THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES: A PARADIGM FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION FOR CANADIAN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

"The Messages to the Seven Churches: A Paradigm for Organizational Evaluation for Canadian Protestant Churches"

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Board members and pastors in Canadian Protestant churches need a stronger theological foundation for the practice of evaluating what "success" means for the local church. The Canadian church exists in a post-Christendom context where significant shifts have taken place relative to its perceived value and prominence in Canadian culture, which has sparked new interest in examining ministry fruitfulness. Within this context, the skill of conducting a theologically sound organizational evaluation will become a critical practice.

This practical theology project follows the methodology of Richard Osmer, giving prominence to practice-led research as an over-arching paradigm. Empirical research, biblical interpretation, and theological reflection are key features of this project, which the researcher approached from the perspective of a consultant to church board leaders. Primary research was conducted among pastors and board members of Canadian Protestant churches to provide a research-informed understanding of evaluation criteria, processes, and tools currently used; theological principles, biblical passages, and spiritual practices that guide the evaluation process; and barriers or obstacles experienced.

The messages to the seven churches in Rev 2–3 were used as an evaluation paradigm, which was tested, refined, and validated in research with five case study churches. Within these messages, Christ set out criteria for evaluation as well as an evaluation process methodology. Christ exhorted the seven churches to maintain a faithful witness, practice love, and produce fruitful service. Christ also warned them about the dangers of assimilating with culture as well as the importance of being attentive and diligent about false teachers and influencers within their churches. The evaluation methodology modelled in the literary form of the messages provides a Christ-centric pathway for ministry evaluation. Christ's evaluation methodology includes an acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty, a context specific evaluation, an authoritative and aligned evaluation, a balanced approach of commendation and exhortation, a call to action, the practice of discernment, and a focus on the long-term mission of God.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Rod—who listened to my theological ramblings and supported me tirelessly on this journey;

and to my children and their spouses—Sarah and Andrew, Stephen and Meg;

my life is truly blessed by each of you.

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This project would not have been possible without the encouragement and assistance of many people. I first honour my fantastic advisors, Dr. Lee Beach and Dr. Cynthia Long Westfall. It has been a privilege to work under the guidance of such fine scholars. I am also grateful to Dr. Steven Studebaker, who persistently encouraged me to continue my research at this level—God used you to draw my attention to the Spirit's call in my life.

I have made every effort to build this project on a strong biblical foundation. However, I come to this project as a practitioner and not as an accomplished biblical scholar. I have not wrestled with all the critical questions of the texts I have used in this project, but rather have leaned on the exegetical resources of respected biblical scholars. I am indebted to them for their work.

There are many friends and professional colleagues who have contributed to my thinking about this project; however, there are a few I acknowledge here because of their tremendous ongoing support. Mary Ann Charters provided technical guidance and oversight for the survey portion of the project. Natasha Lichti, my faithful proof-reader, made many helpful editing suggestions. My DPT colleagues, Stephen Barkley, Merv Budd, and David Long, gave me constructive feedback and encouragement throughout this journey. I am grateful for each of you!

Finally, I sincerely thank the denominations and umbrella groups who assisted me by circulating the online survey to their churches, as well as the five churches who participated in the case study portion of this project. This research would not have been possible without you.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Canadian Protestant church board members and pastors need a stronger theological foundation for the practice of evaluating what "success" means for the local church. While recently there has been some movement away from employing the traditional criteria of attendance and giving, there is more work to be done in developing contextually appropriate and useful approaches to conducting organizational evaluation in Protestant churches in Canada.

A significant challenge that church board leaders face is the lack of accessible resources that work within the church context. The desire to evaluate is there, but church board leaders are unsure how to begin and/or how to incorporate a biblical approach. Another challenge relates to the tendency for church board leaders to concentrate on their legal and fiduciary responsibilities. The idea of considering broader factors that relate to mission may be unfamiliar. Yet as the Canadian church becomes increasingly marginalized in the wider culture, the skill of conducting an organizational evaluation will become increasingly important as pastors and church board members re-focus their attention on mission accomplishment.

Viewed from the perspective of church board leadership, this research project engages in primary research to better understand the current practice of organizational evaluation in Canadian Protestant churches. This research includes a broader survey of the practice as well as in-depth case studies with five congregations. In addition, this project engages in a study of the messages from Christ to the seven churches in Rev 2–3. Theological reflection on the practice and biblical passages coalesce in a paradigm for

evaluation that provides church board leaders and pastors with a theologically rich process and criteria for conducting an organizational evaluation.

What is Organizational Evaluation?

Organizational evaluation is a comprehensive process for understanding how well the organization as a whole is fulfilling its mission. It includes determining if resources are being stewarded well and whether or not results are achieved in an ethical way. Examined from the perspective of the governing board of the church, this project focuses on the process of organizational evaluation—how the evaluation process is undertaken—and the criteria used in evaluation—the key elements that indicate whether or not the organization is "successfully" fulfilling its mission.

It is important to distinguish organizational evaluation from other common types of evaluation. Program evaluation is more limited in scope and looks at the effectiveness and efficiency of an individual program to determine whether or not a specific program is working well and achieving desired results.[1] For example, a pastor might consider the effectiveness of the church's small group ministry. Though there are connections between programs and mission, organizational evaluation takes a broader view. Another type of evaluation that is often conflated with organizational evaluation in the church context is the performance review of the pastor, which is potentially problematic. Instead of focusing more broadly on mission-related outcomes, the evaluation may center around specific duties and character qualities of the pastor, such as "preaching, equipping lay leaders, providing pastoral care, and investing in personal spiritual

[1] Festen and Philbin, *Level Best*, 5.

growth."[2] While this type of personal staff evaluation is needed and valuable, the focus on mission accomplishment is potentially reduced and may isolate the pastor as the one solely responsible for the "success" of the church.[3] In this project, organizational evaluation is understood to encompass a broader examination of how well a particular church is fulfilling its mission. This examination includes the process that a board leadership team would undertake as well as the criteria to be used in the evaluation process.

The Importance of Organizational Evaluation

The church is at a critical juncture in its history. The Canadian church exists in a post-modern, post-Christendom world where significant shifts have taken place relative to its perceived value and prominence in Canadian culture.[4] This significant disruption to the once-comfortable position of the church has sparked new interest in examining the fruitfulness of ministry advancement. In this season of transition, upheaval, and change, church leaders must be able discern what is truly important. How might the Church become a more faithful witness to the ways of Christ? How might the Church better understand the influences of culture that require our attention? What innovations are needed? Within this context, the skill of conducting a theologically sound organizational evaluation will become a critical practice.

Although organizational evaluation may have negative connotations for some pastors and church leaders, there is also great potential. When approached with a posture

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[2] Card, "Trinitarian Principles for Church Boards," 3.
[3] Hudson, *Evaluating Ministry*, 9.
[4] Beach, *Church in Exile*, 19; Mancini, *Church Unique*, 33.

of humility and willingness to change, the practice of evaluating ministry may be a significant catalyst for renewal. In the messages to the seven churches we clearly see that Christ's exhortations were not intended to condemn the churches, but to cause them to understand their true condition and become what they were meant to be.

This research seeks to fill some of the void that exists in church board governance literature. Current church board governance materials seldom include a robust system for organizational evaluation that provides theological, theoretical, and practical guidance for the board in terms of process, criteria selection, measurement, and reporting. Moreover, there are even fewer resources that address the unique nature of organizational evaluation in smaller churches. This research also supports various denominational initiatives around the issues of church health and theological vitality.

While many church leadership teams are open to the idea of organizational evaluation, others are uninterested in evaluation or concerned about the appropriateness of ministry evaluation in the church context. This project showcases Christ's evaluation methodology and "success" criteria, which not only validates the practice of organizational evaluation, but also provides a Christ-centric approach.

Design and Methodology

This project employs several methods: practice-led research, practical theology, management sciences, biblical interpretation, and theological reflection. The methodologies for these components are outlined below.

The Iterations Between Practice and Research, Research and Practice

The over-arching paradigm for this project is practice-led research. Hazel Smith and Roger Dean describe the essence of practice-led research as an "iterative cyclic web."[5] Smith and Dean's model illustrates how the researcher moves between practice and theory, allowing practice to augment, refine, or sharpen theory and vice versa.[6] Practice-led research moves between theory and practice in a variety of ways, including reviewing literature, generating ideas, testing ideas in practice, developing ideas further as a result of practice, revising training materials, and synthesizing research and practice into new theories or techniques.[7] The elements of this project were designed to create a dialogical cycle that moves between the previous work and consulting experiences of the researcher, theological work completed during doctoral studies, primary research into the actual practice of Canadian Protestant churches, and the experience of facilitating the practice of organizational evaluation in the case study component of this project.

The movement between research and practice occurs both intentionally and intuitively.[8] If one were to draw a diagram, it might indeed look like a tangled web because of all the criss-crossing back and forth between practice and theory. However, it is this continuous act of moving between practice and theory that strengthens the research conclusions that are reached. The common spider web provides a helpful metaphor in this regard. A typical spider web is made up of two different kinds of silks. Dragline silk is the non-adhesive line that is used to make the main structure of the web.

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[5] Smith and Dean, "Practice-led Research," 19–20.
[6] Smith and Dean, "Practice-led Research," 21.
[7] Smith and Dean, "Practice-led Research," 20.
[8] Sullivan, "Making Space," 48.

These lines provide an outline and the spider can travel easily along these lines to any part of the web. The capture-spiral silks, produced by the same spider, are sticky and strong. They are laid across the dragline silks to catch the prey.[9] Both types of silk lines are needed to achieve the desired result. The prey is not captured if either component is absent or weak. In many ways, these two types of silks help us to consider the equally important contributions of both practice and theory. Theory is like the dragline silk that gives some initial framework for responding to the questions being asked. In this project, theory included the initial development of the consulting materials that provided the framework to be used with case study participants. Because this project was viewed from the lens of a consultant researcher, it was necessary that training materials be prepared in advance. The observation and reflection on the practice of evaluation with the case study participants functioned like the capture-spiral silks that revealed nuances, insights, and innovation related to the practice and theory of organizational evaluation.

Practical Theology

This research follows the work of Richard Osmer, who outlines four core tasks of practical theological interpretation: the descriptive-empirical task, the interpretive task, the normative task, and the pragmatic task.[10] The purpose of the descriptive-empirical task is to gather information to facilitate understanding. It asks the question, "What is going on?" and seeks to collect information to answer that question.[11] In this project, the researcher used an online survey of pastors and church board leaders as well as

[9] Steinau, "Spider Webs," para. 7.
[10] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[11] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 33.

empirical research from five case study congregations to better understand the current practice of organizational evaluation in Canadian Protestant church boards.

The interpretive task of practical theology uses tools in the arts and sciences disciplines to explain why patterns occur. Interpretation asks, "Why is this going on?" and is concerned with cause and effect relative to the issue being examined.[12] While the output of this research does not fully answer this question, the case studies provide more detail and insight, while laying the ground work for further study.

The normative task uses theological concepts to propose a guide and asks, "What ought to be going on?"[13] Osmer outlines three approaches to normativity: theological interpretation, ethical reflection, and good practice.[14] This project highlights good practices identified by the survey and case study participants. Connections have been made between these observations and the theological principles developed in the project, allowing each one to shape the other. Finally, the pragmatic task seeks to influence actions in positive ways. It asks the question, "How might we respond?"[15] Proposals resulting from reflection about the pragmatic task are outlined in chapter 4.

Biblical Interpretation and Theological Reflection

A paramount aim of this project is the development of theological resources to assist church boards with the task of organizational evaluation, which involves both biblical interpretation (to develop initial training materials) and theological reflection (to bring the research into critical dialogue with biblical passages and practices that inform a

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[12] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[13] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.
[14] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 161.
[15] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

theology of organizational evaluation).

Biblical Interpretation

Many churches within the Protestant tradition place a high importance on Scripture; therefore, the development of biblical principles relative to organizational evaluation is a key component of this research. Two elements are used in this project's hermeneutical framework: social-scientific criticism and literary criticism. The social-scientific critical method attempts to learn about the historical, religious, economic, political, and cultural environment in which the text was written.[16] This emphasis brings greater understanding about the context of the ancient world, which helps the reader to relate the ancient culture to their own context. This element was a vital component for the case study work, which encouraged participants to imagine themselves in the environment of the seven churches in Revelation and consider how the Holy Spirit might be speaking to them.

The literary criticism aspect of this project focuses on the genre of the book of Revelation and the epistolary forms of the messages to the seven churches in particular. Some of the characteristics of epistolary literature include a prescript (author, addressee, greeting), a body (the purpose of the letter, exhortations), and the closing (final greeting or instruction).[17] Revelation includes these features, but also has unique characteristics that set it apart.[18] The researcher used the repetitive literary structure of the messages to the seven churches as framework for the organizational evaluation process.

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[16] Elliott, *Social Scientific Criticism*, chapter 1, para. 2, location 91. In this project the researcher is talking about social description as opposed to sociological analysis.

[17] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 157. See also Ryken, *Bible as Literature*, 155.

[18] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 2.

The literary device of allusion to Old Testament texts contained within the seven messages was also investigated, specifically the references to Balaam, Jezebel, and the sevenfold call to listen to the Spirit. Allusion characterizes a current situation or story like one from the past.[19] The researcher followed the "one meaning, multiple contexts and referents view." This view suggests that there is "essential unity in meaning" between the Old Testament and New Testament texts; however, it allows for the possibility that the New Testament author may make the application to a new context that was not anticipated by Old Testament writers.[20]

Theological Reflection

Howard Stone and James Duke view theological reflection as a process that involves correlating theology with practices and experiences.[21] John Patton takes this reflective process further by promoting the idea that theological reflection can lead to "the construction or reconstruction of Christian theology."[22] In this project, theological reflection occurred between the research (case studies, online survey, literature review), study of Scripture, and experience (insights gained through the practice of board consulting activities). Through this interactive reflection, ideas were shaped, expanded, and generated.[23] This generative theological reflection process is highlighted in chapter 4.

