Course Description
While there are wonderful examples of healthy, vibrant and growing churches, a substantial number are struggling with questions of identity, relevance, and survival. Articles, books and seminars abound with prescriptions of how to become healthy and purposeful in the midst of a shifting culture. As the era of mega-churches and seeker congregation appear to be passing, the time is ripe for yet another effort to explore the nature of the church.

Learning Outcomes/Expected Competencies
First, explore the biblical-theological foundations of the church’s mission.
Second, evaluate the effectiveness of various models of congregational life.
Third, recognize how context impacts organizational character and ministry.
Fourth, acquire skills for organizational assessment.
Fifth, examine the ways in which churches experience change and redevelopment.

Textbooks
Required:

Recommended:


**Requirements**

Course assignments have been arranged sequentially. One requirement builds upon the next. The first assignment is to research the changing dynamics of church life. This “literature review” is to facilitate greater understanding among leaders regarding the shifting realities of ministry in a postmodern context. The second assignment is discover what people are thinking and feeling about their church’s ministry. Based upon this research and findings, the final assignment involves creating a strategic plan to launch or re-develop one aspect of the church’s ministry.

- **Church Board Presentation**

Church leaders and members generally want to see their church growing, active and with a healthy budget. However, all churches are less than ideal, are sometimes rather boring places, and are often in conflict about a variety of matters. Every now and again, one catches glimpses of what the church can actually be like. Your assignment is to prepare a discussion guide or some other form of presentation for a church board to help them consider the nature of the church in this generation. This presentation should also prompt them to explore, design and/or redevelop appropriate methods of ministry.

To facilitate your research, peruse the tables of contents of journals and magazines that deal with cultural shifts and trends, organizational development, and innovative ideas and approaches being used by groups. Sources should be from the last 3-5 years. Journals and magazines do not necessarily have to be theological in their orientation.
In addition to such well-known publications as Christian Century, Christianity Today, and Leadership, your literature base may include: Academy of Management Review, American Demographics, Business Week, Church Management, Clergy Journal, Congregations, First Things, Harvard Business Review, Journal of Higher Education, Journal of Volunteer Administration, Organizational Dynamics, Personnel Journal, Training, and Youthworker Journal. These articles should provide insight into congregational dynamics, human development, cultural shifts and sociological trends, leadership, staffing, etc. If browsing the Internet, you may also find other resources.

Based on your research from (minimum of ten articles), develop a presentation that is well-reasoned, convincing and should prompt discussion among leaders. Length: 7-8 pages. Due: January 23.

☐ Congregational Analysis Report
A most important (and ignored) step in preparing for congregational development is talking with the people who will be affected by the changes. Make appointments with 10-12 individuals who are part of your organization. Select men and women who are involved in various programs, represent a range of years in the organization, serve in different leadership capacities, as well as folks who are not very active in ministry but attend regularly. You need to spend 30-40 minutes with each individual. For details, see the document “Getting to Know Your People” (pp.8-13). Before starting, the permission form must be signed and returned (p.14).

Upon completion of the interviews, prepare a report for your leaders. (Before this report is submitted to the leaders, I want to read it.) Length: 7-8 pages. Due: February 6.

☐ Ministry Development Strategy
Assuming the board’s receptivity of the congregational analysis report develop a strategy for one component of the church’s ministry (i.e. worship, evangelism/outreach, education of adults, youth or children, small groups, fundraising). Determine a vision statement, goals, objectives and implementation plan. The strategy should include a section on dynamics of change pertinent to your setting. Identify the key people in the process. What are the pivotal issues? Are there areas of uncertainty and pockets of potential resistance? If so, how might these areas be approached and consensus achieved? Length: 7-8 pages. Due: February 27.

☐ Class Participation/Assigned Reading
Since this course is a one-week intensive, students are expected to read all textbooks in their entirety prior to the beginning of class. Familiarity with the authors’ ideas enriches classroom discussions.

Style
Papers must be typed, double-spaced, flush left, using a 12 point Times New Roman font on 8½ x 11 inch white paper. Page numbers are on the bottom right corner of the page. Margins must be set at one inch. Papers must have a cover page indicating the course title, your name, date, and box number. Plastic folders are not necessary. A staple in the upper left corner will suffice.

