("We are the body of Christ-doing the work of God on earth") (p. 10), the Great Commission Continues ("the church changes in order to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples"), and Church Change is Normal (p. 11). It was excerpted from a book on church change and planning for success

(Anderson, 1992, pp. 238-244) and suggested that church change was a denominational concern. These ideas emerged repeatedly throughout my study.

Another magazine available in the church was *Faith Today: The Magazine of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada*. The mission of the magazine is “To Connect, Equip and Inform Evangelical Christians in Canada” (2009, p. 1). This pastor drew my attention to an article in the current issue, “Finding Fellowship Online” (p. 5). It considered how the Internet and social media were changing people’s experience of their faith. Interestingly, though the article cited several Canadian academics and pastors, it featured the research of Heidi Campbell cited extensively in the literature review above. The production and use of social media was a concern of *New Governance Church* as will be discussed below.

The Church provided its members with a small lending library of several hundred volumes located in the foyer by the main entrance of the Church. Many of the books were adult, juvenile or children’s fiction but the collection did contain 63 non-fiction titles on theology (e.g. Lightner, 1991), faith (e.g. Marr, 1995), and personal growth (e.g. Cloud and Townsend, 1995). These titles were exclusively from Evangelical Christian authors and publishers, but were predominately older works from the 1970s to the early 1990s.¹² I did note that none of these titles specifically addressed church governance, change management or leadership issues generally, and the non-fiction titles did not appear to have been frequently borrowed.

¹² The oldest work in the collection was from 1937 (Ironsides) and a lone title from the 2000s (Graham, 2004).

New Governance Church had developed its own systems to disseminate information about the Evangelical Christian faith, their Baptist beliefs, and the church and its activities to the Church's members and the wider community. The Church was also a creator of new information, and a re-user of information, and this was most evident in the Sunday morning services. I attended a variety of services between November 2009 and March 2010, and kept notes on many of them. The services usually opened in prayer, followed by an introduction, and announcements. The church worship team then led the congregation in a time of singing.

The Church had recently adopted a new style of worship that included mostly Contemporary Christian music,¹³ a decision that was not without controversy in the church. For example: on February 7, 2010 Sunday's order included all choruses: "Did you feel the Mountains Tremble" (Smith, 1994), "Everlasting God" (Brown, 2005), "Better in One Day" (Redman, 2000), "Psalm 121" (Doerkson, 1990), and "Facedown" (Redman, 1999). Each week of Tuesday evenings the worship team met to prepare a program of worship, supported by piano, electric and acoustic guitars, and drums. The Church used subscription software called EasyWorship (2009) on a Toshiba laptop to create dynamic visual presentations from a library of Christian choruses, picture backgrounds, and video clips. Additional media can be uploaded into the presentation in the form of text, Adobe pdf, Microsoft Powerpoint, or video/image files created by the operator or downloaded from the Internet. One Sunday

¹³ For a brief explanation of this music genre see Chapman, 2010, 117-118.

service, for example, included a Powerpoint presentation of the photographs from a recent children's program event, a Kub Kar rally. The presentation was manually coordinated with the audio-visual volunteers in the sound booth. Each presentation was later archived as a project and a permanent record of the service.

Following the worship time was the sermon. The Sunday sermons at *New Governance Church* were original works of Bible exposition and application prepared by the pastor and in his absence by either guest speakers from other churches or by lay leaders from the church. I had the opportunity to preach at *New Governance Church*, and my experience there was not dissimilar to my earlier pastoral experiences. The pastor's own description of his sermon preparation was considered in his interview described below. He studied the Bible, consulted commentaries, and used a variety of sources to find illustrations for his lessons. He drew on personal anecdotes, biographies and even fiction, but also video, music, and even social media.

During one sermon (January 24, 2010), he first referenced a book and then immediately an online forum before returning to the Bible. "Recently, I heard in one of these forums," he said in one sermon, "people were talking about conspiracy theories...someone made a comment that there is likely a cure for cancer out there but because there is such a huge institution out there built around treatment and research" there is a disincentive to make it known. A cancer doctor responded that no amount of money would stop him from sharing a cure if he had it, and the pastor equated this with the need for church members

to share their faith with a world that needed it. During another service (November 29, 2009), the pastor attempted to use a Youtube video of a famous sermon “That’s My King” (Lockridge, 2008) but had difficulty finding a good enough version online. References to Facebook and blogs were common. There appeared to be no conflict for the Pastor or members in using online sources in preaching at *New Governance Church*.

The pastor frequently made reference to biographies of notable protestant missionaries as exemplars of the Christian life in sermons. During one of these services the pastor spoke on prayer and referenced George Mueller, the 19th century evangelist and founder of orphanages across England (Benge, 1999). Mueller was known for the miraculous answers to his prayers in times of great need. The pastor recited a story from Mueller’s biography, at a time when Mueller’s orphanage housed eighty-one children and nine staff: “On August 18, 1838, George wrote in his journal, I have not one penny in hand for the orphans. In a day or two again many pounds will be needed. My eyes are on the Lord.” The authors noted, “By the end of the day five pounds had arrived, a gift from a woman who had sold some of her jewelry for the benefit of the orphans. It was enough money to buy food for a day, but by evening, they were back in the same situation. On August 20, George again received a gift of five pounds, which was also used to buy food. The next day it was twelve pounds and three pounds the following day.” The authors (and the pastor) observed, “Each time he prayed, money arrived in the nick of time” (Benge, 1999, pp. 132-133). Stories from Mueller’s life became important example for the church on the power of prayer.

The services not only drew on online resources but were accessible online. *New Governance Church's* sermons were all audio-recorded using *Audacity* editing software, produced into mp3 files on a Toshiba laptop, archived for later listening by absent members, and posted online as audio podcasts. The services also were streamed online in their entirety using an application called *Livestream*. The services were also recorded using a Sony mini-DV professional camera, connected to a Macbook laptop, and streamed in real time to the Livestream website. The Livestream application allowed the audio-visual volunteers to add themes and overlays ("welcome to the morning service") to the video feed. The application also included tools such as view counters and a chat function so viewers could interact with the audio-visual staff and each other online. The streamed services could be archived for several weeks and links added to the church website and social media pages.

Each week I observed a few online viewers, usually friends and absent members from the church. One Sunday while I was in the audio-visual booth members of a church in Tyumen, Russia joined the service online, and passed on their greetings. However the presence of cameras also caused tension in the Church. One Sunday in July a member commented to me in the audio-visual booth, "I think that there should be somewhere where people can sit without being on the camera." The member wanted to know how narrowly the camera was focused. I noted after that that many members sat on the sides of the auditorium rather than the centre to avoid appearing in the streaming video. The ability to extend the boundaries of the service and create an interactive preaching

experience offered the potential to transform traditional forms of preaching and worship, but not everyone was comfortable with the perceived invasion of their privacy. Although many churches are beginning to develop privacy policies, I was unable to find any privacy policy about the use of live or archived streaming video of services for *New Governance Church*, nor any of the other study sites.

Technology impacted the service experience in other ways. In this church it seemed important for members to follow the Bible readings in their own Bibles. I noted from my vantage point in the back that several members regularly used handheld devices to access the Bible online using the churches wireless network. Most were using a smart phone app called *YouVersion Bible*¹⁴ that was available for Blackberry, Apple, and Android phones. Launched in 2007 by Lifechurch, an American megachurch, the multilingual YouVersion Bible app had been installed on 3 million mobile devices by 2009 (Youtube, 2011). I also installed the app and was surprised by the number of versions and languages available as well as features for annotating, and sharing comments online. By 2014 the app was installed on over 125 million devices. This does suggest that *New Governance Church* had a number of early technology adopters. Members also used mobile devices to access the streaming video and chat features during the service. Although they were onsite they were interacting online with those offsite and with each other during the service.

¹⁴ For a brief discussion of the development of this app see Hutchins, 2012.

4.3.3 New Governance Leaders' Seeking

In the previous section I described the context including the information resources and activities of the members of *New Governance Church*. In the following section I considered the information experiences of leaders in a corporate decision making context, two Governance Team meetings (September 23, 1990 and December 16, 2009); in a church decision making context, a congregational annual meeting (January 27, 2010); and finally individually seeking, gathering and using information through individual interviews. I also included a note on the use of outside consultants by *New Governance Church* leaders.

4.3.3.1 Governance Team Meeting # 1

This first Governance Team meeting I attended was on September 23, 2009. As was their practice the meeting followed the regular church prayer meeting, and there were five leaders present, the pastor and the four elected leaders. The purpose of this meeting was to explain the research study and answer leaders' questions. I had discussed with the leaders my intention to share the research at two upcoming conferences. One leader was concerned how their religious beliefs and practices like prayer would be viewed by researchers at these conferences. I explained my qualitative approach, and that I would take their practice and beliefs at face value.

In the ensuing discussion the pastor shared two stories of the power of prayer. The first story was about a nearby church that needed to temporarily relocate for several months. Their present building had been sold and the

construction of their new facility had taken longer than planned. They were faced with a choice between using another church on Sunday afternoons and leasing space in a local mall. The church option was in all respects preferable, as the mall would require significant setup, and faced the barrier of not looking or feeling like “church”. After a period of prayer, the board members individually all felt that God wanted them to move to the mall. This move had a variety of unexpected benefits that only became apparent months later such as a new sense of community teamwork and opportunities to connect with many Sunday shoppers who otherwise would not have attended the church. I had heard this story previously in other contexts and it became an important example of God’s leading in unexpected ways for the leaders of *New Governance Church*. The second story shared was one of missionary George Mueller, a favourite of the pastor as noted above.

The recitation of these two stories (well known to the leaders) appeared to serve two functions: to reaffirm the leaders own belief in Divine leading through prayer, and to emphasize the differences between church leaders’ decision-making and that of other nonprofit leaders.

4.3.3.2 Governance Team Meeting # 2

The second leadership meeting I attended was the Governance Team meeting held in early December 2009. An earlier meeting had been postponed for weather. The meeting was described to me in the email correspondence as a “brainstorming meeting” in addition to other important Governance business. The governance team regularly communicated using email and Googledocs although

one leader did not have access to email at home and required documentation to be in print. This was an issue as leaders did not always have access to the same information. The pastor told me that the leaders felt this was an important meeting for me to attend, as part of the meeting was to be led by a consultant.

Prior to the meeting there was the regular church prayer meeting. The church prayer meetings usually included a short devotional by the pastor, a time for sharing church prayer concerns, and then the prayer time when individual members would take turns praying for the concerns. I noted that several members prayed for the church leaders, asking that, "God would lead the leadership team." Prayer for God's leading became an important theme throughout all the leaders' decision-making processes as was discussed below. There were six church leaders who attended the Governance Team meeting, the pastor, four elected leaders, and the youth leader.

The Governance Team meeting began at 7:50pm after the prayer meeting and ended at 10:40pm. Despite an agenda and the consultant's list of "Fact Finding" questions circulated by email prior to the meeting, it became clear that not all the leaders understood the purpose of the meeting. One leader asked, "I'm sorry, I'm... just so I'm straight where we are coming from...so this has nothing to do with our website and all that right?" This was the first indication that the use of social media was an issue. It was evident though as the discussion unfolded that they all recognized the problem: the church's inability to attract people and get their message out to their community. Members commented: "why do people leave, I don't always know why," "We lack a deeper connection.

Are people growing here”, “Maybe it’s not always the message...I like the guy [---] and I want to see him,” and “a very friendly church but no friends.” One example that elicited discussion the children’s program that succeeded in attracting children but not their parents. The teen program was well attended but a leader observed their hope that teens would connect to the church never materialized, “For some reason that hasn't happened and maybe there is an opportunity there to connect that we are missing?” The frustration expressed by the leaders surprised me, “so close, this close,” an older member said in reference to their previous attempts to grow the church.

The consultant planned to use a number of ‘Fact Finding’ questions that would in his words, “help better identify our audience and the respective key messages that will find their way into future communication channels.” The consultant led the leaders through a process of reflection on their image in the community. Older leaders shared extensively from their prior experiences in the church, while younger ones also shared stories they had heard from other churches: “When I first became a Christian...”, “I was talking to a young couple...”, “We did that once.” They discussed whether the “Baptist” name turned off some people, and if a more neutral name, “fellowship” (popular since the Lord of the Rings movie), would be more inviting. A variety of program ideas were discussed such as the *Alpha* program (2013), an international religious education program, taken by one leader, to create an inviting place for those curious about the church and Christianity. The conversation turned to the importance of creating safe connections and friendships within the church, and a

number of the leaders shared their personal stories of coming to the church including the consultant. The question was asked by a younger leader, “how do you get people to start the trial?” The leaders began to explore how they could extend the invitation, to “provide people with a means of investigating.” Leaders discussed opportunities to welcome the community into the church such as attractive signage and hosting community events such as polling stations. Leaders reported on meetings with community leaders to identify community needs, such as helping with seniors, and cleaning the cemetery, as a means to make community connections.

The consultant described how these activities could help the church build its brand in the community, increase visibility, and attract particular demographics. Younger leaders were more inclined to suggest radical options that included further changes to the traditional formats of services. Leaders were divided on the value of changes like the move to contemporary worship styles.

Important themes that arose in the discussions were the role of theology in information seeking and use, the role that technologies play in communicating, and how leaders self-restricted their use of information sources when in the leadership role. Much of the discussion could have occurred at most not-for-profit leadership meetings. It is significant that thrice during the meetings leaders brought the discussion back to the unique mission of the church. Early in the meeting a leader raised the importance of evangelism in discussing programs: “If you died tonight, would you go to heaven,” and the mysterious role of the Holy Spirit in leading people to the church. Another leader raised the church’s calling

to make disciples, “we are commanded to do it.” Though open to using various tools and programs to make connections, a leader stressed that the task of the church was to go “where you cross over from meeting a social need to meeting a spiritual need”, and “there is a point that differentiates us from marketing a business...and an evangelical church...we are here to explain Christ.”

The leaders’ differing perceptions about technologies were also evident in the discussions. The website, social media, and Livestream feed were described as a safe way to explore the church and service, and the leaders planned to use more web analytics to investigate use and impact. Other leaders were critical of the role of technology in the church: “I think that one of the problems with social media, you don’t get that relationship right...So you lose all that emotion...I think it is isolating people.” Some leaders shared positive experiences with social media enabling people to connect. Despite divisions regarding the use of technologies, many leaders, even in the meeting, remained connected online. Leaders would check phone messages during the meeting and three times during the meeting someone’s phone rang. I met with the pastor later that month (December 29, 2009) to talk about apparent divisions within the group, often along age lines. The pastor explained that the younger leaders were very engaged online, technically knowledgeable, and well read on the current trends in church technology use. One blog regularly consulted was ChurchMag (2013), a blogging site that offered tips, code, and podcasts on a variety of topics of interest to churches.

The leaders of *New Governance Church*, appeared to take their role very seriously, and were committed to the task of leading the church to engage their community. In the course of this meeting, leaders relied heavily on personal memories and experiences when planning their future direction. Leaders used trusted people including community leaders, denominational sources, consultants, or knowledgeable church members. Using secular experts and resources appeared to be acceptable by the leaders but only within the context of their own theological beliefs, and their understanding of the unique ministry of the church. A number of the leaders did not come from a Baptist background, and were less familiar with Baptist doctrine and practice. They tended to make reference to evangelical beliefs more generally. Younger leaders, with less church experience, were more likely to look to external sources of information including online information about programs and activities in other churches. Prayer played a role in this meeting as preparatory in seeking God's leading.

4.3.3.3 Annual Meeting

Baptist churches practice a form of congregational government where leaders take direction from the membership. In January 2009 I had the opportunity to attend the *New Governance Church* annual members' meeting. Twenty-two people were present for the meeting, the majority being older members. I understood that the church was facing financial challenges and that this would be discussed at this meeting. I asked some of the members about the usual conduct of meetings, and although some were concerned the meeting would be tense, members seemed positive. The pastor began the meeting at

7:15 pm with a devotional based on the Biblical passage John 15:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” Following this was a prayer time where several members offered prayers. There was an emphasis in the prayers on the Lordship of Christ over the Church and its work. Several members used the Bible (1988) phrases: “direct our paths,” and “lean not on our own understandings” (Proverbs 3:4-6). They also voiced God’s concern for the work and the growth of the church, one member commenting, “God is concerned for our lost neighbours. God is concerned for our growth.”

The business meeting began with the minutes of previous meetings, and members raised questions about procedures, references, and constitutional requirements. Each of the church ministries then provided a report of their activities. One report was about recent meetings with representatives from three levels of government to discuss community needs in respect to teens, seniors, and single moms. The purpose of the meetings was to discern how the church could assist in meeting those needs. This led into a discussion about the use of the church facilities by community groups. Most of the ministry reports however were received without comment until reports about the children’s and youth programs. The members were concerned about older children graduating out of their programs, and the lack of connection between many of the teens in the teen program and the church. Many teens did not regularly attend the church, and the church members wanted to create relationships with them. The members referred to the church’s new strategic plan that identified outreach to teens as a priority. Members were reminded of the Bible verse, “I am the LORD...do not

fear” (Isaiah 41:13). I interpreted this as an attempt to assure members prior to difficult discussions. The other area that generated much discussion was the church budget and the support of missionaries. Missionary support was a long-standing practice of the Church, and was important to the members. They considered it important to locate records about commitments to missionaries, and where these were not available they relied heavily on personal memories of previous commitments where records of discussions were not always available: “didn’t we decide,” “who decides,” and “didn’t we settle this.”

The conversation then turned to a discussion of how to decide Church priorities, and this was referred back to the Governance Team. The Pastor shared again the verse “do not fear” and they broke for a prayer time to seek the Lord’s leading. At 9:30pm the pastor presented the new Guiding Principles document prepared by the Governance Team and distributed to the members for the first time. The members were given several weeks to consider the documents to prepare for a town hall meeting. The pastor spoke about the new mission statement and strategic plan, citing scripture, and describing the historical church documents they had uncovered through the restructuring process. He also shared testimonies from members of the church including board members that I interpreted as “church family memories.” The pastor presented an action plan for congregational discussion. He closed the meeting in prayer, “Lord...guide our steps, govern our path....” This meeting provided a snapshot of church decision-making where members drew on historical records

and external expertise, as well as personal memories and experiences, the Bible and prayer.

4.3.4 Individual Seeking (Five Interviews)¹⁵

In the weeks following the Governance Team meeting, I had the opportunity to interview five of the church leaders to investigate their information experiences both in their everyday lives, and in their role as church leader.

The first set of questions focused on information seeking in everyday life situations. Examples of everyday life situations were hobbies and household tasks, but a two of leaders also described typical work problems. When asked about their everyday life information seeking leaders described themselves as feeling confident in their ability to find answers to information problems they regularly encountered. In the scenarios they described four of the leaders talked about going online for answers (Google, Wikipedia), four consulted knowledgeable people, one cited television programs and one used information at hand. Accessibility, ease of use and social factors like friendship and trust appeared to be important criteria for source selection.

We then talked about the ways leaders sought information for their own spiritual growth, and it appeared that they approached this in a similar manner to their non-religious information seeking. Leaders identified collectively thirty-six information sources that they relied on. Four sources were traditional: the Bible, non-fiction and fiction books, prayer, and conversations with other Christians.

¹⁵ Much of the material in this section has been previously published in Michels, David. "Seeking God's Will: Information Seeking of Leaders of Churches in Transition." *Canadian Journal for Information and Library Science*, 36(1), 2012.

The use of the Bible also included Bible reference tools like dictionaries and concordances (e.g. Cruden, 1967; Strong, 2010). All five leaders cited the Bible and prayer as information sources and four respondents identified the Bible as the most important. I had the opportunity to observe three of these leaders in Bible teaching roles, and personal Bible study was an obvious passion for them. The leader who did not identify the Bible as his most important resource, felt less confident in his knowledge of the Bible. He however identified “people” as his most important resource, as they were important to his understanding of the Bible: “they can show you...right where it is in the Bible.”

When leaders were asked what they were reading for their own spiritual development, the Minister referenced a number of non-fiction books of religious themes such as *Simply Jesus and You* (Stowell, 2006) and *Why Men Hate Going to Church...*(Murrow, 2004). *Simply Jesus* is a short book written by an evangelical (but not Baptist) pastor to be used as a devotional tool to promote spiritual growth. Using selected Bible passages supported by the author’s commentary and illustrating stories, the author challenged his readers to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus by removing distractions that hinder that focus. Another leader described a similar book, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Piper, 2003) by a popular evangelical American Baptist pastor. Piper wrote, “God created us to live with a single passion: to joyfully display his supreme excellence in all the spheres of life. The waster life is the life without this passion.” *Why Men* in contrast is a socio-cultural study of statistical decline in the attendance of men in American churches. Rather than a clergy person the author was television

writer/producer, but the book is still deeply rooted in an evangelical Christian perspective. Bible studies were also important tools for personal growth, and leaders referred to *Community Bible Study Canada* (2013) *Campus Crusade for Christ* (2013), and John Piper's *Desiring God* (2013) ministry as valuable resources. These are all conservative evangelical ministries that operate as para-church groups, that is, without direct church oversight. Two leaders referenced the fiction and non-fiction writings of Anglican apologist C.S. Lewis, particularly *Mere Christianity* (Lewis, 1987). *Mere Christianity*, unlike Lewis' well-known fictional works,¹⁶ is a collection of essays that explores basic Christian theology and many challenges in living the Christian faith. The popularity of this author and work is indicative of the leaders' own theological worldview. For example, though generous in some areas of doctrinal disagreement, Lewis was at other times unbending:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (p. 52)

Leaders also used media sources: Christian radio programs, and television, websites and social media (Youtube, blogs and Twitter). CJLU the

¹⁶ E.g. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *Till we Have Faces: A Myth Retold*.

local Christian radio station airs Christian music and evangelical Christian programming including *Focus on the Family Ministries*, *Back to The Bible*, *Insight for Living*, *In Touch* and *Voice of Prophecy*. These programs reflect a diversity of theological perspectives within the evangelical movement such as Baptist, Christian Reformed, Christian Brethren, and Pentecostal. One leader also described accessing Christian music through Youtube videos. Christian television also played a role in spiritual development. One leader described a Canadian religious television program he regularly accessed on Vision TV called *Door of Hope*. I was surprised to find that this program reflected a Pentecostal theology. There are significant differences between Pentecostal doctrine and conservative Baptist doctrines, and many key Pentecostal teachings have been officially rejected by this church's denomination. Two of the leaders followed Christian blogs and tweets online as sources of inspirational materials.

The remaining sources used for personal spiritual development were conversations either with people, as four members described, or with God, described by all members. Other Christians generally were important: "the people in the church...I hang around with these people", but pastor and partners (wife, girlfriend) were specifically named. Four respondents identified prayer as very important in their daily spiritual development.

What was noticeably absent in these interviews was any reference to any of the church's library resources, and I never observed any leader using these resources. This might suggest that leaders, like clergy, relied on personal libraries or others recommendations for print resources. When leaders were

asked how they became aware of the resources selected, three described recommendations from others. One leader explained that an older couple had mentored him, and they directed him to specific print resources like Bible dictionaries and concordances that he still relied on. Another leader described how a campus group had connected him with many useful online resources. Two leaders spoke about their own ability to locate appropriate resources, while other leaders indicated that online searching and reputable websites offered links to useful resources. Throughout the five interviews I identified sixteen criteria the leaders used to select their sources: doctrinal soundness (4x), advice of others / good reputation (5x), usefulness (3x), convenience (3x) and divine leading (1x). Just as doctrinal soundness is important in the sources leaders used in decision-making, so also was the importance of theology as they sought information for their own personal spiritual growth. Despite the importance leaders placed on “doctrinal soundness” and good theology, leaders appeared open to accessing information sources from Christian groups outside their own Baptist tradition for personal faith building.

I then interviewed the leaders about their individual preparation for their leadership roles to determine how they sought information to guide their leadership for the church. I was struck by how seriously these leaders took their leadership roles, suggesting they were highly motivated information seekers. One leader said: “This is not the Kiwanas club.... They do very good things... but this is not what this church is about. It has a dealing with God....” This observation revealed a significant tension: all the leaders believed God was

leading them, yet felt, “it’s obviously a difficult thing to do to seek the will of God.” The task, as described by one leader, was creating a consensus within the group so that all members would feel at peace that it was God’s will: “we could interpret that for our own lives, but when you do it in a group setting and we are all praying for the same thing, we don’t all feel led in the same way and so it is difficult...to see the will of God sometimes...” The leaders shared stories of decisions they had to make where they were divided such as calling a new minister. The leaders were self-conscious about their role as leaders, and wanted to ensure that, as one leader stressed, they wouldn’t “make a mistake.”

Four leaders described prayer for divine leading as an important means of preparing for their decision-making roles: “to see how the Lord wants to lead you.” Prayer had an important place throughout this study, and leaders frequently spoke about prayer: “you know that God hears every prayer,” “your basic [method] is just pray over it...to pray what your role is,” “God is here with me,” and “I did spend a lot of time praying about it.” One leader described praying before the meeting, “God, don’t let me harm anybody...[through my decisions]”. Two leaders engaged in Bible/Theological study as a means of preparation. Another described talking with people.

The minister spoke about using books recommended by the denomination on leadership and church growth. At that time he was reading: *Hit the Bull’s Eye* (Borden, 2003), *Winning On Purpose* (Kaiser, 2006) and *Breaking the Missional Code* (Stetzer & Putman, 2006). All three books recommended by the denomination were by conservative evangelical authors, in the American Baptist

tradition. They all emphasized the local church's evangelistic role in their community, and as well the ways the local church can transform their associations and denominations. Each referenced Biblical texts and church doctrine but their foci are church organization and structural issues like accountability (Kaiser, 2006, 70-78), leadership (Borden, 2003, pp. 56-77), and strategies (Stetzer & Putman, 2006, pp. 108-118). Stetzer and Putman for example argued, "Breaking the code means we have to recognize that there are cultural barriers (in addition to spiritual ones) that blind people from understanding the gospel. Our task is to find the right way to break through those cultural barriers while addressing the spiritual and theological ones as well" (p. 4). They drew on examples of successful U.S. megachurches like Mars Hill Church and Saddleback Community Church to identify "the right ways."

When asked about their corporate task of seeking God's will, the lay leaders seemed to significantly restrict their information sources. They all talked about relying heavily on church documentation (by-laws, "authority documents") provided by the minister, who in turn relied on denominational sources: usually books and people such as the regional director. Only the minister in his interview referenced print information sources such as "best practice" documents. Other information sources cited were experienced people in the congregation, prior experience, "you try to draw on that experience," and the Bible.

As discussed above, from email, to worship and teaching software, to smartphones to look up Bible passages in the service, technology was part of the fabric of church life. In their interviews, four leaders understood technology

playing a role in their personal spiritual growth and all described an impact on corporate decision-making. Several leaders described the wealth of information now accessible as a boon: “you go online...and all of a sudden there are 200 persons’ opinions on the passage which is exciting...” and “...Google it and you have the whole world open to you.” The leaders also valued the speed of online communication: “I mean we can communicate with missionaries instantaneously!”

Technology use was not without complications. As noted above, one member does not use email. Three respondents raised concerns that when online tools become the primary means of communicating, some members may be left out. Several members were concerned that the use of technology might be diminishing face-to-face interaction. Technology was also perceived as a potential distraction. One team member observed: “...these things are good but sometimes it changes, you know, the times for reflection or meditation on an issue. Sometimes I’ll say, “you know, we can find an answer, I’ll just look for it up,” as opposed to, “our greatest resource is going to have to be study and prayer....” Another leader observed “[technology] certainly doesn’t replace corporate prayer or individual prayer.”

Despite the importance of orthodoxy in selecting resources, respondents felt comfortable selecting resources outside their Baptist tradition. Since the Internet allows for a greater access to resources outside of the denominational domains, theological confusion was a risk. In my recruitment stage several ministers raised this concern. The minister leader in this study referred to a

member ordering a book online with questionable theology: “ten years ago you wouldn’t have stumbled across that...it wouldn’t have been in your local bookstore.” When I explored the sources that leaders cited by name I found that they were from a range of evangelical authors (Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal and Plymouth Brethren).

4.3.5 Leadership Consultants

The leaders relied on two consultants to support their decision-making. As noted above, the denomination provided a consultant to work with the church beginning in November 2008 and continuing through 2009. The Guiding Principles document presented in the Annual Meeting was one result of this process. The second consultant, a branding strategist, began working with the church in December 2009 into 2010. This was the consultant referred to in the Governance Team meeting.

The denominational consultant, John Kaiser, was a well-known church growth specialist, and leader within the Baptist community in Canada and the United States. At the time of the consultation with *New Governance Church*, Kaiser was the president of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada. He had founded and directed *Growing Healthy Churches* (2013) under the auspices of the American Baptist Churches of the West, and consulted with and coached churches and nonprofit organizations in North America, New Zealand, and Australia. The organization’s website described their goal “to support church planters and high level leaders for the task to which God has

called them.” Kaiser has published on church growth (2006) and church decision-making (2011).