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[19] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 124.

[20] Bock, "Single Meaning, Multiple Contexts," 106; Keener, *Revelation*, 33. See also Beale, *Use of the Old Testament*, 26–27. G. K. Beale also provides a nine-step approach for interpreting the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament. See Beale, *Use of the Old Testament*, 41–54.

[21] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 30.

[22] Patton, *From Ministry to Theology*, 13.

[23] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 65.

Online Survey Methodology

The online survey provided a broader perspective about the current practices of organizational evaluation in Canadian Protestant churches. Specifically, the survey explored evaluation processes and tools, theological principles and biblical passages that guided the evaluation process, evaluation criteria, barriers or obstacles, and positive and/or negative outcomes.

The target audience for the survey was lead pastors and board members eighteen years of age or older who were currently serving on the leadership boards of Protestant churches in Canada and who participate in the process of evaluating the overall ministry of the church.[24] The survey was distributed between October 2, 2018 and November 14, 2018. In total, the survey was distributed to 4,972 individuals. Of the 624 unique individuals who logged into the survey, 527 were eligible to complete the survey, which is an 11 percent response rate. Of those eligible to complete the survey, a further fifteen were removed from the study population because they only responded to demographic information, which did not contribute to the end results of the survey. The final study population was 512, which consisted of 338 pastors and 174 board members.

Survey Design

The eighteen-question survey was designed by Heather Card with advice from Mary Ann Charters, principal at Advanis, a Canadian market research firm, and Dr. Lee

[24] In the survey, the term pastor was used in the survey questions. This term was used to encompass other titles, such as minister, clergy, and priest. Similarly, this survey used the term church board or church board member, which would include other titles such as deacons, elders, overseers, directors, session members, or wardens.

Beach, Associate Professor of Christian Ministry at McMaster Divinity College. Advanis has extensive experience conducting and analyzing surveys in the not-for-profit, public, and private sectors.

The first section of the survey contained screening and segmenting questions. The answers to these questions were used to determine whether the individual was qualified to complete the survey. If the participant's church conducted an organizational evaluation, they proceeded to the second section of the survey that asked questions about the organizational evaluation in their context.

The survey included open-ended questions as well as questions that required the participants to select a response from a predetermined list. Although employing open-ended questions required more work on the part of the researcher in terms of categorizing and coding responses, this method facilitated a deeper learning about the world of the respondent.[25] Once the questionnaire was finalized, the survey was tested by nine people in the target audience to validate the clarity of survey questions and the time estimate for survey completion. The final survey is shown in Appendix 1.

Data Collection

In order to reach the target audience, various denominational district and head offices were contacted to assist in promoting the survey. This non-random, snowball method of recruitment enlisted twenty-two denominational head offices or district offices who agreed to promote the survey within their membership. In addition, two umbrella groups, the Canadian Council of Christian Charities and Life Links Network, also

[25] Fink, "Responses," 35.

circulated the survey to their memberships.[26] A complete list of groups that promoted the survey is shown in Appendix 2. The survey was also promoted on the researcher's Facebook and LinkedIn social media channels. Individuals completing the survey between October 2, 2018 and November 14, 2018 were included in the study. The survey took an average of 13.6 minutes to complete.

Participant Confidentiality and Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, the Internet Protocol addresses of individuals accessing the survey were reviewed by Advanis to determine whether the same individual logged in multiple times. In total, forty-eight records were excluded from the survey as a result of this review. The survey data was cleaned and analyzed using two software programs: Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Advanis online reporting portal. Statistical differences between various segments were identified using a 95 percent significance level. Advanis ensured participant confidentiality by removing Internet Protocol addresses and ensuring that personal information was excluded from the final data file provided to the researcher.

The responses to five open-ended questions were manually categorized by the researcher. During the first review, the researcher underlined key words in an excel worksheet, created preliminary classification categories, and established survey coding guidelines for each open-ended question. The responses were then reviewed by the researcher a second time to ensure consistency with the survey coding guideline. A final

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[26] The Canadian Council of Christian Charities is the largest association of Christian ministries in Canada with over 3,400 member churches and Christian agencies (www.cccc.org/who_is_cccc). Life Links Network is a non-denominational association of churches (http://lifelinks.org/about-us/).

review of the categorization was undertaken by Mary Ann Charters for quality control purposes.

Case Study Research Methodology

Case studies are brief, written narratives about specific situations that have been used extensively in teaching and training contexts.[27] The case studies in this project were formulated from contextual background information about the church, current organizational evaluation practices, and the exchanges that took place during and after the research consulting process. Confounding data were used to maintain confidentiality of the participating churches. In terms of data analysis, the direct interpretation approach was used, which looked at each case separately to analyze within-case themes.[28] In addition, cross-case theme analysis was conducted to consider similarities and differences between the case study participants.[29]

Recruitment

In his work outlining procedures for conducting case study research, John Creswell describes "purposeful sampling" as a method of choosing various participants who provide a variety of perspectives on the area being studied.[30] The researcher used her best efforts to recruit churches for the case studies that represented different denominational traditions, congregational sizes, locations, cultural backgrounds, and governance board structures. The ideal candidates for participant churches were pastors

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[27] Schipani, "Case Study Method," 91.
[28] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 199, 209.
[29] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 209.
[30] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 100.

and church board leaders who were willing to work together as a leadership team to establish or improve their current organizational evaluation practices. In total, nine Protestant churches were contacted in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. This effort yielded five churches in Ontario that agreed to proceed with the research.

The denominations represented in the research sample include Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anabaptist, and non-denominational. The case studies included two churches with less than one hundred people attending each week, one mid-sized church of approximately one hundred and seventy-five people attending, one satellite campus church with three hundred and fifty attenders, and one very large church with approximately eight hundred and fifty people attending. One case study participant was a second-generation immigrant congregation. In terms of rural or urban setting, two churches were in rural or small-town settings while the remaining cases were located in larger urban centres.

Prior to confirming participation, an assessment was completed to determine whether or not it was an appropriate time for the church to participate. Factors considered included a desire to develop organizational evaluation practices, a healthy relationship between the pastor and church board, a reasonably stable financial position, and the existence of a mission or purpose statement. With the exception of one church, each participant included both pastors and board members, male or female, over the age of eighteen and actively serving as a church board member or pastor. One participant church decided to include only their executive leadership team. The researcher felt this perspective on evaluation would be a valuable contrast with the other case studies.

Data Collection

Creswell recommends an extensive collection of case study data to provide a rich description for analysis.[31] For these case studies, information was collected from people, internal church documents, government research, observation, and various types of media. Other source documents developed during facilitation were used to create written summaries of the sessions. A post-session feedback form was also completed by the pastors and church board leaders in each church. A data collection matrix is shown below.

Consulting Sessions

Participating churches received two three-hour training sessions, which were delivered between January 8, 2019 and May 28, 2019. The first session included a theological foundation for evaluation based on the messages to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. In the second session, the consultant was a catalyst for assisting board leadership teams in defining their own evaluation criteria, process, and measures.[32] Three post-session mentoring sessions were also offered to the churches to assist them in finalizing and implementing their decisions.

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[31] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 100.

[32] The presentations for the sessions evolved not only between the various case study participants, but also after the sessions were completed.

Case Study Data Collection Matrix: Type of Information by Source					
	Pastor	Board	Documents	Media	Other
Off-session conversations to prepare, debrief, and coach	✓				
Verbal interaction and observations during sessions	✓	✓			
Approved session notes	✓	✓	✓		
Researcher reflection notes after each session, interaction			✓		
Post-session feedback forms	✓	✓	✓		
Board minutes, AGM minutes			✓		
Mission/vision/values statements			✓		
Church financial statements			✓		
Church website and/or social media pages				✓	
Current evaluation reports/dashboards			✓		
Statistics Canada community demographic information			✓		
Municipal information about community				✓	
Online sermons, if available				✓	
Tour church facility					✓
Tour neighbouring community adjacent to the church					✓

Research Project Overview

This dissertation project has four components. The literature review in chapter 1 examines organizational evaluation resources from the perspectives of the governing board of a Christian church or ministry, pastoral leaders in a local church, and non-profit organizations. Many of the resources about organizational evaluation for the governing board or pastoral leaders are underdeveloped, both methodologically and theologically. While non-profits have also struggled to implement an effective organizational evaluation process, the review of these resources did provide additional resources for developing and prioritizing indicators, collecting information, using evaluation tools, and reporting evaluation results.

Chapter 2 seeks to offer a fresh biblical perspective on organizational evaluation by examining the messages to the seven churches in Rev 2–3. Christ's evaluation methodology follows the literary form of the letters that includes the acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty, a context specific evaluation, an authoritative and aligned evaluation, a balanced approach of commendation and exhortation, a call to action, the practice of discernment, and a focus on the long-term mission of God. Christ also sets out various criteria for evaluation urging these churches to be faithful witnesses, to practice love and fruitful service, to be diligent about false teachers and influencers, and to avoid assimilation with their culture.

In the third chapter, results from a broader Canadian survey of pastors and board members in Protestant churches are analyzed. This chapter also includes analysis and theological reflection about the researcher's experience with five case study congregations and the evaluation framework and criteria developed in chapter 2. The

concluding chapter engages in deeper theological reflection about the practice of organizational evaluation based on learning from the literature review, biblical framework, and primary research. This chapter concludes by outlining a revised proposal for the ministry evaluation training sessions, including an overview of artefacts developed as a result of this research project.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW: ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION IN CHURCH AND NON-PROFIT GOVERNANCE

If a church board member were looking for a comprehensive, biblically based resource about organizational evaluation, they would need to cobble together ideas from a variety of sources. Current church board governance materials seldom include a robust system for organizational evaluation that provide theological, theoretical, and practical guidance for the board in terms of process, criteria selection, measurement, and reporting.[1] Although the pool of resources for pastoral leaders on organizational evaluation has improved in the past decade, these resources still lag behind some of the development that has occurred in the non-profit sector. As a result of the foregoing, this literature review seeks to examine organizational evaluation from three perspectives: resources developed for governing boards of Christian organizations, resources directed toward pastoral leadership, and resources from the non-profit sector.

Church Governance Resources

There are many books on general church leadership, but relatively few resources that deal specifically with governance leadership in churches.[2] This section of the literature review examines Christian governance resources from five American and three Canadian authors representing several different faith traditions in the North American Protestant church. Many of these board resources do a stellar job of educating the reader

[1] The literature review for this project has been confined to published works. The researcher is aware that some Canadian Protestant denominations have programs and initiatives related to church health, which would add valuable insight to this project; however, such an examination could be a project unto itself and has been excluded from this literature review.

[2] Holland and Hester, *Boards for Religious Organizations*, xv; Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 7.

about the fiduciary nature of board work. The topic of organizational evaluation, however, occupies a much smaller portion of governance real estate.

Notably, most of these resources underscore the importance of aligning any evaluation process with the mission of the church. While many specifically view the Great Commission as the primary evaluation criteria, these resources rarely offer specific evaluation indicators besides the number of disciples produced. Interestingly, many of these resources borrow language from secular sources, such as the ends and means delineation outlined in the popular Policy Governance® framework or the setting of specific goals and objectives.[3] Comparatively few resources provide a more detailed treatment of the evaluation process or a robust integration of Scripture and theology in their evaluation framework. These governance resources are examined in turn below.

Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence (Aubrey Malphurs)

American scholar and church revitalization consultant Aubrey Malphurs seeks to provide "not only practical evaluation tools but a plan for developing a church board that can accomplish defined and vital goals."[4] While Malphurs' approach embraces business and non-profit methods, he also contends that Christians must run all theories and principles through "a biblical, theological grid."[5] Malphurs succeeds in his quest for this theological integration throughout the book. Malphurs views the board as an integral part of church leadership with the pastor being accountable to the board.

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[3] For a more complete explanation of Policy Governance®, see Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference*.

[4] Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, Back Cover.

[5] Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 8.

Despite the valuable contribution that Malphurs makes to church board governance, those searching for "practical evaluation tools" at an organizational level will find a sparse harvest. By embracing the Policy Governance® model, Malphurs ensures that there will be a focus on ends or mission. In that regard, Malphurs contends that the most important criterion for ministry success is accomplishing the Great Commission, which he describes as making and maturing believers "at home and abroad."[6] That being said, there is little embellishment about the process that a board might undertake in order to define what this broader statement means and what indicators might be used to evaluate success. Finally, while Malphurs includes monitoring as one of the four primary functions of the board, only two pages are devoted to this task in this volume.

Stan Toler's Practical Guide to Leading Church Boards (Stan Toler)

In this resource Stan Toler, a bestselling author and former American Nazarene denominational leader, seeks to provide "both the big ideas and the nuts-and-bolts tools" to equip pastors to lead their church boards.[7] Toler views the Great Commission as the source of purpose for every church.[8] He acknowledges that the primary functions of the church board are both fiduciary and missional; however, most of the content of the book is rudimentary, covering material such as establishing expectations, running a board meeting, and orienting new board members. While Toler provides wisdom in dealing with the political and relationship issues that can plague boards, little substance is

[6] Malphurs, *Leading Leaders*, 40–41.
[7] Toler, *Leading Church Boards*, 7.
[8] Toler, *Leading Church Boards*, 84.

presented concerning an organizational evaluation process. For Toler "success" is found in setting and achieving goals; unfortunately, few specifics are provided on how this might be accomplished.[9]

Building Effective Boards for Religious Organizations (David Hester)

David Hester laments that church boards fail to integrate their faith and religious identity into their governance decision-making roles, which makes them "indistinguishable" from other secular non-profit boards.[10] He asserts that the board member's primary role is to be both an expert interpreter of the culture as well as a decision maker who responds in good faith with the church's mission.[11] Hester proposes an "Interpretation Model" for governance decision making that includes four components: "naming the situation," "interpreting meaning," "responding faithfully," and "evaluation and reflection."[12] Naming the situation requires reflection on several discernment questions in order to produce a multi-faceted description of the situation that is viewed through the lens of mission.[13] The next step in Hester's process is to interpret what the situation means by reflecting on both the tradition of the church as well as contemporary culture.[14] During the response phase "imaginative and constructive" ideas are proposed.[15] Finally, the board engages in critical reflection about the solutions implemented—have the desired outcomes been achieved?[16]

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[9] Toler, *Leading Church Boards*, 86.
[10] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 61.
[11] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 69.
[12] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 70.
[13] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 73.
[14] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 74–75.
[15] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 76.
[16] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 77.