Plagiarism
Plagiarism is widespread in academic settings. Taking another person’s materials and presenting them as one’s own will not be tolerated. Anyone found plagiarizing will be penalized. See the Student Handbook regarding the seminary’s policy.
Grading
Assignments are to be completed by 5:00 p.m. as indicated in the schedule. Late papers will be penalized one full grade for the first week, two grades for the second week, and will not be evaluated after this date. Electronic submissions are acceptable (Microsoft Word 95 or higher). In the case of extenuating circumstances, exceptions may be allowed.

☐ Church Board Presentation 30%
☐ Congregational Analysis Report 30%
☐ Ministry Development Strategy 30%
☐ Class Participation 10%

Grades are awarded according to the following criteria:
A = Excellent  All aspects of assignment are completed in an excellent manner.
B = Very Good  Most parts of assignment are done well but room for improvement
C = Good  Aspects of required work show a basic grasp of assignment
D = Poor  Shows some grasp of basic requirements but needs work
F = Failure  Missed the basic aspect of assignment

Schedule
January 12  Introductions
             Models of Christendom
             Biblical-Theological Foundations
             Mission of the Church
January 13  Trends and Shifts
             Organizational Systems
             Assessment
             Contextualization
January 14  Contemporary Paradigms
             Communities of Faith
             Spiritual Formation
             Mentoring
January 15  Issues in Leadership
             Building Trust
             Dynamics of Change
             Transitions
January 16  Volunteerism
             Staffing
             Delegation and Empowerment
             Church of the Future

(This schedule is subject to change due to inclement weather or other circumstances.)
## Church Board Presentation Rubric

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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction:</strong></td>
<td>Understood the need to understand cultural shifts and trends; recognize need to adapt approaches to ministry to various contexts.</td>
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<td><strong>Critical Thinking:</strong></td>
<td>Researched issues from a variety of sources (minimum of ten); summarized ideas and concepts; articulated strengths and/or weaknesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance:</strong></td>
<td>Discussed significance of ministry issues; correlated ideas to church settings; explored relevancy to specific ministry context.</td>
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<td><strong>Clarity/Organization:</strong></td>
<td>Logically organized throughout; ideas were well organized within paragraphs; ideas flowed smoothly; transitions were used to connect related ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar//Mechanics:</strong></td>
<td>Writing was excellent, free from typographical or grammatical errors; assignment conformed to requested format; references were cited appropriately.</td>
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Additional comments:
**Congregational Analysis Report Rubric**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Recognized need for congregational analysis through personal interviews; understood importance of collecting representative data.</td>
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<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Solicited from 10-12 individuals thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the nature and functioning of the congregation; determined and articulated conclusions which are well-reasoned and well-supported.</td>
<td>24 or less</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td>Discussed significance of findings; explored importance to church’s potential and future development of the church; expressed insights clearly and passionately.</td>
<td>24 or less</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td><strong>Clarity/Organization</strong></td>
<td>Logically organized throughout; ideas were well organized within paragraphs; ideas flowed smoothly; transitions were used to connect related ideas.</td>
<td>6 or less</td>
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<td><strong>Grammar//Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>Writing was excellent, free from typographical or grammatical errors; assignment conformed to requested format; references were cited appropriately.</td>
<td>3 or less</td>
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**Additional comments:**
**Ministry Development Strategy Rubric**

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<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>Grasped the need for a strategic planning for ministry development; sensitive to dynamics of change in the congregation.</td>
<td>3 or less 3.5 4 4.5 5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Determined vision, goals and objectives according to church analysis; implementation plan based upon well-reasoned and well-supported conclusions; sensitized to congregational realities.</td>
<td>24 or less 28 32 36 40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance</strong></td>
<td>Understood pivotal issues in congregational acceptance and approval; recognized areas of uncertainty and potential resistance which need to be accounted for.</td>
<td>24 or less 28 32 36 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clarity/Organization</strong></td>
<td>Logically organized throughout; ideas were well organized within paragraphs; ideas flowed smoothly; transitions were used to connect related ideas.</td>
<td>6 or less 7 8 9 10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3 or less 3.5 4 4.5 5</td>
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**Additional comments:**
Getting to Know Your People

A concern in many church organizations is the separation between the leadership team and the people. As the organization grows (notably when it reaches 100-150 in membership,) there is a tendency to distance the people from the decision making processes. It is assumed that it is impossible to seek out the opinions of the membership as a whole, and so few people try. However if a congregation is to break real or perceived barriers, people must be consulted. People genuinely want to feel as if their thoughts and actions count.