New Governance’s initial consultation began with a consultation weekend in late 2009 with the pastor, the leaders of the church ministries, and a focus group representing the congregation. After an evening of interviews on Friday evening, members were engaged in workshops all Saturday, and then a service and luncheon on the Sunday. Prior to the weekend was a period of extensive preparation including the documentation described above and congregational surveys. Following the consultation the denomination provided a report, and after acceptance by the congregation, the denomination assigned a church coach to work with the church leaders over the following year (during the time of my study). The consultation workshops addressed theological teaching on missions, leadership structures, and church life cycles. The sessions resulted in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of changes facing the congregation. The focus group and surveys data provided insight into members’ perceptions of levels of commitment, involvement, morale, and attitude toward change. The documentation prepared by the leaders in anticipation of the consultation offered a rationale for engaging an external consultant: “we need someone who has information about us, who has experience with a number of churches, and who is gifted and Spirit led, to help us see ourselves exactly as we are and then give us wise counsel as to how we can keep our strengths strong while growing where we need to grow.”

The branding consultant invited to the Governance Team meeting was a branding strategist and church member. He had offered his services to the church leaders through the pastor, and explained his motivation in the meeting, “As a member of the church, I have an interest in helping. I'm also a partner in a firm that is a branding and marketing agency so it is my desire that we can help and the office team that I have to put together efforts in the future to help market the church.”

I had the opportunity to review his company website prior to the meeting, and then we met informally several days after the meeting. The company presented itself as a branding agency that specialized in brand consulting (strategy, audits, identity), advertising (TV, radio, print, online), and digital strategy (social media, usability testing, user research). They had an impressive portfolio of local, regional, and national clients, and I was familiar with a many of the campaigns. Although an experienced and successful marketer, in our informal conversation he expressed that religious organizations posed a unique challenge. Discerning a “product” or “service” to promote was not as straightforward, and our discussion explored the nature of churches as communities of faith. It required a new way of thinking about the church and its mandate. He had explained in the Governance Team meeting, “I spent time thinking about this session tonight. It was a unique challenge for me personally on a professional level... in terms of the message that we have, and the context of what we are talking to people....”

Seeking advice from experienced people was a significant theme throughout the leadership activities though usually from trusted friends, family, and members of the community. The use of a consultant demonstrated the importance of expertise, and their recognition that they needed help beyond their current resources to accomplish their mission. But external expertise was not accepted uncritically; leaders seemed guarded in the case of both consultants, and the advice was weighed against both the theology and prior experiences of the church.

4.3.6 Summary of New Governance Leaders' Seeking

In the interviews with *New Governance Church* leaders I found distinct patterns in their information activities. *New Governance Church* leaders used a wide range of information sources for their everyday lives and for personal spiritual development, including both traditional print sources and new online media. There was an openness to using materials outside the Baptist doctrinal tradition, but most religious materials referenced remained within the sphere of conservative evangelicalism. Prayer and Bible study were important for most of the leaders throughout the personal, preparation, and corporate leadership levels, and may increase in perceived importance at the corporate level where arriving at consensus is seen to be more difficult. Conversation with trusted and knowledgeable people was also valuable for leaders at all levels of their seeking. When the leaders moved into corporate leadership roles they significantly restricted their information use to official documents of the church, and materials provided by the minister and denomination. External expertise was valued and

used repeatedly by the church and its leaders. However it was used carefully, and local knowledge and the prior experiences of leaders remained the more trusted resources. Technology was embedded in the life of *New Governance Church*, and in the lives of most of the leaders. Although perceived by many leaders as a boon for communication and outreach, it was not accepted uncritically, and some leaders observed that at times it became a distraction and competitor with other forms of seeking such as Bible study and prayer.

4.4 Big Vision Church

Big Vision Church posed a significant challenge in collecting data. I initiated contact with this church in January 2012, had my first meeting in February 2012, and completed data collection in June 2013. The Lead Pastor welcomed the study and was very positive about my involvement. He provided me with access to a number of members' meetings and church records. The chairs of the church's leadership team, the Deacon's Board, were also initially welcoming in our correspondence and conversations. On several occasions however, I was tentatively invited to a meeting, and then the invitation to attend was postponed to a later date. I became aware later that the leaders were dealing with critical personnel issues, and that this was likely the cause of the hesitation.

The board chair raised two concerns about leader participation in my study. First, I explained that leaders were concerned about their time commitment. Consequently we were able to negotiate different ways to gather the data that were less time consuming for the leaders. Second, it was suggested that some members of the leadership team would be more comfortable allowing me to participate in meetings if I were a member. I had noted previously that the church was careful with sharing information such as annual reports outside the membership. The church membership process is lengthy, and I was not prepared to become a member of the church at that time. Despite these obstacles, I had many excellent opportunities to observe regular and special meetings of the church, as well as leaders' workshops and meetings.

I was thankful for the openness from many members and staff. After a year of negotiating with two board chairs I still was unable to conduct individual interviews, although the board Chair recently reiterated their original commitment to participate. I was limited to informal conversations, public presentations, observations, and church records to develop a picture of leaders' information behaviour. This meant I was not able to discern differences between intents and preferences and the actual information seeking activities of the leaders.

4.4.1 What is *Big Vision Church*?

Big Vision Church was a theologically conservative Baptist church in the evangelical Protestant tradition. It was innovative in its use of new communication technologies and contemporary church growth strategies. It had a strong emphasis on evangelistic outreach and discipleship, with significant commitment to local, national and international evangelistic missions and social development. This was the largest Baptist church in the region, with 800 members, and had a positive reputation in the community. Several informants had recommended *Big Vision Church* as a candidate. I was familiar with this church having visited it on a number of occasions at its previous location. The church presented itself on its website as friendly and contemporary, with a relaxed dress code, and stressed the importance of building interpersonal relationships over practicing religion. The website highlighted their new facilities, the ample parking, and their "awesome kids' programs."

Big Vision Church was founded in 1979 with seven members who met in a local community centre in this rapidly growing suburb. The membership grew and their written history described how the ground was broken for a new 10,000 sq. ft. facility in 1980. The first service in that building was held in 1981. The church hired a new Senior Pastor in 1987, and by the following year had grown to 172 members. The church voted to expand the facilities in 1995, and added an additional 12,600 sq. ft. with a gymnasium, nursery wing, foyer, kitchen, and office wing. As the church grew they hired additional pastoral staff: a Worship/Music and Outreach Pastor in 1996, a Children's and Youth Pastor in 1998, and a College/Young Adult and Small Group Ministry Pastor in 1999. The church membership reached 542 members by 2000. At the time of this study the church had a leadership team of five pastors/directors, and eleven paid and volunteer support staff members.

The church auditorium is situated on the second floor of their new facility, a temporary location until they complete a new auditorium wing. The auditorium felt like a sound stage more than a sanctuary, with a prominent stage, professional quality lighting, and video cameras. At the back of the auditorium was a large media booth. When the services began the curtains were drawn over the windows so as not to interfere with the special lighting.

The church, at the time of the study, offered two services each weekend, Saturday evening at 6:30pm, nicknamed "pizza church" because a pizza supper was offered before the service, and a more traditional Sunday morning service at 11:00am. I attended services at both times. I found the "pizza service" seemed

to average 200-250 participants, attracted a younger crowd, with more children, and was more casual. The Sunday morning service had the same order of service but was less casual, attracted an older demographic, and appeared to average 350-500 participants. Both services were typically 60-80 minutes in length including worship, announcements, and the sermon. Services were contemporary in style with worship teams consisting of singers, piano, guitar, bass, drums, and a variety of other instruments as available. Lyrics to chorus and hymns were shown on four large monitors positioned strategically around the sanctuary.

The church made heavy use of video clips during the services for weekly announcements, missionary moments, and storytelling to support the theme of the service. Although many videos were produced in house, the church used materials developed by a local production group, *Muddy River Media* (2013). The sermons typically were 30-45 minutes in length. The Lead Pastor preached the majority of the sermons and used traditional expository methods. The church has a number of capable preachers with differing styles, and they did on occasion preach. The sermon portion of the services were recorded, for a time were streamed live to another campus, and were available to view on the website, or to download as an audio podcast from the website media centre.

The church offered a number of children's program at both times for age infant to grade six, as well as a mid-week children's program. The church operated a pre-school on site for 24 children and staffed by trained early childhood educators. The church had meetings for teens (junior high and high

school), women, men, 50+ adults, and small community bible study groups during the week. The church is well known for its Christmas and Easter musical productions. During the study the church offered a Christmas musical that attracted over 3500 attendees over a series of performances. *Big Vision Church* was also involved in a number of community and fund raising activities to support local charities, and was heavily involved in local and overseas missions work. I was struck by how busy the church was and how motivated the members were to impact their community.

I chose the pseudonym to reflect the very ambitious vision that the church had voted to adopt that would see major new construction, and a multipronged outreach agenda. In 2007 the church embarked on a project to construct a new \$8 million campus on 54 acres on the outskirts of the community. The church had worshipped at their previous site for 27 years and having grown to three services each Sunday had begun planning to relocate in 2003. The church had identified this site and acquired it believing, in the words of their Pastor, "This location has become even more strategic with the major nearby development of the [XXXXX] and the significant population growth of the surrounding residential areas." It was an early dream of the church membership to create seniors' housing on the site, but for reasons not entirely clear this had not materialized.

Press releases described the new facility as containing a state-of-the-art 1,500-seat auditorium that would be one of the largest auditoriums in the municipality, and would be open for public use to help address the lack of performance space in that part of the city. There would be an adjoining foyer and

two floors of youth/children's ministry space. The first floor of the children's wing would include a nursery, a preschool, children's classrooms, two small auditoriums that seat 100 and 150 people, and a library resource centre. The second floor would house offices, a boardroom, a hospitality area with kitchen facilities and a 500-seat youth auditorium. The new building would total 51,068 square feet of space, and the site included paved 500 parking spaces. Site development began in December 2007 and construction began on October 1, 2008.

In the meantime the Church membership accepted an offer for the sale of their existing facilities on March 14, 2008. However, construction was delayed, and the buyer of their existing church building wished to take possession of the facilities by the end of January 2009 and the new site would not be ready until early September 2009. The members of *Big Vision Church* were faced with a choice between using another church on Sunday afternoons and leasing space in a local mall.

This was the story referred to earlier by the leaders of *New Governance Church*. As described above, the church option was in all respects preferable, as the mall would require significant setup, and faced the barrier of not looking or feeling like "church". After a period of prayer, the board members individually all felt that God wanted them to move to the mall. *Big Vision's* Pastor explained: "We looked at a lot of different possibilities ... and we decided [the Mall] would be innovative and different, and could be exciting and dangerous." This significant factor in church decision-making will be explored in greater depth in chapter five.

Each Sunday morning for eight months volunteers arrived to set up the stage, auditorium, equipment and seating for 700 for a 10 a.m. service. This move had a variety of unexpected benefits that only became apparent months later such as a new sense of community teamwork and opportunities to connect with many Sunday shoppers who otherwise would not have attended the church. Phase two of the new facilities opened to the public on September 13, 2009. The completed phase one included the foyer and children's wing with the foundation laid for the future auditorium.

In the church records I reviewed I found reference to a church information session held on a Sunday, early in 2009, in which the church leaders presented a new vision for the future of the church, entitled *Vision 5*. The Church goal was to reach 5,000 people a week through the local ministries: 1,000 children, 500 teens, and 3,500 adults. The church also planned to develop five satellite campuses around the province linked by videoconference to create a multisite church. Internationally the church would create partnerships with churches in five cities in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and North America. In order to finance the new construction, and the outreach campaign, the church planned to raise \$6 million, with \$5.4 million toward construction and \$600,000 earmarked for international missions.

Parts of the vision were realized by 2013: the completion of phase one of the construction project and the five international partnerships. However, only one satellite campus was established and it closed after several years. The second phase of construction was not completed. The church went through a

period of financial struggle, and staff downsizing. A position for an Executive Pastor advertised in 2012 was not filled. During this time the church deacons' board began to wrestle with the future direction of the church, and it was decided that their longtime Lead Pastor would step down as soon as a new Lead Pastor was employed.

The church itself was located in a suburban community of the Halifax Regional Municipality. There was good demographic information provided for this district by the Regional Municipality. This community was established in 1749 at the same time as the capital city of Halifax, and due to its proximity to Halifax was a commuter community. Although the local community council described a quickly growing community, with a district population of 28,000 residents, the Community Counts profile (2013) recorded the population in 2011 as 21,382 residents. This represents a small population decrease of 4.6% between 2001 and 2011. The community has a slightly younger population than Nova Scotia generally with 42% of the population less than 34 years of age. The number of married families had decreased 8.5% since 2001, while common law families have increased 25.4%, and lone-parent families increased 12.3%. Single parents lead 19.2% of families, slightly higher than the Nova Scotia average. The community has a low immigrant population with only 2.2%, and 99% of residents are Canadian citizens. The vast majority of residents (98%) speak English in their home. Residents in this community have a lower mobility than Nova Scotians generally with only 31% having moved within the last five years, most (23.1%) having moved within the municipality. The family median

income of residents is \$64,896 compared to the Nova Scotian median of \$55,412. More residents have completed only a high school diploma (28.4%), higher than Nova Scotia (23.3%), but a slightly lower percentage of residents (52.4%) have completed a post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree that residents of Nova Scotia generally (53.8%). In 2006, 80.6% of the residents owned their own home rather than rented (19.2%). The community unemployment rate (5.1%) in 2011 was almost half the Nova Scotia rate (10%).

The community has nineteen public and private schools, two public transit hubs, many shops and services, a new community health centre, a dozen community groups, and twenty-three community churches. This is a working class community, and although it has seen some population decline, it is stable and very homogenous. The high number of churches in the community may be perceived to limit growth possibilities and increase competition for new members, which is perhaps why *Big Vision's* outreach plan extends to other nearby communities.

4.4.2 *Big Vision Church as an Information Space*

4.4.2.1 *Traditional Media (Announcements, Bulletins, Magazines, Library)*

When I considered *Big Vision Church* as an information space, I first looked at the usual forms of information exchange: announcements, bulletins, magazines, and the library. At the outset of the project the church relied heavily on print media as communication tools. Ushers would provide print bulletins with upcoming events and notices: "Weekend Services – Saturdays at 6:30, pizza and pop available at 5:45pm" or "30 Hour Famine Youth Event". The bulletins might

also include special inserts to announce upcoming projects (What's Your Next Step), missions' news (Meet your 2012 Ecuador Team), or occasionally sermon notes that might outline the sermon text and key points. Members could respond using "Connection Cards" provided in the bulletins to request more information from the church or request prayer. Ushers would collect these or the cards could be deposited in a box by the entrance of the auditorium. Announcements would be read at the beginning of each service. During the period of the study, the church transitioned away from print bulletins and notices in favour of video "commercials" at the beginning of each service and extensive use of social media. The church provided members with materials such as *Our Daily Bread* devotional booklets (2009).¹⁷ In the church foyer visitors could visit the "Welcome Centre" to sign up for church events, pick up brochures on Christian Children's camps, or Christian magazines such as *Integrity – A Christian Business Magazine* (2013).¹⁸ Adjacent to the "Welcome Centre" visiting groups and speakers such as missionaries would often set up literature display tables for members.

The church had a library of several thousand volumes available for members to borrow for periods of one or two weeks. I had the opportunity to serve for several months as a library volunteer, and interact first hand with library clients. The collection was in the process of being catalogued in an online

¹⁷ This devotional guide includes a Bible text, a short inspirational message, and prayer for each day, and published quarterly. It is distributed by Radio Bible Class Ministries a conservative evangelical multinational ministry.

¹⁸ *Integrity: A Christian Business Magazine* "is a faith-based print and electronic business magazine with a focus on the important role that living out your Christian faith plays in today's workplace."

system but materials were still circulating using a manual card system. The collection was predominately print adult and children's fiction, a smaller non-fiction print collection, and some DVDs and videocassettes. The volunteers were actively collecting materials, and had a backlog of materials to be processed. The library was open before and after services, and on occasion during the week when a volunteer was available. I learned that the room was also used for prayer meetings before some services and then was unavailable as a library. The library collection was not heavily used and fiction and children's titles were most popular. There were hundreds of non-fiction titles, predominately on areas of Bible study, personal faith and growth, and biographies. I noted that biographies and devotional materials were the most popular non-fiction materials.

The church hosts annually a leadership conference (discussed below) and collected several dozen titles promoted through the conference relating to leadership. Well-known evangelical Christian authors like John Stott (2006, 2011), N.T. Wright (2008) and Andy Stanley (2007) authored many of the titles, presenting a number of traditions within the evangelical movement. However, many other titles were leadership books from business perspectives like *The Leadership Secrets of Colin Powell* (Harari, 2003) and *Big Change at Best Buy* (Gibson & Billings, 2003). Many of the titles, both religious and secular were calls to radical change, and although there were no religious books outside of the evangelical tradition, seeking truth outside of religion appeared acceptable as long as the source did not contradict official doctrine.

4.4.2.2 New Media (Website, Streaming video, Social Media- Facebook, Chat)

As noted above, *Big Vision Church* was actively engaging new communications technologies such as social media to reach its members and community. Most church events required online registration and in order to assist members without Internet access, the church provided an online registration kiosk in the church lobby. At strategic places throughout the church were electronic notice boards that announced upcoming church events. It was noted above that the church broadcast their weekly announcements as a video commercial entitled “Need to Know”. These commercials were projected during the service, and were posted to the website and social media. The production of these video announcements was labour intensive, and the leaders desired to maintain a high production quality.

The church maintained a professionally designed website, a Facebook page (685 “likes”), a blog, Twitter (264 followers), and SmugMug accounts. Although the use of social media allowed for two-way communication, these accounts were used to publish church news, and apart from affirmations and “likes” there was little evidence of discussion or interaction. Previously the services were streamed live and this was popular for those unable to attend in person. The church no longer streams the services live except for special events, but instead archives the past year of sermons in video format using the Vimeo service and since July 2011 as audio podcasts in iTunes.

Big Vision Church was a very dynamic information space that actively used traditional media and new technologies to communicate with members and

reach out to their community. Members seemed to embrace new technology enthusiastically and appeared to have few reservations about how the media might impact the message. Although social media was widely used by the church, the communication was still largely one direction, information delivered to the members and community, with little evidence on online engagement and interaction.

4.4.3 Big Vision Leaders' Seeking

4.4.3.1 Leadership Consultants (DiSC, Accountability Group, Leadership Summit)

During my visits at *Big Vision Church* I became aware of several tools and processes that the leaders used to prepare themselves as Church leaders, to seek God's leading in their personal lives, and to gather information to inform their decision making in the church. These were a mix of secular and sacred resources and emphasized the interpersonal dimensions of their roles as leaders.

During the course of my research at *Big Vision Church* I did not observe the use of external consultants either from the denomination or another agency. The church did anticipate having denominational consultants in the coming year to conduct congregation surveys, host a consultation weekend, and report to the leaders on recommended prescriptions for the church. This was to be a similar process to the one conducted by the denomination in *New Governance Church* described above. The Lead Pastor of *Big Vision Church* himself was a Church leadership-training consultant with a local para-church organization. This group's mandate was to encourage church leaders in Atlantic Canada and help them focus and equip for ministry. They accomplished this through monthly leaders'

meetings, annual conferences, and special leadership events. It is noteworthy that the Parish Priest of *One Ship Church* described below also served in the same capacity in this organization.

Pastoral staff members at *Big Vision church* were strongly encouraged to develop an accountability group that they could turn to for advice, to use as a sounding board, and when needed, to receive constructive criticism. These were people that the leaders perceived were of good Christian character who could provide wise counsel on a personal level. In my own experience as a pastor I found it often difficult to find people within my church that I could go to for counsel with my own problems apart from other pastors. The Lead Pastor had an accountability group that he met with several times a year. He explained that he found it very valuable. He was open to me attending a weekend retreat with his accountability group however the group was not comfortable having me to participate at that time.

Another tool that the staff leaders used to build an effective team was the DiSC Personality Assessment (2013). Each staff member completed the assessment when they first joined the team and then biannually. DiSC is a workplace leadership development tool based on a psychological assessment of personality traits. There are versions available for churches that, for instance, illustrate personality types using Bible characters (DiSC Biblical Profile, 2013), or provide training resources for church use (DiSC Biblical Facilitator's Guide, 2013), but the tests themselves are secular resources. The use of secular staff development assessments would also appear in the later case study.

Annually the church hosts the *Global Leadership Summit*, described in the following manner, “The Global Leadership Summit is a two-day, world-class leadership event experienced by more than 170,000 leaders around the world, representing more than 14,000 churches” (Willow Creek, 2011). This summit was telecast on September 29-30, 2011 to 300+ cities in 92 countries from Willow Creek church, a U.S. mega-church, with content provided by the Willow Creek Canada Association. I was invited to attend as a church guest with the leaders of *Big Vision Church* and the Pastor of *New Governance Church*.

The goal of the summit was, “to infuse vision, skill development and inspiration for the sake of local church transformation.” Although hosted by an evangelical association, the speakers at the summit were not all evangelicals or Christians. Speakers included religious leaders like mega-church pastors Bill Hybels and Steven Furtick; but also business and community leaders such Erwin McManus, filmmaker and activist; Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks; Michelle Rhee, founder of StudentsFirst.org; Dr. Henry Cloud, author, psychologist, and leadership consultant; Cory Booker, mayor of Newark; and Seth Godin, author and marketing blogger. Keynote speaker Hybels summed up the perspective of the summit as “unapologetically Christian, but agnostic when it comes to whom we can learn from” (Hybels, 2011). The Lead Pastor of the host church later echoed this view in his closing remarks.

The dynamic presentations provided powerful contrasts: Nobel prize nominee and Coptic Orthodox missionary Mama Maggie Gobran (2011) described her work among the poorest of Cairo’s children, while entrepreneur

and marketer Seth Godin challenged leaders to “poke the box.” This was his call to instigation and initiative (2011). Although not an author of religious books, Godin’s ideas were discussed by leaders at both *Big Vision Church*, and *One Ship Church* below.

4.4.3.2 Visioning Meetings (3 Age Groups)

In an effort to better inform their re-visioning process, church leaders planned a series of Visioning Meetings for members. The intent was review the church’s vision and mission statement and to gather input from members on what direction they believe the church should take and how the church might achieve the goals it sets. The leaders planned three meetings dividing participants by age groups: 18-35 (called “Nacho Night” held in February, 2012 with 54 participants), 36-49 (called “Snack attack” held in October, 2012 with 21 participants), and over 50 years of age (called “dessert and dialogue” held in November, 2012 with 36 participants).

I was invited to all meetings and was introduced as a researcher from Dalhousie at the beginning of each meeting. Attendance was voluntary and meetings were advertised well in advance using the usual communication channels, with verbal reminders from the pastors during the services in the weeks leading up to the events. To create a casual environment for discussion, members sat around round tables of 6 to 8 seats, and snack foods were provided. The Lead Pastor facilitated the meetings using a flip chart to record participants’ comments, and each participant was provided handouts that

included an agenda, the current church vision/mission statement, a statement of the church beliefs, and writing materials for notes.

The meetings all began with a prayer, “to help members wrestle with God’s will”, a presentation of the intent of the meetings, and a discussion of the theological calling and beliefs of the church: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...’” (1988, Matthew 28:18). The review of the Church beliefs was considered an essential part of the process, as beliefs were described to be foundational to first values, then mission, and finally vision. In the first meeting the lead Pastor described how he believed the church “was on a plateau but we can’t break through. You are here because you have what we need to know to break through.” This echoed ideas shared in the leaders’ planning meeting described above.

In the first meeting, under 35 years, the participants at each table were asked to participate in two rounds of discussion and reporting on a series of questions about the current church strengths and priorities, and then to engage in more blue sky thinking about the long term direction of the church. Finally members were asked to answer a personal questionnaire about their current involvement in the church, and future interests in involvement. The other meetings were less structured and members were asked to wrestle with the question: “what does God want our Church to look like five years from now?” After each group discussion time, groups’ spokespersons shared their ideas that were then recorded by staff. Not surprisingly ideas and priorities varied by age

group: the youngest appearing to emphasize outreach/missions and new ministries, the middle-aged emphasizing families and local community, and the 50+ emphasizing trans-generational and community ministries. The eldest group also had the strongest support for completing the building program.

In conversations with the Lead Pastor and Board Chair during the meetings, it was apparent that they believed these meetings were valuable tools to connect with the congregation. The responses raised red flags in some areas and affirmed others. The responses drew heavily on members' personal experiences and stories of success in other churches. The information gathering exercise was strongly bounded by the theological beliefs and practices of the church, and the belief that God ultimately directed the decisions and that it was the members' task to discern that will.

4.4.3.3 Corporate Seeking (Staff Planning Meeting)

As demonstrated above, *Big Vision Church* was a dynamic information space with a wealth of information sources and communication tools available to the members and leaders. The leaders had additional resources to help equip them for their roles as leaders, and to gather information that would inform corporate decision-making. I was interested in seeing how leaders drew on these resources in their corporate interactions. My leadership informant provided me access to church records describing strategic planning meetings since 1987 to the present. These records would enable me to establish an historical context to current planning practices. I was also invited to attend a planning meeting of

the church pastoral staff. I was not able to attend a full meeting of the Deacon's board.

The church strategic planning meetings provided insight into the processes by which the church leaders both sought guidance and created a vision for the church. It was evident from these records that the church leaders were very methodical in their approach to church planning and growth and that strategic planning had religious and non-religious elements. One document distributed, entitled, "Vision Implementation- General Notes on Church Administration and Leadership" (Luecke & Southard, 1986), set out a "Biblical," as opposed to a "secular," approach to administration, but also argued, "Administration is an art and a science. It is a combination of skills and personality. It is a spiritual gift. Any leadership role requires administrative or managing skills and abilities." Leadership ideas were frequently framed in religious terms such as the "Jethro Principle, Exodus 18," from a spring 2001 meeting, a description of management delegation.

The records described annual "Strategic Prayer and Planning Meetings" and the "Action Plans" that arose out of these meetings. Central to these meetings was the church's religious goals. In a document from 1989 entitled "Long-Range Planning Retreat Summary" the church's philosophy of ministry was "to exalt Christ by edifying and equipping Christians to evangelize the community." Following this was an evaluation of ministries and an action plan for each: e.g. "Fellowship – Increase Hospitality Awareness."

A prominent item on each annual agenda was regular prayer times scheduled through the strategic planning meetings. For example, a Church Leadership retreat in 1991 allocated four 30-minute prayer times across the 11.5 hours of meetings. Another theme was the use of hard data in planning. A planning meeting in 1996 entitled “Staffing for Growth – Dare to Dream”, used statistical data on the population and church saturation to set outreach targets: “Touch 3,000 souls per week – 7-8 per member.” The church frequently set outreach and financial targets to meet in the coming year. The minutes made reference to SWOT analyses, and marketing brainstorming activities.

It was not always apparent what resources were used in preparation for these meetings but occasionally resources were cited. One book was a theological exposition (Lints, 1993), another a secular text on support groups (Wuthrow, 1996), but most were books and documents from evangelical authors on various aspects of leadership such as finances (Harder, 2003), church growth (George, 1993), and visioning (Warren, 2002). Beginning with the 2003 strategic planning meeting, there were references to online resources such as Powerpoint presentations from church coaching consultants (Bullard, 2003). The records illustrated a long-term openness to management ideas but within the framework of evangelical theology. “Hard data” was frequently cited in planning processes, but more subjective tools such as prayer also played a significant role. Resources cited indicate an early awareness of the value of online resources in church planning.

A February 2012 pastoral staff planning meeting included ten leaders: pastors, directors, and administrative and volunteer staff members. Leaders began the meeting by sharing devotional thoughts around the table, things they had been reading and meditating on such as the text of a recent sermon, or from *40-Day Journey* podcasts (2008, 2009). Leaders discussed the topic of seeking God's will, the impact of church body life, and the need to renew one's mind in order to interact with God. The meeting turned to the church's recent lack of growth, and the perception that the church had reached a plateau. The Lead Pastor identified this plateau as positive in the sense that only 4% of churches arrive at this level. But he believed that the church could break through this plateau, and that there was "sufficient wisdom around the table to break through." They unveiled a new growth strategy for the church that would identify concrete stages of engagement for members, to encourage active growth, and help connect members to the many ministries of the church.