Hester observes that the need for evaluation is widely accepted, but the method of effective evaluation is largely undefined.[17] I applaud Hester for emphasizing discernment practices, connecting the evaluation process with the mission of the church, focusing on outcomes, and recommending theological reflection as a critical piece in the process. Hester's contribution also emphasizes being attentive to culture, which is a unique feature of his work. That being said, Hester's work does not offer more specific evaluation criteria or the idea that evaluation extends beyond a single problem or situation.

Winning on Purpose: How to Organize Congregations to Succeed in Their Mission (John Kaiser)

In this resource, John Kaiser, former president of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada, articulates an organizational structure designed to focus both pastor and board on the end results desired or "success." Kaiser follows the general contours outlined in John Carver's Policy Governance® framework. He borrows liberally from the language of business, while at the same time infusing key concepts with Scripture references. For Kaiser, mission must be completely embraced in the culture of church leadership and directly influence how "money, time, and attention are distributed."[18] The primary criterion for determining the success of a congregation, in Kaiser's view, is Jesus' command to make disciples in Matt 28:19–20, which includes "proactive outreach," baptism, and multiplication.[19] Numerical growth is clearly an important consideration in this model.

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[17] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 77.
[18] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 27.
[19] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 53,

Kaiser opines that there is a disconnect in church board leadership when conducting ministry within policy guidelines (i.e., "the rules") is conflated with mission accomplishment.[20] While acknowledging the importance of limitations and boundaries, Kaiser calls for church leaders to focus on the end results of ministry, not on "keeping the rules," noting that "it is possible to keep all the rules and still lose the game."[21]

Kaiser's work rightly orients the board discussion toward achieving the mission of the church. That being said, one wonders whether Kaiser has placed too great an emphasis on the quantitative production of disciples over the qualitative aspect of disciple making. Unfortunately, the actual process of monitoring progress (evaluation) receives only scant attention in Kaiser's model.[22] Moreover, the emphasis on multiple staff resources and the larger church context does not adequately address the needs of a smaller congregation.

Serving as a Board Member: Practical Guidance for Directors of Christian Ministries
(John Pellowe)

The Canadian Council of Christian Charities is an association dedicated to resourcing Canadian churches and Christian ministries in an array of support functions, including board governance. This resource addresses a person's readiness to serve on a board, fiduciary duties of a board member, good governance practices, as well as special legal aspects of charity leadership.

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[20] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 61.
[21] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 61.
[22] Kaiser, *Winning on Purpose*, 148–49.

The importance of helping the ministry or church to fulfill its mission is a key emphasis of the book.[23] John Pellowe suggests that board members focus on "effectiveness measures, including the strategic plan, program evaluations, and mission metrics."[24] In the chapter outlining good governance practices Pellowe provides a series of questions that the board should ask. For example, "What evidence is there that our ministry is progressively fulfilling its mission?"[25] "What is going on in the external environment?"[26] Through these questions Pellowe provides an introductory gateway that leads the board toward solid evaluation practices. While acknowledging that this volume is a primer for board governance and that general theological principles are interwoven throughout, the limited amount of space and level of detail devoted to organizational evaluation is paradigmatic of the organizational evaluation deficit that often exists in church governance literature.

The Art of Kubernēsis (1 Corinthians 12:28): Leading as the Church Board Chairperson (Larry Perkins)

In this specialized volume for church board chairs, Canadian biblical scholar and governance practitioner Larry Perkins covers a significant amount of governance terrain, including roles and responsibilities, models of board governance, relationship with the lead pastor, and board effectiveness. Above his contemporaries, Perkins explicitly recognizes that governance processes function in diverse ways, depending on the size of

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[23] Pellowe, *Serving as a Board Member*, 3, 89.
[24] Pellowe, *Serving as a Board Member*, 89.
[25] Pellowe, *Serving as a Board Member*, 131.
[26] Pellowe, *Serving as a Board Member*, 133.

the congregation.[27] The governance structure in a small church is less formal, more relational, with consensus decision making prevailing.[28]

For Perkins, the primary responsibility of the board is to ensure that the church is mission-focused, which he defines as fulfilling the Great Commission.[29] Perkins observes that church board evaluation processes are very weak relative to other governance functions; however, he also believes the practice of evaluation has the potential to elevate the board's effectiveness significantly.[30] Perkins borrows heavily from established non-profit practices exhorting readers to ensure that programs be aligned with mission, that outcomes be defined, and specific goals, objectives, and key success factors be expressed.[31] Perkins also speaks briefly to evaluation process considerations, such as how often evaluation should take place, defining what methods of measurement will be used, and considering when to communicate results to the congregation.[32]

High Impact Church Boards (T. J. Addington)

T. J. Addington, a consultant and ministry leader of the Evangelical Free Church of America, asserts that the local church has "settled for too little" suggesting that pastors and board leadership teams have not embraced Christ's promise of ministry fruitfulness (John 15).[33] Mission clarity and focus is a key plank in Addington's board leadership platform as is the interior spiritual life of the leader.

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[27] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 75.
[28] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 75.
[29] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 45, 77.
[30] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 145.
[31] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 143-44.
[32] Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 144-45.
[33] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 13.

Addington calls boards to be "intentional" rather than "accidental" with respect to ministry results, which reflects an impact orientation versus an activity orientation.[34] Addington begins by suggesting ways that boards can ensure they are developing and continually evaluating their mission statement by aligning it with the Great Commission; making the mission statement simple, specific, and clear; and customizing the mission to their specific church context.[35] Addington then brings intentionality into the process by offering several critical questions designed to encourage thinking about whether or not the mission is being accomplished. The examples below reveal Addington's desire to encourage boards to identify specific criteria, set targets or goals, conduct an evaluation on a regular basis, and consider what evidence would support their claim that progress was being achieved. He asks,

> How well have we defined what spiritual maturity looks like, so we know our target?
> How are we doing, as we measure spiritual growth?
> What weak spots do we need to concentrate on?
> What are the evidences that the congregation is displaying God's love to one another and to outsiders in a healthy way?
> Can we measure with clarity, on an annual basis, how well we are doing in accomplishing the mission?
> Do we measure results honestly or simply assume we are doing well?[36]

Addington's questions push further than many other resources in promoting a culture of honest, ongoing, intentional reflection. While Addington clearly considers numerical growth to be important, he also focuses attention on the quality of spiritual growth, recommending story telling as a method of providing qualitative evidence of progress.[37]

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[34] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 14.
[35] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 125.
[36] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 127.
[37] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 130.

In terms of the board evaluation process, Addington asserts that cultivating a culture of accountability for results, continuously measuring results, and being open to change are paramount considerations.[38] He recommends an annual retreat as an intentional time to remember and celebrate what has occurred, evaluate where progress has been made, and identify next steps toward greater mission accomplishment.[39] In my view, Addington's work advances the organizational evaluation conversation at the church board table beyond many of his contemporaries. While there is room for further development, he considers several facets of evaluation including culture, desired outcomes, and frequency of evaluation.

Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders (Charles Olsen)

In the midst of resources that preach the nuts and bolts of church board governance, Charles Olsen dedicates his entire book to what he sees as a missing element of board leadership—spirituality.[40] Olsen decries the unexamined culture of corporate decision making that has inculcated church board leadership—a culture that often excludes vibrant spirituality. Olsen critiques the focus on human ability and rational thinking as the primary means for conducting board business.[41] Instead, Olsen advocates for discernment to be infused into the practice of church board leadership. For Olsen, discernment is a process where the collective group comes to an understanding about the situation from God's perspective by prayerfully asking questions, listening in silence,

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[38] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 152–53.
[39] Addington, *High Impact Church Boards*, 154–55.
[40] Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, xi.
[41] Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 87.

and consulting Scripture.[42] Olsen does not exclude gathering data, analysis, and communication activities; rather, he calls for boards to integrate a discerning posture into decision making practices.[43]

Olsen makes a welcome contribution to board leadership in general and to the practice of organizational evaluation in particular. While most other governance resources make brief mention of discernment as important, Olsen is much more intentional, outlining a process that is crafted specifically for the church board meeting context.[44]

Church Governance Literature Review Summary

The review of church governance resources reveals that while there is positive theoretical development in the area of organizational evaluation, there is additional work to be done to provide a concrete evaluation process that has a solid theological foundation. On the positive side of the ledger, governance resources spotlight mission as the target against which ministry accomplishment is to be measured. These resources also promote focus on longer-term outcomes, not just activity. Importantly, there is a growing interest in the practice of discernment.

However, it is also evident that several components require additional development. For example, indicators are often delineated in a general way with no additional segmentation or nuance. Methods and specific tools for measuring progress, whether quantitative or qualitative, are largely undefined. Methods often assume a

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[42] Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 88–90.
[43] Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 95–96.
[44] Olsen, *Transforming Church Boards*, 95–96.

structure where there are multiple paid staff and formal board structure. These practices may not work well in a smaller church context. Finally, although Scripture is noted as a primary reference point for Christian leadership, specific theological and biblical development in the area of organizational evaluation process considerations remains underdeveloped. This project seeks to integrate the strengths in the literature (i.e., mission, focus on outcomes, discernment) and offer additional resources in terms of identifying more specific evaluation criteria, defining an evaluation process, and incorporating a theological and biblical foundation.

Pastoral Resources

This section of the review examines selected literature primarily written for the pastoral leadership team. These resources do not address the role of the governing board in any significant way; however, they often speak about organizational health, revitalization, or success. In my view, these types of resources are good dialogue partners for the purpose of this literature review. Various Protestant faith traditions are represented in this review, including mainline, conservative evangelical, and missional.

The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church (Robert Warren)

Robert Warren provides both theory and practical implementation advice about church revitalization. Warren's research in the United Kingdom concludes that healthy (or "successful") churches exhibit seven characteristics: they are energized by an active, lived-out faith that is birthed from robust engagement with Scripture;[45] they possess a

[45] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 19.

service-oriented, outward focus coupled with a deep concern for social issues in their local community;[46] they actively seek to discern what God wants, setting both immediate and long-term goals;[47] they respect the past, but willingly takes risks and embrace change and growth;[48] they nurture loving relationships and foster participation in the church and community;[49] they make room for all regardless of spiritual maturity, social status, physical ability, or mental state;[50] and they do fewer things well.[51] Warren argues that these criteria are more detailed expressions of the two Great Commandments—to love God and to love others.[52]

The process that Warren promotes begins by engaging church leadership in conducting a collaborative, honest assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the congregation.[53] The leadership team then identifies the most critical areas for improvement and action plans are developed.[54] Once initiatives are implemented, church leadership monitors progress on an annual basis. Leadership teams are encouraged to be patient and to celebrate advances.[55] This process is to be infused with Bible study in each of the areas as well as prayer and reflection.

Warren's work makes a valuable contribution to church organizational evaluation in several ways. First, he takes the broad command to love God and love others and provides specific indicators that move the church toward fulfilling these

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[46] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 22–24 .
[47] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 26–29.
[48] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 31–35.
[49] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 36–39.
[50] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 40–43.
[51] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 44–46.
[52] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 18.
[53] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 124.
[54] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 54.
[55] Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, 56.

ideals. This detailed development of criteria is a significant contrast compared to the board governance resources examined in the previous section of this literature review. Moreover, growth is viewed as a maturing of faith as well as numerical growth.

Warren's theory and method is aided by the handbook style format and detailed facilitator guidelines provided. Warren also advocates for an intentional process infused with reflection on Scripture and prayer. Additionally, this method employs creative, interactive, and descriptive dialogue among the leadership group. Finally, Warren includes an annual check-in procedure to ensure that the process is continued on an ongoing basis.

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church (Mark Dever)

In *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* Baptist scholar and pastor Mark Dever seeks to recover principles of evangelical church life that he feels have been lost to the church growth movement, which he argues have produced "a notional and nominal Christianity."[56] Dever's main criticism of the church growth and seeker sensitive movements is that these movements assume "relevance and response are the key indicators of success."[57] Dever's prescription focuses on what he considers the two most urgent congregational needs: "preaching the message and leading disciples."[58]

The marks associated with preaching include expositional preaching—helping people to understand Scripture in the context in which it was written, including a life application versus an audience driven topical sermon approach;[59] biblical understanding

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[56] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 29.
[57] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 31.
[58] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 32.
[59] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 45, 58.

of "God in his character and his ways with us";[60] the gospel as news to be proclaimed; a biblical understanding of conversion, which is not merely mental assent, but a radical change in lifestyle;[61] and a biblical understanding of evangelism that views this task as a proclamatory responsibility not just for professional clergy, but for everyone.[62] The marks associated with making disciples include a biblical understanding of church membership that seeks to hold members accountable for espoused beliefs;[63] the practice of biblical church discipline, which involves judging and excluding those who do not conform;[64] a concern for discipleship and growth that is more than just numerical growth, but also a "maturing and deepening in the faith;"[65] and biblical church leadership, which includes "biblical qualifications," "Christlikeness," and a preference for congregational polity.[66]

Although Dever himself concedes that not all criteria for a healthy church are included in this book, he does propose these as the most important, given what he considers to be the deficiencies of the church today.[67] Dever also provides a biblical rationale for the criteria advanced. Unfortunately, this resource, though clear about preferred criteria and several specific indicators, offers little in the way of evaluation process and implementation considerations.