A formal survey of the membership may secure some information. However, people may feel "surveyed to death" and experience has shown that survey results are seldom used. Also, it may be assumed that adequate feedback from the congregation will be secured either informally or at business meetings. However, such formats discourage individual responses except from individuals who are publicly vocal. The opinions of the vocal minority tend to be seen as representative.

If we believe that people are the church, then we must find ways to hear from or dialogue with the majority of those involved with the church. A "visitation strategy" is one way to get close to your people. In the early stages of the church it is possible and important for the pastor to visit the entire body for the purposes suggested within this document. If the church grows, other persons will have to share the responsibility. Regardless, people need to be heard and it is important for leaders to attend to this task in every situation.

Advantages for the Church

Experience has shown that the majority of people in the church genuinely want to serve the Lord. However, they are often frustrated by the limitations and unresolved real or perceived difficulties in traditional program structures. Experience has also shown that the vast majority of people will express themselves constructively and positively when approached in this way. Most people want to be part of the continued growth of the organization of which they are a part. When you approach persons positively and with a genuine willingness to hear their ideas/concerns, they will respond thoughtfully.

There are significant advantages when people’s dreams, hopes and concerns are heard. Pastors who willingly make themselves available are glad that they do so. Some benefits are as follows:

1. Concerns and trends emerge
   Areas of concern, trends or new ideas for ministry usually surface during interviewing. These ideas and trends can be used as springboards for planning and/or problem solving.

2. Positive feelings increase
   A major complaint of people is that they feel they are not being heard. They feel isolated from the sources of decision making. For instance, phrases such as: "I don't know what they are doing," or "No one ever listens to my concerns/ideas," are not uncommon as a church experiences growth. But as you talk with people, increased numbers begin to feel part of the ongoing development of the church and these people, now feeling positive, can only add to the well-being of your congregation.

3. Fund of resources is unearthed
   You will discover talents and areas of interest that you didn't know existed. Individuals who are not interested in becoming part of the traditional program structure of the church, can express their desires for ministry in your visit. Essential to your planning process will be finding ways to mobilize the gifts and interests you unearth.

4. Needs are discovered
   You may find out many things: people are not growing in their understanding of God's Word or developing in their faith; personal difficulties that need to be addressed; people who feel worship services boring; teaching ministries are deemed ineffectual; deep yearning for more significant relationships; small group structure is perceived as superficial and attendance a duty.
5. Significant communication will be stimulated among the leaders. There should be a greater sense of actually working in partnership within the church body. It should create a deeper sense of accountability and honesty, and lead to greater freedom from non-issues and/or peripheral issues.

As You Plan for Your Visits
1. Decide on the age groups you will visit. It is not out of the question to visit children and young people. They are as much a part of the church as adults! However there may be reasons why you choose to visit adults.

2. Divide the congregation into "visitation blocks" to help determine who you will meet. In your determination, you want to plan on meeting with 8-12 people. Generally, it is preferable to visit with one person at a time. However, in some instances you may have to visit husband and wife together. Be prepared for the probability that one will not be as open or as conversational when the spouse is present.

3. Make appointments with the people. Visit people one at a time. Only when it is impossible should you visit with a small group. When making an appointment, inform the individuals that your intention is to talk about their perceptions of the church. You want to hear their ideas and concerns. Tell them that other members and adherents are also being visited.

4. Familiarize yourself with the suggested questions (pages 3-5). These questions are suggested and do not have to be used verbatim. This interview is for your benefit as well as the church. Make these queries your own.