Leaders relied on a variety of statistics and measures as they discussed membership needs and growth: "men spend 60% of their time at work" but "85% don't know how to share their faith at work." The church was known for its elaborate Christmas and Easter productions that attract thousands of people, but resulted in few new members, and they wrestled with the sustainability of this approach. A theme that emerged both from conversations with pastors of other large churches and leaders' own experiences was that "relationships trump vision" and that people who make friendships are more likely to stay and become involved.

The leaders of *Big Vision Church* were open to drawing on tools from outside of their faith tradition, and even materials from non-religious sources to inform and support their roles as leaders. Leaders cited statistical studies, and used a variety of assessment tools. Leaders did regularly reference back to their own theological perspectives when evaluating these resources, for example, by linking them to Biblical texts they found important and that supported these ideas. Personal and community experience also played an important part in equipping and informing leaders in their roles.

4.4.4 Individual Seeking

Although a number of leaders acted as informants in the church throughout the data gathering and interpretation processes, I was not able to negotiate individual personal interviews with church board members or the church staff members within the data collection window. This was a significant limitation in capturing the leaders' perspectives but I was able to ameliorate this lack of data somewhat through observations of other leadership activities and informal conversations.

4.5 One Ship Church

4.5.1 What is One Ship Church?

4.5.1.1 Demographics

One Ship Church is a parish of the Roman Catholic Church, and is part of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Halifax and Yarmouth. A diocese is the basic administrative unit of the Roman Catholic community presided over by a bishop. It is divided into parishes each under the care of a priest. In the case of

Halifax-Yarmouth, the diocese is presided over by an archbishop. *One Ship Church's* self-description on the Church website was: "...a Catholic Christian Community of Disciples of the Lord Jesus. We believe that everyone is called to be on a spiritual journey and what matters is not where a person is on that journey, but actually being on the journey. Therefore we seek to welcome all people regardless of the stage of their spiritual life, their struggles and failures."

During a meeting with Archdiocese officials, three parishes were identified as having undergone significant transitions in the form of parish mergers. One merger process was unsuccessful as it attempted to merge churches from historically and socially unrelated communities. Two other mergers were considered successful and were identified as study candidates. This was one of those successful mergers, and it was the result of three urban parishes coming together to create one new parish.

According to a histories document prepared during the mergers, "Remembering our Beginnings – We Continue with Hope in God: An Historical Review 1760-2007," The mergers of Roman Catholic parishes in the region were motivated by changing regional demographics, the rising costs of operating parishes, and the decline in the numbers of priests. In January 2004 the *Planning for Pastoral Renewal Committee* presented a report that would recommend the planning for the consolidation of the three parishes. The history described the creation of the new Parish in name in August 2006, and "on March 1, 2007 the process became official with the Archbishop's issuance of the Decree of Suppression and the Decree of Establishment under which the three previous

parishes were terminated and in their place, the new ...Parish was established....” The new church facilities were completed in 2010.

This new parish created by the merger of the three parishes served two adjoining municipal census regions with a combined population of more than 50,000 according to 2011 Nova Scotia Community Counts data. The smaller region (pop. c. 16,000) is long established and has experienced some growth in the past decade. Forty-five % of the region’s population is under 35 years of age, and 21% consists of single parent families (21%). This area has a high percentage of immigration (10%, n=1,570), and a high rate of mobility with 50% having moved within the past five years. Six percent of the population speak neither English or French in the home, and 14% reported that English was not their mother tongue. The family average and median income was slightly lower than the Nova Scotia median. The educational attainment was slightly higher than the Nova Scotia average with 58% having a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree. The majority of residents are renters (60%) compared to Nova Scotia (28%). Compared to Nova Scotians, the region’s residents are more likely to live in families, are less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to use public transit.

The larger region (pop. c. 34,000) has seen 32% growth over the past decade with 45% of residents under 35 years of age. Two thirds (66%) live in families led by married couples, with a lower percentage of single parent families (16%). Seventeen and one-half percent (n=5900) of residents were immigrants; with 91% of residents being Canadian citizens, and 87% spoke English only in

their home. Fifty-five percent of residents moved with the past five years, and 61% rented their dwellings. The median and average household incomes were substantially higher than the Nova Scotia household averages. Sixty-eight percent of the population had a post secondary certificate, diploma or degree, much higher than the Nova Scotia statistics of 54%.

The differences in education, income levels, and household composition between the two regions that *One Ship Church* serves create challenges for outreach. *One Ship*, for example offers a number of programs for families with small children, but must also consider the unique needs of large number of single parents in the neighbouring region. The high mobility levels as well as the higher immigrant populations may necessitate multi-lingual and multi-cultural outreach programs such as English as a Second Language. A highly mobile population also creates challenges in building strong community, a stated objective of *One Ship Church*.

The pseudonym I gave to this church, "*One Ship Church*", comes from a description by the Parish Priest in our first interview. He spoke about the challenges faced by small struggling churches, and the barriers to effective outreach and growth because of dwindling memberships and rising costs. He described the merger of the three parishes as three small and underpowered boats struggling against the current and heading for the rocks, but now as one large ship they have the resources, "the engine power", to turn the ship around and move against the current. His caution was that although the church now had "the engine power" they still needed to use it to turn and move forward if they

were willing. My initial expectation was to explore the historical transition, the merger, but discovered perhaps a more significant transition process as the church created and acted on a new vision for its ministry.

The leadership team of *One Ship Church* in September 2012 consisted of a Priest, a Pastoral Ministry team, a Pastoral Council, and a number of other committees: Finance Council, the Building and Grounds Committee, Catechetics Committee, Facilities Management Committee, Liturgy Committee, Music Committee, Social Justice Committee, and Stewardship Committee. The pastoral team consisted of the Director of Administration, Parish Secretary, Finance Officer, Director of Evangelization, Pastoral Associate and Director of Religious Education, Pastoral Ministries Coordinator, Director of Music, Coordinator of Youth Ministry, a Franciscan Sister, and four Ordained Deacons. These are a mix of full-time and part-time paid positions, and volunteer positions. The Pastoral Council, according to the Church website, “is responsible for the overall pastoral development of the parish. The council’s role is to promote pastoral activity, using the parish Mission Statement as its guide.” I had the opportunity to attend the Parish Council meeting where the leaders finished drafting the parish Mission Statement, and I describe this meeting below.

The Church met in a modern facility that began construction in the Fall of 2009 and was dedicated in a service in Spring 2010. Located at a major intersection the building was easily accessible to a large residential area and clearly visible from the adjacent shopping district. It is unmistakably a church building but has a contemporary feel. Worshippers enter the building through

large doors facing the parking lot, and enter the foyer by crossing a “bridge” walkway. In the foyer there is a kitchenette for hospitality, an information kiosk with both print information, and a multimedia centre.

The sanctuary is visible through the glass wall and ushers welcomed visitors as they prepared to worship. The sanctuary’s maximum capacity was 1000 but perhaps comfortably seated 700-800 worshippers. The sanctuary integrated a variety of elements from the originating churches and visible reminders of the church’s history. The sanctuary was a mix of traditional church architecture, and accommodations for new technologies such as audio-visual presentations with an elevated media booth. Prayers and readings could be shared on overhead screens, and on occasion videos were used in the Mass. Off the sanctuary and accessible as well from an outside door was a smaller chapel. The church had a large hall on the lower level with a large kitchen, and a number of multi-use rooms for Bible studies, classes, and committee work. There was an office complex on the lower level. I was struck on my mid-week visits on how well the building was utilized.

The church held daily masses, and four masses on weekends. When asked about the total membership, the Priest indicated that he tended to measure size by regular attendance estimating that 2800 people attended the church, and 2300 members attended on any given weekend. Beyond Masses the church offered a wide range of programs for adults (men/women/seniors), youth, and children, as well as social outreach ministries such as English as a Second language classes, healthy living workshops, and visitation for shut-ins.

Activities for seniors and families were also offered by outside groups such as the regional health authority, capitalizing on the strategic location of the church building. As music was an important part of weekly worship, the church had an active music ministry with both traditional and contemporary musicians. The church calendar regularly recorded 40-60 scheduled events each week using the building, with as many as six separate groups using the facilities on a given evening.

One Ship Church is a large and dynamic community, highly engaged with each other and their surrounding community. Size and busy-ness can often pose challenges for internal communication and interaction. How does *One Ship* position itself as an information space, and how does it keep its members informed and connected?

4.5.2 *One Ship Church* as an Information Space

4.5.2.1 *Traditional Media (Announcements, Bulletins, Magazines, Library)*

In creating an effective information space, *One Ship Church* used an exceptionally wide range of traditional and new tools to communicate, educate, and engage their communities. They relied heavily on print materials to promote the church and its activities, but increasingly were using online media to reach out to their members and communities. Although growing their online engagement, the church was only beginning to utilize social media to communicate and interact online. As demonstrated below, the use of the Internet remained predominantly one direction, Church to the members, and there appeared little exploration of the ways that the Church could be practiced online.

First time visitors to the Church could pick up a set of print leaflets in the main foyer that describe the various spaces and artifacts. The leaflets explained the significance and provenance of objects like the Altar, and the Prayer Wall. The emphasis was on how these spaces were used, as in the case of the “Meeting Rooms”, where the reader is reminded, “Evangelization, the proclamation of the gospel, is central to the mission of the Church.” The leaflets are unique print artifacts not reproduced in digital medium.

As was typical in most churches, One Ship Church used print tools such as bulletins and newsletters to provide weekly and monthly news. Sunday bulletins would regularly be four 8 ½ x 11 pages in size, larger than most church bulletins. The front page of bulletins included church contact information including phone, email, and web addresses, and staff names, although in the past year staff names have been omitted. The first page would also feature Mass times and liturgical calendar information. Most weeks the front page included notices from the Archdiocese, and on occasion from the Vatican. For example, in a late 2011 bulletin, the merger of the Archdioceses of Halifax and Yarmouth was announced and explained.

In Autumn 2011 and for several weeks after this space featured changes to the English language liturgy that were to take effect on several months later. That space could be used to promote the vision of the Archdiocese (February 2012: Excerpts from the Archbishop’s Pastoral Letter) or to provide notices of Archdiocesan events (January 2013: Steubenville Youth Conference.) Contact information was usually included in the form of phone, email, and web addresses.

On January 1, 2012, World Day of Peace, this space featured an excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI message to young people. Parishioners were invited to view the full message on the Vatican website (Pope Benedict, 2012).

Inside the bulletin there was an opening message from the Priest, often promoting church emphases (e.g. “Stewardship Commitment Sunday”), special notice (e.g. “Financial Corner – Thanks”) and schedules of upcoming events in the Church (e.g. “Hockey Day in Canada”). There were also announcements for community building events as well. An inspirational Bible verse is also often included (e.g. “What is this? A new teaching – with authority!” Mark 1:27).

Bulletins are available in print in the vestibule of the church, but are also available for download from the Church website, and by subscribing to the email service. The web version on occasion did suppress notices about finances and special needs. The Church also produced additional print notices such as a half page order of service for a special service such as the “Celebration of Hope” Advent service in 2011.

The Church also had materials professionally printed for promotion of special programs and initiatives. An attractive colour brochure presented both what members can expect of the Church community, and what the community will expect of its members: “To be a member of this parish is to enter into relationship with the other members of the parish who are also on this spiritual journey. We do this together. Clear expectations are at the heart of every healthy relationship.” Other distributed materials presented opportunities for

service, “Stewardship of Time,” and forms to submit that outline the member’s service commitments.

Perhaps the most intriguing print documents circulated are teaching documents from the Archdiocese (*New Evangelization, Feast of Pentecost 2011*) and from the Priest of *One Ship Church (Towards a New Model of Pastoral Care of the Sacraments...)*. Available in the lobby or for download from the Church website, these documents were deeply theological, and also proposed a specific organizational structure and ministry emphases for the church. The latter document (*Towards*) was 24 pages in length, and argued for changes in the church’s approach to pastoral care including discipleship, administration of the four of the seven sacraments (Baptism, Marriage, First Eucharist, and Confirmation), and community engagement. The document included an exegesis of relevant Biblical texts, and an exposition of foundational Catholic doctrine, and contemporary Church teaching.

The Priest also referenced sources such as Gallup Survey tools for organizations, a companion book entitled *Growing and Engaged Church* (Winseman, 2006) and upcoming workshop series on events facilitated by an external Parish Renewal consultant. These sources were described below. I found the document distributed to be very theological, and though likely created as a leadership document, it did suggest openness to a broader community dialogue.

The Church did not offer an extensive library of materials compared to the previous Churches, but did engage the congregation with a book reading

program during my initial visits. Members obtained the books from a display in the foyer for what appeared to be a partial donation toward their costs. Two books offered were Winseman's *Growing an Engaged Church*, referenced above, and *Rediscover Catholicism* (Kelly, 2010). Winseman worked with The Gallup Organization¹⁹ as the Leader for Faith-based Organizations, and was a former United Methodist pastor. The book's argument drew heavily on Gallup's own statistical research to debunk common myths about growth and engagement, discussed cases of engaged and growing congregations, and offered "strategies for improving engagement" (p. 125). Although referencing examples of Roman Catholic churches, the text itself was not written from a Catholic worldview. It would be most appropriate to say it was written for faith based organizations generally, though the framework seemed to assume a Christian organization. The text discussed the place of belief in growing a church, but was a sociological rather than a theological examination of the question of why people are committed to their church. Winseman contended, "Spiritual commitment is usually a result of one big – and often overlooked - factor: congregational engagement. Focus on improving engagement, and increased commitment will follow" (p. 63).

¹⁹ The Gallup Organization, Analytics and Strategic Consulting Group. "Gallup consultants help private and public sector organizations boost organic growth through measurement tools, strategic advice, and education. Gallup's 2,000 professionals deliver services at client organizations, through the Web, and in nearly 40 offices around the world." Online: Gallup, About Gallup, <www.gallup.com>.

In contrast *Rediscovering Catholicism* is written from a Roman Catholic perspective.²⁰ Kelly, a Catholic speaker and author, is also a business consultant who has worked with many high profile corporations (2013). He was also the founder of *The Dynamic Catholic Institute* whose mission was “To re-energize the Catholic Church in America by developing world-class resources that inspire people to rediscover the genius of Catholicism.” Kelly drew on the Bible to build his case, “Teacher, which is the greatest of the commandments?” (Matthew 22:34ff; Kelly, p. 41) and offered a somewhat prophetic assessment of the future of Catholicism, before turning to the question, “What is the Authentic Life?” (p. 65) Kelly drew heavily on his understanding of Catholic faith and practice in an appeal to the average Catholic for recommitment and renewal.

A third book promoted through a membership development program was *Living Your Strengths* (Winsemen, Clifton, & Liesvert, 2004). This book was billed as a “religious spinoff” of Clifton’s earlier book on discovering your strengths written for managers (Living, 2013). Rather than focus on business settings, this book considered people’s fit within the local church. The book in was built around the *Clifton StrengthsFinder*, an online assessment tool that measures the test takers’ responses against a profile of 34 strengths to determine natural strengths. Each book purchased included a code that would allow one online assessment. Additional tests could be purchased.

²⁰ It is noted that *Rediscover Catholicism* has received The Imprimatur, a declaration that the book is considered to be free of doctrinal or moral error. This does not imply that those who grant The Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions, or statements expressed.

The majority of the Church pastoral team members participated in this assessment, and most have added their top strengths as a profile item on their web profile. This was one of the assessment tools in Gallup's suite. The church offered workshops to assist people in completing the assessment and interpreting their results. I completed the assessment on my own and found my own results similar to other personality assessments I had previously taken such as *Lifekeys* (Kise, Stark, and Hirsch, 1996) or Myers-Briggs Personality Types (2013). There was nothing particularly religious about this book except that it mapped strengths to typical church activities and tasks.

4.5.2.2 New Media (Website, Online Courses, Facebook)

One Ship Church used the web in several ways to communicate with existing and potential members through its website, email, online courses, and limited use of social media. The church's website first came online on December 2, 2008 when the new parish was first created, and was designed in part by the John Paul II media Institute, "a network of Christian media professionals and highly trained volunteers who seek to advance the Kingdom of God through media productions and education" (John Paul, 2013). At the time of the study, this was the most comprehensive information portal I had observed for a church website with more than 66 pages and subpages introducing the church and staff, activities, organizations, sacraments, outreach and news through text images and embedded video.

An important Google application was the church calendar of events that could be viewed by week, month, and agenda formats. Members could

download registration forms for various purposes in pdf format and the website served as a document repository. Although largely a one-way communication tool, the website did allow members to respond through online registration tools, comment and prayer requests forms. Members could join the “prayer tree” to receive email or phone updates of items for prayer, and at least one program had a link to a news blog. A testimonies page allowed members to submit personal faith stories that would be shared on the website: “At first I was a little skeptical of God and if he really cared for me,” wrote one member, “but with the discussion we had...I think I now know that God truly cares....”

When I began collecting data at *One Ship Church* in 2011, social media was only beginning to be used. For example the Alpha Discipleship program had a Facebook page for its group members. In 2012 the Church created its own Facebook page and Twitter site that are used to promote Church events and news stories of interest to Catholics.

Religious education resources were also available through the website. In 2010-2012 the Church offered a course entitled Catholicism 201: “Consider taking part in Catholicism 201 to refresh your memory of what makes us unique as Catholics.” The course format instructor led with a combination of DVD lessons and small group discussion. However many resources such as short video clips, weekly lesson plans, small group discussion questions, and preparatory readings were accessible through the website for group members and curious visitors. Although online teaching tools were used in the classes, I was curious why face-to-face learning was still the dominant method, and why

more interaction could not take place over the Internet using social media tools for synchronous and asynchronous learning.

4.5.2.3 Meetings (Mass-Youtube, Seeking God's Will Class, Vision Congregational Meeting, New Members Luncheon, Stewardship Fair)

One Ship Church offered many different opportunities for members to gather and exchange information during the course of the regular life of the community. The primary opportunity was the weekly Masses held daily (9am), and four times on the weekends (Saturday- 4pm, Sunday- 9am, 11:15am & 6pm). During my visits at *One Ship Church* I was able to attend a weekday Mass, and at least one weekend Mass at each of the four scheduled times. The first Mass I attended (December 2011, 11:15am) had about 600-700 people in attendance representing a wide range of age groups.

Although there was a children's program concurrent with the Mass, many parents had their children with them, and a number participated in the Mass. There was a conscious attempt to create a worshipful atmosphere leading up to the service, with a choral prelude and with ushers keeping the doors to the noisy foyer closed except to admit parishioners. To the right and left of the sanctuary front were elevated data projection screens, and as I entered there was a message announcing the second Sunday of Advent and an image of John the Baptizer in a stylized fresco painting.

Many Protestant churches are experimenting with new forms of worship, often reflected in worship spaces. I was interested to see how the new modern facilities of *One Ship* and the adoption of new communication technologies would

impact worship. The nature of the Catholic masses however, precludes most local attempts at change. The Church's transition to a new English liturgy was a denominational change, though I did note that the changes were causing some unease. The music used in worship was a blend of traditional and more contemporary pieces performed by a choir and led by a cantor. The use of new music styles would be one area where changes to worship could occur at the local level.

The projection screens were used to display the recitations, and some members had print copies of the Missal they used to follow along. The congregation seemed at ease with the use of the projection screens in the Mass. In another Mass (December 2014, 9:00am) a video clip, "Jesus and Santa" (IgniterMedia, 2012), was used to contrast the two views of Christmas, and to stress that Jesus "brings us something more, the grace we so desperately need." The members seemed to be comfortable with this use of new media in the Mass. The homily itself used the hook of the arrival of Sidney Crosby and the Stanley Cup in the city, a significant media event, as an illustration for preparation of the coming of the Lord.

The Priest emphasized the importance of confession, a uniquely Catholic sacrament. Announcements were a regular part of the service, members were invited to pick up a bulletin in the foyer, and reminded that the information was also available on the website. I was struck by the easy blending of traditional and contemporary elements in the Mass that I did not see to the same extent in the Baptist churches I visited. As a Protestant, I was intrigued by the use of

traditional elements like the Greek responsive reading, “Kyrie, eleison,” projected on the overhead screen. The use of technologies in the service raised no reactions, as members appeared used to this. The use of electronic and print worship resources was merely a matter of preference. The Church offered a wide range of regular classes on a weekly basis that served as learning and relationship building opportunities such as community Bible studies, Youth Confirmation classes, Alpha, and Catholicism 201 (both noted above).

There were also a number of special information-sharing opportunities held through the year in the church. Examples of these types of events I participated in were a “Seeking Direction” workshop, a Congregational Q&A Meeting on the new Church vision, a New Members’ Luncheon, and the annual Stewardship Fair.

I had the privilege of attending a workshop in early 2012 on “Seeking Direction” held by a Sister in the Church. I felt this would give me insight into how members of the church thought about the topic of “seeking God’s Will.” There were about twelve participants of different ages and backgrounds for this evening workshop held at the church. The emphasis throughout the session was on gathering information, and stressed that God speaks through family, friends, circumstances, and Scripture. Although not completely rejected, the idea of extraordinary communication was cautioned: “If someone says ‘God spoke to me’, I would say go see a psychiatrist.”

The benchmark presented of an authentic experience with God was how it has changed the individual to be more compassionate, kind and loving. The

Sister discussed at length the differences between secular and Christian discernment, and emphasized that although one could seek discernment without God, if we seek his leading we must know him. This is accomplished through prayer and Scripture study, particularly the New Testament. Much of her presentation drew on her own discernment experiences, and her own calling to ministry, and these were powerful lessons. The perspective taken in this workshop emphasized strongly the wisdom model of discernment, and reflected a more liberal theological understanding of leading.

The Congregational Q&A Meeting was held in December 2011 following a weekday morning Mass, attended by about 120 worshippers, and a short social. The Priest had shared that some members were struggling with the church's new direction. He had shared that this direction, an emphasis on the "New Evangelization", had been neglected for about two generations, but now was a direction at all levels of the church. This meeting was an opportunity for members to share their concerns. Thirty-three members stayed for the meeting where an overview of the direction was presented. The Priest stressed the need to ensure that people's concerns are heard lest they become disengaged. The three ships illustration was raised as well as the importance of outreach programs like Alpha, and the use of church growth tools like Gallup research and the upcoming congregational survey. The members were open to sharing and recognized and affirmed the Priest's expertise in church growth.

One example was the new members' luncheon that followed a December 2011 Mass. A new members' luncheon was held every two-three months as an

opportunity to make connections. I was invited to attend and there were approximately 80 participants, larger than the usual number. During the luncheon several speakers presented opportunities for involvement and service in the church and were available to answer questions about the church and its ministries. One speaker presented the book *Living Your Strengths* (Winsemen, Clifton, and Liesvert, 2004) noted above. This luncheon provided an excellent opportunity for new members to connect with leaders in the church and to gather information. It was an opportunity for me to meet some of the new members and to hear their own stories of what drew them to the church.

Another valuable information context at *One Ship Church* was the Stewardship Fair (January 20, 2012), an annual opportunity to showcase the many volunteer service opportunities in the church. The event was set up throughout the church with a carnival atmosphere. Entertainment, food, and door prizes were available. Each ministry of the church had a booth set up staffed by a volunteer who could answer questions. Most groups provided print literature about their ministry. The event generated a lot of participation and excitement, and seemed an ideal way to reach out to members who might have been hesitant to approach a ministry on their own. The breadth of opportunities fascinated me (as well as the discovery of a fledgling iPad band). Although most of the contact information was already available on the website, the church saw the importance of interpersonal contact in attracting people to volunteer.

These Church activities offered rich information contexts for gathering, sharing and engaging. Although new modes of communication were used,

traditional means, particularly interpersonal communication remained highly important. Seeking God's will at the congregational level requires effective information gathering and use.

4.5.3 One Ship Leaders' Seeking

One Ship Church leaders' information seeking was explored in two dimensions: their corporate and their individual experiences. In considering corporate information seeking I considered their use of external consultants, their participation in parish leaders' training workshops, and a Pastoral Council meeting. I explored leaders' personal information seeking through individual interviews of *One Ship Church* leaders.

4.5.3.1 External Resources and Consultants

I was intrigued by *One Ship Church's* use of external strategic planning tools to inform leaders' decision-making. In my initial interview with my informant, the parish priest described their use of the Gallup tools such as Winsman's book (2006) described above, as well as the Gallup *Me25 Member Engagement Survey* (2011). Gallup has developed a number of instruments "that measure the 'unmeasurable' – spiritual engagement" (p. 1), similar to the tools used to measure employee engagement and customer satisfaction in business.

The premise explained in Gallup's promotional materials is that engaged members are more likely to invite others to their church, spend more time serving in their communities, and generally to be more satisfied in their lives. The *ME25* is a confidential survey that measures 25 engagement, spiritual commitment, and faith outcomes. The survey is confidential and anonymous, can be administered

online or by paper, and is intended to be taken by as many church members as possible. Gallup provides tips and resources to improve survey participation. When the survey is completed the church is provided their individual results, comparisons with similar churches (e.g. Catholic Churches), and comparisons with all churches administering the *ME25* survey.

Gallup provided a consultant to meet with leaders to interpret the scorecard and facilitate discussion of action plans. The initial test is intended to establish a baseline, and further administrations of the survey are recommended to assess the effectiveness of the action plans. The church planned to repeat the test in 2014. The leadership was enthusiastic about the use of these materials, and shared the results from the first survey administration.

The use of these strategic consulting materials was done in concert with other initiatives. Soon after my arrival at *One Ship Church* the leadership hosted an event entitled “Sharing the Vision and Mission of The New Evangelization” (October 2011). This weekend consisted of three workshops: “Seeking and Proclaiming Christ as Catechists” for catechists on the Friday evening, “Parish Renewal: Building An Evangelized and Evangelizing Faith Community” for all parishioners Saturday morning, and an action plan session for leaders on Saturday afternoon. This weekend workshop was facilitated by internationally known Catholic author/speaker Tom Quinlan from Chicago.²¹ One hundred participants attended the Saturday morning workshop from One Ship and a

²¹ Tom Quinlan is the Director of the Religious Education Office for the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois, and the Founding Chairperson of the National Committee for Catechetical Leadership in the U.S (LinkedIn).

number of other parishes in the diocese. The intent of this session was to facilitate an open conversation about the pastoral letter from the Archbishop (Mancini, 2011) a document previously referenced in leaders' meetings, church publications, and Masses.

The session was introduced with worship notably the hymn "Christ Beside Me" and a reading from Isaiah. The session itself included presentations from the facilitator, open discussion, individual brainstorming, and even a Youtube video. The facilitator challenged the participants to consider how the Church might better engage with Nova Scotia culture in an effort to be relevant, and to think about how to connect with local neighbourhoods. Using a variety of handouts participants explored qualities of healthy parishes, and their evidences, as well as qualities of dysfunctional parishes.

Quinlan rooted the presentation firmly in Catholic theology yet argued, "The goal of this is not to pour information into people" and asked "Do people believe their way into belonging, or belong their way into believing?" Essential to Quinlan's own church growth experiences were stories he shared with participants of the impact of the U.S. mega-church Willowcreek Community Church on his home community.²² He described how Willowcreek's parish abutted his own, and was drawing over 10,000, compared to the 15 Catholic parishes' 15,000. They saw Willowcreek "creating places to draw people in and then bring them into the church." They decided to build a Catholic Willowcreek,

²² Willowcreek Community Church itself began as a church plant in 1975 and has grown to currently 20,000 members. It markets its own church growth resources (e.g. Hybel, 2002).

understanding that they could not be whatever people want as they had 2000 years of history and tradition, but they could take the best of Willowcreek. Quinlan said, “Willowcreek can teach the revelation of Christ. We have the fullness of the revelation in Christ, Scripture and Tradition.” The remainder of the session guided participants on an exploration of the elements of building a renewed and evangelizing parish.

The afternoon session for leaders began with an opportunity for leaders to share stories of leaving and rediscovering the church. The presentation explored the challenge of culture and true conversion. Throughout the presentations and sharing diverse authors and resources were cited as useful such as Willowcreek, Fr. Robert Barron,²³ Mother Teresa,²⁴ and Seth Godin.²⁵ The Priest discussed the Gallup ME25 survey and the weaknesses it identified such as providing spiritual leadership to such a large congregation. Leaders were challenged to broaden their definition of leadership and understand their roles as key influencers. The resources used were both secular and sacred, and elements of this discussion could apply in churches of other denominations or even secular organizations. However, throughout the sessions Quinlan kept bringing the conversation back to the distinctive nature of the Church. Mirroring a quotation I heard in another of the participant churches, Quinlan said, “We are not the

²³ Fr. Robert Barron is an author, speaker and theologian. He is the founder of global Catholic media ministry (Barron, 2013).

²⁴ Mother Theresa of Calcutta (1910-1997) was a Catholic Nun, missionary to Calcutta, India and founder of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity. She was beatified by John Paul II on October 19, 2003 (Mother Theresa, 2013).