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[60] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 68.
[61] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 121.
[62] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 128.
[63] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 163.
[64] Dever, *Nine, Marks*, 184.
[65] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 213.
[66] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 232.
[67] Dever, *Nine Marks*, 20.

The Gospel-Driven Church: Uniting Church-Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace
(Jared Wilson)

Baptist scholar Jared Wilson adds his voice to others who are sounding the alarm about the shallowness and insufficiency of attendance-oriented measures of success promulgated by the church growth and seeker-sensitive movements in the late twentieth century.[68] Wilson proposes five metrics or criteria for a fruitful church: Jesus Christ as the "worshipful center of everything;"[69] an emphasis on helping people to "comprehend, confront, and confess their sin;[70] a devotion to the Bible as the paramount source for instruction;[71] an interest in theology and doctrine to better understand who God is;[72] and deep love for God and neighbour.[73] Wilson's method of evaluation is reflective in nature, and he provides several sample diagnostic questions to assist pastoral leaders in evaluating the success of the church and the spiritual growth of people.[74] For example, "Are those being baptized continuing to walk in the faith years down the line?" and "Can our members articulate the gospel?"[75] This book, although not designed as a handbook for ministry evaluation, does highlight the differences in theological orientation between traditions and the importance of adopting criteria that fits the local church context.

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[68] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 43.
[69] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 55.
[70] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 57.
[71] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 59–60.
[72] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 63.
[73] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 55–68.
[74] Wilson, *Gospel Driven Church*, 68.
[75] Wilson, *Gospel Driven* Church, 68.

Keeping Score: How to Know if Your Church is Winning (Dave Ferguson)

In this resource for church planters, Dave Ferguson outlines a process for creating a scoreboard that is reoriented from one that tracks church size and financial resources as the primary measure of success towards one that also focuses on faithfulness to God's mission.[76] Ferguson prioritizes disciple making, mission accomplishment, and movement making (in that order) as key criteria for success.

Importantly, Ferguson goes on to outline a three-step process for creating "a winning metric,"[77] which includes clearly defining what it looks like to be successful, simplifying the definition into the few characteristics that matter the most, and deciding how to measure those select characteristics.[78] The process of defining, simplifying, and deciding is accomplished through thoughtful dialogue. Ferguson advocates for limiting the characteristics for each criterion to three to avoid creating a time-consuming and overwhelming process. A key contribution that Ferguson makes is to keep metrics as simple as possible and to use the "what does it look like" question to stimulate creative thinking about outcomes and potential measures. However, one might be concerned that discernment and prayer as well as collaboration between board and staff are missing elements in this approach.

Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church (Reggie McNeal)

In this book, Reggie McNeal argues that the missional church movement is reorienting what it means to be the church and how this change impacts how ministry success is

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[76] Ferguson, *Keeping Score*, 10, 16–17.
[77] Ferguson, *Keeping Score*, 31.
[78] Ferguson, *Keeping Score*, 31–32.

viewed. According to McNeal, the North American church is "a vendor of religious goods and services" that is mainly focused on measuring activity versus outcomes.[79] McNeil views the overarching purpose of the church as a participant in God's mission "to set things right in a broken, sinful world…and to restore it to what God has always intended."[80] The key shifts that McNeal supports include orienting the focus outside the church versus "hovering around and in the church"[81] and focusing on people development versus programming.[82]

McNeal's most significant contribution to the evaluation dialogue is a list of specific measures that he views as being missionally oriented. These measures include the number of growing relationships with non-church people, and the number of hours in personal service in the community.[83] McNeal also advocates for a plan to develop "cultural exegesis" and story-telling competencies to enhance communication and understanding of the community in which the believer lives.[84] Notwithstanding McNeal's positive contributions, this resource is more of a prophetic call than a comprehensive resource. This book points in a new direction, however, it does not adequately address issues about the evaluation process itself. In addition, there is no mention of church board leadership and their involvement.

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[79] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 37–38.
[80] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 21.
[81] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 45.
[82] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 94.
[83] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 160.
[84] McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 160–61.

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations (Robert Schnase)

Robert Schnase, a leader in the United Methodist Church in the United States, proposes five practices of "fruitful congregations" that he considers core to the process of disciple-making.[85] Scripture passages that inform Schnase's approach include the Great Commandments (Luke 10:27) as well as the concept of abiding in Christ and bearing fruit (John 15). The practices Schnase recommends include radical hospitality that is characterized by a genuine love for others; passionate worship that seeks to encounter God in a transformative way;[86] intentional faith development that includes active engagement with Scripture with the aim of maturing in faith;[87] risk-taking mission and service that extends outside the walls of the church;[88] and extravagant generosity that emphasizes mission and transformation over budget needs.[89]

Like Warren, Schnase makes a positive contribution by fleshing out the detail of what it looks like to be a mature disciple. Schnase encourages the reader to use this resource as a conversation starter to consider how their particular congregation might become more fruitful.[90] Reflection questions and stories included in each chapter are likely to animate this dialogue; however, detail about how to implement these ideas is not addressed in any significant way.

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[85] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 7.
[86] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 33, 39.
[87] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 62.
[88] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 85.
[89] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 119.
[90] Schnase, *Five Practices*, 10.

Doing the Math of Mission: Fruits, Faithfulness, and Metrics (Gil Rendle)

A key question that is an integral part of organizational evaluation is whether or not to attempt to measure results. Acknowledging that the church is "early in its learning cycle" with respect to outcome measurement, United Methodist Church consultant Gil Rendle seeks to advance the conversation about metrics beyond merely counting—paying attention to numbers and activity—toward measuring the outcomes, the desired difference that has not yet occurred.[91]

Like others, Rendle advocates for clarity of church mission, which for him is to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[92] For Rendle, measuring is about paying attention to the change that is occurring, engaging in discerning conversations, and learning from both success and failure.[93] Rendle provides a helpful definition of an outcome. He writes, "An outcome is a measurable/desirable difference…you believe God has called you to make…[in a] relatively brief period of time."[94] Discernment, reflection, and robust dialogue play a significant role in in this process.[95] Helpfully, Rendle provides specific reflection questions that seek to reorient the evaluation conversation from an activity-based format toward an outcome-oriented format using a cascading method that progressively directs the conversation from description and purpose toward discernment, boldness, implementation, and learning.[96]

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[91] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 2, 13, 40.
[92] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 15.
[93] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 8–9.
[94] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 23.
[95] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 51, 95.
[96] Rendle, *Math of Mission*, 85–91.

Christian Schwarz's Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches (Christian Schwarz)

Schwarz's Natural Church Development is another resource that has been used by many churches in the past two decades. This method outsources a portion of the evaluation process through the collection and analysis of congregational information. Through research, Schwarz discovered that growing churches exhibited the following qualities: empowering leadership, gift-oriented ministry, passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship service, holistic small groups, need-oriented evangelism, and loving relationships. This model assumes that healthy churches are growing churches. Schwarz argues that churches should concentrate on minimizing obstacles to growth.[97]

Although this approach has been used extensively, Schwarz's method has been criticized for insufficient sampling of congregational data, the connection between questions asked and the eight essential qualities proposed, and the emphasis on proposing model principles without having regard to the local context of the church.[98] Moreover, relying completely on survey results without taking additional time to discern whether the results reflect reality may lull leadership into a rubber-stamping posture instead investing fully in the process.

Pastoral Literature Review Summary

The review of organizational evaluation literature targeted to pastoral leadership recognizes that the previous metrics of offering and attendance are insufficient. While

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[97] Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 10.
[98] Erwich, "Identical Global 'Plants' or Locally Grown Flowers?" 26–32.

different theological trajectories exist among various Protestant faith traditions, there is a common, almost prophetic call encouraging pastoral leaders to develop outcome criteria that are directly connected to the mission of the church. Most resources consider the Great Commission and the Great Commandments as orienting Scripture for their evaluation criteria. The criteria of fruitfulness and faithfulness are also evident in some resources. Importantly, some of these resources also incorporate discernment into the evaluative process. Despite the foregoing, however, this segment of the literature is underdeveloped in terms of the practicalities of setting up a complete process for evaluation, options for measurement tools, and collaborative engagement with church board leaders. This project seeks to address the gap that exists in the evaluation process, and also promotes a healthy culture of evaluation with church board leaders.

Non-Profit Resources

The church has a history of borrowing structures and practices from secular society.[99] While these borrowed ideas must be carefully assessed, they may provide a beneficial rubric against which to critically evaluate and perhaps innovate various practices of the church. This portion of the literature review explores organizational evaluation practices of boards in the non-profit sector—the closest relative of church board governance.[100]

Like the church, non-profit organizations do not operate with an underlying profit-making motive designed to increase shareholder wealth. The bottom line for non-profit organizations is to fulfill a specific mission. This does not mean that financial

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[99] Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry*, 3–4; Perkins, *Kubernēsis*, 3.

[100] Jeavons, "Secular and Sacred Governance Views," 107; Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry*, 4.

metrics are unimportant, but rather that financial resources are a constraining factor. In churches, ministry is also constrained by financial resources. Board members in non-profit organizations also function as stewards of the mission on behalf of the public.[101] Similarly, church board leadership functions in a stewardship capacity with accountability to God as well as other church leaders and church members.[102] I contend that these similarities make non-profit governance practices a reasonable comparator for the purpose of this literature review.

Organizational Evaluation Deficits in the Non-Profit Sector

Several leading experts in non-profit board governance agree that the practice of organizational evaluation in the non-profit arena is lacking along several dimensions. John Carver, a respected author and practitioner in the field of board governance, notes that many non-profit boards have struggled to set meaningful expectations in the area of organizational performance and evaluation, noting that the practice itself is almost non-existent.[103] Carver critiques those who evaluate success using activity-based measures, which do not necessarily result in mission accomplishment.[104]

Canadian scholars conducting research on effectiveness and evaluation in the non-profit sector agree with Carver's assessment about the lack of competent board

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[101] Jeavons, "Secular and Sacred Governance Views," 108.

[102] The researcher acknowledges that there are various governance structures present in the Canadian Protestant church. Some would see the board's accountability to a pastor or other more centralized leadership structure; however, I submit that all would resonate with the idea that accountability for mission would ultimately be to God. For additional resource on church governance see Engle and Cowan, eds, *Who Runs the Church*.

[103] Carver & Carver, "Ends: Capturing Board Values About Results," [n.d.]

[104] Attendance at a program would be a common activity-based measure. Attendance alone would not indicate whether the desired transformation had been achieved—only that a person was present at the program. It is not an unimportant measure, but it is insufficient.

engagement vis-á-vis evaluation practices. James Cutt and Vic Murray offer that boards do a lot of talking about evaluation, but that a rigorous process is not incorporated into the board's rhythm of work.[105] Cutt and Murray also observe that there is no sustained effort around these evaluation practices. An intermittent or occasional process may provide some value; however, this lack of continuous effort does not permit the board to become competent evaluators. Moreover, boards may be tempted to be selective in their evaluation—either evaluating exclusively in times of crisis or only when things are going well.

Non-profit board specialists Richard Chait, William Ryan, and Barbara Taylor argue that non-profit boards can get locked into a narrow mindset that creates a barrier for organizational evaluation. They suggest that many boards are stuck in an ethos that promotes thinking that is "technical, incremental, and intended mostly to detect and correct."[106] This pervasive mindset can cause boards to approach decision making in a routine and mechanical way instead of focusing on important questions such as, "How do we know the organization is fulfilling its mission? Does a proposed initiative effectively advance our mission?"[107] Non-profit leadership scholar Thomas Jeavons observes that even though non-profits are not bottom-line driven, the broader cultural emphasis on efficiency, costs, and fundraising means that financial dialogue often monopolizes the board agenda.[108]

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[105] Cutt and Murray, *Accountability and Effectiveness Evaluation*, 139.
[106] Chait et al., *Governance as Leadership*, 46.
[107] Chait et al., *Governance as Leadership*, 48.
[108] Jeavons, "Sacred and Secular Governance Views," 117.

Recently, Imagine Canada conducted research about the measurement and evaluation practices in non-religious Canadian charities.[109] Although the 2018 study was not conducted from the perspective of board leadership, it does provide some empirical insight into the measurement and evaluation practices of secular Canadian charitable sectors. For example, the study reported that while 96 percent of participating charities evaluate their work in some way, a significantly smaller proportion, 64 percent, look at program outcomes.[110] In addition, the study revealed that small charities with annual revenues less than $150,000 were much less likely to use evaluation metrics (27 percent) compared with medium-sized organizations (48 percent), or large organizations with annual revenues greater than $5 million (77 percent).[111] This study also reports that quantitative data, such as administrative information and statistics, are the most common evaluation methods.[112] In this study, the role of the board appears to be that of passive consumer—board members are recipients of reporting, but are not engaged in an active, strategic way.

Many non-profit governance leadership books do a respectable job of outlining principles for effective board-staff relationships, providing clarity about board member expectations, and developing various risk management policies; however, the actual organizational evaluation process is rarely codified in any significant way. The Policy Governance® model developed by Carver is unique among other non-profit governance resources because it requires disciplined, intentional reflection on missional progress

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[109] Imagine Canada is a national charity whose goals are to provide a voice into federal public policy and to offer programs and resources to strengthen Canadian charities. See www.imaginecanada.ca. Charities are a special class of organizations within the broader non-profit sector. Since most churches are charities, this group makes a good comparator.

[110] Imagine Canada, "State of Evaluation," 4.

[111] Imagine Canada, "State of Evaluation," 10.

[112] Imagine Canada, "State of Evaluation," 6.

within the model itself. This model first requires the board to clearly define the Ends or "outcome, impact, or change" that the organization desires.[113] Under this model, the chief executive is required to provide the board with a narrative and evidence-based report about how the mission of the organization has been moved forward.[114] However, the Policy Governance® model provides little detail on how to create a supporting framework that makes it possible to supply such a report. Other sources view evaluation as part of the overall planning cycle, but do not give further guidance on various process considerations.[115] Very few resources consider the particular challenges of a small non-profit organization.