5. Decide how you will keep a record of the ideas, concerns and information. If you have a mini-recorder, "dump" your data and impressions into it after the visit. (It is better not to use a tape recorder during the visit.) It is usually better not to take notes during the visit (unless you're with someone who would not be bothered or with someone who is giving you so many ideas you have to ask for permission to write them down). It is less threatening and distracting if you keep mental notes of the major impressions and insights you receive, and record them immediately after the interview.

6. Let people know you will be sharing this information with the leadership of the church. Since this information is important, let people know their comments will be shared for reflection and constructive responses. Ask the person if s/he would mind if her/his name is shared with the information, or just the information.

As You Visit
1. When interviewing:
   - create or choose a comfortable, relaxed, hospitable environment
   - listen carefully, ask open-ended questions, listen for patterns in attitudes and thoughts (be sensitive to non-verbal cues)
   - ask questions that give the impression how several responses might be possible . . and that her/his viewpoint is desired
   - don't be afraid to use probing questions (be sensitive in the timing and phrasing of questions)
   - let your body language communicate respect, warmth, acceptance
   - be flexible and give yourself the freedom from your questions to be able to pursue an opening suggested by the responses of the person you’re meeting

2. You will probably spend the first 15-20 minutes or less in small talk. You want to relax and feel comfortable even though the situation may be awkward for some people. It is possible that individuals will be hesitant or even suspicious. (They feel as if they are only visited when the church needs money or "workers.") The person has to be assured that it is safe to talk with you
and that you are there for the reasons you have offered. As questions become more specific, assure the person confidentiality will be respected.

3. As you become more specific, use opening questions that invite people to talk about the church. For example:
   - "How long have you been coming to . . . ?"
   - "Where did you come from?"
   - "Why did you come to this church?"
   - "What experiences have you had here that have been positive for you?"
   - "What do you wish had been different in your time here?"
   - "What are your general impressions of the church?"
   - "To what extent have you been involved in the decision making processes here?"
   - "To what extent is the congregation involved in planning and decision making? To what extent do you feel they should be involved?"
   - "How would you describe the communication channels in this church?"
   - "Do you have ideas on how effective idea exchange can be developed between the staff, elders, pastor, congregation?" (use terms appropriate for your church)

3. Sometimes your questions will produce responses that will lead to related questions. Don’t be so tied to a set of questions that you can’t be flexible. Also, you want to listen "between the lines" and be alert to the person's tone of voice and body language. If you sense that there is something behind a response that has to be coaxed out, ask gentle probing questions. You might use phrases such as:
   - "So, you seem to be saying that . . . "
   - "Could you expand on that a bit more?"
   - "I’m sure there are many things we could do to improve our track record in this area. Do you have some ideas?"

4. Use questions that will unlock the feelings and perceptions of the persons you visit.
   - "What do you feel are the strengths of this church?"
   - "How do feel about the worship experiences of the church?"
   - "What is your understanding of worship for this church?"
   - "Do you find it easy to establish relationships in the church? Do you feel that we are really in fellowship with one another in this church?"
   - "Do you feel that you are growing in your knowledge and understanding of the Word through the teaching ministries of the church? Do you want to? Are you being challenged to grow in these areas?"
   - "If you had the freedom to express anything to the leadership team of this church, what would you say?"

5. Ask questions that will lead the person to talk about their gifts, interests, experiences in ministry and desire for ministry.
   - "Have you had opportunity to minister in and through this church?"
   - "What experiences have you had in ministry through this church?"
   - "What experiences have you had in other situations?"
   - "What were some of your likes or dislikes in those situations?"
   - "What aspects of ministry interest you the most? Work with people? Tasks? etc?"
   - "How are persons invited for ministry involvement here? Have you been approached in the past? How did you feel about that?"
   - "What do you feel your strengths or gifts are?"
   - "Do you have any ministry ideas or dreams you would like to share with the church?"
   - "Are there non-traditional ministries we could be developing?"
   - "Do you sense there are needs we should be addressing?"
   - "If you could do anything for the Lord, what would it be?"
   - "If we assume that ministry stimulates spiritual growth, do you feel you are growing?"
   - "What do you look for in equipping/training experiences?"
- “Do you feel that you should be learning something as you minister? In other words, is the opportunity to learn something an important reason why you would volunteer?”
- “Identify strengths and weaknesses in your ministry area - materials, relationships, communication, effectiveness, etc.?”
- “What immediate changes would you recommend to increase the effectiveness of the ministry in which you’re involved?”