²⁵ Seth Godin is an author, marketing guru, blogger, and leadership consultant. He states “he writes about the post-industrial revolution, the ways ideas spread, marketing, quitting, leadership and ost of all changing everything.” (Godin, 2013).

Kiwanas club. We are the Church of Jesus Christ, this is what it is all about.” The session ended with prayer.

4.5.3.1 Group Decision Making

I was invited to attend a full morning Pastoral Council special meeting on March 9, 2013 where leaders were involved in a visioning and operational restructuring process for *One Ship Church*. I hoped to observe Council’s decision-making process, and record their use of information sources. Eleven members attended the meeting, five staff and six lay leaders, including one leader participating offsite via a Skype call. The Pastoral Council had two important agenda items: staff restructuring, and visioning. The current Operational Level Team was struggling with day-to-day tasks and had little time to engage in mid to long-term planning. Additionally there was a need to move staff members from doers to leaders of volunteers. The final agenda item was to approve the proposed Vision Statement that would guide staff priorities, and inform the Church’s direction.

Prayer was an important component of this meeting: the meeting began with sharing prayer requests and a time of prayer, would close in prayer, and a critical decision point, a member asked, “do we need to stop and pray before we vote.” I did not believe that respondents saw this as only a religious formality, but they sincerely invited God into their process.

Another important theme was the openness to resources both sacred but outside Catholicism and secular resources. An example was a report on a

meeting with Nicky Gumbel,²⁶ founder of the Alpha Course, an outreach tool by the Church, and Vicar of one of Britain's largest churches, Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church. As *One Ship church* grows they were conscious both of the lack of local Catholic models, and the need to look farther afield for models. One resource that was recommended was the book *Death by Meeting* (Lencioni, 2004), a secular business book. Several of the leaders present had business and management backgrounds and experience in strategic planning and they brought those experiences into the meeting as they discussed the need for staff restructuring and management. However, leaders also apologized for bringing their secular expertise into the discussion, as the leaders wrestled with balancing the sacred and the secular.

Much of the conversation was not dissimilar to conversations I have had in secular workplaces as leaders debated SWOT analyses, organizational charts, scalable operations and strategic planning processes. It was a large organization with a growing professional staff and the leaders recognized that questions like reporting lines and accountabilities had to be addressed. The focus of the conversation shifted in tone in the second half as they discussed the proposed vision statement that would guide the work of staff, and the direction of the Church. This was very much a faith-based conversation, and leaders expressed differing priorities for the Church. Older leaders drew heavily on their prior Church experiences. After considerable discussion leaders arrived at a

²⁶ Nicky Gumbel is the Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, the largest Anglican Church in Britain with a regular attendance of 4,000 people in eleven Sunday services (Gumbel, 2013).

consensus that went beyond an organizational vision and reflects their religious orientation: “Parish Vision Statement: XXXXX XXXXX Parish is a healthy and growing faith community that brings people to Christ, forms disciples and sends them out to transform the world. Every member is committed to worship, to grow, to serve, to connect and to give.”

This was a management meeting, but it was apparent that leaders believe in the eternal spiritual results of the work of the church in people's lives, and this re-shaped how they viewed the guiding vision and planning of the church. In this meeting leaders drew heavily on their prior experiences, outside expertise, and personal faith. Leaders were open to outside resources but used them critically, in a manner consistent with their faith.

4.5.4 Individual Seeking (Four Interviews)

I had the opportunity to meet with many individuals at *One Ship Church* to hear about their personal faith stories, involvement in the church, and the impressions of the church's vision and direction. Here I described four formal interviews with staff and lay leaders about their personal information seeking, and their information seeking as a leader of the Church. The four leaders represented different age groups and included two men and two women. All were university educated, and all were deeply committed to their faith and the work of their Church. I was both inspired and challenged by their enthusiasm and commitment. I was also struck by the way individual personalities impacted the respondents' approaches to information seeking, the sources they valued and used, and those they did not. In the interviews at *New Governance Church*

prayer was repeatedly referenced as an information seeking resource. In the following set of interviews I explored references to the use of prayer when they were raised, and allowed the respondents to elaborate on the role and importance of prayer to them.

The respondent leaders of *One Ship Church* approached information seeking in their personal, preparatory, and leadership roles in a variety of ways but themes emerged from their descriptions. Respondents for example often demonstrated little variation in how they approached everyday life information problems and information seeking for faith building suggesting that in some ways the distinction between those spheres of life was artificial. To illustrate, one respondent described a work research problem, in which perceived national experts were interviewed to gain insight into how other jurisdictions had addressed the issue, and then an online search was conducted to identify national and international trends. The respondent drew on significant professional experience to narrow the parameters on both kinds of information gathering. When asked if the respondent would use the same criteria for selecting faith or health sources, for example, the respondent said, “Yes, I think so, the same kinds of sources.”

When considering personal faith development the four respondents described a variety of resources. One leader who was more inclined to use technology in both the workplace and church contexts subscribed to Listservs hosted by institutions such as the *Catholic Education Resource Centre* (2013), a general resource of articles and papers, and the *Vatican News Service* (2013).

This respondent also enjoyed reading and regularly visited local religious bookstores to browse for resources.

The respondent selected resources based on “interest sparked by something online,” recommendations of the parish priest, or any books related to topics of personal interest like Ignatian Spirituality and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. He enjoyed Pope Benedict’s writings and “once I started reading him, I started buying him.” The respondent also used online tools such as Amazon to locate interesting sources, and considered personal experience as very important in discerning useful materials, and the respondent noted a local academic who drove, “me to the meatier stuff.” So the respondent browsed widely. Recommendations from trusted experts, personal interests, and the respondent’s own expertise all played roles in information selection for personal faith development.

A second respondent used similar resources for both personal development and preparation for the leadership role. For example, at that time for personal interest the respondent was reading two books: *Is the Reformation Over* (Noll & Nystrom, 2008) and *The Biblical Basis for the Eucharist* (Salza, 2008) both deeply theological and historical. Reading generally was important whether it was the Bible, spiritual writings, daily mass readings, or even religious poetry. Music was also used for faith development, “but for the most part it’s about the written word.” The respondent was regularly involved in religious instruction, and found that “just doing your research for it was really part of my faith formation...I always get something new out of it. I always get recharged and

refilled.” The third respondent echoed this, “Because it’s a vocation, right, this isn’t just a job, this is my living out my faith, right?”

All the respondents, in personal faith development, but also in connection with leadership decisions, noted the importance of the sacraments. One respondent mused: “Sometimes even the Sacrament of Reconciliation can even be a chance to at least touch some of the things that I want to make decisions about.” As was the case with the earlier respondents, the boundaries between personal faith development and preparation for leadership roles were often blurred.

In contrast to the respondents who referenced a variety of print sources, two respondents did not consider themselves readers. It is important to clarify that both respondents were well educated, and well read, but they were emphasizing where they placed their information priorities. One respondent did use a variety of resources for personal development including contemporary Christian music and hymns, Papal Encyclicals, and the biographical works on the lives of the saints. But they described their greatest resources for faith development as people, as one said: “my top five are all under the relationship building one so of course the first thing I say when you’re asking me is, ‘Christian Fellowship’.” That respondent drew on a Biblical model attributed to the apostle Paul to support this approach: “look up for direction, look laterally to help them develop their faith.” This was an interesting theological justification for choosing particular information sources.

An important selection criterion for information sources was utility; “I go with what works for me. In terms of mentoring, if I am not getting anything out of a spiritual leader or director...I’m not exactly going to go to them for advice...I go where it is fruitful.” The other respondent also stressed utility as an important criterion for selecting any information source, describing a particular group that created an outreach program that has proved widely successful “my first choice for this is I want something that works.” The respondent placed a high degree of trust in proven resources and organizations, and was averse to seeking out any additional resources.

When we turned to the question of preparation for leading, respondents described using a variety of resource types. Print resources were used when available, but information overload and authority were always concerns; “I don’t always have the time to take to read everything,” said one respondent, “so sometimes you just have to skim through things and go ‘hmm I don’t know if I like the sound of this’.” Generally however, respondents seemed to be very selective in the resources they gathered, particularly online, and employed information filters. One respondent described searching out specifically resources that were familiar or specifically recommended rather than general searching. That respondent, for example, relied on people who were skilled online seekers, but remained adamant that they forward only the best information, the “nuggets.” Another respondent’s description of online searching also emphasized mediation by people: “I’m not a big Google the Internet and look at all these articles, I’m not a big reader, and so that’s not how I learn best. I learn best by talking to people.”

A theme throughout all the interviews and particularly for the two self-described non-readers was the use of knowledgeable people both as information sources, but also information filters.

Another key theme in preparation for leadership was prayer, as one respondent flatly stated, “Well the key resource is prayer, always prayer and reflection. Prayer is a substantial part of my life and I don’t walk away from it.” Another respondent spoke about drawing on both personal religious experience and management training, and saw both of these as important resources but, “80% prayer, 20% reflecting on experience.” I asked the respondent to elaborate on the role prayer played in preparing for a leadership meeting. The respondent explained that business experience was brought to the table, recognizing that a church was not a business but that there were business elements, and parallels between marketing and evangelism. The respondent would then read through the agenda and become familiar with the issues the leaders would discuss.

The next step was to reflect on what to say and not to say, and seek God’s leading through prayer, usually the *Liturgy of the Hours* (2013) and the *Lectio Divina* (2013). The goal was to discern how to share insights in a gentle and pastoral manner, but also revealed an important belief about prayer: “The Bishop said to me recently, there are no coincidences with God and you know these things help me.” This illustrated an important function of prayer in creating the appropriate perspective for decision-making. Another respondent illustrated the role prayer played by describing the administration of the congregational survey, “it wasn’t just ‘fill out this survey’ but we’re going to do this prayer and we’re going

to talk about why we are doing this first. We'll talk about this, then we'll ask the Holy Spirit's guidance, and then we'll do the survey." That respondent felt prayer was very important to both information gathering and discernment, as it created the appropriate attitude and perspective.

One leader was very explicit about the personal need for prayer in preparation for leading, and selecting appropriate resources: "Well, you pray about it. I do. I see the need, ask the Lord to guide me, if I tried something and it falls flat and then I ask the Lord for mercy." The importance of prayer in relation to the burden of leadership echoed similar ideas shared by *New Governance Church* respondents.

In their leadership contexts, respondents were often challenged to find useful materials that would work in their unique context, and as a consequence often had to look far afield for appropriate resources. Respondents did reference key thought documents provided by the Diocese such as guidance from the Bishop. Often materials were produced by other dioceses within the Roman Catholic Church such as stewardship materials that helped inform the leadership's own discussions (e.g. USCCB, 2002). These materials were usually provided by the local Diocese office, or were located by the local priests.

When it was necessary to extend outside the parish and diocese for external resources Roman Catholic materials were preferred by leaders. Leaders described a number of Roman Catholic bodies, conferences, and associations that were preferred information sources. One respondent was very adamant that resources he sought "have to be Catholic. And I don't seek

information from other denominations.” I did note however, that the leader had cited non-Catholic resources that he used heavily in his ministry.

The apparent contradiction was resolved by noting a distinction between what the respondent saw as programming materials and theological materials. Program materials could be appropriate if they were consistent with Catholic doctrine, or that could be adapted for the Catholic context. Questionable materials would require approval: “When it comes to information and other people’s ideas it would have to be have to be the Bishop or Father XXXX coming and saying here, ‘I really want you do to this.’” This appeared to be the case with another respondent who talked about using the materials by evangelical mega-church leaders like Bill Hybels and John Maxwell. Given the unique situation of the parish, the respondent was open to consider new approaches and ideas for outreach and evangelism, but remained rooted theologically in the Roman Catholic tradition.

When we discussed the impact of technology on leaders’ information seeking and use, respondents’ attitudes ranged from positive to ambivalent. One respondent cited email as having the largest impact, and used the example of recent focus groups where PowerPoint presentations were emailed to participants. That respondent was positive about the use of technology: “It makes it much easier to access people at a larger level and it’s easier to deal with the data afterwards and prepare documents and get them out quickly and easily.” Being able to archive digital documents was also considered a valuable resource that could be referred to in the future. The only downside for this

respondent was that some things could not be done by email, “You always have to have personal contact.”

Another respondent had reflected significantly on the impact of technology on parish life generally, and argued for an increased use of technology to reach out to the younger generation. The respondent used the Biblical illustration of Jesus going to meet the Samaritan women at the well to propose that the church needs to join the online conversations, but reminded me that it was “not about the tools but about the message.”

One respondent was excited at the idea of introduction of new technologies in Mass and instruction. In the introduction and literature review I noted some of the clergy and authors who expressed concerns about online sources eroding authority. None of these respondents appeared to share this concern.

For all the *One Ship Church* respondents, people remained the most valuable resources for discernment at the decision making level. Respondents repeatedly described trusted leaders, mentors, and colleagues, who made up their leadership information networks. I cannot help but reflect on the unique nature of religious organizations that exist both as a corporate entity and a faith community, recognizing that the interdependent membership is never really removed from the boardroom table.

I found *One Ship Church* to be a unique religious organization in Nova Scotia for both its size and complexity. As an information place, it was a dynamic environment where information was created, gathered, disseminated, and

exchanged, by traditional means, and by a variety of new digital technologies. In some respects this church lagged behind the other two churches in its adoption of social media, yet leaders saw the potential of these new forms of communication, and were open to new ideas.

Leaders identified some limitations associated with new technologies, and there was evidence of critical reflection on the role of technologies in the Church. One Ship Church leaders were strongly rooted in their own faith tradition, and although they frequently identified the need for change, the changes appeared to be to structures and attitudes rather than church doctrines. There was openness to external resources such as program materials and consultants, and some of these resources were from secular and non-Catholic sources. Leaders were careful about the use of non-Catholic resources, and used religious authorities when necessary to recommend or vet resources. I did not interview the parish priest about his own information behaviour, although I had a number of conversations with him about information seeking and use in the Church. He was a very busy man, and his time was limited, so often our conversations occurred over lunch, between meetings, and over preparations for parish activities. I appreciated those opportunities to “tag along.” He was an invaluable informant in helping me bridge the gap between my own preconceptions about Catholic churches and realities. He also assisted me in understanding the unique role that *One Ship Church* plays in the region as a model of a successful church merger, and an exemplar for the new evangelization. Parish priests play a unique role as leaders in their churches, distinct from the roles Pastors play in

most Protestant churches. In retrospect, by emphasizing non-clergy leaders at *One Ship Church* I may have missed some important insights into leadership in Catholic churches.

4.6 Summary: Key Themes

In the pilot study when I considered the question “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’” four key themes emerged. Through the interviews with lay leaders, staff, and deacons these themes continued through the two other churches’ surveys.

4.6.1 Church and the Internet

Technology was ubiquitous, and was transforming many of the traditional activities of the Church including its leadership activities. All three of the study churches were enthusiastic users of technology, but not uncritically. Leaders were also conscious that not all members or even leaders used technology, and were careful to not exclude anyone. Technology became an important tool for leadership communication and engagement. In the following chapter I explore attitudes about technology, and the idea that technology has negatively impacted church life.

4.6.2 Theology of Information Seeking

Leaders did not restrict their information seeking to resources produced by their religious group. The leaders from the two Baptist churches accessed resources from a number of Evangelical Protestant groups particularly at the

personal and preparatory levels. The leaders from the Roman Catholic Church also used materials from Evangelical groups including some in common with the other churches. Although denominational boundaries seemed to be porous in respect to information, church leaders were not indiscriminate, but appeared to filter materials through the lens of their own church's doctrine. Leaders were theologically astute and were able to discern appropriate and inappropriate borrowing of materials, and when uncertain leaders deferred to clergy as the authority. In the following chapter I explore patterns of information use that considered the role of clergy as information guides and the information boundaries leaders would not cross.

4.6.3 Prayer as Information Seeking

Leaders routinely consulted people in their information seeking and use, particularly at the leaders' corporate decision-making level. As a corollary to that, leaders sought out divine leading through prayer. Prayer was a common practice for leaders across the three churches and the principle discernment practice for many. Prayer as an information practice posed challenges for the researcher. One cannot listen in on an answer to prayer, and it cannot be analyzed as other information sources or tools. In the next chapter I explore the idea of prayer as a reality for the leaders, and consider how it can be handled within information-seeking models.

CHAPTER FIVE: THREE KEY THEMES

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on three of the study's key themes that I believe are most important for understanding information behaviour within the church context. Although earlier models of everyday life information seeking are still relevant in this context, I will demonstrate how unique characteristics of church leaders' seeking require a more nuanced model. The three key themes I chose to explore are:

I. *The Church Online*: The impact of technology was a sub-question I raised at the outset of this study. The churches' engagement with new technologies was explored in greater detail, as well as leaders' attitudes toward the role of that technology in congregational life. I make specific reference to insights from the *New Governance Church* Informatics Project case study, and how these insights were confirmed in the *Big Vision* and *One Ship* studies. I also reference the case study of preparation for preaching and the Internet conducted at *New Governance Church* and supported with data from *One Ship* and *Big Vision* churches.

II. *The Theology of Information Seeking*: Research has demonstrated that all information seekers bring their own conceptual filters to their tasks. Religious leaders are no different, and one set of conceptual filters appeared to be the leader's personal and church theologies. I use the term "theology" somewhat fluidly here, but intend the formal and structured religious beliefs held by the

individual and their church. During the collection of data, it became apparent that leaders used these theologies to define search perimeters, evaluate information, and integrate that new knowledge. At times those theologies also appeared to create barriers and tensions such as when leaders wished to use information from outside their own theological boundaries or when engaging with secular information. Paradoxically, sometimes leaders appeared to ignore obvious theological boundaries in their choice of information sources. In order to explore this apparent discrepancy, I developed criteria to measure the theological position of the respondent's church, and then applied them to the sources leaders selected to see if there was a mismatch. Do leaders select sources that support or undermine traditional religious authorities?

III. *Prayer and Information Seeking*: The use of people to meet information needs is an important characteristic of information seeking. People can be important sources of new information. People can provide validation of information found through other means. People can help affirm our information decisions. All three uses of people were evident in the interviews of Church leaders. Churches and leaders frequently used prayer as a tool for information seeking, as a means of validation of information gathered, and as an evaluative method. The ways prayer was used by leaders parallels closely their use of people, and they described prayer as communication. In this section I examine prayer as an information tool, and make some suggestions for how it can be incorporated into our understanding of information seeking in church contexts.

Some of the material presented in this chapter on the *New Governance Church Informatics Project* was originally presented at the 7th *International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture* as “Little Church on the Internet: a case study of one congregation’s online engagement” (Michels, 2010b). Some of the material presented on online engagement for preaching was previously published in the *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* under the title “Dipping into a shallow pool or beginning a deeper conversation: A case study of a minister’s engagement with the Internet for preaching” (2010a). Some material included in the section of the theology and information seeking was presented in a poster at the *Atlantic Provinces Library Association 2012 Conference* entitled, “the Theology of Leaders’ Information Seeking” (2012), and a paper presented at the 2010 Dalhousie Interdisciplinary PhD Student research Roundtable, entitled “the Theology of Information Seeking” (2010). The section on the theme of prayer contains material from a paper “Beyond Belief: Prayer as Communication in Religious Information Seeking” presented at the 2011 *Canadian Association for Information Science Conference* (2011). I am indebted to those who provided feedback on each of these early presentations; their insights enabled me to refine my questions for the two subsequent research sites.

5.2 Churches Online

In Chapter Four I described three churches and the ways new communication technologies were integrated into congregational life. These technologies, whether used to seek and gather, or to create and disseminate information, were hallmarks of each of the congregations that participated in this study. Each of these churches demonstrated adherence to official doctrines and practices. I would not consider any of these churches to be theologically innovative or “edgy.” Each church, however, was enthusiastically technologically innovative, beyond the level of most regional churches.

Each church had a professionally designed website for internal and external communication. Applications such as calendars and maps provided enriched content. All three had used streaming media produced in house or downloaded from online sources such as Vimeo and Youtube in their services of worship and instructional classes. Conversely they all used streaming media on their websites and podcasts to open their services of worship to their wider community. The three churches had also made fledgling attempts at communicating through social media although largely these were for news and announcements. Attempts to generate dialogue through social media remained limited. *One Ship* and *Big Vision* had begun to integrate interactive elements into their website like the ability to submit prayer requests, share testimonies, sign up for events, and make online donations. What I could observe through the website and social media I subscribed to, and what I heard from the leaders I spoke with, was that generally the use of communication technologies remained

one-to-many where information is controlled and managed by the church. It is possible, even likely, that individual groups of members are communicating among themselves through their own online communication tools but I could not observe this. One-to-many online communication reflects Helland's typology of "religion online" (2002), suggesting that although the churches saw the potential of new technologies they were not prepared to surrender control in a many-to-many online environment.

It is important to note that the use of new technologies was intentional, and often seen by leaders as essential to engaging with younger generations. A leader of *One Ship* was adamant, "I see technology changing the church, yes we need to be there if we are going to evangelize to youth who should be the present in the church we need to reach them where they are at." However, I also found that despite general support for the use of new technologies, leaders had differing attitudes about their personal use of technology, ranging from enthusiastic to resistant. It was also apparent that the three churches were at different places in their adoption of new technologies. Both *Big Vision* and *One Ship* were in new buildings with integrated communication technologies. *Big Vision* was a more active user of social media, while *One Ship's* leadership was exploring digital media for instruction. Leaders of these churches were more comfortable with their technology, and seemed more open to utilizing it where appropriate.

New Governance Church was in a different situation. At the time of the study, the leadership had recently adopted a somewhat radical agenda to "get

online” moving from low-tech to a comparably high level of online engagement. In the following section I described the implementation of these new technologies and considered what leaders were saying about the project. I also explored the use of technology in the services of worship, a practice shared by all three churches, but specifically through the experiences of *New Governance Church*.

5.2.1 New Governance Church Informatics Project²⁷

In September 2008 the *New Governance Church* engaged in a “church informatics” project. In chapter four I described in detail the technologies used by this church. The adoption of these new technologies was in fact very recent and in order to understand the role new technologies played in the members and leaders’ information seeking I looked more closely at the church’s new technology innovation plan. “Church Informatics”, in the words of the project leader, “is about pursuing the goals of a church (or the Church) with the aid of technology to be more effective and efficient.” The primary goal of this project, in his words “was...reaching the unsaved in our community, our secondary focus was the existing church body...getting ministry staff to adopt the tools available to let us work more efficiently.”

The congregation already had a limited web presence with a Google maps application and downloadable sermons in mp3 format. Using the services of a professional marketing company, the leaders planned to re-launch the website with a new brand and a host of new features such as live and archived videos of church services with chat functions. The intent for this streaming video was evangelistic: to reach those not attending by providing a “window” on the service, “OK, you can check us out online to see what we're all about” in the words of one leader. The leaders hoped to have a member available in the chat room to answer visitor questions. It was emphasized that it was not envisioned as an

²⁷ Material in this section was originally presented in Michels, “Little Church on the Internet: a case study of one congregation’s online engagement” (2010b).

alternative to physically attending the church, although the project leader was aware of the broader debate around virtual services.

The project leader felt that more important than just redeveloping the website was “the behind-the-scenes optimization, analytics, and tactics to ensure it was reaching our intended audience.” Two tactics were raising the church’s ranking in online searches and minimizing confusion with churches with similar names. The church also began using Facebook and Twitter on the premise that “the more contact you can have with people, the better. If a person was already using Facebook or Twitter, we join the conversation where they are already having it.” The leadership would now use email for congregational communication, and Google Docs and online chat for church business.

On Sunday in the autumn of 2009, at the beginning of the pilot study, the congregation began its new experiment with the web. The new streaming Church services were announced in church the previous Sunday, through email and the new Facebook site. The first streaming service attracted nine external viewers: young people who had left for college, and interested friends. Using the chat feature several visitors “logged in” and exchanged greetings. During the following Sunday service, the pastor indicated that a former member who had moved for school emailed to say that the streaming service allowed her to feel that she was still a member of the church. Two congregation members in the sanctuary were able to use cell phones to join the online service and share comments. Numbers would gradually decline over the coming months to four viewers by February 14,

2010. Sunday school teachers unable to participate in the service described how they watched archived services, in addition to members who were ill or travelling.

Facebook and Twitter began as a means of posting church announcements, but soon featured inspirational thoughts. Facebook was used to post “teasers” about upcoming sermon topics that would generate discussion among “friends.” This opened a dialogue during the sermon construction process. At the time of the study, there were thirty “friends” on the Facebook site, nine were regular attendees to the physical service, several more were occasional visitors, and the remainder was online friends. There are about thirty followers of the church Twitter account, but it was noted that posts to the church account are frequently re-tweeted to personal accounts. It was estimated that re-tweeted posts reached in excess of two hundred people, and had the potential of being “more of a snowball than Facebook could ever be,” in the words of the project coordinator. This became a primary means of communication among the youth.

Although I focus here on the intentional technology adoption pilot at *New Governance Church*, *Big Vision Church* and *One Ship Church* also employed these communication tools. Leaders of *Big Vision Church* did make public references in services to these tools but use seemed light and each account appeared to have only a handful of followers. These tools continue to be underutilized. During my first visits at *One Ship Church* in 2011 use of Facebook and Twitter was very limited by leaders. When I returned in 2013 the Church had begun using these tools, and interest was growing. For example, the official Facebook site established in 2012, had only fourteen posts that year, but this has

increased to more than sixty the following year. A visit to this site and the Twitter feed in 2014 revealed a concerted effort by the leadership and members to use these tools for communication. Although slower to adopt these tools, *One Ship Church's* use has dramatically increased while the other churches has maintained the same or declined.

When I compared the integration of technology at *New Governance* and its adoption at the *Big Vision* and *One Ship* churches I noted some interesting contrasts. While all three churches were highly engaged with technology, the adoption of new technologies at *Big Vision* and *One Ship* appears to have occurred more gradually over many years, and might involve only some new technologies. For example, *Big Vision* had been streaming services for a number of years, while *One Ship* appeared not to have experimented with streaming services online until 2013. *Big Vision* at one time did stream its services in real time but has since moved to archive podcasts and video streams. Both *Big Vision* and *One Ship* churches seemed enthusiastic about the use of technology but only where it seemed appropriate. This more gradual adoption likely reduced the resistance that new technologies faced at *New Governance Church*.

5.2.2 Pushback

The changes at *New Governance Church* were not without controversy. After the pastor's announcement about the online student who felt like a member of the church, a concerned member approached him to stress that only those who are physically in church should consider themselves members. The use of other online social media has also had mixed responses. Importantly not all

members and even church leaders were online: “Me, I’m not” one leader said, “When I left work I left the computer....” This was in contrast to other leaders who seemed to consider the Internet to be a valuable source of information for personal faith building, decision-making and worship and preaching preparation: “Google it and you have the whole world open to you.” As a communication and relationship-building tool, leaders’ opinions were divided. One leader was concerned that the new Church website remains accurate and current: “if it’s wrong once or twice well then it loses credibility....” Yet, members were concerned that online activities required too much staff time. Though most of the leaders and many church members had Facebook accounts, few were active users. One church member was even described as “anti-Facebook.” This divide became apparent during a crucial church governance meeting on outreach. One leader was very emphatic, “I think that is one of the problems of social media, you don’t get that relationship...Rather than calling up or talking to people you’re texting or twittering them...So you lose all that emotion...I think this is isolating people.”

Were these attitudes unique to *New Governance* or perhaps an outcome of their rapid adoption? In chapter four I described some of the attitudes that leaders of *One Ship* had toward new technologies in church life. Some saw significant potential and challenge: “the Internet is a huge meme generator. It used to be the church that generated the memes.” For this leader this was an opportunity to create a dialogue and interact around the values and ideas being debated online. Older technologies such as email were accepted without

critique, as another leader explained, “It makes it much easier to access people at a larger level and it’s easier to deal with the data afterwards and prepare documents and get them out quickly and easily.” Social media however was not seen as relevant. Another leader commented, “My best sense on it is where a lot of our parishioners are in the 45 and up age range they aren’t going to be probably using online media, they’re not making that connection yet.”

The leaders seemed intrigued by the potential of social media but paradoxically had little interest in personally or professionally using tools such Facebook and Twitter. When asked directly about the value of a tool like Facebook for ministry, a fourth leader replied: “Awesome. I don’t use it but I love it...I’ve got a twitter account, I’ve tweeted once. I’m totally for the social media.” Often these leaders relied on others within their ministries to develop and use these tools. I did not find the same resistance to technology at *One Ship Church*, even though some leaders I interviewed were not personally interested. This may be a result of the parish priest’s enthusiasm for social media, thus alleviating some of the leaders’ possible concern about its use in the Church. A theme I did hear repeatedly was the concern that technology might undermine face-to-face encounters and community building. Building community was an important theme, throughout the interviews. The leaders all believed that Christians are meant to have fellowship, and that togetherness is vital in order to successfully live the Christian life. Despite this desire for the church, the leaders at *New Governance* lamented that it was “a very friendly church, but no friends,” suggesting that they already had a concern about a lack of deep relationships.