Potential Contributions from Non-profit Governance

While the actual practice of organizational evaluation in non-profits certainly exhibits some significant weaknesses, the review of key sources also provides potential theoretical contributions for church board governance. In this section, the importance of mission, the impact of accountability relationships, the value of a performance measurement system, and the influence of board culture are examined.

Mission

Several resources in the non-profit sector make a strong connection between evaluation and mission. Mission provides the bedrock for the non-profit organization and it should

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[113] Carver & Carver, *Ends and the Ownership*, 5.
[114] For a comprehensive overview, see Carver, *Boards that Make a Difference.*
[115] Grace et al, *Mission, Planning, and Evaluation*, 5.

express, with exceptional clarity, why the organization exists.[116] Mission is the artesian well from which all decisions, strategies, programs, and plans cascade.[117] Non-profit consultant Lawrence Butler describes the mission of the organization as "the spine of the enterprise—the essential underlying framework of values and purpose that gives it shape and resiliency."[118] Of particular value is Butler's methodology for using the mission statement as the framework for developing key performance indicators by breaking down the mission statement into purpose, audience, methods, and outcomes. This segmentation allows for a multi-faceted approach to evaluating mission accomplishment.

Accountability Relationships

Another contribution that non-profit evaluation theory makes is the nature of accountability relationships and engagement with various stakeholders, including beneficiaries and communities.[119] Carver and Carver contend that all organizations exist because there is an accountability relationship to legal owners.[120] In this context, the elected board is accountable to the wider group of people who elected them.[121] At a minimum, the board should report back to these legal owners about their stewardship and missional progress through an annual general meeting.

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[116] Grace et al, *Mission, Planning, and Evaluation*, 5; Wei-Skillern et al, *Entrepreneurship in the Social Sector*, 323.

[117] Grace et al, *Mission, Planning, and Evaluation*, 6.

[118] Butler, *Using Metrics to Drive Mission*, 12.

[119] Edwards & Hulme, *Beyond the Magic Bullet*, 8.

[120] Carver & Carver, *Ends and the Ownership*, 1; Laughlin and Andringa, *Good Governance for Nonprofits*, 76.

[121] The researcher acknowledges that there are other governance structures but uses this example as it most closely mirrors the governance structure found in many Protestant churches.

Discussion about board accountability relationships in the context of organizational evaluation must also consider the nature of the relationship and power dynamics that occur between board members and the chief executive. Carver and Carver submit that there are two unhealthy polarities that exist: either board members are too adversarial or too friendly.[122] If the board views the chief executive as friend, there is the possibility that organizational evaluation will be cursory or that significant issues will not be addressed because there is concern about preserving the relationship at all costs. Conversely, if the board views the chief executive as an enemy or adversary, the board may listen to evaluative information with a tin ear, unable to conduct an honest, effective evaluation because of their overly suspicious or hostile attitude toward staff.

Instead of these unhealthy extremes, a posture of mutual trust, accountability, and power sharing should be fostered.[123] Power sharing acknowledges that both board and chief executive are integral in the evaluation process and that a relational foundation must be established so that they can work effectively together. When this partnership exists, board and staff may be seen as co-evaluators, each fulfilling a valuable, complementary role in the evaluation process.[124]

Performance Measurement Systems

A performance measurement system, whether formal or informal, simple or complex, is viewed as critical infrastructure that supports the overall evaluation process.[125] Cutt and Murray's research reveals that there is much effort expended in identifying indicators

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[122] Carver & Carver, *The Policy Governance Model*, 1.
[123] Gray, *Evaluation with Power*, 31.
[124] Gray, *Evaluation with Power*, 32.
[125] Hunter, "Evaluating Organizational Impact," 35.

and attributes for evaluation, but little specificity about how to measure indicators, what process should be followed, who should be involved, and how to interpret results.[126] Cutt and Murray conclude that this lack of attention to detailed implementation considerations has ultimately contributed to the slow adoption or abandonment of the evaluation system altogether.[127] Despite the drought that Cutt and Murray describe, there are a few resources, highlighted below, that provide some refreshing rainwater for the parched ground of measurement systems.

Two of the most common deficiencies of non-profit organizational evaluation include a fixation on financial indicators (such as funds raised or amount of cash reserves) and activity-oriented measures (such as the number of persons attending a program or number of training sessions delivered). Indicators that track activity and finances are still important, but they are insufficient. Non-profit consultant Laurel Molloy recommends several steps to consider when developing outcome indicators. The first step is to clearly describe what it looks like to be successful in achieving the outcome to be measured.[128] The next step in Molloy's process is to create and prioritize a specific list that will provide evidence that progress is being made or that the desired outcome has been achieved.[129] Indicators that perfectly represent a specific outcome are rare to non-existent—proxies are always required. The best indicators are not only closely tied to the outcomes but are also measurable and supported by key stakeholders as relevant.[130]

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[126] Cutt and Murray, *Accountability and Effectiveness Evaluation*, 136.
[127] Cutt and Murray, *Accountability and Effectiveness Evaluation*, 137.
[128] Molloy, *Outcome Measurement Strategies*, 38.
[129] Molloy, *Outcome Measurement Strategies*, 38.
[130] Molloy, *Outcome Measurement Strategies*, 38.

If defining indicators of mission accomplishment was difficult, deciding how to actually measure and interpret the indicator often poses an even greater challenge. A distinguishing feature is whether the measure is quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative measures are numerically based and are the most common. Quantitative measures can be fairly straight-forward, such as counting the number of attendees at a program, or more complex, such as developing a survey, coding written responses into categories, and deriving statistically meaningful results. Types of quantitative measures include raw numbers, averages, percentages, ratios, indexes, or a mixture of these measures.[131] The underlying assumption of the quantitative approach is that the interpretation of the data may be reduced to a numerical value. In contrast, a qualitative approach to measurement uses text and/or visual representations to describe and interpret what is (or has been) taking place.[132] Examples of qualitative measurement inputs include interview notes, diaries, journals, pictures, paintings, and photos. Though sometimes viewed as the poor cousin of quantitative methods, qualitative information is a valid, though perhaps unfamiliar, option.

Doing the work of connecting measures with mission, selecting appropriate indicators, and collecting measurement information without a coherent reporting and communication plan is like planting, fertilizing, and cultivating a crop, but then letting the valuable grain sit in the field when it is ready to harvest.[133] While it is possible (and appropriate) for boards to read a detailed evaluation report, many non-profits now use a dashboard to summarize key information.[134] Butler outlines several principles of a good

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[131] Poister et al, *Managing and Measuring Performance*, 114–20.
[132] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 45.
[133] Molloy, *Outcome Measurement Strategies*, 75.
[134] Butler, *Nonprofit Dashboard*, 24.

dashboard which include making the dashboard relevant to the board's expressed needs, making it easy to understand, using a consistent format, employing colour and graphics, and providing explanations and/or narrative stories.[135] No matter what the format of the evaluative information, it is important to ensure that "negative findings" are also included.[136] If failures are omitted from the analysis, it is difficult for the board to conduct an honest evaluation.

Board Culture

The posture and mindset that board members embrace with respect to organizational evaluation sets the tone for the relationship with the chief executive, who in turn sets the tone in the organization. Festen and Philbin purport that evaluation is still often viewed as a negative exercise—it is a "pass-fail, right-wrong, good-bad" proposition.[137] These authors advocate for a significant reorientation toward a mindset where evaluation is viewed as a natural process that provides important information for learning, course correction, and planning.[138] Viewed this way, the evaluation process has the potential to cultivate an environment where people ask curious questions, learn what is working or not working, and subscribe to a collaborative approach.

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[135] Butler, *Nonprofit Dashboard*, 30.
[136] Russ-Eft & Preskill, *Evaluation in Organizations*, 364.
[137] Festen & Philbin, *Level Best*, 3.
[138] Festen & Philbin, *Level Best*, 3.

Non-Profit Literature Review Summary

Non-profits, like churches, have struggled to consistently implement an effective organizational evaluation process. While non-profit literature advocates for an outcome focus, the reality is that many non-profits are still measuring success based on finances and/or activities. Small charities are lagging even further behind.

Despite these struggles, non-profit literature offers several theoretical contributions. For example, the mission statement may be used as a framework for developing segmented indicators that includes purpose, audience, methods, and outcomes. Non-profit sources also identify key accountability relationships (e.g., funders and beneficiaries) and emphasize sharing relevant evaluation information and receiving valuable feedback. Importantly, board members and chief executive are viewed as co-evaluators and collaborative partners. The non-profit literature also provides resources for developing and prioritizing indicators, collecting information, using evaluation tools, and reporting evaluation results. Finally, non-profit literature addresses the issue of board culture vis-à-vis organizational evaluation, advocating not only for a board that is intentional and disciplined, but also for a culture that embraces questions, learning, forthright conversation, and change.

This project incorporates the idea of missional segmentation as well as prioritization of indicators, and the importance of an intentional process. It also embraces and emphasizes a healthy culture of evaluation yet pushes further to include a focus on discernment.

Overall Literature Review Summary

This literature review supports the premise that the practice of organizational evaluation by church boards is relatively weak and underdeveloped. Many of the church governance resources examined in the literature review do a stellar job of educating board members about the fiduciary nature of church board work; however, the topic of ministry evaluation is underdeveloped both methodologically and theologically. Indicators are often delineated in a general way with no additional segmentation or nuance. Few resources written for church board leaders provide an evaluation process or a robust integration of Scripture and theology. On a positive note, some of these governance resources are beginning to emphasize mission accomplishment and the importance of considering outcomes in addition to activity measures.

The literature on ministry evaluation for pastoral leaders recognizes that the previous metrics of offering and attendance are insufficient indicators of ministry success. Most of these resources consider the Great Commission and the Great Commandments as orienting Scripture for their evaluation criteria. The criteria of fruitfulness and faithfulness are also evident in some resources. Importantly, a few of these resources advocate for incorporating discernment into the evaluative process. Despite the positive developments in the theory, this segment of the literature is often underdeveloped in terms of outlining a specific process for ministry evaluation, offering practical ways to assess progress (measurement tools), considering the challenges for small churches, and promoting collaborative engagement with church board leaders.

Non-profits, like churches, have struggled to consistently implement an effective organizational evaluation process. However, these non-profit resources provide some

important theoretical contributions that could be considered in the local church context. Where church literature focuses generally on mission, non-profit literature pushes further, using the mission statement as an orienting framework for segmentation and the development of specific indicators. Moreover, non-profit resources put forward the concept of a measurement system that includes prioritizing indicators, collecting information, as well as reporting and communicating results. Non-profit sources also advocate for a positive board culture that embraces curiosity, learning, forthright conversation, and change.

I now move from this exploration of published literature on organizational evaluation to an examination of Christ's messages to the seven churches in Rev 2–3 in chapter 2. Here I offer a preliminary evaluation paradigm based upon Christ's evaluation criteria and methodology in Rev 2–3. In addition, I reflect theologically and provide commentary about how these criteria and process considerations might relate to the evaluation practices in the contemporary Canadian Protestant church.

CHAPTER 2: THE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES: A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR EVALUATION PROCESS AND CRITERIA

This chapter seeks to offer a fresh perspective on organizational evaluation by mining the messages to the seven churches in Rev 2–3 to reveal a diamond in the rough that, with theological polishing and processing, provides a biblical framework for the practice of organizational evaluation. Although the book of Revelation was not written as a theological guide for church evaluation, it offers a resource for theological reflection on evaluation as it depicts the Lord himself evaluating churches based on criteria that clearly matter to him. The methodology by which Christ himself evaluates these churches is particularly instructive for church leadership.[1]

The social context of the late first-century churches in the book of Revelation reveals some striking parallels to the contemporary Canadian context. These churches in the seven Asian cities were called to be a faithful witness and to engage appropriately with their culture while remaining true to the example that Christ had set for them. These churches faced many pressures: the pervasiveness of religious tolerance and syncretism, the prevalence of sexual promiscuity, the allure of wealth in an economically-imbalanced, consumer-oriented society, the existence of a plurality of idols, the difficult work of judging false teachers, and the challenge of navigating

[1] The researcher does not claim that the messages to the seven churches in Revelation include all aspects of evaluation that could be considered. For this project, the researcher has purposely narrowed the area of investigation. More fruitful work could be completed by examining other passages of Scripture including God as the evaluator of creation, the Old Testament prophets as God's evaluators of kings and leaders throughout Israel's history, the evaluation practices developed in the book of Acts, and the apostle Paul's epistolary correspondence to churches. A fully orbed theology of evaluation would include all these components.

relationships with other religious groups. The parallels between these first-century churches and the contemporary Canadian church are quite remarkable.[2]

This chapter begins by orienting the reader to the Apocalypse by briefly examining dating, authorship, social context, and genre of the book. Following this, Christ's messages to each church are explored to unearth the organizational evaluation deposits contained within. The chapter concludes by reflecting theologically on process and criteria considerations for organizational evaluation for the contemporary Canadian church.

Authorship and Dating

The author of Revelation is identified as John—a servant of God (Rev 1:1), an exiled brother known to the seven churches (Rev 1:9), and a "brother" or member of a community of prophets (Rev 22:9).[3] Although a variety of hypotheses have been advanced, the two most common theories are that the writer was either John the apostle or another John.[4] Those favouring John the apostle as the writer cite the widespread acceptance of apostolic authorship by early church fathers.[5] Some who question the possibility of apostolic authorship note that the apostle John was believed to have been martyred before 70 CE.[6] The general conclusion of many scholars is that the writer of Revelation was a Jewish Christian prophet living in Asia Minor, while some

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[2] Craig Keener argues that Revelation "addresses many issues that have not changed because human nature and God's character have remained constant." Keener, *Revelation*, 40.

[3] Aune, *Revelation*, l; Koester, *Revelation*, 65; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 43; deSilva, *Introduction to New Testament,* 894.