6. You may find that some visits will lead into discussions of major problems or concerns. Don’t avoid these discussions unless they become destructive. Most people do not want to destroy the church or its people. However, it does not mean they don’t have ideas and strong feelings. For example, some people may feel the church isn’t friendly. Ask them why they feel that way and ask for suggestions. Invite them to take initiative in reaching out to people in the church! Some individuals will express deep concerns about the leadership of the church. Again, don’t avoid the comments. Ask them why they feel that way, invite suggestions, and look for a way to allow issues to be raised. Men and women who express significant concerns will usually do so in constructive ways. If you feel uncomfortable with the interview, invite the person to address her/his concerns to someone who is in a position to deal with them.

You may find yourself in a situation that necessitates more counsel than you can give. Suggest that you will make an appointment at a later time or put the person in touch with someone with more skill that you perceive you possess. (If you are not the pastor, the next person with whom the individual should speak is the pastor.)

Your discussion will probably include spiritual concerns. Encourage conversation that allows you to reflect on your spiritual growth and desires for greater depth in this area.

**Summary Guidelines for Your Visit and Additional Questions**

1. Meet your people in a comfortable, relaxed environment.
   You may meet them in their home, in a comfortable room in the church, or anywhere that will facilitate ease and openness in conversation. Avoid meeting places where you will be interrupted or excessively distracted. If meeting a person with young children, anticipate that you will need to have someone look after the children during the visit, or provide toys and activities for the children. Also, take steps to insure that some meetings (i.e. members of the opposite sex) are not completely private.

2. Be an attentive listener.
   Ask open-ended questions that encourage persons to make thoughtful responses - without feeling that you are looking for the “right” answer. Before each interview, prepare 5-6 key questions. Know what you are looking for. However, be alert and flexible enough to allow the visit to move in directions you may not have planned. And don’t rush things. Keep your own body language relaxed, unhurried and open.

3. If a response(s) is unclear or more detail is needed, ask additional, probing questions without being rude.

4. Additional questions for your visit:
   - "What responsibilities have you had in other churches?"
   - "What do you know about this organization? What do you wish you knew!?”
   - "How would you describe the general mood or climate of this (church)?”
   - "What do you enjoy doing?”
   - "What do you find difficult?"
   - "What types of people do you enjoy working with?”
   - "What types of people do you find it difficult to work with?”
   - "You have been working in a particular program in the church. What, if anything, would you suggest for improvement? What seems to be going well in the program?”
   - "What priorities do you feel are reflected in the church’s budget?”
- "What specific areas would you like to address in the coming months or next year? Is there something you would enjoy learning how to do - or do better?"
- "Do you feel you know what is happening in the church? Do you have suggestions that would further improve the communication within the church?"
- "What is your perception of the curricular materials you used in your program area?"
- "How do the young people feel about this church?"
- "What changes have you noticed over the years you have been part of this church?"

If you are visiting a leader in the church:
- "What have you found to be the most effective ways to stimulate and encourage people to whom you are ministering?"
- "On what basis are persons chosen and approached for ministries within the church?"
- "What are the constant realities you find in working with volunteers?"
- "What reasons do people give when they say they want to leave a program?"
- "To what extent do the people share in the decision making processes in this church?"
- "Do you have regular times of evaluation for the various ministries of the church?"
- "How do you secure feedback about the functioning of the programs?"
- "What priorities do you feel are reflected in the church's budget?"

Other questions will likely emerge spontaneously during the visit. Write these questions down for use in other visits (if you feel they have been helpful in stimulating the conversation).

Preparing the Report
You will have used one of three approaches to gather data and impressions that will be part of the report. You will have:
1. Visited a selected number of people in the church in order to test the pattern of trends, concerns and ideas. Generally, visits with a representative sample of the congregation (about 20-25%) will provide accurate feedback. However, do not assume that you “know” your church on the basis of this sampling of responses. To personally visit even 20% is better than the usual ways that we attempt to secure feedback. But keep building your number of face to face contacts.
2. Visited the majority, if not all, of the persons in the church yourself (assuming the church is small).
3. Used the “visitation block” approach described above.