Leaders seemed divided on whether technology was a panacea or hindrance to community building.

This perceived tension between community online and offline expressed at *New Governance* and to a lesser degree *One Ship* is challenged by the research of Campbell and Linderman and Lovheim described in chapter two. Campbell's research considered the biblical concept of *ekklesia* and *koinonia* as part of the theological construction of community. As already noted above, leaders distinguished church community from other forms: "this is not the Kiwanas club...[t]hey do very good things and other but this is not what this church is about. It has a dealing with God...." It was not enough to build community; they had to build a Christian community. Campbell examined these concepts and the ways social networks met those needs (2005). Some of her study participants had faced challenges in creating relationships in the brick church, but developed online connections that opened doors to the offline. Linderman and Lovheim found that these online relationships might not look like traditional (or ideal) religious community, but they might not be dissimilar to the ways relationships are expressed in "real-life" (Linderman & Lovheim, 2005, p. 135). As noted above, they believed these online relationships might be more complex and flexible than offline relationships.

When considering leaders' attitudes, it is helpful to make reference to Campbell's three views of the relationship between religion and the online (2010). The first "media as conduit" (p. 44) was certainly expressed by several leaders. One *New Governance* leader argued, "... like anything else it is a

tool...You can go on the Internet and watch pornography or you can go to a Bible study site; the choices are still the same, they are just faster.” This was a dominant view among many of the younger members, who were eager to harness the evangelistic potential of the web. However, I also heard a second way of speaking of the relationship, what Campbell described as “media as a mode of knowing” (p. 45). There was significant unease about the negative potential of the Internet to isolate and infiltrate the church, even among those who were actively engaged in the Church Informatics project. This is related to the theological question: social media might have the potential to make community, but some leaders remained unconvinced that it can make Christian community.

In *New Governance Church* there was also a process of negotiation with technology. Sometimes the congregation placed limits on its intrusions. Camera shy parishioners requested “no camera” areas of the sanctuary. On one occasion the live stream was paused to permit the announcement of a member’s health diagnosis, considered too personal for the Internet. Many aspects of the service do not translate online (“shake hands with those around you”) and preference was usually given to the offline. Sometimes however, technology was permitted to reshape traditional activities. The potential for online dialogue during the preparation of the sermon, comments from online participants through live chat (including from those in the physical sanctuary and simultaneously online), and debriefing following the service, can all contribute to transform the

monologue to a dialogue. What does this do to the theology of proclamation, the prophetic voice? This question was raised in part in the next section.

5.2.3 Worship and the Internet²⁸

In Chapter Two, I considered the question: “To be (online) or not to be (online)”, and offered Campbell’s description of three views of the relationship between religion and media: “media as conduit”, “media as mode of knowing”, and “media as a social institution” (2010, pp. 44-48). Authors like Dyer (2011), an advocate of technology use in the church, argued that Christians still needed to critique their use of technology based on biblical and theological principles. Van der Laan’s article, “How the Internet Shapes Religious Life, or the Medium is itself the Message” (2009) was an example of a more critical approach to online engagement. He considered the use of Internet resources by American Protestant Christian ministers. His intent “to explore here is how pastors and parishioners rely on technology, specifically the Internet, as their guide to understand, define, and practice their religion.” He added, “I take a close look at Internet resources and ‘inspiration’ for preaching and what that means for contemporary religious life in the United States” (p. 272). His study was inspired by his own personal church experiences. Van der Laan explained:

“Not long ago, I heard a pastor begin a sermon with a telling remark that went something like this: ‘As I was doing research for my message this past week, I found pertinent information on the internet.’ I have to admit that for some time now my personal radar has been suspecting Internet

²⁸ Some material in this section was originally published in David Michels, “Dipping into a shallow pool or beginning a deeper conversation: A case study of a minister’s engagement with the Internet for preaching.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information*. 9(1): 2010.

sources of the sermon anecdotes and illustrations I have been hearing in church services...” (p. 272).

Van der Laan’s methodology was to survey materials available online through sites such as eSermons.com. He discussed authorship, costs related to accessing these resources and ethical/plagiarism issues. Van der Laan then asked the question: “what happens to churches and pastors and Christian religious life when those involved rely increasingly, maybe soon predominately, on such Internet sources and resources.” He concluded that this food for religious life becomes processed, diluted and artificial; “certainly, the sermon is sullied, and the word becomes wooden” (p. 275). He then turned to a more philosophical consideration of the impact of the Internet on religious life generally, drawing on Ellul, Dreyfus and Kierkegaard.

On the face of this study, van der Laan made compelling arguments, raising fears about the depersonalization, commercialization, and homogenization of faith. What was missing from this study was the voice of the minister or any of the church leadership. There were no interviews or analysis of actual Internet information use in sermons. Much of van der Laan’s analysis was rooted in the marketing of the commercial Internet sites. He appeared to assume that ministers might use this Internet material uncritically, and that the Internet exists as an archive or pond that one can dip into for information. I contend that the ministers’ relationship with the Internet was more complex than presented by van der Laan, and worthy of further exploration.

In order to test van der Laan’s proposition, I chose a case study of the impact of the Internet on sermon preparation, drawn from the New Governance

data. I asked, “what is the pastor’s experience of this engagement with the Internet for preaching?” In chapter four above I described information use generally but in the following section, I recounted the minister’s own description of his preparation for preaching as it interacts with the Internet, and considered other studies of clergy information seeking behaviour associated with preaching. I returned to van der Laan’s concerns in my conclusion.

In chapter four the demographics of New Governance were considered, noting higher levels of education and income. Members were more likely to be in professional or managerial occupations. These demographics are significant because they reflect a similar context sociologically and theologically to the congregation referenced in van der Laan’s article (p. 272). The respondent was the Senior Pastor of the *New Governance Church*. He has degrees in the humanities and education with a graduate ministry degree. This was his first pastorate, although it is his second professional career. He was computer literate and comfortable using online communication technologies. He described himself as being “reasonably successful in being able to pursue and acquire the information that I need.”

The respondent described two work related paths for information seeking: “devotional” where the information seeking was for general personal spiritual development, and “intentional” where there was a need for specific religious information related to sermon or religious instruction preparation. These two paths intertwine as serendipitous insights from devotional activities inform the construction of sermons. For example: the respondent enjoys reading

missionary biographies, a source for numerous sermon illustrations. A third concurrent path used by the respondent was observed through analysis of sermons and online posts. This path informed sermon construction as an ongoing online dialogue.

In the formal sermon preparation path the respondent indicated that his beginning point was the Bible, described as the most important source alongside prayer. He would then turn to Bible reference/language tools such as concordances in print or online. One example of an online tool used is BibleGateway.com, a Bible verse lookup tool, with keyword and topical search features. The respondent then turned to other books on Bible themes related to his sermon topic. One example, referenced above, was a book titled *Simply Jesus and You* (2006), a book on Christian Living from a conservative evangelical perspective. He reports that he locates these print sources through recommendations of others, visits to bookstores and through online searching. Recommendations might include materials suggested by the denomination. He then will search online for additional commentary on his topic. He described both browsing and directed forms of online searching. In browsing he stated “if I see a website that mentions resources, I might just flip through it and follow some links and see where it leads.” In more directed searching, when describing the value of online tools he said “...I myself, for instance preparing for a sermon, looking in one book, this is someone’s explanation of a difficult passage and I go online putting it in and all of a sudden there are 200 persons’ opinions on the passage....”

In the devotional path the respondent also indicated that he began with the Bible as his first and key resource. He will then turn to books but this time with a more devotional focus or even Christian fiction. He noted that he had just reread the fiction thriller *The Prophet* by evangelical author Frank Peretti (2005). He then explained that he would listen to current gospel music or contemporary Christian worship music frequently through the Youtube video sharing website, “and listen to and see what people have done visually just to see if something clicks for the church.” He also described turning to blogs and Twitter posts, but added, “of course the resource of prayer and reflecting on the things I have been reading or listen to.” So the idea of discernment and critical thought was never disassociated from this process.

In the third path, online dialogue, web 2.0 applications like Facebook and Twitter were used engage to colleagues, friends and congregation members in the thought processes of the respondent leading up to the sermon. As noted above social media use remained largely a means to communicate outward but on occasion leaders did attempt to create dialogue, and sermon composition was one of these contexts. One example, also noted above, was a post on Facebook on November 25, 2009: “It’s about the Cross – Christmas music video” taken from Youtube (Go Fish Band, 2006). The respondent was taking a controversial position that the focus of Christmas should be on the death and resurrection of Christ. This resulted in several posts questioning and supporting this position, as well as discussion offline. This idea would become a key theme for the Christmas Eve service one month later. Other examples would be the posting of

intended sermon topics on Facebook: “The difference between doubt and denial, join me on Sunday at 11:00am at www._____.ca for an online discussion, you can even send your comments!”

Table 3: *New Governance* Leader’s Information Paths

Task	Path #1 - Intentional Seeking	Path # 2 – Devotional Gathering	Path # 3 Dialoguing
Selecting Text	Bible	Bible	
Textual Exegesis	Reference Books / Online Sources (Concordance: print and online)		
Thematic Study	Books (thematic) Online Sources (Commentary)	Books (devotional/fiction)	
Lesson Application		Gospel Music / Contemporary Worship (Youtube) Blogs/Twitter	Facebook/Twitter Face to face conversations

5.2.4 Evaluating Information

In the interview the respondent was asked to describe his criteria for determining how useful a resource might be in a context of faith building and ministry. He identified the most important criteria as orthodoxy that he defined as “theological perimeters”: “because there is no point in a resource if I don’t consider the information it is going to give to be valid to what I believe.” The exception was the intentional seeking out of different perspectives. This concern is evident in the selection of books used both for sermon preparation and devotional reading representing a particular conservative evangelical perspective. When asked how this would relate to criteria for the selection of non-religious information, he compared it to credibility. Other criteria were

usability, time, and practicality: “something I can take and use in the moment.” It is significant to note that time restrictions can direct the use of certain resources. The respondent spoke about “reading through [church father] Eusebius...I’ll look at this sometime when I’ve got time and now I’ll see if anyone pulled out of it pithy little quotes.” He might then turn to other commentary or online sources on the writings of Eusebius.

5.2.5 Critically Engaging the Internet

The respondent’s engagement with the Internet for sermon preparation and personal preparation was not without critical reflection. He was asked: “how would you say that technology has helped build your personal faith?” and then “how has technology changed the information gathering process?” He indicated accessibility of information was a significant change for personal seeking, sermon preparation and church decision-making. He indicated that this might become an orthodoxy issue because variant viewpoints are now accessible that “ten years ago you wouldn’t have stumbled upon that...it wouldn’t have been in your local bookstore.” He indicated that his role and those of leadership as “centre of Biblical truth” has changed and theological positions are more frequently challenged based on information found online. He also suggested that his role as teacher was changing as members sought their own information online and then would come to him to share it. The respondent voiced a concern that the capacity of the Internet to provide extensive information extends the information seeking process and thereby limits the role of prayer and reflection: “sometimes

I'll say you know we can find an answer, I'll just look it up as opposed to our greatest resource...study and prayer....”

5.2.6 Earlier Patterns

The studies of clergy information behaviour described above in chapter two suggested generalized characteristics of information seeking by clergy (see Allen, Porcella, Tanner & Wicks). Many of these patterns are rooted in the theological worldview of the clergy, as most respondents came from a Christian and predominantly Protestant orientation. My respondent is also situated in this theological and cultural context so it is not surprising to see a similar pattern emerge in my data. The respondent in my study also emphasized formal sources in sermon preparation such as the Bible and reference tools. But he also accessed a variety of informal sources that he indicated played a role in the development of the sermon. This may reflect a network of colleagues accessed through online applications. Certainly, my respondent considered doctrinal orthodoxy a significant selection criterion and restricted his information seeking to likeminded sources as earlier studies suggested. This applied to both print and online sources.

The respondent in my study, although open to materials outside his Baptist denomination, did restrict himself to conservative evangelical materials as was suggested by earlier studies. The use of print sources still dominated my respondent's source preferences but the inclusion of audio-visual sources suggests an interesting variation from Wick's study (1999, p. 207). The respondent relied heavily on his own library but supplemented this with online

sources accessible through his home or office Internet access. On the general level there were no significant discrepancies between earlier studies and my study data. However, I was mindful of Tanner's (1992, p. 25) concern that we consider practice in context. Roland's study (Roland, 2007) was unique in its examination of clergy information use in context. I found it notable that there are no references to the use of Internet in this process.

The respondent in Roland's study, like the respondent in my study, reported a high degree of confidence in his ability to locate relevant sources to construct a sermon (p. 129). There were significant similarities between the respondents' intentional information seeking process as well as several differences. One of the most notable differences was the use of the lectionary and church calendar in selection of an appropriate Scripture text for the sermon. The lectionary is a calendar of readings selected for each Sunday over a three-year period and is used by a number of Protestant denominations including the respondent's Lutheran denomination. The four texts designated for the upcoming Sunday constrains the preachers' choices for text and topic. The respondent in Roland's study indicated, "I almost always preach on the readings" (p. 64) which is consistent with other research on lectionary use by various denominations (p. 100). Baptists, with whom my respondent is affiliated, were found to rarely use a lectionary. Roland has suggested that further research is needed to determine how other denominational ministers seek out relevant Scripture texts for preaching (p. 138). Roland concluded that the primary information source used by his respondent for sermon preparation was the Bible

(p. 105) as was the case in my study. The respondent considered the *Book of Concord*, the collection of creeds and confessions of the Lutheran theological tradition, his second most important information source (p. 103 & 105).

The Baptist tradition does not have a comparable collection of doctrine, however the respondent in my study described the use of books on biblical and theological themes, consistent with his denomination's theology, which would serve in a similar role in interpretation and application of the Scripture text. Although not explicitly noted by Roland's respondent, it was determined that he regularly engaged in study of the Scripture texts in the original languages (pp. 102 & 130). The tools used in language study would be comparable to my respondent's use of Biblical reference tools. Although Roland's respondent indicated that there were additional Bible study books available from the denomination, it was not clear to what extent he used them (p. 83). Following Wicks' study (1999, p. 207), both respondents appeared to select sources constrained by their own theological and denominational worlds. This was explored in greater detail below. It appears that although my respondent accessed online versions of several of his research tools, the information sources selected by both respondents were similar, used in similar manners, and with similar priority. The intentional information seeking paths for both respondents were essentially similar.

Turning now to the devotional sources of information, Roland found that the respondent used few informal/devotional sources for sermon preparation. There were references to church history and a current news story that impacted

the respondent's thinking (Roland, 2007, p. 105). The role of music in the Christian life was discussed several times in Roland's study (pp. 118, 119, 122 & 131) but there was no indication that the respondent used music in relation to sermon preparation. There was no reference to devotional or fictional reading. It appears that the respondent in my study used more devotional information sources in both print and digital formats than was evident in Roland's study. The final path identified in my study was discourse. The respondent in Roland's study for a period of time met for "text studies" with two community ministers (p. 86). There is a further reference to an "imagined" dialogue with his audience that prompted a mid-sermon adjustment of the text in response to how he anticipated some members of the congregation might react to his comments (p. 199). There was no direct means of soliciting feedback identified in Roland's study, online or otherwise.

Perhaps one of the most interesting similarities between the two accounts was the role of prayer and the Holy Spirit in the sermon preparation process. Roland's respondent stated, "Sermons begin, I guess, with prayer and with a discipline..." (p. 69) Like the *New Governance* pastor, Roland's respondent also spoke of a need to "mull over" the text (p. 126) and "to prayerfully consider 'Okay what is this about'" (p. 126). The respondent repeatedly emphasized the Holy Spirit's leading in the selection of the appropriate text (p. 136), direction of the message (p. 66), and affecting the listeners (p. 104). Roland came to an interesting conclusion that "the Holy Spirit is something other than an information resource because the clergy member cannot just pull the Holy Spirit off a

bookshelf, turn to the proper page, and get the answer. The Holy Spirit is the active presence of God, mysteriously and timelessly at work in the world and in the informant's life" (p. 137). This echoes my respondent's comments about the need for prayer and reflection in his sermon construction process. It also highlights the same ambiguity I found in situating the activity of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit in this process.

Although this study focused on the minister, it is helpful to add a brief excursus on the congregation's experience of the sermon. Van der Laan raised the concern of Internet plagiarism as a shortcut for sermon preparation. However, the use of the Internet is not invisible to the congregation. Three examples illustrate this. The first is a verbatim recitation of a well-known sermon portion from Bishop S. M. Lockridge entitled "That's My King" (2008) referenced above in chapter four. This text was downloaded from the Internet and was used as an introduction to the service. The respondent would later preach his own sermon on this theme relating it to the key ideas in Lockridge's. The respondent's original plan was to download and play a video of this sermon in the service. However, although he found many digital copies online, he did not find an adequate high-definition copy. He opted to download and read the text. It was made clear to the congregation that this was not his creation. On another Sunday (January 24, 2010), the respondent used as an illustration a discussion held in an Internet forum around conspiracies and the search for a cure for cancer. He stated: "recently, I read in one of these forums...." I saw no

indication that the congregation found this any less appropriate than an illustration from a newspaper or television program.

On another Sunday (Feb. 13, 2010), the respondent described at length the use of web 2.0 technologies such as Facebook and blogs to create an online presence. As noted above, the church maintains its own online presence, and is accepting of the practice. Rather, the focus of the sermon was on the nature of the online presence members of the congregation create and what it reveals about their own commitment to their faith. The respondent drew on an old adage among evangelical preachers that “If being Christian became a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us?” The adage is now applied to the new online environment. The possibility that some clergy may use Internet material surreptitiously is not discounted. However, these examples suggest that where there is no apparent stigma attached to these resources, there is no need for concealment. Indeed there was no evidence that preacher or congregation were less critically engaged with online information that they might have been for illustrations drawn from a book or newspaper.

There was no evidence that congregational acceptance of the incorporation of new media into the sermon was unique at *New Governance*. I described above in chapter four both *One Ship* and *Big Vision* churches use of online media in the service. After one Mass I attended at *One Ship* that incorporated a downloaded video in the homily, I raised the issue with a church leader. The leader’s response was enthusiastic:

Yeah! And I would love to see more of it right. I mean, I would not like to take anything away from our liturgy. At all. But to be able to incorporate

things that really tap into the psychological realm of people. Like, “oh the lights are dimming...I should be getting excited right now.” There’s an ambiance being put into play.

At both churches the online was bleeding into the offline in worship and preaching. Most members appeared comfortable with the use of the online, but there was no sense that either leaders or members accepted this uncritically.

5.2.7 Conclusion

I began with the question “what is the pastor’s experience of this engagement with the Internet for preparation for preaching?” Similar to Roland’s study and van der Laan’s studies, I focused on the preaching of one pastor drawn from my pilot study. I sought to explore whether the concerns expressed by van der Laan were being borne out in the experience of my respondent. It is not possible to generalize from this one example, but it does demonstrate that that at least this pastor and congregation could effectively navigate the impacts of new technologies in the sermon without the dire consequences suggested by van der Laan. I concluded that the respondent did not describe an experience with the Internet that has significantly transformed intentional activities surrounding preparation for worship. The respondent viewed his engagement with online sources as critical and careful. Further research is needed to determine whether the greater use of devotional materials is a consequence of greater online access or personal preferences of the respondents perhaps related to learning styles.

It was relevant that devotional materials reportedly used by my respondent were both in print as well as digital formats. Perhaps the most interesting impact

of the Internet on sermon preparation was the possibility for ongoing dialogue using online communication technologies. As these technologies are increasingly adopted, it may become commonplace for congregation members to engage in the sermon development process and even extending into the preaching of the sermon. It was also significant that the respondent found the accessibility of information online both a help and hindrance. It created the impression that there is an answer “out there” rather than to seek an answer through prayer and reflection, an important theme in Roland’s study. The place of prayer as a source and evaluation process needs further exploration if we are to truly craft a picture of the work of the minister on or offline. Yet the relationship between my respondent and the Internet is more dynamic and complex than van der Laan’s description. What I believe I observed was the beginning of a deeper conversation.

5.3 Theology of Information Seeking²⁹

5.3.1 Introduction

What do the information source choices of leaders tell us about the endurance of their personal and corporate theology in the information age? During the recruitment phase of the study, several pastor informants shared concerns that traditional religious authorities were being undermined by information sources accessed both through popular media and especially the Internet. One pastor was frustrated with the impact of popular spiritual “gurus” such as Oprah. The plurality of religious teachings was seen as a potential stumbling block for members who might be confused or led away from their faith. This concern about the negative impact of popular media and the Internet was not restricted to the pastor informants.

Apocalyptic predictions about the negative impact of the Internet on religion are frequently found in the popular media. Krotoski’s article in *The Guardian* was an example of this rhetoric when she argued, “Online, God has been released from traditional doctrine to become everything to everybody” (Krotoski, 2011). Above we considered van der Laan’s argument that the Internet has negatively impacted preaching. He argued, “what happens to churches and pastors and Christian religious life when those involved rely increasingly, maybe soon predominately, on such Internet sources and resources

²⁹ Some of the material in this section was previously presented in David Michels, “The Theology of Leaders’ Information Seeking.” Poster, *Atlantic Provinces Library Association Conference*, May 29, 2012, Wolfville, NS; David Michels, “The Theology of Information Seeking.” Interdisciplinary PhD Student Research Roundtable. Dec. 12, 2010, Dalhousie.

certainly, the sermon is sullied, and the word becomes wooden” (2009, p. 275). It was demonstrated that for at least the preachers considered, the concern was overstated.

In chapter four it was shown that leaders were choosing information sources outside of their religious tradition. Respondents in the pilot study, for example, cited sources that represented a variety of theological traditions: Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, Plymouth Brethren and Presbyterian. These traditions all fall within the Protestant branch of Christianity but reflect a broad spectrum of beliefs, practices, and histories.

It was also significant that in the pilot study, the five respondents described sixteen evaluation criteria they used when selecting their sources. I have grouped them into five classes: doctrinally sound (4x), advice of others / good reputation (5x), usefulness (3x), convenience (3x) and divine leading (1x). As one respondent noted, “Criteria number one would be in my opinion, is it orthodox, because there is no point in a resource if I don’t consider the information it’s going to give to be valid to what I believe....”

Table 4: States Criteria for Source Selection

Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Orthodoxy	Trusted advice	Usefulness	Convenience	Validity
Usability	Usefulness	Good Doctrine	Trusted Advice	Convenience
Convenience “pithy quotes”	Reputation	Reputation		Reliability
		Trusted Advice		Orthodoxy
				Divine Leading

So a further question was: “how did leaders reconcile these stated values and their information practices?”

5.3.2 In Their Words – Leaders Thoughts About Information and Their Beliefs

During the course of the interviews and conversations, I was struck leaders' own reflections about the interplay between information and their beliefs. I share a number of representative quotations before considering this theme in greater depth. It is significant to this study, if only to illustrate that these leaders have thought about this.

“In the sense of church leadership being the centre of Biblical truth, that is definitely changed.... Now it is more common that they would go home and look it up on the Internet, or something like that in a chat room or whatever.”

Pastor – New Governance Church

“Well I'll live ten times to exhaust the riches of the catholic church, the wells run so deep they go right back to Jesus.... I would never get to the end of it.... So I'm not going outside of that intentionally, because there's no need to.”

Staff Leader – One Ship Church

“So and I see that with the people I deal with, who come all excited about something they have learned...they would never even been exposed to that ten years ago because of the internet.”

Lay Leader – New Governance Church

“Willowcreek can teach the revelation of Christ. We have the fullness of revelation in Christ, scripture and tradition.”

External Consultant – Roman Catholic Church

“When it comes to information and other people’s ideas it would have to be the Bishop or Father coming and saying here I really want you to do this. In which case I would be like of course. Out of trust and obedience I would do it, but I’m sure not looking.”

Staff Leader – One Ship Church

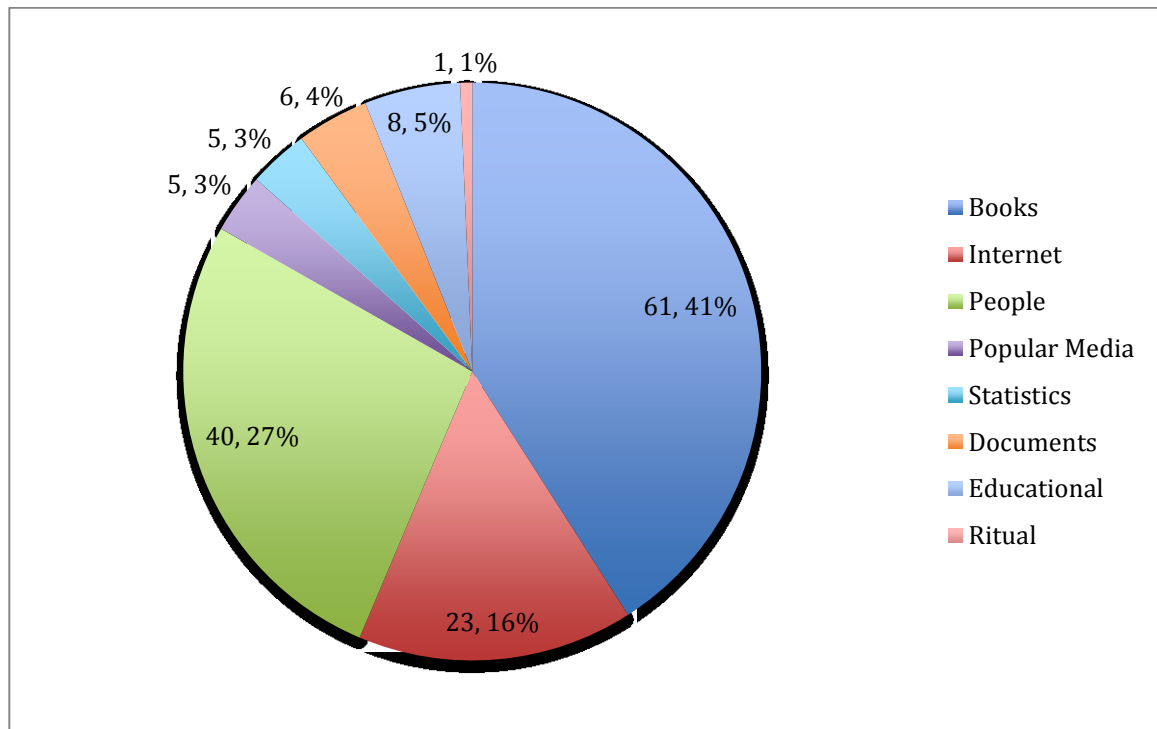
5.3.3 The Research Problem

In my observations of leaders' information seeking, I saw abundant evidence that leaders were using information sources from outside their own religious denomination. Baptists enthusiastically recommended information from Anglican sources for example. Catholics seemed at ease using resources developed by Evangelicals. Both groups accessed secular sources to make church decisions. Despite this behaviour, the leaders all seemed to possess a strong theological centre from which they evaluated information. Was this evidence that the ease of access of new information was in fact undermining traditional church authority as some have proposed? Is it possible to demonstrate in some quantitative manner that leaders are cross doctrinal and religious boundaries in search of information? In this section I explore the theological characteristics of the information sources leaders selected, and considered what this says about their theological boundaries.

I used data gathered from nine leaders interviews, the observations of leaders' meetings at *One Ship* and *New Governance* churches, and materials recommended by the leaders. I analyzed available the documentation from each church to aid in understanding both communities theological orientations. All named or observed information sources were identified, collected, and analyzed for their theological characteristics. Leaders described using or were observed using collectively 149 information sources. There were 61 books, 23 Internet sources, 40 people sources and 25 other sources (1 radio program, 2 TV

programs, 5 statistical sources, 1 ritual source, 2 music source, 6 religious documents, and 8 educational programs/conferences.)

Chart 5 – Distribution of Named Sources Types by Number and %.



Christians have been referred to as “people of the book” in reference to the centrality of the Bible. It was not surprising then that the Bible was cited 8 times, and Bible studies 7 times. Bibles and Bible studies represented 10% of all sources named. It is noteworthy that three of the 16 Internet sources cited were also used to access the Bible online. Books represented another 46 sources. Leaders frequently noted favourite authors such as: C.S. Lewis, Bill Hybels, John Maxwell, Richard Rohr, Robert Barron, Sean Eldridge, and Joseph Ratzinger. Although recommendations were also sought from clergy and friends, browsing was still a valuable method for locating material of interest whether browsing in person at local religious bookstores or online with services like Amazon.