[4] For a more complete analysis of distinct options related to authorship see Aune, *Revelation*, xlviii–lvi; Koester, *Revelation*, 65–71.

[5] Osborne, *Revelation*, 2–3; Aune, *Revelation*, li.

[6] Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 26.

commentators also connect the prophet to the larger Johannine community.[7] In either case, it is clear Christ chose a Spirit-led, prophetic voice known to the community as his chosen instrument for delivering both comforting words and severe critique.

The most popular options for dating the book of Revelation include the reigns of Roman emperors Nero (54–68 CE) or Domitian (81–96 CE).[8] A later dating for the book is preferred for several reasons. The second century extra-biblical witness of Irenaeus connects the writing of the book of Revelation with Domitian's reign.[9] Moreover, the issue of emperor worship that plagued the seven churches best coincides with this time period.[10] In addition, there is no evidence that the practice of banishing Christians, which was the case with Revelation's author (Rev 1:9), occurred prior to the reign of Domitian.[11] Finally, the book of Revelation used ancient Babylon as a symbol for Rome—terminology that was not popularized until after 70 CE and after Nero's reign.[12] These factors in combination suggest the later dating.

The Religious, Social, and Political Setting

People in the ancient Mediterranean world at the end of the first century embraced a polytheistic worldview.[13] Not only was worship of the emperor the norm in Asia Minor, but the worship of patron gods and goddesses was also rampant in cities throughout the empire. These patron gods were thought to "oversee governance, education, family life,

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[7] Aune, *Revelation*, lvi; Beale, *Revelation,* 36; Koester, *Revelation*, 66; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 50–51.

[8] Osborne, *Revelation*, 6; Aune, *Revelation*, lvii; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 37.

[9] Mounce, *Revelation*, 32; Beale, *Revelation*, 19; Keener, *Revelation*, 35; Koester, *Revelation*, 71.

[10] Beale, *Revelation*, 9; Suetonius, *Twelve Caesars*, 309.

[11] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 38.

[12] Koester, *Revelation*, 75; Aune, *Revelation*, lxi; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 57–58.

[13] Newton, *Revelation Worldview*, 63.

commerce, and worship."[14] Trade guild associations were the heart of civic life, promoting business relationships and serving as the primary forum for social interaction.[15] Refusing to join in these festivities rendered one a social outcast at best and in the worst case economically impoverished.[16]

The seven churches of Revelation were located in large cities in the affluent province of Asia.[17] The Roman road system encouraged the development of trade routes, and the presence of Roman military on the seas reduced piracy, which allowed ports that facilitated sea merchants and the slave trade to thrive.[18] Despite economic progress, there was increasing social tension. Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the social and political elite, which contributed to a luxurious lifestyle for some, but a meagre existence for the majority.[19]

Roman Asia had become "the most strongly Christianized area in the whole world" by the later part of the first century.[20] These Christian communities included a mixture of Jewish Christians as well as Gentile believers.[21] Many of the cities also had substantial Jewish populations that had not embraced the Christian gospel. The relationship between Christians and Jews had always been strained, but it experienced significant deterioration in the late first-century.[22] It is important to note that Judaism

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[14] Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 314; Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 88.

[15] Koester, *Revelation*, 99; Osborne, *Revelation*, 151.

[16] Koester, *Revelation*, 99; Osborne, *Revelation*, 11; Beale, *Revelation,* 30.

[17] Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 114.

[18] Koester, *Revelation*, 93.

[19] Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 97–99; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 94; Koester, *Revelation*, 102; Carter, *Roman Empire and New Testament*, 100.

[20] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation,* 66.

[21] Koester, *Revelation*, 87.

[22] Osborne, *Revelation*, 11; Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 85.

enjoyed a special exemption from emperor worship.[23] Because Christians claimed a Jewish heritage and connection, they also enjoyed this exemption for a period of time. Following the Great Revolt of the Judean Jews in 66 CE, the Roman government imposed a special tax on Jewish people,[24] which assured them of their continued exemption from emperor worship.[25] Christians refused to pay this tax, which caused an increasingly inhospitable response from Jewish communities.[26] Over time this taxation issue and key theological differences led to a more obvious separation between the two communities, which made the protected status of Christians less secure.

In summary, the seven churches in Asia faced an increasingly difficult context in which the polytheistic culture imposed pressure to participate in worship of emperor and patron deities as part of their civic duty and ability to survive economically. In addition, their relationship with the synagogue was becoming increasingly difficult. While there was no systemic persecution of Christians in the province at this time, trouble was looming on the horizon.[27]

Genre

Although there are many facets of genre that could be explored, the characteristics of Revelation as apocalyptic literature, prophecy, and letter are the most significant for this project. Apocalyptic literature connotes the idea of an important revelation or disclosure.[28] The reader (hearer) is implored to critically consider "who is Lord over the

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[23] Osborne, *Revelation*, 11; Beale, *Revelation*, 31.
[24] Keener, *Revelation*, 38.
[25] Osborne, *Revelation*, 11.
[26] Osborne, *Revelation*, 11.
[27] Osborne, *Revelation*, 11.
[28] Koester, *Revelation*, 104. See also Aune, *Revelation*, lxxvii; Johnson, *Discipleship*, 26.

world?"[29] This message of lordship is a key theme in Christ's evaluation of these churches.

Revelation is also specifically identified as prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19),[30] and the language contained in the letters to the seven churches exhibits some characteristics similar to the lawsuit speeches in Old Testament prophetic writings, which were reserved for communication that came directly from God.[31] In addition, John the seer was directed to "'write' and 'send' a letter to the assemblies (1:11), much as the biblical prophets were to 'go' and 'tell' (Isa 6:9; Jer 1:7)."[32] These prophetic connections through the use of Old Testament language would have greatly increased the authoritative nature of the messages with their audience.

Revelation also exhibits characteristics of an epistle[33] that was meant to be distributed widely.[34] Scholars agree that the messages would probably have been delivered to the gathered congregation within the context of a worship service.[35] Alan Bandy outlines seven characteristics of the letters:

1) Address (Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ….ἐκκλησίας γράψον [To the angel … church write]).
2) Prophetic formula (τάδε λέγει [Thus says] coupled with a Christological prediction).
3) The οἶδα [I know] A speech of commendation, if applicable.
4) The οἶδα [I know] B speech of accusation (ἀλλά ἔχω κατά σοῦ [I have this against you]), if applicable.
5) An admonition laden with imperative verb forms.

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[29] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 15.

[30] Koester, *Revelation*, 107.

[31] Koester, *Revelation*, 108; Bandy, "Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits," 199; Beale, *Revelation*, 229.

[32] Koester, *Revelation*, 108.

[33] Osborne, *Revelation*, 12; Koester, *Revelation*, 109–12; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 10–11; Aune, *Revelation*, lxx–lxxii; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 12.

[34] Koester, *Revelation*, 110; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 11; Osborne, *Revelation*, 105; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 135; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 13.

[35] Aune, *Revelation*, lxxii; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 10; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 123; Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 3; Osborne, *Revelation*, 57.

6) An exhortation to listen (ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω [The one having ears, let him hear])
7) An eschatological promise of salvation (τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ [To the one who overcomes I will give])[36]

In this project, I argue that this literary formula represents Christ's evaluation methodology. In addition, the seven-fold call to listen to the Spirit served "as an injunction to an audience to pay very close attention to the message."[37]

In summary, the genre of Revelation impacts how the messages were understood and received. The apocalyptic characteristics entreat the reader to consider who is truly Lord in this world and reveals the hidden battle that is taking place. The prophetic genre adds credibility and authority to the messages. The written letters provide a consistent format for Christ's evaluation method and ensures accuarate communication to a broader audience.

Messages to the Seven Churches

The messages to the seven churches of Asia were an evaluation of each church's spiritual health and contained encouragement and/or exhortation. Christ's evaluation came from an intimate knowledge of their circumstances and their inward motivation (Rev 2:23). The exhortations contained in the letters are motivated by love with the end goal of disciplining and strengthening the church (Rev 3:19). Christ identified the problem, urged the churches to respond, and offered solutions for moving toward the end goal.[38] In this section, the unique context of each city is highlighted and the specific

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[36] Bandy, "Patterns in Prophetic Lawsuits," 187. See also a similar analysis by Osborne, *Revelation*, 105–6; Aune, *Revelation*, 119–24; Beale, "Hearing Formula in Revelation," 169.

[37] Aune, *Revelation*, 123.

[38] Osborne, *Revelation*, 106.

points of evaluation by Jesus Christ are examined. The section concludes by reflecting on process and criteria considerations for organizational evaluation for the contemporary Canadian church.

Ephesus

Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor and a prominent economic hub in the Roman Empire.[39] It boasted an impressive seaport and a well-established road system that made it "the largest emporium in Asia."[40] Ephesus was also the centre for Roman administration in Asia.[41] The massive temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis was considered one of the most spectacular structures of the ancient world.[42] Ian Boxall observes that the vestiges of Roman influence and opulent culture were everywhere. He writes, "Imperial Rome had also left its mark in striking terms on the city, from its state agora with a temple to the goddess Roma and Divus Julius, through its statue-lined streets of gleaming marble, to the impressive theatre capable of seating 25,000."[43]

The church in Ephesus was commended for the purity of their teaching and adherence to proper doctrine.[44] Specifically, they were praised because they had tested the teachings of those who claimed to be apostles but were promoting false teaching (Rev 2:2). In the late first century, it was typical for itinerant teachers to travel from church to church, which raised the risk that false teaching would be perpetuated.[45]

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[39] Osborne, *Revelation*, 256; Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 94; Koester, *Revelation*, 256.

[40] Koester, *Revelation*, 256.

[41] Koester, *Revelation*, 256.

[42] González and González, *Revelation*, 22.

[43] Boxall, *Revelation*, 47.

[44] Caird, *Revelation*, 30; Osborne, *Revelation*, 113.

[45] Osborne, *Revelation*, 113; Aune, *Revelation*, 115.

Because Ephesus was a major seaport, there was easy access to the church.[46] The Ephesians were also commended for their hard work and endurance. In this context, the Greek word κόπον (labour) means "the toil which exhausts."[47] Staying on top of false teaching was difficult, draining work in Ephesus. The fact that this church needed to work hard could suggest that the false teachings were not obvious—that the deviations were more "subtle and deceptive."[48] Alternatively, the exhausting work could indicate that there was such a preponderance of false teaching that the church was required to devote significant attention and effort to this task. The work of the Ephesian church in this regard represented a "vigilant attitude toward inner purity, which the church maintained well into the second century."[49] The Ephesian church is specifically praised because it opposed the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Although information about the Nicolaitans is scant and inconclusive, some scholars believe that the Nicolaitans proposed that Christians be permitted a degree of participation in cult worship.[50] This is consistent with the reference to the Nicolaitans in the letter to Pergamum (Rev 2:14–15).

Despite these accolades, this church is severely rebuked for having lost their first love (Rev 2:4). John Christopher Thomas argues that the Ephesian Christians, as part of the Johannine community, would have clearly understood that it was a love for others that they had lost, suggesting that love for others was a "central theological theme for the community."[51] Thomas writes:

> Within the Johannine community, there could hardly be any misunderstanding about that of which first works consists: love for one

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[46] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 38.
[47] Barclay, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 22.
[48] Koester, *Revelation*, 261; Beale, *Revelation*, 229.
[49] Koester, *Revelation*, 229–30.
[50] Beale, *Revelation*, 233.
[51] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 116.

> another. This is, after all, the new command which Jesus gives to his disciples (Jn 14:34), the criteria by which all will know that 'you are my disciples' (Jn 13:35), and the way in which we know that we love God and Jesus (1 Jn 4:7–5:5).[52]

Many commentators agree with the idea that it is the love for "neighbour" that the Ephesians have lost.[53] It is important to note that the love to be demonstrated includes love for God *and* love for people—they are inextricably linked.[54] To love God alone is inadequate. There must be an outward love toward others that is evident. In this context, resisting false prophets would likely have been seen as a demonstration of love for God,[55] but these actions alone were insufficient. This exhortation highlights the fact that a church can become so focused on maintaining its orthodoxy that it fails to demonstrate the love commanded by Christ.[56] Because it lacked love, the church in Ephesus was in danger of losing its witness to the world, its prominence among the Asian churches, and even its existence.[57] They had declined from a very high point to a dangerous new low (Rev 2:5). The remedy for the Ephesian church was to remember the way they had functioned in the past, repent, and radically change their current mode of operating.[58]

The message to the Ephesian church points to the importance of carefully examining teaching that is reaching the congregation. However, Christ's evaluation is also a reminder that love for God in terms of religious zeal cannot be separated from the

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[52] Thomas, *The Apocalypse* , 118.

[53] Koester, *Revelation*, 269; Keener, *Revelation*, 106; Beasely-Murray, *Revelation*, 75; Osborne, *Revelation*, 116; Mounce, *Revelation*, 88; Wright, *Revelation for Everyone*, 13. Contra Beale who argues that "they no longer expressed their former zealous love for Jesus by witnessing to him in the world." Beale, *Revelation*, 230. Johnson suggests that it is love for God alone that has been lost. Johnson, *Discipleship*, 55–57.

[54] Osborne, *Revelation*, 116; Keener, *Revelation*, 106.

[55] González and González, *Revelation*, 24.

[56] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 39.

[57] Koester, *Revelation*, 262.

[58] Mounce, *Revelation*, 88.

expression of genuine love for others. Love must be the motivation and bedrock of all church witness and ministry, or the church will be an ineffective Christian witness.