Your visits should have produced a number of insights, impressions, and concrete ideas for your report. In preparation, include the subjective impressions as well as the objective. In certain situations, feelings can be facts. Call together a group of persons who can help you assess/process the information. Together, with openness to the Spirit of God, attempt to discern significant concerns, impressions and ideas that need to be addressed immediately. (Some concerns may be small oversights or details that have loomed large in the mind of the people because of neglect. Deal with these matters. Frequently, it is the seemingly small concerns that are the source of significant discontent.) It is important that you process the information quickly and move in 1-2 areas fairly quickly or your work will fall into the same category as a useless survey!

As you make decisions about areas to move on fairly quickly, avoid issues or ideas where you feel further background is needed. Make the decision to move quickly to get that background. After the report has been prepared, it would be wise to “debrief” your work in formal and informal contexts. For example:
1. Use the small group networks of your congregation to test ideas or impressions from the report. Invite these small groups to be part of the planning and brainstorming you will need to do in order to implement ideas.
2. Meet key people in the church informally and talk about various impressions, etc. from the report.
3. Visit a variety of persons from the congregation informally to talk about impressions and ideas from the report.
4. Visit senior members of the congregation to assess the reaction of those who are part of the history of the church.
5. Create intergenerational groupings to involve the youth and older children in the process.
6. Use your public meetings (e.g. services and/or business meetings) to feature the positive outcomes from the work you have done. For example, highlight a ministry that began because of suggestions from the people. In other words, large group meetings are not generally the places for problem solving and planning . . and it would be boring to simply read the report to the gathered public.

7. Summarize the main findings from the report in 2-3 pages. Post them, include them in the bulletin, and/or mail them out to the congregation. Indicate some of the steps you are taking to act on the responses of the people.

8. Meet with the leaders of the various programs in the church, and as many of the other participants who wish to be involved, in order to “debrief” concerns or ideas pertinent to that program.

9. Tackle the negative issues (or people) that surfaced through the process. Most churches have at least one “resident Pharisee.” You will need great discernment both to recognize and deal with such persons. Ask for guidance from persons you consider wise.

Through this process, you have encountered the people of the congregation face to face and included them in the processes of evaluation and change. It takes more time to work with a church in this way. However, the long term benefits of the process make time spent an investment.

**As You “Debrief” the Report Drafts**

1. Examine the Skeleton or Outline of the Report
   - Are the points, or headings, consistent with the perceived trends, issues, concerns, etc raised in the interviews?
   - Is there overlap between any of the points in the outline (e.g. one or more points might be better organized under another major category)?

2. Determine the Relationship between Symptoms and Real Problems
   Does the report describe symptoms without giving evidence of searching for or dealing with larger or more significant problems underlying the symptoms? In other words, are you able to discern some yet-to-be-discerned problem lurking behind scene?

3. Give Feedback on How the Report Will “Sound” to the Relevant Church Group
   - Are the points being made clear and concise?
   - Is the order of the points raised logical? For example, are provocative issues placed first when it might be better for them to be raised after less threatening observations have already been made?
   - Are any issues raised which are unnecessarily provocative?
   - Are there conclusions and recommendations given in the report? In other words, will the relevant group have some positive steps to consider?

(This document has been revised for the purposes of this course with permission by Linda Cannell, Ph.D. of North Park Theological Seminary.)
PERMISSION FORM

I __________________________________ of ______________________________________
[pastor]       [organization]
hereby give permission to _________________________________________ to be involved in
[student]
meeting with and interviewing members of the congregation as part of her/his requirements in
EM/MC 619 Congregational Development at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. I have perused
the questions. I understand the importance of this project, the need of respect and confidentiality, and
the importance in aiding her/him in this process.

If at any time I believe it is in the best interest of the student and/or congregation to discontinue meeting,
I reserve the right to request these meetings cease.

Signed ________________________________ Date ____________