“People” was the next most common information source category. “People” included partners (3x), mentor (1x), and fellow parishioners (3x), but most often were recognized Church experts such as Pastors (7x), Deacons (2x), Professor (1x), and denominational officials (5x). These experts represented another 10% of all sources cited. Other official sources included networking with experts through conference and organizations. “People” sources named also included themselves (experience) (6x) and prayer (5x).

Internet sources were often used to access traditional media, like the Bible, noted above, or writings by the *Church Fathers* archived online. Many popular authors, like John Piper, supplemented their print materials with web resources like e-books, downloadable materials, and blogs. Several religious organizations were noted as having downloadable educational materials available. Listservs, Twitter, and social media were other sources of official and unofficial information. Four online sites were described as sources of streaming videos used by leaders for personal development, or corporate worship and teaching. This quantitative analysis provided a picture of types of information sources leaders were choosing, and I considered above the criteria leaders offered for selecting specific information sources. The next step was to consider qualitatively the theological nature of the named sources themselves.

In order to determine whether respondents are choosing materials outside their denominational or theological boundaries, I developed a framework to categorize and position each information source in relation to the respondents' church. The three categories I applied to each source were: 1) the religious

affiliation of the information source (e.g. Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic etc.); 2) the source's position on a liberal-conservative theological spectrum, and since some sources were not religious in nature, 3) the sources' position on a secular-sacred spectrum. The development of these criteria is described below. After applying these criteria to the 149 named sources and the three church sites, I plotted each on a three dimensional graph to visually depict their inter-relationships. I finally discuss these inter-relationships and offer several conclusions.

5.3.4 Criteria: Three Spectra

Religious Spectrum: Religious organizations create information for their purposes that might be confessional, didactic, evangelistic, or devotional. The information may be unofficial for internal use (e.g. a church bulletin) or might represent an official position of the church (e.g. Articles of Incorporation). When the provenance of a named information source was known, I could attribute a particular religious perspective to that information. Even when the origin was not known, the perspective of the information can frequently be discerned through context analysis. Using this criterion I proposed that I could determine whether information sources used by leaders originated from their own religious organization or were borrowed from another religious group. Using *Statistics Canada* and *Project Canada Survey* criteria I developed a religious community affiliation framework. *Statistic Canada's* 2001 Religious Groups in Canada profile series (Canadian Centre for Justice, 2001) identified eight broad religious categories: Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, Other Eastern Religions,

Jewish, Other, No Religion, and Not Stated. Subcategories were indicated in the table below.

Table 5: Religious Groups (p. 3)

Religious Group	Includes
Catholic	Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, Polish Catholic, Other Catholic
Protestant	United Church, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal, Mormons, Other Protestants
Eastern Orthodox	Greek Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Other Orthodox
Other Eastern Religions	Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Baha'i, etc.
Jewish	
Other	Atheist, Free Thinker, Humanist, New Age, Scientology, New Thought, native Indian or Inuit, etc.
No Religion	
Don't Know/ Not Stated	

The *2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables* ("Religion (108)") also identified eight broad religion categories though slightly different from the 2001 categories: Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Traditional (Aboriginal) Spirituality, Other Religions, and No Religious Affiliation. The Christian category was divided into nine subcategories: Anglican, Baptist, Catholic (7 types), Christian Orthodox (13 types), Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, United Church, and Other Christian (38 types and 7 subtypes). The *Project Canada* survey categories of religious identification in Canada were: Catholic, No Religion, Evangelical, Other World Faiths, United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran (2011, "The Religious Situation").

In my study none of the respondents described using non-Christian religious sources. Consequently for the purpose of this analysis I limited the categories to Christian groups. Using the criteria from the frameworks described above, I created a theological spectrum with seven points organized both theologically and chronologically based on the historic emergence of these theological traditions.

Table 6 – Religious Affiliation Spectrum

Data Point	3	2	1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4
Religious Category	Cath	Orth	Angl	Non	Prot. Main.	Evang	Bapt	Charis

Catholic and *Orthodox* categories included the sub-categories developed by *Statistics Canada*. *Anglicanism*, although part of the Protestant branch of Christianity, has characteristics of both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. The centre category represented *no stated religious affiliation*. I classified sources as non-affiliated if they were non-religious, religious but not connected to any particular religious group, or religious but transcending religious boundaries such as the Bible.

Protestant Mainline as a category included the mainline Protestant denominations that began in the 16th century including the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anabaptists (Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, Brethren) and denominations that emerged in the 17th-18th century such as Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational. Some branches of these groups may be included in the following category. *Evangelical* category included Canadian groups such as

Evangelical Free Church, Associated Gospel Church, Plymouth Brethren, and Canadian Missionary Alliance.

Baptist category included the family of Baptist groups including but not limited to the Southern Baptist Convention, American Baptist Convention, Canadian Baptist Ministries, and The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches. The final category *Charismatic* included a variety of Pentecostal and Charismatic groups that emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is significant that although arranged chronologically, these religious groups also move from more hierarchical to less hierarchical across the spectrum. An example of an information source that is identified with a particular doctrinal community would be the *Book of Concord* (Roland, 2005, p. 105) described in Roland's study as a key theological document of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In the above spectrum for example, the *Book of Concord* would be placed at the -1 data point position.

Liberal-Conservative Spectrum: Protestant churches frequently characterize themselves by their theological position, as more theologically conservative or more liberal. The *Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches* in Canada for example was formed in 1953 in reaction to perceived modernist threats (Fellowship, 2013). Wicks in his study of clergy information seeking asked clergy a variety of questions intended to determine theological position that he classified as "liberal, middle, or conservative" (1999, p. 210). After reviewing a variety of studies, he proposed "that common to all those religious scales is a series of questions about the orthodoxy of the subject's beliefs" (p.

210). Theological orthodoxy could then be easily applied to Protestant Churches. Applying this criterion has proven to be more challenging for Roman Catholic churches that share a common official doctrine. Individual Catholics and movements within the church may theologically differ but do not self-identify in the same way. This is a limitation in applying this criterion to *One Ship Church*. In further studies it may be necessary to develop an individual matrix that measures the leader's own position relative to official Church doctrine. Surveys have been conducted on individual Catholics agreement with the Church positions on a range of issues, and analysis of allow the synthesis of more meaningful categories in the Catholic context.

Liberal or Modernism Christianity has been described as “a modern movement that seeks to formulate a form of Christianity contoured to the critical demands of modernity – one that works in consonance with, rather than in opposition to, Enlightenment philosophy, science, historical research, and culture as a whole” (Liberal, 2012). The historical development of the Roman Catholic and Protestant forms of *Liberalism* has been considered at length elsewhere (Reardon, 2005), but a number of common characteristics can be offered: an emphasis of rationalism resulting in a rethinking and rejection of traditional Christianity, a de-emphasis of the miraculous, emphasis on the humanity of Christ, tolerance for differing religious viewpoints, de-emphasis of the concepts of sin and judgment and a more optimistic view of human nature and progress, and an increased concern for social issues and their socio-political roots.

Conservative Christianity is characterized by a belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, by assumptions about the pervasiveness of human sinfulness, and the conviction that salvation is made possible through a commitment to Jesus Christ (Hempel & Bartkowski, 2008, p. 1674). Consequently, ensuring orthodoxy (and rejecting many forms of ecumenism), and social impact through personal transformation are conservative priorities. This category may include but is broader than Catholic Traditionalism (Dinges, 1991) and Protestant Fundamentalism.

The *Moderate* category was applied to both non-aligned information sources, and to those that shared characteristics of both *Liberal* and *Conservative* Christianity. One such movement is *Progressive* Christianity. The term is often used as a synonym for Liberalism but is a distinct movement. The *Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity* described key characteristics of the movement that is rooted in Christian heritage and tradition, but is open to rethinking faith and practice, and draws on many sources of religious wisdom as fallible human expressions. *Progressive* Christianity emphasizes social justice, rejects dogmatism, and emphasizes openness and respect (Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, 2013). The *Emerging Church* movement is an example of a progressive movement that rejects the traditional orthodoxy and authority of the Protestant evangelical movement (Teusner. 2012).

Table 7 – Theological Provenance Spectrum

Data Point	2	0	-2
Theological category	Liberal	Moderate/ Non- Aligned	Conservative

Sacred-secular spectrum: In chapter two I discussed Durkheim’s definition of religion as, “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden...” (1912, p. 47). In that section I discuss these realms of life and Renate Barber’s “fuzziness of the borders between sacred and profane” (1964, p. 46) and Paden’s distinction that sacredness was about relationships (2009, p. 34) that I argued were constructed and protected within communities. This way of understanding realms of life can be helpful in understanding how seekers in church contexts cross boundaries in search for useful information. Respondents were observed using information sources that could be considered sacred and secular to accomplish religious purposes. To represent these socially constructed characteristics of information sources, I developed a five-point scale to categorize sacredness and secularity. I chose to recognize the “fuzziness” at the borders by subdividing the categories of sacred-secular.

Table 8 – Secularity Spectrum

Data Point	2	1	0	-1	-2
Category	Sacred 1	Sacred 2	Secular / Sacred	Secular 2	Secular 1

Information sources categorized as “Sacred1” were sources that are confessional or theological by nature. Religious Scriptures such as the Bible were categorized as “Sacred1”. Authoritative documents such as creeds, confessions, Statements of Faith, and official church documents were also considered “Sacred1”. Other information sources though confessional and theological did not have the same standing in the church. The hymn “Amazing Grace”, the devotional reading “The

Word Among Us”, and the book “Simply Jesus and You” were all categorized as “Sacred2” information sources recognizing that they are a step removed.

An information source was considered “Secular1” if it was not created for a religious purpose nor represented any obvious theological perspective. A local politician and a Community Profile demographic report were both considered “Secular1” sources. Other information sources were created for secular purposes, but have been repurposed for church use. The *Gallup ME* and *DiSC Church Leaders* resources are both examples of business tools that have been adapted for Church needs. These tools for example are based on organizational management theories that are applicable to the church as an organization. The *Global Leadership Summit* was a Christian leadership event but not all the speakers were Christian though the perspectives they offered aligned with the Summit’s outlook. These kinds of sources were categorized at “Secular2”, positioning them as secular in origin though adapted for sacred purposes. Some information sources possessed characteristics of both Sacred and Secular perspectives. For example, many Bible study tools such as Bible Atlases are produced for religious purposes but are not in themselves theological. A map of 1st century Mediterranean is a geopolitical and historical document, although it may be used to illustrate the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. A church annual report is a legal document required of a registered incorporated charity, but is also an account of the religious activities of the church. These information sources were categorized as “Sacred/Secular”. Below is an example of an Information Matrix.

Table 9 – Example of Information Matrix

Information Source	Type	Religious Affiliation	Liberal - Conservative	Sacred – Secular
Bible	Book	0	0	2
“Amazing Grace”	Music	-1	-2	1
“Community Profiles”	Internet	0	0	-2
“Simply Jesus and You”	Book	-2	-2	1
“The Word Among Us”	Internet	3	-2	1
Gallup ME	Statistical	0	0	-1

5.3.5 Analysis

There were 41 named sources identified in the interviews of leaders of *New Governance Church*, and an additional 7 sources observed in the two leaders’ meeting. By comparison leaders of *One Ship* named and used more information sources. There were 74 named sources in the interviews of *One Ship* leaders, and an additional 27 sources identified in general corporate use and two leaders’ meetings. When the category of Religious Affiliation was applied to the sources it was found that leaders of *One Ship* church selected 71% (n=72) of their information from Roman Catholic sources. For the 29% of information sources selected outside of their denominational sphere, 11% (n=11) was drawn from other denominations and 18% (n=18) came from non-religious sources. In contrast leaders of *New Governance* church selected only 29% (n=14) of their information from denominational sources. Religiously non-aligned information sources represented 23% (n=11) of sources selected. Perhaps the most surprising was that nearly half (48%, n=23) of sources named by *New Governance* leaders were selected from outside their own Baptist tradition.

Table 10 – Religious Affiliation of Names Sources Selected

Source Selection	Within Denom.	Non-Aligned	Outside Denom.	Total
NG	14	11	23	48
OS	72	18	11	101

Chart 6 – Religious Affiliation of One Ship Leaders Information Sources

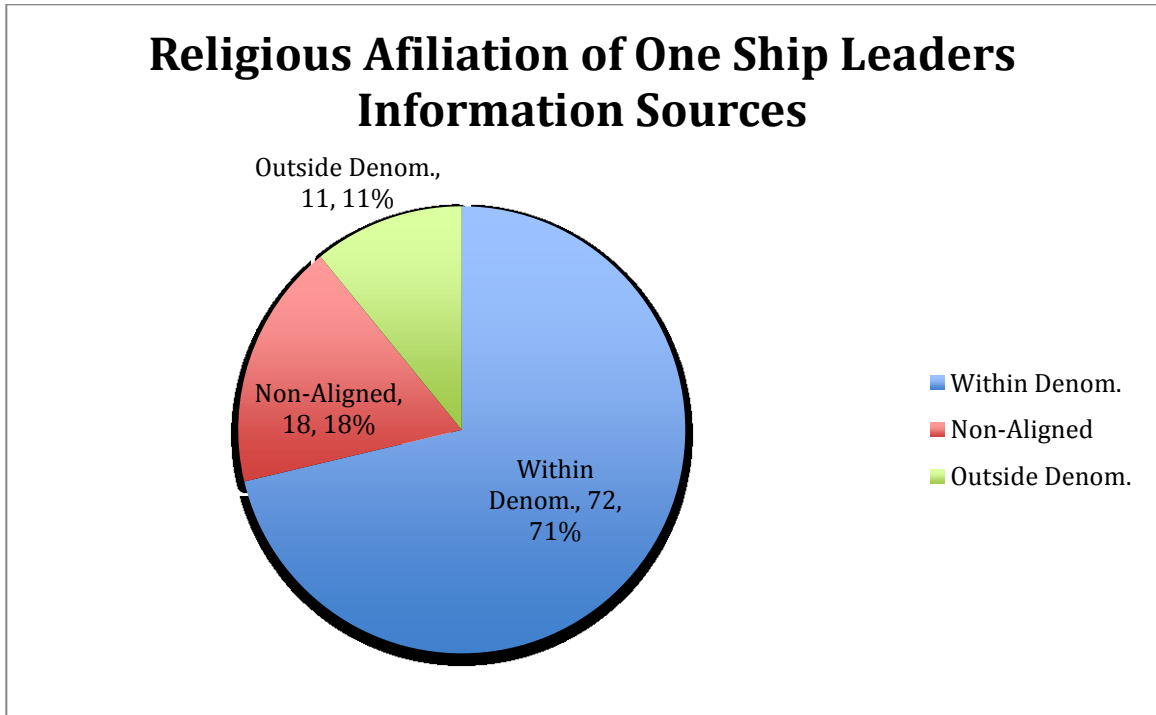
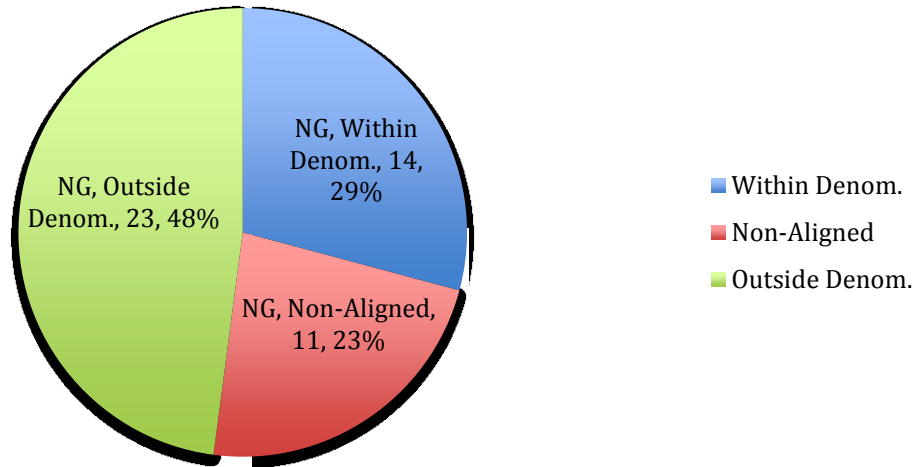


Chart 7 – Religious Affiliation of New Governance Leaders Information Sources

Religious Affiliation of New Governance Leaders Information Sources



When applying the theological criteria first to the two churches, I found that *New Governance Church* was theologically very conservative, identifying itself with the Evangelical movement and with Fundamentalism. *One Ship Church* leaders appeared to hold to traditional Catholic doctrine, and I did not have any indication that they personally disagreed with any church teachings. Although the label may fit poorly, I would consider the Church theologically conservative. It was then no surprise that I identified no “Liberal” information sources named or used by leaders of *New Governance* or *One Ship* churches.

Table 11 – Theological Perspective of Information Sources Selected

	Liberal	Moderate/Neutral	Conservative
NG	0	19	29
OS	0	38	63

The division between “Moderate/Non-Aligned” and “Conservative” for both churches was similar. New Governance leaders selected “Conservative” sources 60% of the time, while One Ship leaders did so 62% of the time.

Chart 8 – Theological Alignment of Sources Selected by New Governance Leaders

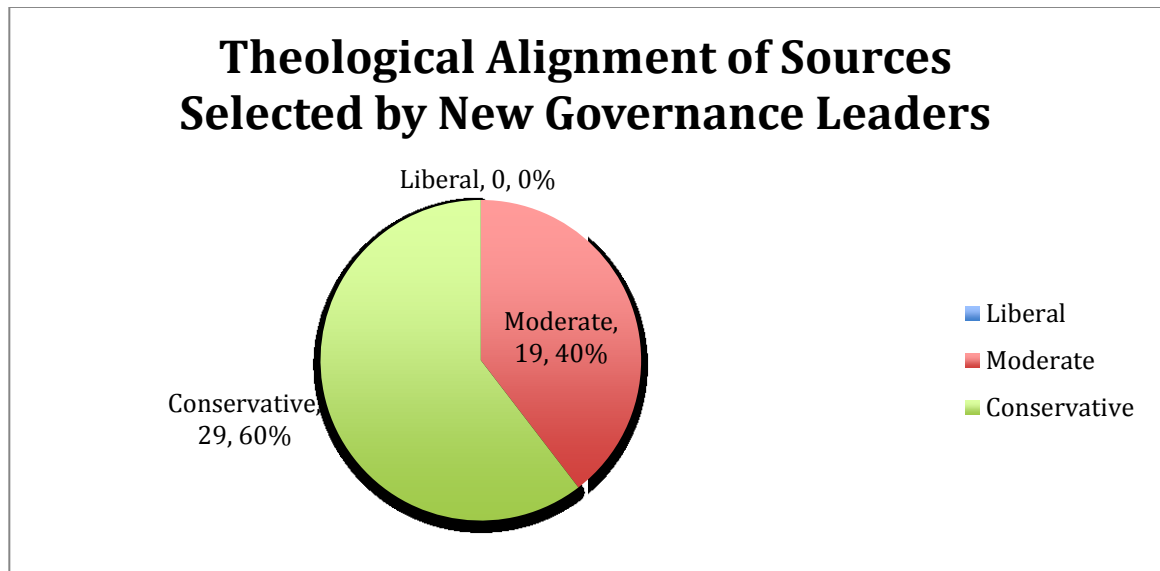
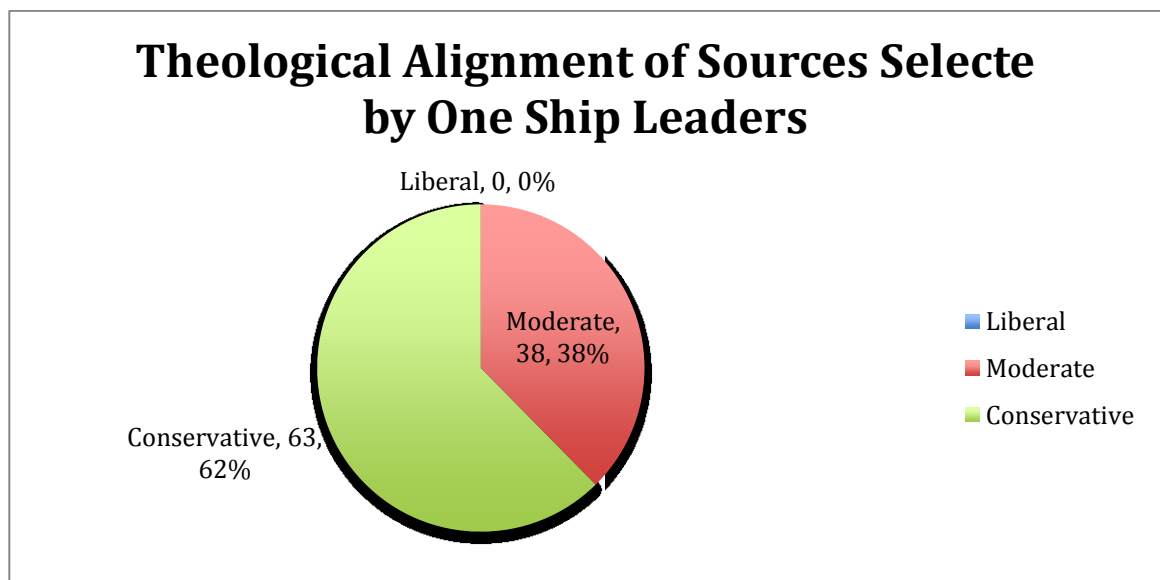


Chart 9 – Theological Alignment of Sources Selected by One Ship Leaders



When I considered the “Moderate/Neutral” category I found that more than half of these sources (n=20) were Bibles, study aids, rituals, and worship aids that had no explicit theological perspective. Of the remainder most sources named/used were non-aligned either because they were secular sources or were leadership sources applicable to a range of theological positions. Only 11 (7%) sources (NG:2, OS:9) might be considered ecumenical or more progressive theologically compared to the churches.

When considering information sources on the secular-sacred spectrum, I found that the overwhelming majority of the sources (n=126, 85%) leaders selected were categorized as sacred. A full third of sources were the Bible and related Bible resources, official church sources, and clergy. More than half of sources were books, music, poetry, and videos, created for or serving religious purposes or were religion people. The remainder were secular information sources particularly leadership resources, some adapted for religious purposes, and others used as is.

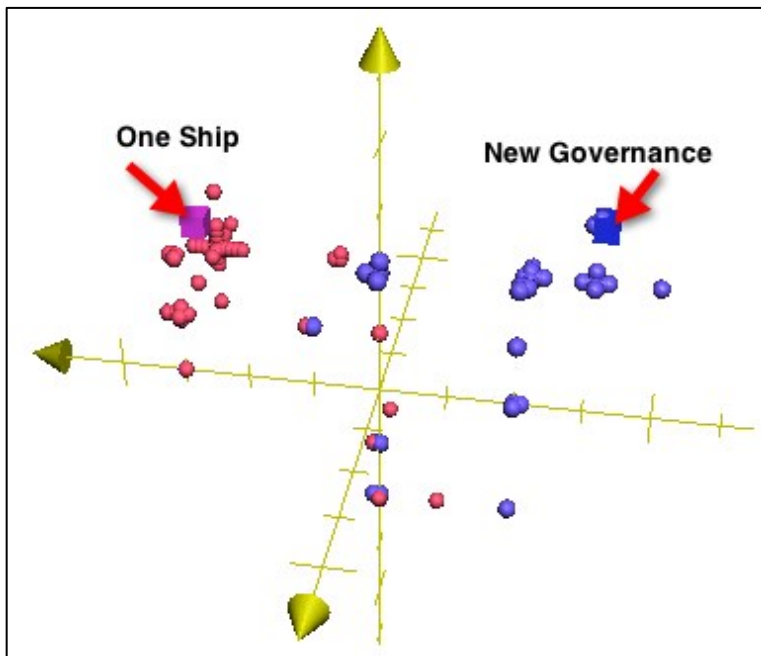
Table 12 – Orientation of Information Sources of Secular-Sacred Spectrum by Churches

	Sacred 1	Sacred 2	Secular/Sacred	Secular 1	Secular 2
NG	15	26	3	1	3
OS	34	51	3	5	8
Total	49	77	6	6	11
%	33%	52%	4%	4%	7%

To visualize the interaction between all three of these spectra, the three values assigned to each information source were plotted on a 3d (x,y,z) graph using Mac Grapher. The resulting graph exhibited very distinct point clusters.

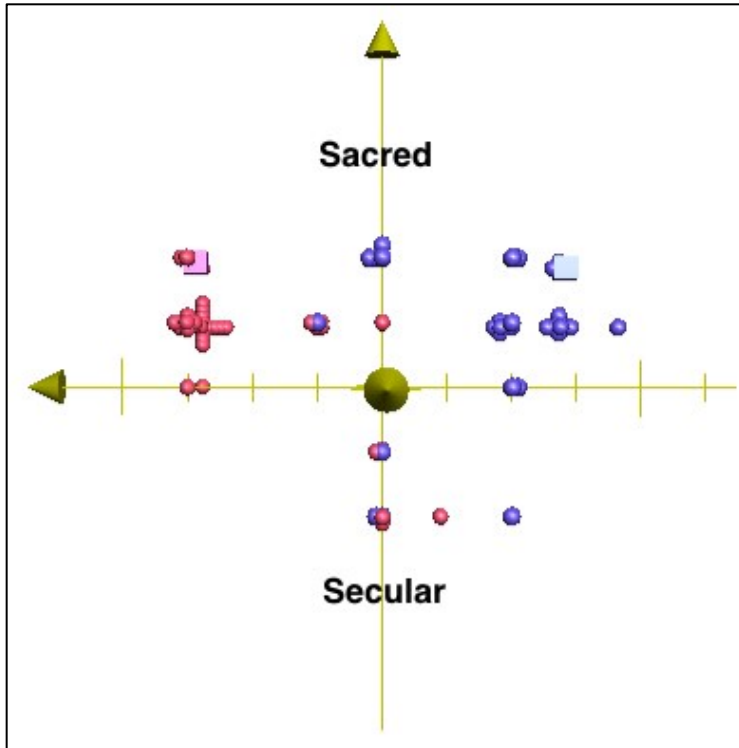
On graph 1 below the cube on the right side represents *New Governance Church* and the cube to the left represents *One Ship Church*. Points representing information sources can be seen in clusters in proximity to both church nodes suggesting that leaders habitually selected sources close to their church's values and theology.

Chart 11 – 3D Plot of Information Sources on Three Axes.



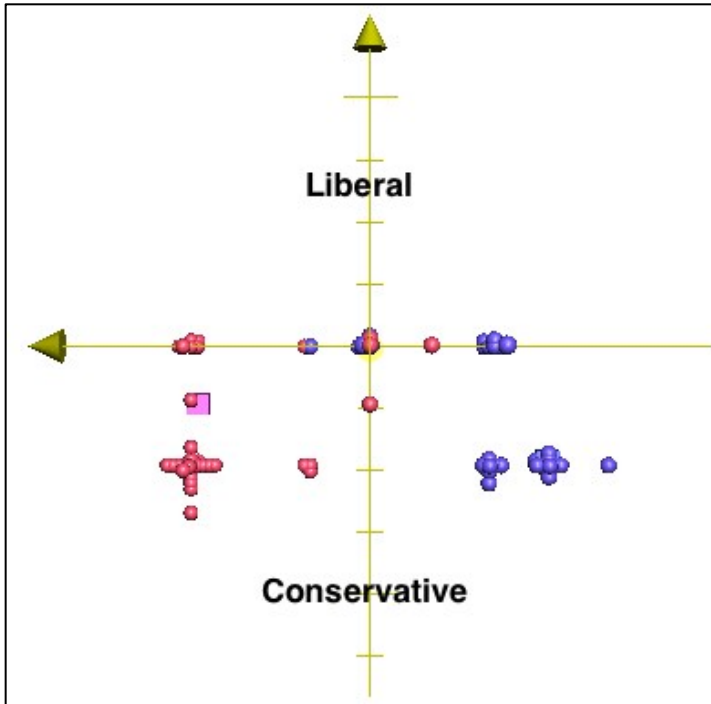
When viewed from the perspective of the first spectrum Secular-Sacred, I observed that leaders preferred religious information sources for personal faith development but used more secular sources for corporate decision-making. I noted above that these secular sources were usually leadership, statistical, or management materials.