Smyrna

Smyrna was a harbour city of approximately 100,000 people[59] with majestic buildings upon its hillside that poets referred to as "the crown of Smyrna."[60] Smyrna had been destroyed by its enemies and abandoned for several centuries; however, because of its excellent location, it was rebuilt.[61] It earned the reputation as "the city that died yet lives."[62] Smyrna was loyal to Rome and one of the judicial centres of Asia Minor.[63] It also had a substantial Jewish population.[64]

The Christians in Smyrna were experiencing hardship from the Jewish community (Rev 2:9). The source of hostility between Jews and the church in Smyrna likely resulted from theological concerns. Jews likely felt that Christians were committing blasphemy against Yahweh because they considered Jesus equal with God. In the Gospel of John, Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemous speech because he claimed to be God (John 10:33, 36).[65] Since Christians would have maintained this claim, they would have opened themselves up to similar accusations and hostility. Craig Keener notes that it is also likely that Jewish leaders desired to foster a collegial relationship with Roman authorities and may have viewed association with

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[59] Boxall, *Revelation*, 52.

[60] González and González, *Revelation*, 25; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 125; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 75.

[61] González and González, *Revelation*, 25.

[62] González and González, *Revelation*, 25.

[63] Koester, *Revelation*, 273.

[64] Boxall, *Revelation*, 52; Koester, *Revelation*, 273.

[65] Lambrecht, "Jewish Slander," 422; Beale, *Revelation*, 240; Koester, *Revelation*, 240.

Christians as risky to their long-term security.[66] The reference to the "synagogue of Satan," was likely a reference to the excommunication of Christians from the synagogue and/or the practice of reporting Christians to Roman authorities, which may have caused increased persecution for the Christians in that city.[67]

The financial health of the church in Smyrna is a significant contrast to the wealth of the city. It is possible that the Christians in Smyrna were poor relative to the population for several reasons. Christians often came from poorer classes and were generous in giving their resources to others.[68] The Christians in Smyrna also likely refused to participate in trade guilds, which would have hurt them economically. It is also quite plausible that the Jews in the synagogue were at least partly responsible for the economic hardship that the church faced.[69] If those from the Jewish synagogue denounced them and reported them to the authorities, the protection they previously enjoyed would have vanished.[70] Authorities may have also confiscated their property.[71] Even though they were poor economically, the Christians in Smyrna were rich in faith. There are no rebukes for this church, but Christ revealed that there would be an intensification of suffering, hardship, and possibly death (Rev 2:10). The letter closes by encouraging them not to be afraid, but to remain faithful.

The message to the church in Smyrna provides evidence that Christ values faithfulness and does not necessarily relieve the church from suffering. Christ revealed that further hardship was on the horizon, not to discourage, but to reassure the church

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[66] Keener, *Revelation*, 115.

[67] Osborne, *Revelation*, 127; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 67.

[68] Osborne, *Revelation*, 129; Koester, *Revelation*, 274; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 68.

[69] Boxall, *Revelation*, 54.

[70] Lambrecht, "Jewish Slander," 426; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 67; Keener, *Revelation*, 115; Aune, *Revelation*, 176.

[71] Koester, *Revelation*, 274.

that the final reward was of far greater value that the present suffering. The message to the church in Smyrna also causes the reader to consider how to navigate relationships with groups with whom there are significant and important theological differences.[72]

Pergamum

Although there is some debate as to whether Ephesus or Pergamum was the centre of Roman administration in the province of Asia, there is no doubt that Pergamum was supreme in terms of its dedication to the imperial cult.[73] It had been awarded the honour of building three temples dedicated to emperor worship—more than any other city in Asia.[74] Pergamum was also home to many temples, altars, and shrines for Zeus (king of the gods), Athena (goddess of victory), Dionysus (god of the dynasty), and Asklepios (god of healing).[75] The massive altar of Zeus was noted as the "city's most distinctive landmark."[76] Pergamum was a thoroughly pagan city. It is no wonder, then, that this city was identified as the place where Satan's throne resided (Rev 2:13).

The church in Pergamum was facing opposition from outside, in the form of persecution, and pressure from the inside, in the form of false teaching. Pergamum faced the most intense challenges of all the seven cities—Antipas had been killed because of his faith. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the level of dedication that the city had toward the worship of emperor and pagan gods. Grant Osborne explains how serious the refusal to worship the emperor would have been. He writes, "Emperor worship was

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[72] Keener, Revelation, 119.

[73] Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 83–84; Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 94.

[74] Ramsay, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 289.

[75] Osborne, *Revelation*, 139; Thomas, The *Apocalypse*, 133; Koester, *Revelation*, 286–87; Beale, *Revelation*, 246; Aune, *Revelation*, 182–83.

[76] deSilva, *Unholy Allegiances*, 93.

linked to civic loyalty and patriotism. Thus, refusal to participate was not only godless but subversive."[77] Rome dealt harshly with subversion to maintain power and control over its vast empire. The image of the sword in this letter to the church in Pergamum alludes to the military might of Rome and to the government's "*ius gladii*, the right to execute capital punishment."[78] Antipas was singled out as a faithful witness, and the church was commended for trusting in Christ through the difficult situation that they faced (Rev 2:13).

Despite its faithful witness, Pergamum was strongly critiqued because there were people within the church who followed a first-century "Balaam" (Rev 2:14). The reference to Balaam was an allusion to an Old Testatment, non-Israelite prophet and diviner (Num 22), who initially seemed obedient to God's instruction to bless Israel, but who later proved to be a rather conniving person who "found a way around God's initial intervention and provided Balak with advice that would cause Israel to break covenant."[79] Balaam is viewed as culpable in Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh and is later killed (Num 31:16).[80]

Christ identified that some in Pergamum were following "Balaam's" teaching, which implies that the first-century "Balaam" was an influential leader and teacher within the church.[81] In this context, "Balaam" is clearly not viewed in a positive light; therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that this person's teaching was a significant stumbling block to others.[82] If the first-century Balaam taught that it was permissible to

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[77] Osborne, *Revelation*, 139.
[78] Keener, *Revelation*, 122.
[79] Decker, "Covenant Fidelity," 174.
[80] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 137.
[81] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 137.
[82] van Henten, "Balaam in Revelation," 251.

engage in the activities of the trade guilds, there would not only be obvious economic benefits, but also exposure to idol worship and sexual promiscuity.[83] Jan van Henten argues that the accusation against the first century Balaam and his followers—that they engaged in fornication or sexual immorality—could be interpreted both literally and symbolically.[84] On a literal level, this accusation could be referring to the sexual laxity that was present within the wider culture at Greco-Roman festivals or cult banquets, or eating food that had been sacrificed to idols.[85] On a more symbolic level, the practices of this influencer are likely condemned because they are opening the door that will lead people from the church toward idol worship and away from God. David deSilva describes the obvious connection between the symbolic identification of Balaam's teaching and the situation in Pergamum. He says, "Sexual immorality functions as a label for all improper intercourse with Roman society and its gods; sexual purity or fidelity represents loyalty to the one God and God's Messiah."[86]

The overarching issue for the church in Pergamum was the question of appropriate engagement with culture. On one hand, the church was evaluated favourably and received accolades for their faithful witness (Antipas). To be faithful is to acknowledge one's faith before other people and to act in ways consistent with those beliefs.[87] On the other hand, it appears that some had been lured by the economic gain and sexually permissive activities. Although many in the Pergamum church had been faithful, church leaders were critiqued for allowing an influential leader in the church to

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[83] Keener, *Revelation*, 124.

[84] van Henten, "Balaam in Revelation," 257. See also Aune, *Revelation*, 193; Osborne, *Revelation*, 145; Beale, *Revelation*, 250; Thomas, The *Apocalypse*, 138–39; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 85. Contra Koester, *Revelation*, 289 who views the symbolism only as religious infidelity.

[85] Koester, *Revelation*, 289.

[86] deSilva, *Unholy Alliances*, 92.

[87] Koester, *Revelation*, 287.

propagate this false teaching. It was not just the teacher Balaam and his followers who were called to reform; the entire church was also called to repent for tolerating the situation.[88]

Thyatira

In the first century, the Pax Romana had facilitated the transformation of Thyatira from a contested war zone into a thriving commercial centre.[89] Although trade guilds were an important part of all city life in the province of Asia, Thyatira was especially well-known for its abundance of associations that included "wool workers, linen workers, garment manufacturers, dyers, tanners, potters, bakers, salve dealers, and bronze smiths."[90] T. Scott Daniels notes that the guild meetings were "highly influenced by the moral and sexual laxity of the Roman culture, [and that] these events were almost always filled with drunken partying..."[91] Like the other cities, Christians in Thyatira were in a difficult position: how would they survive economically without joining a trade guild and bowing to the pressure of emperor cult worship and a lifestyle that was in opposition to Christian belief and practice?[92] Adela Yarbro Collins asserts that the Christians could have easily integrated into society by participating in the trade guilds, but there was a high cost. She writes, "At stake here was the question of assimilation: What pagan customs could Christians do for the sake of economic survival, commercial gain, or simple sociability?"[93]

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[88] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 87.

[89] Osborne, *Revelation*, 151; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 107.

[90] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 76. See also Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 89; Koester, *Revelation*, 295; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 107.

[91] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 77.

[92] Osborne, *Revelation*, 156; Keener, *Revelation*, 132.

[93] Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 88. See also Keener, *Revelation*, 133.

Christ commended the church in Thyatira for its love, faithfulness, service, and endurance (Rev 2:19). Service (διακονίαν) encompassed a variety of activities, including spreading the gospel through faithful witness and providing tangibly for the needs of others.[94] Endurance (ὑπομονήν) signified the idea of "steadfastness in the face of open hostility (Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12) and the pressures of false teaching (2:2–3)."[95] Not only had the work of the church in Thyatira been exemplary—it had exceeded the works it did when it was initially established (Rev 2:19). Some commentators believe the greater works indicate the quality of the works,[96] while others also argue for an increase quantity. In either case, it is clear that the progress is favourable, and that it is recognizable.[97]

Despite these accolades, the Thyatiran church was admonished because they had allowed a self-proclaimed prophetess "Jezebel" to lead people within the church into "inappropriate cultural participation and accommodation."[98] The despised practices were likely linked with participation in the Roman trade guild banquet, which would have included the eating of food sacrificed to idols as well as sexually promiscuous activities (Rev 2:20).[99] In holding herself out to be a prophetess, the Thyatiran Jezebel would have been claiming that what she taught was received directly from God.[100] It appears that she had followers ("children")[101] and taught that Christians could take part in trade guild activities, which promoted pagan worship, eating meat sacrificed to idols,

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[94] Koester, *Revelation*, 298.
[95] Koester, *Revelation*, 298.
[96] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 90.
[97] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 145; Koester, *Revelation*, 298; Aune, *Revelation*, 203.
[98] Carter, "Accommodating Jezebel," 35; Osborne, *Revelation*, 157.
[99] Aune, *Revelation*, 213; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 90; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 148.
[100] Osborne, *Revelation*, 156.
[101] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 91.

and participating in sexually promiscuous activities.[102] It is possible that she saw nothing wrong with participating in the guild feasts—that it was merely a civil practice.[103] Or perhaps she might have relied on the apostle Paul's teaching to the Corinthian church that idols themselves have no real power.[104] If her followers were not causing a fellow Christian to stumble because of their freedom of eating food sacrificed to idols, could they could not eat in good conscience (1 Cor 8:4–13)? Alternatively, she might have realized that the guilds were a place where satanic power operated, but she felt confident that Christians would be supernaturally protected.[105] Whatever the case, Christ revealed that her teaching was in error.

The original Jezebel was the Phoenician wife of Ahab, an ancient king of Israel who attained notoriety for the extreme evil he did during his reign (1 Kgs 16:30–33). Jezebel promoted the worship of the god Baal and persecuted legitimate prophets of God.[106] Jezebel was an outsider to the covenant community, but as queen she systematically influenced Ahab to support and promote the worship of the god Baal in Israel.[107] Beale observes that the Israelites added Baal to their worship ritual to ensure economic prosperity.[108] Besides promoting spiritual idolatry, the worship of Baal often included sexual promiscuity and licentiousness.[109]

Perhaps there is a parallel between the persona of the Thyatiran prophetess and the rebellious, influential nature of Queen Jezebel. The fact that the Thyatiran Jezebel

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[102] Beale, *Revelation*, 261; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 148. However, Koester views this as religious infidelity Koester, *Revelation*, 299.

[103] Osborne, *Revelation*, 157.

[104] Osborne, *Revelation*, 162.

[105] Caird, *Revelation*, 44; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 154.

[106] Koester, *Revelation*, 298.

[107] Osborne, *Revelation*, 155.

[108] Beale, "The Hearing Formula," 176.

[109] Osborne, *Revelation*, 155; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 90.

had "children" also indicates her influence within the church. Her unrepentant attitude reveals that the leadership of the church had not been able to discipline this leader and bring her into line with correct doctrine. This church is the opposite of the Ephesian church. They have love, but they have not held teachers and influencers accountable for right doctrine. The message to the leaders of the church and those following her would have been clear: they must take action to correct her false teaching and remove her influence. It is a message that "warns against the dangers of 'soft' love that tolerates all things and judges none."[110]

The evaluation given to this church reveals that Christ expects progress over time. The increasing quality and quantity of "works" of this loving church is duly noted. Spiritual growth and transformation lead to action. This letter also serves as a warning against assimilating with culture, even in the face of economic and physical hardship. Christians must continue to interact with culture as a faithful witness.[111]

Sardis

The city of Sardis had seen better days. It was prosperous enough, but its current wealth was nothing like it had been in its ancient past with its plentiful gold deposits and wealthy kings.[112] It was still a centre for trade, industry, and guilds, but it was a shadow of its former self. Like the other cities examined so far, imperial cult worship was woven into the fabric of everyday life in the city of Sardis. Geographically, Sardis was unique because it was built atop a hill with cliff fortifications that rendered it a

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[110] González and González, *Revelation*, 31.
[111] Keener, *Revelation*, 127.
[112] Koester, *Revelation*, 309–10; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 131.

formidable military fortress.[113] This natural defence feature made the city practically immune to attack. However, history records that Sardis experienced two surprise attacks when adversaries scaled the unguarded cliffs.[114] T. Scott Daniels notes that "in poetry and wisdom literature of the day, Sardis became synonymous with the dangers of overconfidence, pride, and arrogance."[115]

Despite having environments consistent with other cities, there is no mention of external hostility toward the church, internal doctrinal challenges, or Jewish opposition.[116] There are no words of affirmation for this church. Christ is direct and to the point with His evaluation: they are dead, even though they had the reputation of being alive (Rev 3:1).[117] Their desperate condition appears to have developed over a period of time, with only a remnant showing any signs of life.[118] Their reputation of being alive was based on their past vibrancy, but that reputation did not reflect the reality of their present condition.[119] Daniels writes, "The church of Sardis was not alive enough to have enemies or confront heresy. It had simply become the model of non-offensive Christian faith."[120] Christ judged that their works or actions were "far from complete" (Rev 3:2). They were urged to wake up to the reality of their condition and strengthen what was left.