Chart 12 – 3D Plot of Information Sources on Secular-Sacred Axis



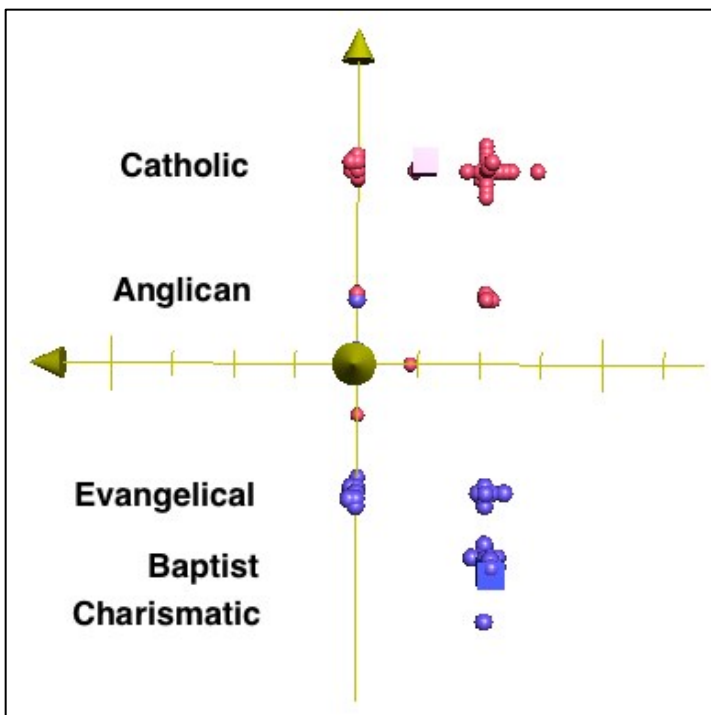
When considering information plotted along the Liberal-Conservative Spectrum, I saw that information clustered along two planes: the moderate and unaligned, and the theologically conservative.

Graph 13: 3D Plot of Information Sources on the Liberal-Conservative Axis



When considering information plotted along the religious affiliation axis, I observed that information sources clustered in particular spaces.

Graph 14: 3D Plot of Information Sources on the Religious Affiliation Spectrum



One Ship information sources clustered around the Roman Catholic affiliation with a small cluster around the Anglican affiliation. *One Ship* leaders did select a number of sources within the Anglican and Evangelical affiliations. The Anglican selections related specifically to the Alpha program and its resources, though the program used at *One Ship* was the Catholic version. Evangelical selections were drawn from Evangelical mega-churches, but several leaders emphasized that it was the methodologies they found valuable. In various ways they emphasized that although “Willowcreek can teach the revelation of Christ. We have the fullness of the revelation in Christ, Scripture and Tradition.” Leaders saw no conflict drawing on other traditions in a limited way because they believed they could effectively contextualize these methodologies.

New Governance had information sources points clustered at the Baptist affiliation. Baptists however, represent only 2% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011, “Religion (108)” and consequently lack the range of resources available to larger groups. As I demonstrated above, the leaders of *New Governance* regularly drew on sources outside of the Baptist community. A few sources were drawn from the Anglican communion for personal faith building. The majority of sources selected were affiliated with a cross-section of conservative protestant traditions some with conflicting theological distinctives. However, these groups have in common characteristics that affiliate them with the Evangelical movement. Evangelicalism in Canada has been researched extensively by Canadian historian George Rawlyk and Sociologist Reginald Bibby. The origins of the evangelical movement in Canada is usually traced back

to the preaching ministry of Henry Alline in 1776, bringing New England's "Great Awakening" revival to Nova Scotia, and eventually Canada (1984, p. 10). Alline's evangelical movement has influenced a wide range of Canadian Christian denominations. Historian Timothy L. Smith coined a particularly useful image of the Evangelical movement as a "Kaleidoscope", a word picture that has been adopted by later writers to describe the diversity within the evangelical movement. He was referring to the "...kaleidoscopic diversity of our histories, our organizational structures, and our doctrinal emphases..." (1986) Smith described three characteristics of evangelicalism that he saw consistently evident in this movement from the 18th century to the present. He wrote "from that day until this, these three characteristics have defined evangelicalism in the English-speaking world: the Bible is its authority, the new birth as a hallmark, and evangelism as mission." For the 2003 Ipsos-Reid Survey of Evangelical Beliefs and Practices, six indicators of evangelicalism were selected:

1. Belief that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God provides the way for the forgiveness of one's sins
2. Belief that the Bible is the Word of God, and is reliable and trustworthy
3. Commitment of one's life to Jesus Christ and self-identification as a "converted Christian"
4. Disagreement with the statement that "the concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in these modern times"
5. Disagreement with the statement "Jesus Christ was not the divine son of God"
6. Weekly church attendance.

These characteristics were shared by *New Governance Church* and all the churches from which they gathered information sources. Notably, the leaders at *New Governance* did not borrow from churches that were not part of the

Evangelical Kaleidoscope. It appeared clear then that the leaders understood the appropriate boundaries that restricted information seeking, and those boundaries included churches that may differ in many religious distinctives, but were part of Protestant Evangelicalism.

5.3.5 Discussion

By analysing the information sources leaders selected I observed that leaders used numerically more and diverse sources for personal faith building, but self-restricted when in a leaders' role. I observed that personal experience and trusted leaders and members sources played a significant role in leadership decision-making. Baptist respondents frequently selected sources outside of their denominational boundaries, but within the evangelical "kaleidoscope" of beliefs, while Catholic respondents preferred sources within their doctrinal community. Catholic respondents did utilize sources from evangelicals that offered useful methodologies, but were very conscious of doctrinal differences and used sources in a manner that was compatible with their faith. Respondents rarely sought out clergy for sources for personal faith building, using their own interpersonal networks or online sources.

I concluded that the fear of the Internet undermining traditional religious authorities appears unfounded for my respondents. Clergy and Church officials still played a key role in information seeking activities, both for personal faith building and corporate decision-making. The role of clergy has however changed, no longer being the primary source of religious information. It appeared that leaders valued clergy and traditional authorities for discerning the

appropriateness of information sources. Leaders were careful consumers of information, choosing trusted sources through experience, recommendations, or online searching.

5.4 Prayer as Information Seeking³⁰

5.4.1 Introduction

Leaders prayed. It was apparent throughout my observations and interviews that prayer was considered an important tool for leaders' information seeking to discern God's will in all three churches. In the following section I explore the use of prayer by the communities and the leaders both corporately and individually. I also discuss the challenge that prayer posed to analysis and integration into an information-seeking model.

Before considering prayer's role in information seeking I needed to decide how to handle the metaphysical, that which cannot be observed or measured. I took a sociological standpoint, adopting Berger's approach that "sociological theory must, by its own logic, view religion as a human projection, and by the same logic can have nothing to say about the possibility that this projection may refer to something other than the being of its projector" (1969, p. 180).

Sociologically, Weber defined prayer as entreaty to gods, analogous to a petitioner approaching a potentate seeking favour through sacrifice or service (1963, p. 25).

Prayer, as communication with the supernatural, is a familiar religious practice for many Canadians. Sociologist Bibby found that 74% of Canadian acknowledged that they pray privately; 28% pray daily (2002). Reasons stated for praying included: "source of comfort", "direction" and "relationship" with God

³⁰ Some of the material in this section was previously presented in David Michels, "Beyond Belief: Prayer as Communication in Religious Information Seeking." 2011 *Canadian Association for Information Science Conf. Fred., NB June 2-4, 2011.*

and others. For the purpose of this study I defined prayer as, “a simple belief that God could be petitioned to intervene and effect changes in nature and in the course of world events” and “allows us to speak of prayer as talking to God” (*Evangelical Dictionary*, 1996, “prayer”). I did not consider the uses of prayer as thanksgiving or as worship although these uses were certainly present. Prayer remains an important practice for many Canadians, and regardless of my position as the researcher, the respondents believed God answered prayer, and I took that at face value.

In chapter two I showed that information seeking in religious contexts has been under-researched, and religious practices such as prayer have received little attention. There have been some notable exceptions in the everyday life context of health and information behaviour. In cancer studies, prayer was found to be a coping mechanism when information was overwhelming (Leydon, 2000). Patients would turn to prayer in the belief that “everything will be all right” (2008, p. 336) and unanswered prayer could also be a source of personal conflict (Holt, 2009, p. 250). Prayer was sometimes linked directly with information seeking. One cancer survey stated, “I prayed a lot and I asked the Lord to help me and show me what He wanted me to do” (p. 255). A recent study on endometriosis blogs and cognitive authority considered spiritual and intuitive sources of information (Neal and McKenzie, 2011). One respondent in that study shared, “I’m thankful that God showed me His will” (p. 132). Prayer then has already been demonstrated to play a role in information behaviour in everyday life contexts.

5.4.2 Community Prayer

Prayer was a regular practice in all three of the churches. During the site visits I participated in more than two-dozen services and prayer was part of every one. At *New Governance Church*, for example, the service opened with a prayer of invocation seeking God's presence in the service. During the service there was a time for prayer for community needs, either shared by the pastor or from the floor by members. As explained above, on occasion the leaders of *New Governance Church* told anecdotes in the service about the importance and power of prayer, like the stories of Missionary George Mueller, or the story about the leaders of *Big Vision Church* and God's leading in their move. The church hosted a weekly prayer meeting held at the church, and as described above, would precede the monthly leaders' meetings. In this event there would be prayers by members for "the Lord's leading" of the congregation generally and specifically for wisdom for the leaders that, "God would lead the leadership team."

Prayer similarly played a role in the services of *Big Vision* through the invocation and a community prayer time led by the pastors and worship leaders. In the much larger church, members had different means to share concerns, either in print through the "Connection Cards" or online. The church held regular prayer times before and after services, and had a number of small groups that met weekly with each having a time for prayer by members for their own and church concerns. This was also the practice at the congregational visioning meetings I attended where each began with prayer. This purpose of prayer, it was explained, was "to help members wrestle with God's will." When I reviewed

the history of the church, annual planning meetings were also called “strategic prayer and planning meetings.” Prayer and visioning were intertwined at *Big Vision Church*.

At *One Ship* prayer was an integral part of the liturgy of the Mass. Prayers in the Mass were conducted responsively but also privately, including elements of confession, contrition, and thanksgiving. These prayers repeatedly referenced God’s will in regard to the Church: “graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance to your will” (International Commission, 2010). In chapter four I reviewed the many ways that the congregation of *One Ship* participated in prayer through the “Prayer Tree” network, and online prayer request forms, perhaps the closest example of practicing online religion. In the Sister’s workshop on discernment I attended, prayer and Scripture study were cited as key tools of discernment. More than the other churches, *One Ship* offered spaces like the Chapel, “a place that is suited to private adoration and prayer,” and the Prayer Wall, an architectural feature in the sanctuary designed to remind members, “our Church must be a place of prayer where the needs of the world are brought to God.”

I have demonstrated that prayer was important in the lives of the three churches. But how did prayer impact the behaviour of the leaders? In each church I participated in leadership meetings that included prayer. Prior to both the Governance Team meetings of *New Governance Church* leaders met for prayer. When leaders brought their strategic plan to the church, they prayed for the Lord’s leading, “Lord...guide our steps, govern our path.” When I met with

the *Big Vision* leaders, they began their meeting with prayer. I was particularly taken with the sincerity of a *One Ship* leader during an important council meeting, who asked, “do we need to stop and pray before we vote.” The meeting began with prayer and included a prayer time, but this was not a formality but a heartfelt need for assurance. One leader described their weekly staff meeting: “we pray for at least half an hour, maybe forty minutes before each staff meeting.” Prayer for these leaders was an important component in preparation for corporate decision-making. It was not surprising then that prayer was also a common theme in the individual interviews of leaders.

5.4.3 Individual Prayer

In the interviews with the leaders of *New Governance*, there were twenty-four occurrences of the prayer terms, and references to the “Lord leading”, “God saying”, “God hears/is hearing”, “God is/was telling” and “he says”. There were action verbs related to prayer and information seeking: God “leads”, “calls”, “places”, “wants”, “is here”, “can be connected”. Twenty passages discussed prayer across the five interviews. I applied sixty-eight codes to these occurrences, and identified seven themes: prayer and conflict, prayer as communication, prayer and divine agency, prayer as information, importance of prayer, answered prayer, and prayer & Bible study. Prayer in these texts included both personal (3x), and corporate prayer (8x). One significant observation is that respondents viewed God as personal and communicative. One respondent said, “God is here”, and “he hears our prayers.” God was viewed as both a passive recipient of

prayer and an active, personal agent. God is described as acting by answering, calling, preventing, and leading.

Respondents described prayer as an important resource (7x), and described the role of prayer in two ways: 1) Prayer was a means of gathering information / a resource, and 2) Prayer assisted in interpretation / discernment / confirmation when evaluating information. Prayer in the first sense was used twice. First, it was associated with Bible study and conversations with others in information gathering. Second, the respondent described how information would come to his attention in response to his prayers through serendipity and information encountering: "There is [sic] just too many times, when Scriptures, sermons, television programs, a piece of music...they fit what you are looking for to be a coincidence." He believed that these occurrences were specific answers to his prayers. The second sense was the more common role of prayer. In several contexts, information was gathered, and prayer was used as a tool to understand information. In eight passages prayer is paired with Bible study, suggesting an interrelationship. Prayer was often presented as a secondary process in information seeking; the respondents would gather relevant information and then use prayer as an interpretation tool, or alternatively as a means of confirming a course of action. The respondents associated perceived answers to prayer more frequently with "knowing" (8x) than with "feeling" (4x), suggesting they understood this as primarily a cognitive rather than affective process.

The theme of prayer and conflict was found in three interviews. Two respondents suggested that prayer was conflicting with technology as a means of information gathering. The inability to meet for corporate prayer caused a conflict for one respondent, as it limited information gathering and sharing. Two respondents raised the issue of unanswered prayer or conflicting answers to prayer. This created a significant unresolved tension, as most respondents described a strong belief in the importance of prayer, and that “God hears every prayer.”

The interviews with the four leaders of *One Ship* offered an opportunity to explore the role of prayer in greater depth, and I asked specific questions about prayer and their information seeking. In each of these interviews I waited until the respondent raised the issue of prayer. The terms pray/prayer/praying/prayed occurred forty-two times in these interviews. There were additional references to “asking the Lord to guide me”, “asking the Lord for mercy”, “calling on the Holy Spirit”, hearing “His voice” and seeking “through my prayers”. Prayer was described as a resource in a variety of contexts: in personal decision-making, leadership roles, and in preparation for preaching. Two of the leaders, for instance, described their own decisions to become leaders of *One Ship*: “So I prayed about it...and I asked for feedback from people who had known me,” and, “It comes out of prayer, I know who I am in God, and I know God as He comes into my life.” Respondents described prayer as part of their personal faith building, and in these contexts prayer was frequently linked with Scripture or

spiritual writings (9x). “Good spiritual writing”, in the words of one leader, “leads you to prayer.”

The leader explained the connection in these terms: “so there has to be that kind of blend of, kind of head knowledge and heart knowledge I guess.” In leadership contexts prayer was described in association with the distribution of a survey as a discernment tool, and was often paired with either “discernment” or “reflection.” Sometimes the reflection was related to readings, but could also be reflections on life experiences. Leaders had a number of different expectations about the results of prayer depending on the context. Sometimes they were seeking confirmation in a decision-making context: “it was crystal clear from that point on.” Sometimes it was preparatory to making a change: “we wanted to situate it in that context of the faith story that’s always calling people to change and go forward.” Sometimes there is a specific need being prayed for, “I pray, I ask for things.” However one leader also noted that there are times when prayer is not required, when God’s will is already clear on a matter, “you don’t have to pray about that. We all were called to do that.” This leader also spoke about the “theology of prayer” suggesting that he believed there was a proper framework for prayer and appropriate objects of prayer in their faith context.

One of the leaders occasionally preached and referenced prayer as a vital tool in his preparation: “Well the key resource is prayer, always prayer and reflection, prayer is a substantial part of my life and I don’t walk away from it.” So here the leader saw little distinction between his use of prayer in other spheres of his life and his ministry role. He described two types of prayers: the *Hours*, and

the *Lectio Divina*, both described above, both to receive answers and to reflect on issues in the Scripture text to be preached on. He explained the process of praying through the text: “What I do is just pray with it until suddenly I am inspired with one or two themes....” The leader also described a variety of other research tools, in print and online, he used in preparation, as well as people he spoke with, but prayer and reflection were prominent.

5.4.4 Discussion

Some of the functions of prayer and information seeking in health contexts were briefly considered above, but the nature of prayer in information seeking has still not been settled. The respondents in this study believed prayer to be communication with God. Is this belief sufficient to incorporate it into an information-seeking model? Some researchers have argued that non-human actors in sociological interactions should be considered. Cerulo (2009) has argued that by allowing for non-human actors we “gain the potential to scrutinize important exchanges that traditional analytical frames block from view” (p. 544). These interactions have played, and continue to play, a significant social role, be they with animals, the deceased or deities. Interactants in prayer are selected with intent, and in accordance with beliefs, information need and personal faith histories (2008). In information science research, Kari’s review, discussed above, suggested two particularly relevant themes: “information can originate from a source considered as a spiritual entity (e.g. God)” and “information processes can be allegedly affected by a spiritual agent (e.g. providence)” (2007, p. 936). If

I accept prayer as analogous to other forms of interpersonal communication, what role does that play in information seeking?

A number of studies have highlighted the role of people as information sources. For example, in a study of managers' information seeking, Auster and Choo (1994) found that people were important information sources for certain kinds of information, notable information about customers and competitors. Julien and Michels (2001), in a study on source selection, found that respondents turned to people as information sources 56% of the time. Seekers valued people both for instrumental and affective reasons, and sought empathy from their people sources. Agosto and Hughes Hassell (2005, p. 43) found that seekers used people as information sources because they are convenient. Savolainen (2007) in his study of environmental activists found that immediacy was an important criterion in using people sources. Julien and Michels (2004) explored a daily life context where a seeker valued accuracy, detail, and efficiency, and valued people for their ability to provide judgments on information.

Affective factors also played a large role in determining good information sources, and the respondent said, "...as for chatting...aw, it's a social thing to do. Y'know, you chat about other things while you're about it. I'm not about to stop talking to people" (2004, p. 560). Given (2002) considered undergraduates' information seeking where the everyday and academic worlds overlapped, and found relationships to be an important reason to use people information sources. Michels' study (2006) of the role of people as information sources in Biblical studies found that researchers often consulted people in their research for

affirmation of their research direction and results. Savolainen also found that in problem specific information seeking human sources and the Internet were favoured in the early phases of information seeking (2008, p. 274-293). So people can offer specific information in response to a problem, but are also often sought out for other reasons: empathy, convenience, immediacy, judgments, relationships, and affirmation.

Many of the qualities that make human sources preferable, can be seen in my respondents' selection of prayer as an information source: God is believed to be immanent, and aware of the need (convenience); respondents felt prayer could meet affective needs for understanding (empathy) and affirmation; and they believed prayer could provide answers to a specific problem. Prayer was also seen as an important aspect on the respondents' relationship with God, and a source of guidance. Prayer was frequently used as a secondary information process, to evaluate information previously gathered.

5.4.5 Conclusion

Belief based information tools such as prayer pose challenges for everyday life information seeking researchers. I cannot listen in on an answer to prayer, nor empirically verify divine leading. That does not diminish that prayer is a real information source for my respondents. By heeding Cerulo's call (2009) to consider non-human social actors, we have the potential to open up unexplored aspects of religious information seeking, and to create a picture of respondents' information seeking experiences in their spaces, and from their viewpoint.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In chapter one I described the challenges faced by Nova Scotia Christian churches. Demographic and cultural changes are forcing churches to adapt in order to survive and grow. I identified many churches that were engaged in transition processes, whose leaders were actively seeking “the Will of God for their church.” How they sought information to accomplish this purpose had not been explored and was not clearly understood. Consequently, I posed the research question: “what are the information seeking experiences of lay and ordained leaders of Nova Scotia churches in transition, as they seek to determine ‘what is God’s will for our church?’” I identified two important sub-questions that arose from the research question: first, “how do these leaders perceive the process of information seeking to discern God’s will for their church as different from how they would gather information to seek God’s will for themselves?” and second, “how do these leaders perceive new digital media impacting both their information seeking process and its outcome?”

In chapter two I reviewed relevant literature that assisted me in developing the theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study. I considered the literature of Human Information Behaviour focusing specifically on Everyday Life Information Seeking and past and emerging studies on information seeking in religious contexts. Two models of Everyday Life Information Seeking by Savolainen and McKenzie offered useful frameworks to inform a context specific model of church leaders’ information seeking presented below in this chapter.

Although studies of clergy information behaviour provide valuable insights, they did not address lay leaders' seeking, or the impact of the Internet. Health information seeking raised similar questions about source selection and professional authority. Doctors and other medical professionals perceived an erosion of authority as a result of online medical resources, in much the same way that clergy felt their position usurped. This suggested that I needed to explore concepts of authority that extended beyond religious contexts. I considered the sociological literature around the concepts of sacred and secular, the construction of authority, identity, and community. There was a growing body of research on religion and the Internet that both suggested and refuted the idea that the democratizing power of the Internet was undermining traditional authority in the Church. Since I sought to understand leaders' experiences I needed to employ a qualitative methodology that could capture their experiences and perceptions. Ethnography was an appropriate methodology, and in order to understand how it might be applied I explored its application to Human Information Behaviour research and the Sociology of Religion and the Internet.

Chapter three presented that methodology in greater detail, and the perspectives that informed it. Important sections of this chapter were the discussion of ethics in this study, significant considering the more invasive methods and the sometimes-conflicted nature of church transitions. As a Christian and former church leader I brought my own insights to the study but I also needed to bring objectivity to the study. I discussed this in chapter three above, and I will return to this in my reflections below.

In chapter four I presented the data gathered on leaders' information activities in *New Governance*, *One Ship*, and *Big Vision* churches and in chapter five I explored three themes particular to the Nova Scotia Christian church context: the impact of technology on information seeking, the use of prayer in information seeking, and the theology of information seeking. The data presented in chapter four with a focus on the three themes was used to develop a contextualized model of the information seeking of leaders of Nova Scotia Christian churches in transition.

6.1 Modeling Information Seeking in Religious Contexts

In chapter 2 two general models/metaphors of information behaviour were considered: Kuhlthau's Model of the Information Search Process and Dervin's Sense Making Metaphor. Two models of Everyday Life Information Seeking, Savolainen's Model and McKenzie's Two Dimensional Model of Information Practices were also discussed.

6.1.1 Savolainen's Model (2006, 145)

The concept of "order of things" in Savolainen's model initially seemed incongruous with a model of seeking for organizational transition. Leaders recognized the need for significant change and were often advocating disruptive practices such as *New Governance's* controversial use of social media or *One Ship's* use of Gallup surveys. On reflection however each church displayed common values and attitudes important to them. This was evident in their shared theologies and religious rituals and practices. For example, leaders seemed to share the belief that finding "the will of God" for their church could not be done

without incorporating prayer. Leaders unexpectedly used a variety of secular sources but not in a manner that conflicted with their own church's belief system, demonstrating that maintaining their religious "way of life" was vital. Leaders were then tasked with balancing the need to introduce significant changes into their institutions while maintaining their personal and corporate values and beliefs. Consequently, any model of church leaders' information behaviour must include processes through which leaders maintain order while engaging with new possibilities.

6.1.2 McKenzie's Model (2002, 26)

McKenzie's model included two phases "making connections" and "interacting with sources" to describe movement through the information seeking process. The second dimension consisted of four modes that described the intentionality of seeking from active to non-directed. Leaders' information seeking exhibited more non-directed activities in personal faith building activities and become increasingly active moving into corporate decision-making. This suggested that leaders were less comfortable with serendipitous information encounters in official roles, even though activities like browsing for videos on Youtube or poetry reading might play an important role in personal spiritual development.

Another important element of McKenzie's model was the mode of information seeking "By proxy." In this mode the seeker gathers information through referral in phase one "being referred to a source through a gate-keeper," and in phase two "being told" (26). As was demonstrated above, people were a

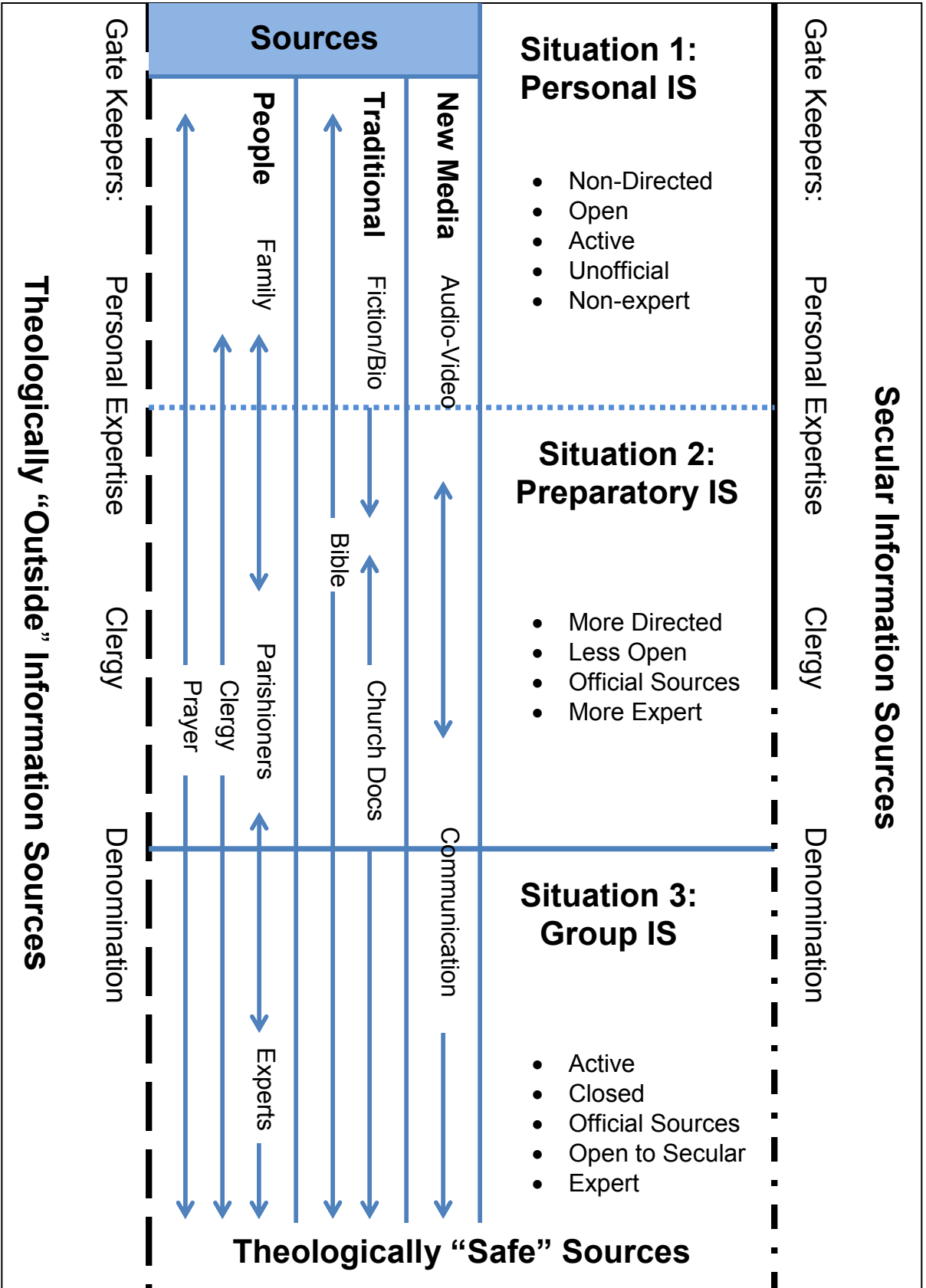
very important information source from family/friends to official experts. Clergy in particular were important gatekeepers for lay leaders, and for some clergy denominational leaders played similar roles. They played two roles: providing or directing seekers to useful information or vetting information uncovered by seekers. This later role was significant for leaders to ensure theological integrity. My model must account for changes in intentionality as leaders moved between their personal, preparatory, and leadership roles.

6.1.3 Michels' Model

When I considered the information experiences of leaders of the three churches, both as described and observed, I noted differences and similarities. I found that the differences were rooted in unique theological and structural characteristics among the churches. Through their respective denominations each church, for instance, had access to church growth experts, although the larger churches were able to send leaders to international conferences and engage with world-class experts face to face. The Baptist churches were able to extend their searches to sources outside the Baptist fold but within Evangelicalism, while the Catholic Church largely remained within their denominational division. The leaders' information experiences displayed many significant commonalities in the ways they approach the search, and then selected and used their sources to meet the needs in the three leadership situations: personal information seeking, preparatory information seeking, and group information seeking. These commonalities are discussed below. These commonalities and differences in each information-seeking situation are depicted

in chart form below. In the following pages I describe the elements in the chart and explain what each category means.

Chart 15 – Michels' Model of Leaders' Information Seeking



Situation 1: Personal Information Seeking

In this study I identified three interrelated but distinct sub-contexts or situations in which leaders sought information. Although presented in a linear model these three situations are not parts of one process but occur independently and repetitively. Leaders move back and forth from each situation as they work through leadership problems.

The first situation was Personal Information Seeking where leaders sought information that would assist them in building their own faith. This seeking was usually conducted individually and was seen as essential to the role/office of leader. Non-directed forms of information seeking were more common in this situation, although leaders also sought answers to personal spiritual questions that troubled them. Non-directed information seeking would include activities like browsing interesting Christian websites or watching Christian programming with a specific problem in mind. Leaders were more open to diverse types of information sources, unofficial sources, and sources outside their theological domains. This situation included the least restricted forms of information seeking.

In my model I categorized information sources as one of three types: People sources, Traditional sources, and New Media sources. When I considered the actual sources used by leaders in Situation 1 patterns emerged. People sources predominately included family/friends, fellow parishioners, clergy, and prayer discussed above in chapter five. Family and friends were convenient and trusted information sources for personal spiritual questions. Parishioners

were selected as resident experts on faith matters, and could be those considered spiritual “elders” in the church, or individuals having demonstrated a high level of spiritual understanding. Clergy became important information sources either through regular teaching duties, or as a source of referrals to appropriate sources. Clergy played an additional role as gatekeeper vetting information uncovered through leaders’ information seeking based on theology and church practices. Prayer was an important source and tool for leaders in Situation 1 both as they sought answers to life questions or sought discernment on the reliability and application of information gathered. Traditional information sources were diverse and included books, radio, music, and television. Pre-eminent among books in this situation was the Bible, followed by commentary and religious writings. Fiction, biographies, and even poetry were used in this phase. New media sources used were online audio-visual and social media sources. These were located by referral, search, or random means. It is noteworthy that leaders might consider some “random” or “serendipitous” information finding as “providential” and illustrative of divine leading. In Situation 1 there was no evidence of the use of secular sources to meet personal faith building needs.

As was described above, leaders in Situation 1 did use sources from outside their theological domain. To determine the validity and usefulness of sources from outside leaders utilized three “gate-keepers”: Personal Expertise, Clergy, and Denomination. Personal expertise was rooted in leaders’ personal theological understanding of what was appropriate to use and what fit with the

teachings and practice of the church. This was the predominate gatekeeper. Clergy were consulted when leaders were uncertain about information gathered, or required confirmation. Denominational gatekeepers were not used in Situation 1.

Situation 2: Preparation Information Seeking

The second situation was Preparation Information Seeking where leaders sought information for ministry/leading, and in anticipation of future corporate decision-making. The boundaries between the first and second situation were not rigid, as leaders brought serendipitous information found in personal faith building into their leadership preparation, and preparation information seeking often unintentionally met personal needs. Personal faith and leaders' activities were often intertwined. Preparation information seeking was also primarily an individual activity. One characteristic of this situation was more directed information seeking as leaders began to focus on specific future decisions and church obstacles. Information seeking became less open and focused more on official church sources. Leaders were more likely to self-restrict to official information sources such as church statements and guidelines. Leaders were more dependent on expert information sources including clergy and denominational officials.

People sources used in Situation 2 were fellow parishioners as local experts, clergy, and external experts. Family and friends played a diminished role in preparation information seeking unless they also were considered local experts, or had leadership experience. Prayer continued to play a significant

role, though prayer became more directed, and emphasized discernment.

Traditional sources such as the Bible and religious literature were also selected in Situation 2 but books were exclusively non-fiction such as works on theology and church growth. New media sources were selected but predominately as communication tools to access specific documents and resources, and particularly to communicate with members and local and distant experts.

Leaders began using secular information sources related to leadership tasks, and continued to access theologically outside materials. To do this appropriately, leaders continued to use gatekeepers but appeared less comfortable with their own expertise, and relied more on clergy and denominational recommendations and referrals.

Situation 3: Group Information Seeking

This final situation of leaders' information seeking is information seeking as a leadership group. In this situation information seeking is conducted collaboratively in order to address specific information needs of the leadership team. The division between earlier situations and Situation 3 was more rigid since it now shifts away from the individual. Leaders did, however, occasionally share with the group information gathered from earlier situations that they found to be pertinent to the discussion. In this situation information seeking was the most active and problem oriented. This was also the most closed situation to theological information from outside the community, and this appeared reflective of the leaders' increased sense of responsibility as church guardians when in the decision-making role. Conversely, in Situation 3 leaders were most open to

secular information sources, as these were considered essential tools for organizational management decisions. Leaders were more aware of their own limitations and relied more heavily on perceived external experts such as consultants and denominational officials.

The sources leaders selected in Situation 3 reflected many of these characteristics. Prayer, conducted corporately was very important in this situation especially seeking discernment and specific guidance. It was vital that the leaders felt that decisions made did reflect God's will for their church. Parishioners still played important information roles, and leaders regularly engaged in consultation practices. Leaders relied heavily on clergy direction in the decision-making processes, and direction from denominational experts was considered essential. Leaders used traditional information sources similar to Situation 2, with the Bible and official church documents being essential. Secular sources such as surveys, reports, and how-to books were used extensively. New Media played a very limited role except as communication tools to engage with local and external experts and officials.

In this situation leaders used all three gatekeepers: personal theological expertise, clergy, and denominational sources, when they needed to consider information that was either secular or outside the theological "comfort zone". Leaders again used personal expertise particularly with secular sources when their personal educational and work experiences qualified them as experts with these sources. Leaders did often wrestle with the theological implications of these sources, and in these cases clergy and denominational officials were

considered essential to explicate the appropriate theological use and establish boundaries.

Conclusion

Michels' model of church leaders' information seeking recognizes that the types of tools and means for selecting information sources for personal faith building did not differ significantly from other types of everyday life information seeking. Leaders spoke to trusted people; leaders turned to convenient sources; and leaders moved from uncertainty to confidence as they located and adapted new information into their own worldview. The processes that guided information seeking for personal faith building information seeking, for example, had much in common with other forms of serious leisure seeking such as volunteerism. Personal health information seeking, as another example, offered the closest analogy to religious information seeking as individuals reflected on how authority is constructed and who is considered the expert in particular health contexts.

There were also distinct characteristics in church leaders' information seeking. Leaders actively narrowed their information choices and resources as they moved from personal toward corporate decision-making. There was an increasing application of what might be described as theological and clergy filters: leaders generally had a clear understanding of what was acceptable information, and when in doubt they turned to traditional authorities. Sometimes traditional authorities like clergy were sources of information. More often, in an age when digital information, including religious information, is readily available, clergy were conduits to official sources or were validators of information found.

Leaders in the midst of often significant change, found ways to master the information they gathered and used it to produce and protect their order of life both for themselves and for their churches.

6.2 Reflections on the Study

Not every transition process is successful. Since the study concluded *New Governance* experienced a significant setback. Most of the technological innovations have been abandoned. Many members have left, including the Pastor and most of the leaders. The church is fighting for its life. This underscores the seriousness of the task faced by these leaders, and the difficulty they face seeking information to discern the will of God for their church. *Big Vision* church has also experienced some setbacks, and the Lead Pastor has stepped down. The church leaders invited denominational consultants to assist them in establishing a new vision for their church. The consultants conducted an online congregational survey to gain an understanding of the members' and adherents' priorities and expectations of the church. They met with leaders and key members through a weekend of consultations, and hosted a congregation meeting to share their results. *Big Vision* is re-visioning. *One Ship's* transition has been successful and the church continues to grow. Leaders have been active in moving the process along and continue to use resources such as the Gallup surveys to evaluate the impact of the changes.

6.2.1 Reflections on Methodology

In the course of this study I identified several limitations with the methodology that required further reflection. Where possible I proposed modifications to the methodology and practices that would strengthen future research.

The first area should be obvious: churches in transition are challenging places in which to conduct research. Though welcomed by key informants and leaders in the three study site churches, access was frequently a problem, sometimes resulting from simple scheduling conflicts, time limitations, confidentiality concerns, and internal church politics. The three churches were located in three different communities in the region and required travel to meet with leaders. On several occasions scheduled meetings at *One Ship* were changed but the date/time was not changed in the community calendars and I arrived on the wrong day or time. Access to leaders' decision-making became a significant roadblock. As initiators of change, leaders face significant demands on their time and abilities. In the recruitment stage one church withdrew over concerns about the time commitment. This was also a significant concern for the leaders of all three study sites and as a result the original plan to conduct memory workshops and group interviews were set aside.

Church change can also have human resources implications. Several meetings with *Big Vision* leaders were cancelled or postponed because they involved personnel issues that were considered confidential. Although I had assured leaders of confidentiality, my status as a non-member in the congregation raised concerns for some leaders, perhaps akin to airing "family business" in public. To address this issue researcher would need to negotiate a deeper level of access. This might be accomplished through a more complete identification with the church through completing the membership process. I was reluctant to do so for personal reasons, but this choice created roadblocks.

During the study two churches were engaged in denominational consultation processes. Becoming part of these processes at the congregational level would provide additional credibility, and would open additional doors into congregational leadership. Since leaders are already committed to these processes, they may be more willing to invest the time needed to complete the study and importantly the group interview elements already part of consultation processes.

A second issue with this methodology was that it was designed without sufficient involvement of the informants. Although the key informants found the study intriguing and hoped to learn from the results, several also raised more pressing questions that they wanted explored that were outside the scope of this study. In my initial meeting with the Roman Catholic Archdiocesan office for example there was great interest in information dissemination and communication at the congregational level. Future research projects would benefit from a closer engagement with churches in the design phase, perhaps not to the extent of participant action research but certainly allowing more opportunities for the churches to frame the questions.

A significant limitation arose in the application of frameworks and even questions that were developed in a Protestant context to a Roman Catholic context. In some circumstances, there were merely mismatches in terminology, and I needed more guidance on how a Catholic might speak about these topics. In other cases, I was asking questions that Catholics would not ask such as questions about liberalism and conservatism. Are there theological variances within the Catholic Church? Certainly, but they are not thought of in this manner,

further research needs to be done to elucidate how best conceptualize and discern these differences.

6.2.2 Reflections on My Experience

It was important for me to have a means to reflect on my research experience during the course of this study. I wanted this to also be an opportunity for informal feedback from other researchers and community members. I decided to blog about my experiences on a blog entitled www.informingfaith.blogspot.com. My first post was on September 2, 2009 and I continued posting until November 25, 2013. I posted 98 times and there were 8623 page views from across the globe including Canada, U.S., Russia, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, the Philippines, and China. Many people accessed the blog through my social media like my Facebook posts, but the majority reached it through Google.

Through this blog I explored familiar themes such as the theology of information seeking, prayer, and faith online. It was here where I first posed my questions, and then later shared my experiences at conferences when I presented the papers developed out of my research. My blogging about those experiences enabled me to process the feedback I received. Blogging about the nuggets I gleaned at conferences on religion, media, information science, and libraries, was a valuable way to solidify these ideas into my own thinking while sharing them with my blog readers. I blogged four times about prayer, first the challenge of objectifying it as data, and then my own tension as a person who believes in prayer. I also posted twice on the closure of regional bookstores

whose sales had been eroded by online sales. I asked, “who teaches seekers to discern good sources in the absence of the knowledgeable clerk?”

My exploration of faith online was not limited to the questions raised in this paper but considered clergy who blogged, and churches who used technology in innovative ways. Religion on the Internet was a frequent theme, and the transformation of Sacred Text raised the question, “How will this substitution in form change the Evangelical theology around the primacy of the text?” I mulled over Marshall McLuhan’s question whether “the medium is the message” as the churches I visited ventured online. I ventured farther online and visited virtual churches in SecondLife, which is, perhaps, the next step in online engagement. I blogged about those experiences several times, and after attending various virtual religious services I reviewed the question raised by Heidi Campbell elsewhere, “there is no virtual ekklesia?”

I wrestled as well with personal questions like the role of emotion in my research, and the challenge of objectivity in what is often deeply personal research. Emotion engagement cannot be ignored in qualitative research. When I engage with people’s real life stories they become more than research subjects, and it is difficult to not be moved by them. In another post I noted that like the information seekers we study, we often talk to people not only as data sources also because we enjoy talking to them. I blogged, “What do I want to be when I grow up?” as I reflected on where this doctorate would take me, and my own role as an information provider.

Blogging was a useful tool for reflection, and became a resource to look back on. It provided a means to document the development of my own thinking, and most importantly required me to write in a way that was broadly accessible. By doing so I received useful feedback that guided, corrected, and challenged my research path.

6.3 Opportunities for Further Study

This study focused on very specific questions applied to a limited number of sites. Numerous questions were raised in the course of this study that warrant further exploration. I propose three courses for further study.

My own early pastoral experiences in the early 1990s were in country churches, where Internet access did not exist, and party line phones were still common. In one situation the closest Christian bookstore was nearly 2.5 hours' drive away, and most browsing for preaching and Bible study materials occurred through mail order catalogues. Denominational officials would visit a few times a year, and meetings with area clergy would occur monthly. Religious diversity was limited to a handful of mainline Christian churches. This was not uncommon in Canada 20 years ago. Since that time technology has become ubiquitous in the church and in the activities of church leaders. This study has suggested that some concerns about the Internet eroding traditional authority have been overstated. Nevertheless the Internet has had a significant impact on the way leaders communicate and share information and this needs to be explored more fully.

Leaders demonstrated an ability to filter information based on their own theological frameworks. Leaders in this study represented a range of training and experiences with many having formal theological or pastoral training. Lay people do not have that same training and it is important to explore how non-leaders experience online information seeking for religious purposes. It should be noted that early studies have considered spiritual information seeking to be rather than a more structured religious information seeking.

Earlier research had suggested differences in source selection based on theological perspective and denominational affiliation. The two Protestant churches studied were theologically conservative. Examining information behaviour of leaders of liberal and progressive Protestant churches could broaden the model. It is more challenging to examine theological difference among Catholic churches since Roman Catholic churches share a unified doctrine. Another way to approach the question of theological differences within Catholic churches might be to consider how leaders personal beliefs accord with official doctrine. A limitation in this study was the use of a framework that envisioned leadership structures of Protestant Christian churches. Although adapted and applied with some success to a Roman Catholic congregation, it would be beneficial to develop a new investigative framework specifically addressing Catholic ideas of leadership and church governance.

Does this model apply only to Christian churches or are there commonalities in all congregational religious groups? This methodology could be applied to leadership practices in religious bodies governed by both lay and

ordained leaders such as Islamic mosques. Conversely, does a model of leaders' seeking require a structured congregational body or would it also apply to less structured congregations such as house churches, small and often unaffiliated groups of Christians meeting in members' homes?

These questions offer a variety of new avenues for exploration. Data uncovered through such studies would provide new insights for those developing and disseminating religious information, and for those, like denominational leaders, who desire to support local decision-making both in times of growth and in times of crisis.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Individual Leaders

Individual Interview Guide

1. The first few questions relate to who you are and how in your daily life you tend to gather information.
 - a. Could you tell me a little about your background and previous education?
 - b. How would you describe your ability to find the information you need generally in your work, or your personal life?
 - c. Could you give me an example of an everyday life situation where you realized you needed information and describe how you resolved that problem?
2. The next couple of questions focus on your regular information seeking in relation to your faith.
 - a. What resources (books, music, television, videos, internet, etc.) do you regularly use to help build your personal faith?
 - b. How important are each of these for your own faith building?
 - c. How do you become aware of useful resources for faith building?
 - d. Could you describe how you determine the usefulness of resources?
 - e. Are the criteria you use for evaluating faith-building resources different from the criteria you might use in other spheres of your life such as your work, hobbies or health?
3. We have already discussed the resources that the elders have used in the process together. I now want to focus on your individual role as elder.
 - a. How did you prepare yourself for your role in seeking God's will?
 - b. What resources did you seek out beyond your personal or the group resources that you hoped would help you seek God's will?
 - c. How did you find out about these resources?

4. The next questions will help me see more specifically how you use materials to seek God's will for your life and for the church.
 - a. Could you show me one resource you are presently using in your role as elder?
 - b. Please describe how you came across this resource?
 - c. Could you guide me through how you used this resource and describe the ways it has and is helping you develop your faith?
 - d. How does prayer impact your seeking and selection of information?
5. The last questions will focus on how technology might be influencing your information seeking personally as an elder.
 - a. How is technology specifically influencing the ways in which you build your own faith?
 - b. You have been in leadership roles before within the church. Could you suggest ways in which technology is changing how you seek information in this present role as elder?
6. Is there anything else that you think might help me understand how you personally have gathered information in your search for God's will for the church?

Appendix B: Group Interview Questions

Group Processes Guide

1. Thinking back to the first meetings you had together as a staff, I would like you to describe the beginning steps.
 - a. Could you recount some of the conversations you had around how the group was going to achieve this goal?
 - b. Can you describe the strategies that began to develop within the group?
 - c. If you were to advise another staff in a similar situation regarding a strategy for achieving this goal, what would you suggest to them?
2. Could you sketch out for me a timeline of what steps occurred at what points in your discussions from this beginning to present?
3. As a group I understand that you have shared various resources, books, conferences etc. that would help the group find God's will. I would like to focus of these for a few minutes. We will have an opportunity in the individual interviews to discuss resources that you found personally helpful.
 - a. Could you list what these resources were?
 - b. How did you become aware of each of these resources and why did it seem that this resource would be helpful for the group?
 - c. What did you find most helpful about each resource?
 - d. What did you feel least helpful about each resource and what might have made it better?
 - e. If there was an ideal information resource what would it be?
4. There are lots of information sources out there, of various qualities and perspectives. I would like to spend a few minutes hearing about how you as a group arrived at the decision to consider the tools you listed.
 - a. Could you describe the means by which you evaluate the usefulness or appropriateness of any resource?

- b. Have you suggested or used resources in this process that you might not have considered before being in this group?
- 5. Seeking God's will is a very ancient quest. An staff group addressing this question even ten years ago would not have access to many of the information technologies we have today. I would like you to describe for me how technologies have perhaps altered how you gathered information for your search.
 - a. How have new information technologies (e.g. internet, email, podcasts, webcasts etc.) changed your interactions as a group?
 - b. How have new information technologies hindered or assisted you in gathering the information you felt you, as a group, needed?
- 6. One resource that is not often discussed when thinking of information gathering is people. I would like to ask a few questions about people who you might have spoken with. It is not necessary to include names unless you feel it is helpful.
 - a. Could you describe some of the people that you might have spoken with as a group about seeking God's will?
 - b. Could you describe the impact of each person's input on your information seeking activities?
 - c. Describe for me the role that prayer played in your information gathering and decision0making process.
- 7. Is there anything else I should know about the process the group has and is going through that you think might be helpful?

I want to thank you for this opportunity to talk with your group about your experiences of seeking God's will for your church.

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to the Study

XXX XXXX XXXXX
XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXX
PO Box XXX
XXXXXXXX, NS XXX XXX

XXX XX, 2011

Dear XXX XXXXXX XXXXXX,

I am writing to invite your leadership team to participate in a study of information seeking and use by leaders of churches in transition. This study will explore the group and personal information behaviours of leaders as they seek to discover the will of God for their churches. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX has been identified as a potential study site because of the local building campaign and the ongoing vision of a multi-site church. XXXXXXXXXXXXX's inclusion in the study would be particularly valuable because the transitions are part of an intentional and internal process of growth and renewal, rather than as a result of financial crisis or numerical decline. In this study I would be seeking to gather ethnographic data about the church, and to interview in groups and individually leaders involved in shaping and implementing the vision for the church.

I am including a letter explaining the study, the expectations in participating, and the ethical safeguards in place. I look forward to hearing from you, and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the study further. You may also review additional information about my research online.

Regards,

David H. Michels MA MLIS PhD(c)
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.
Dartmouth, NS XXX-XXX
XXX XXX-XXXX
www.davidmichels.ca
informingfaith.blogspot.com

Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter and Form

Information and Informed Consent for Participants

Seeking God's will: the experience of information seeking by leaders of a church
in transition

Researcher: David H. Michels
Address: Sir James Dunn Law Library, Rm. Lxxx
6061 University Ave.
Halifax, NS, B3H 4H9
Phone #: (W) 902 xxx-xxxx, (H) 902 xxx-xxxx
Email: xxxxx.xxxxxxx@dal.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Helland
Address: 6135 University Avenue, Rm. xxxx
Marion McCain Arts and Social Sciences Building
Halifax, NS B3H 4P9
Phone #: 902 xxx-xxxx
Email: xxxxxxxx@dal.ca

Introduction

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by David Michels who is a graduate student at Dalhousie University, as part of his doctoral programme. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. This description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort which you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with David Michels.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores how leaders experience information seeking as they seek the will of God for their churches. I am interested in how leaders understand the information that they choose to use and how they evaluate and use the information they gather. I am also interested to discover how new communication technologies, like the Internet, are changing information seeking for church leaders.

Study Design

This will be a micro-ethnographic case study. This means I will be gathering data from the perspective of you, the participant, using interviews, observations and analysis of documents. It is important that I create a picture of how you experience information seeking as you work toward answering the question “what is the will of God for our church?”

Who can participate in the study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of the leadership team of _____ Church and been involved in the ongoing process of change. You may participate in this study as long as you remain a member of the leadership team of _____ Church. If you have joined the board/council/team after the commencement of this study following the initial information meeting then you will not be eligible to participate in the study. Part of the emphasis of this study is the continuing process of information seeking and it is therefore essential that all participants have been involved in this process from its outset.

Who will be conducting the study?

I, David Michels, will be the person gathering information about the church, observing the activities of the leaders’ team and conducting the interviews. I will be employing a transcriptionist who will have access to subsets of the data. This transcriptionist will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to access to the data and will not have access to the data after the transcription is completed.

What you will be asked to do

1. I would like to invite you as a team to a meeting where I will explain the study and answer your questions. Attending this meeting does not obligate you to participate in the study. You will be given the opportunity to discuss the project without me present and determine whether you as a team and as individuals will participate in the study. Your choice to individually participate or not will be kept confidential. I will not share this information with the group. This initial meeting will be less than 30 minutes. If you choose to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form outlining what aspects of the study you agree to participate in.

2. If you agree to participate, I will meet with you and the other members of the leadership team to interview them about their group information seeking. I will also request your permission as a board to use church records to establish a timeline of the church’s history and activities over the past fifteen years. I hope during this meeting to review some of the timeline information to ensure I have interpreted it correctly. I anticipate this meeting occurring on the church property where you would normally meet and it should take a maximum of 60 minutes. This meeting will be audio recorded and I will take notes of your answers and interactions.

3. At a later time and place to be arranged I would like to interview you individually. You may participate in the group interview and decide not to participate in the individual interview. I anticipate that most interviews will take place at the church, in leaders' homes or in a public place such as a coffee shop. If there are expenses such as travel or coffee shop bills, I will pay for these to a maximum of \$100.00 for the project. The goal of this interview is to gather some information about you as a person and to understand your own personal information seeking activities. These interviews will be audio recorded and I will take notes of the interview. These interviews should take less than sixty minutes.

4. I would also like to observe a leaders' meeting, preferably a regular business meeting. The leadership team will determine the length of the leadership meeting. These observations will help provide a context to the interviews.

I am willing to provide a study results meeting for the leaders and/or congregation. It is at the discretion of you as a leadership team whether this meeting is open to the congregation. Although I will record feedback from this presentation, it is not intended that I will revisit my conclusions drawn from the data. This feedback will be useful for me in determining the effectiveness of this methodology. This presentation would be a maximum of sixty minutes.

Possible Risks and Discomforts

I expect that the process of discerning God's will for the congregation is difficult and potentially was frustrating for you at times. Additionally, as a leadership team there was inevitably a period of adjustment as you worked together. You may feel uncomfortable discussing some of these experiences with me. Perhaps you may have doubts or concerns about how you are seeking information. You may also be concerned that confidential information about the church and its members may be revealed during this study that may be detrimental to your effectiveness as a leader within the church. I wish to assure you that the study is focusing on your process of information seeking, gathering, evaluation and use rather than the substance or outcomes of your decision making process. In order to minimize any risk to you, I will not include information about your actual decisions or your relationships as leaders of the congregation that are outside of the study's focus. The confidentiality commitments I am outlining for you in this letter will clarify how I will manage any sensitive information that I collect in this study to further minimize risk. I understand the ethical obligations that you must adhere to as leaders within this church and I will do my utmost to respect and maintain those standards in this research study as a professional and member of this community.

In the event that the leadership team feels it is necessary to bring the study before the congregation for information and/or approval, I am prepared to present the study to the congregation. I will respect the decision of the congregation in this matter.

Possible Benefits

There are no direct benefits for your participation in this study. There will be no compensation paid for participating in my research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. I will make a donation of \$250.00 to your church library for the acquisition of leadership development materials. I will make this donation regardless of whether all participants complete the study. I anticipate most group meetings will occur at the church site or the usual meeting places of the leaders and so should incur no additional expense for the participants. Individual interviews can take place at the church, in participant's home, in a public place such as a coffee shop or my office at Dalhousie.

Indirect benefits of participation in this study include the opportunity to reflect on your information seeking processes and the potential for an increased awareness of local church leaders issues for denominational leaders promoting local church development.

Anonymity

It is not possible to guarantee complete anonymity in this research study, as this is a small group of very particular characteristics: leaders within the church. You will know what was said by other participants in the group interview and in meetings that I observe, but you will not know what was said in other participant's individual interviews. Your names will be removed from all data before analysis. No quotations or references provided in the data will be attributed directly to you in the reporting of this study. Your names will not be used in the reporting of the study results. The name of the church will not be used although those familiar with the church by means of contextual descriptions provided in the study may deduce it.

Confidentiality

I will ask you to share some personal information such as your educational background and work experiences in order to have a better understanding of how you might seek information in your daily life. Other personal data you would share with me could include personal opinions and recollections of information seeking experiences. The data that is the focus of the study itself is not considered sensitive although the participants and members of this congregation may consider some data that is gathered relating to decision making sensitive.

When I am at the church, or other meeting places conducting interviews or observations, all digital audio recording devices and field notes will be kept secure. When I return to Dalhousie all the audio recording devices, transcripts, field notes, written codes, consent forms, and signed documents will be kept in a secure file cabinet in my office in the Sir James Dunn Law Library, Room Lxxx, Weldon Law Building, 6061 University Ave. This cabinet is locked and accessible

only to me. Any data for analysis will be kept on a password-protected laptop, and a password-protected ipad. When this computer equipment is transported to my home it shall remain password protected and secure. Only I will have access to these files.

This data will be held at the Sir James Dunn Law Library for five years after publication of the study results. When the data is no longer required, paper files will be shredded and audio/video files erased. I should inform you that if in the context of this study I become aware directly or indirectly of actions that are deemed unlawful I have an obligation to report these. I shall report them immediately to the appropriate agencies, the Halifax Regional Police or Child and Family Services.

Questions

If you would be willing to participate in this study then I would like to meet with the leadership team to discuss the study in detail and answer any questions you have at that time. At any time you are welcome to contact me with any further questions or concerns you might have about this study or issues that arise during the study. My contact information is located at the beginning of this letter. If in the course of the study situations arise which require a change in the any of the conditions of the study, you will be immediately informed of these and will be given the opportunity to withdraw your participation in the study.

Problems or Concerns

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) xxx-xxxx, xxxxxx.xxxxxx@dal.ca .If you live outside the local calling area you may call Dalhousie collect.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my study. You should be assured that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you should not feel compelled in any way to participate if you are not satisfied with the information provided or the safeguards in place.

Signature Page for Participants

Seeking God's will: the experience of information seeking by leaders of a church
in transition

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

_____ I consent to having the interviews in which I participate audiotaped.

_____ I consent to David including quotations from my interviews in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionists

Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

I, _____, hereby acknowledge that I have been hired by David Michels to transcribe audio-recorded interviews for his research study, "Seeking God's will: the experience of information seeking by leaders of a church in transition". I fully acknowledge that the data for this study is to be kept confidential, meaning that I will not discuss names, places or other details that are contained in the data with anyone other than Mr. Michels.

Signature of Transcriptionist

Date

David Michels

Date

APPENDIX F - SOFTWARE LIST

Audacity Audio Editor 1.2.3, online: <http://web.audacityteam.org>.

Camtasia Studio 2.5.1, Techsmith Corporation, <http://www.techsmith.com>.

Delicious Library 2.7, version 2.7.6, <http://www.delicious-monster.com>.

EasyWorship Church Presentation Software 2009, Online:
<http://www.easyworship.com>.

HyperResearch Cross-Platform Qualitative Analysis Software, version 3.5.2,
<http://www.researchware.com>.

HyperTranscribe Transcription Software for Audio and Video, version 1.6.1,
<http://www.researchware.com>.

iTunes, <http://www.apple.com/itunes>.

Livestream Original, <http://www.livestream.com>.

SnagIt 2.1.5, Techsmith Corporation, <http://www.techsmith.com>.

YouVersion The Bible App, Online: <https://www.bible.com>.