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[113] González and González , *Revelation*, 32; Osborne, *Revelation*, 171.

[114] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 92; Keener, *Revelation*, 144; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 132.

[115] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 92.

[116] Koester, *Revelation*, 316.

[117] Several commentators note that the reference to a dead church in Sardis is likely hyperbolic. Notwithstanding this literary form, the charge against the church would have been a clear wake-up call. Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 162; Beale, *Revelation*, 273.

[118] Osborne, *Revelation*, 175.

[119] Keener, *Revelation*, 144.

[120] Daniels, *Seven Deadly Spirits*, 94. See also Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 146.

There are several clues that indicate how these Christians had fallen short. First, the Christians in Sardis had forgotten the gospel they originally received, or if they did remember it, it was not an integral part of how they lived.[121] As a result, their actions failed to provide a credible witness of their Christian faith.[122] Another deficiency of this church is that they were not attentive or watchful. Their lack of attentiveness and attitude of tolerance led to a pervasive culture of spiritual deadness within their assembly. However, Christ revealed that there were "a few people" who had not stained their clothing (Rev 3:4). Beale notes that the word μολύνω (stain) that is used in this context implies being "stained with the pollution of idolatry."[123] He goes on to suggest that this means Sardinian Christians were casually participating in the idol worship of the culture—that they were perhaps trying to fly under the radar.[124]

The message to the church in Sardis highlights the need to be attentive to the spiritual condition of people within the church. Specifically, leaders were called to pay close attention to the culture around them and to be aware of how assimilating with the culture might be destroying their spiritual vibrancy and witness. When there is little tension or conflict, it is likely that the church has compromised too far.

Philadelphia

Although Philadelphia was strategically located both for trade and military advantage,[125] it had one significant disadvantage: it was prone to earthquakes.[126] In 17 CE there was a

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[121] Koester, *Revelation*, 313.
[122] Koester, *Revelation*, 312.
[123] Beale, *Revelation*, 276.
[124] Beale, *Revelation*, 276.
[125] Osborne, *Revelation*, 184.
[126] Osborne, *Revelation*, 184–85; Hemer, *Letters to Seven Churches*, 156; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 170.

open door would be seen as a comfort and affirmation to the church—that they are part of the true Church of Christ.[134] However, the Philadelphians are warned that they will need to continue to persevere through this challenging situation. The evaluation that Christ gives the church in Philadelphia makes it clear that it is not necessarily the size or power of the church that matters—it is faithfulness despite challenging circumstances.

Laodicea

Laodicea was an extremely wealthy city, strategically located for successful commercial trade.[135] It was known for its banking centres, unique black wool and garment production, and medicinal eye compounds.[136] Like other cities in the region, it was prone to earthquakes, but its citizens prided themselves on being able to rebuild the city without help from Rome.[137] There is no indication in the biblical text suggesting that the church in Laodicea had conflict with Roman authorities, the Jewish synagogue, or within its own assembly.[138]

The Laodicean church boasted about their wealth and economic independence (Rev 3:17).[139] That they had "become" wealthy implies that they had actively participated in the Roman economic system to obtain their wealth.[140] Later in Revelation Rome is portrayed as a prostitute, and those who participate in her system of trade and

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[134] Aune, *Revelation*, 244; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 100.

[135] Caird, *Revelation*, 56.

[136] Osborne, *Revelation*, 201; Howard-Brooks and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 94; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 185; Koester, *Revelation*, 339. Koester refutes the eye compound argument suggesting that "no known source says that Laodicea has a reputation for producing eye salve."

[137] González and González, *Revelation*, 35–36; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 185.

[138] Koester, *Revelation*, 342.

[139] Beale, *Revelation*, 304; Keener, *Revelation*, 158.

[140] Koester, *Revelation*, 102.

military might were "trafficking with a harlot (Rev 17:1, 2, 5; 18:3)." [141] Koester writes, "The tendencies at Laodicea are magnified in the vision of Babylon the whore in order to show how the pursuit of wealth leads people to accommodate a way of life that is based and destructive (Rev 17–18)."[142] The church in Laodicea was deceived by the economic trappings of the empire. As a result, their spiritual health and witness was bankrupt and useless. The contrast of being poor, blind, and naked is a clever word play about the church's spiritual condition compared to the economic strength of the city in terms of its financial wealth, medicinal ointment for eyes, and luxurious clothing.[143]

There is no praise for this church. Christ harshly chastised them for being neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. Some scholars suggest that this picture mirrors problems with the city's water supply. Laodicea lacked its own water supply. It piped in its water either from nearby hot or cold springs.[144] Unfortunately, this meant that by the time the water reached the city, it was lukewarm. Keener writes, "The point of lukewarm water is simply that it is disgusting, in contrast to the more directly useful 'hot' and 'cold' water; all the churches would plainly understand this warning."[145] Koester, however, refutes the idea that lukewarmness referred to the city's water supply, noting that the "water supply was like that of other cities—and water from aqueducts was considered good to drink."[146] He goes on to describe studies of water systems for Laodicea and concludes that the city had a sophisticated system of aqueducts that supplied a vital resource to the

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[141] deSilva, "Strategic Arousal in John's Vision," 19. DeSilva also notes that Aune makes the connection in the Old Testament where trade is equated with prostitution because it would have facilitated "the exchange of religious practices." See Aune, David. *Revelation*. Vol 3. Nashville: Nelson. p 930–31.

[142] Koester, *Revelation*, 342.

[143] Caird, *Revelation*, 57.

[144] Keener, *Revelation*, 158; Beale, *Revelation*, 303.

[145] Keener, *Revelation*, 159; Osborne, *Revelation*, 205.

[146] Koester, *Revelation*, 337.

city.[147] Instead, Koester contends that the hot and cold references should be considered in the context of a typical banquet. He notes that both water and wine would have customarily been heated or cooled to serve as a welcome refreshment.[148] The Christian witness of the Laodiceans has the opposite effect of refreshment. In either case, the idea of the "hot" and "cold" was that it was useful, whereas being lukewarm is of no value at all.

Laodicea exhibited the attitudes of self-sufficiency and complacency.[149] It was lulled into thinking that its material wealth equated to spiritual health. In addition, this church seemed to have no difficulty with the Jewish synagogue or false teachers within their own community, which together with the revelation of spiritual poverty suggests that this church tolerated anything. The fact that Christ is depicted outside of a closed door may symbolize that Christ had been shut out of the church. Despite the significant weaknesses exhibited by this church, Christ declared that he loved them, and because of that love, he was motivated to discipline them. His desire was to draw the church back to spiritual fervour. It was also here, in a church with many problems, that readers see a tender picture of Christ knocking at the door with the desire to have intimate fellowship with them.

The Seven-fold Call to Listen to the Spirit

In every message there is an exhortation for the churches to listen to what the Spirit is saying to them (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The seven-fold repetition serves to

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[147] Koester, *Revelation*, 337.
[148] Koester, *Revelation*, 343–44.
[149] Osborne, *Revelation*, 206.

emphasize the importance of the messages. The thought of the Spirit speaking through the message that John wrote would have reminded the readers and hearers of Israel's prophets, adding more credibility and potency to the warnings and promises contained in the messages.[150] The call to "hear" was often used in the prophetic tradition to call attention to the message being given. In addition, the call to hear implied the necessity for the person to act upon the message received.[151]

This specific combination of words ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω [the one having ears, let him hear] alludes specifically to Isa 6:9–10.[152] The context of the Isaiah passage is important. Isaiah's vision occurred in the year that King Uzziah died. Uzziah had been a powerful king with strong military capability; however, his death likely caused a power vacuum, which made the region ripe for takeover by the Assyrians.[153] More importantly, without a king who was devoted to Yahweh, the people became increasingly unfaithful to their covenant by worshipping the gods of the surrounding nations and engaging in their detestible practices. Eventually, Israel would be taken into exile. Beale underscores the meaning behind this allusion for the first-century audience. He writes:

> Recalling that the hearing formula is rooted ultimately in Isa. 6:9–10 helps explain why it is used in a context of compromise with idols. Just as idols had eyes but could not see and ears but could not hear, so Isa. 6:9–10 describes apostate Israelites likewise to indicate figuratively that what they revered they had come to resemble spiritually.[154]

The Spirit's call to hear was a critical warning, a proverbial red flag, that implored people in the first century church to understand the danger they faced—that they were at

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[150] Osborne, *Revelation*, 106.

[151] Koester, *Revelation*, 264.

[152] Jesus used a similar phrase (Matt 11:15; Mark 4:9, 23); however, Koester notes that there are no other references to the Synoptic gospels in Revelation, so it is difficult to say whether the first audience would have made that connection (Koester, *Revelation*, 264).

[153] Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 126.

[154] Beale, *Revelation*, 239.

a critical juncture. It was a call to be diligent and act in accordance with the new covenant initiated through Jesus Christ.

Considerations for the Contemporary Church

The letters to the seven churches in Asia were prophetic calls to each church to be attentive to their spiritual condition, to stay focused on their primary role as Christ's faithful witnesses, and to exercise appropriate engagement with culture. The purpose of the messages was to awaken churches to the seriousness of their situation, to remind them of what they had been taught, to encourage them to repent, and to motivate them to act. Several were called to be transformed into churches that were a more faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ. This segment of the chapter reflects upon and describes Christ's evaluation criteria and methodology in Rev 2–3, providing brief commentary about how these criteria and process considerations might relate to the contemporary Canadian Protestant church.

Christ's Evaluation Criteria

Within these letters, Christ identifies conditions that work against the ultimate aim of the church as a faithful witness to the world. While on earth Jesus told his disciples that he was sending them in continuity with God's mission (John 20:21) and that they would be his witnesses after the Holy Spirit was given to them (Acts 1:8). Jesus also commissioned them to promulgate God's mission far and wide by making disciples and ensuring these disciples were taught his essential commands (Matt 28:18–20). It is very probable that these principles of faithful witness would have been shared during the

planting and growth of churches in Asia.[155]

John emphasizes that Christ is the exemplar of what it means to be a faithful witness (Rev 1:5; 3:14).[156] Witness is a significant theme and the Apocalypse contains several references to the witness of the saints that indicate it will be necessary to persevere in times of hardship (Rev 1:9; 6:9; 12:11; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4).[157] Not only does faithful witness connote perseverance, but it also includes the idea of being an active part of God's mission. The reference to being a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:6) alludes to God's covenant with Israel (Exod 19:5–6), which is now extended to all believers. Keener explains that the reference in Rev 1:6 would remind the churches of their ultimate purpose. He writes, "In declaring that Jesus made us 'kingdom and priests,' John reminds his audience that salvation is not just what God saves us from (our sins, 1:5), but what he saves us for—for a destiny as his agents and worshipers (1:6)."[158]

Christ called the seven churches back to first principles by exhorting them to practice love, to be faithful in difficult circumstances, and to be fruitful in their service. Christ also warned them about the dangers of assimilating with culture as well as the importance of being attentive and diligent about false teachers and influencers within their churches. Many of these criteria are inter-related, yet each offers a distinct focus for theological and practical reflection. This section describes each criterion as well as a few examples of how this might relate to the practice of organizational evaluation in the

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[155] This idea was shared with the researcher by Cynthia Long Westfall during an email exchange on February 23, 2020.

[156] Keener, *Revelation*, 70; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, 56; Osborne, *Revelation*, 62.

[157] Osborne, *Revelation*, 62–63. See also Keener, *Revelation*, 70–71.

[158] Keener, *Revelation*, 71.

contemporary church.[159]

Love

Arguably one of the most severe messages Jesus delivered was to the church in Ephesus. Although they had done a brilliant job of maintaining orthodox teaching and ferreting out false teachers, they had lost their first love. The evaluation of the Ephesian church is a reminder for church leaders that love for God in terms of religious zeal cannot be separated from the expression of genuine love for others. Love must be the motivation and bedrock of all church witness and ministry, or the church risks losing its place as an authentic witness.

During his earthly ministry Jesus taught that the greatest command was to love God and the second greatest command was to love others (Matt 22:40). He also indicated that love toward others was the method by which outsiders would recognize the church as genuine disciples of Christ (John 13:34–35). Leaders in contemporary congregations should model love in employment and volunteer relationships. The board should examine the quality of its relationship with the lead pastor. The lead pastor should likewise consider how pastoral and administrative staff are working with each other and with volunteer lay leaders. Relationships among volunteer lay leaders, between lay leaders and volunteers, and peer to peer relationships between people in the congregation are also important areas to consider.

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[159]These examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative. Many of the examples noted in this section were developed out of the experience of leading the case study participants through a reflection exercise that asked them to be more specific about the criteria they were using for their evaluation. The case studies are examined in detail in chapter 3.

In their book, *Faithful Witness in a Fractured World: Models for an Authentic Christian Life*, Nicole Johnson and Michael Snarr argue that the church has a less than stellar track record in terms of exhibiting love outside of the four walls of the church. They write, "the image of the crappy Christian abounds, leaving little room for people to see Christ's compassionate love and care as markers of Christian faith."[160] Some churches are very externally focused; however, many are more insular both from an individual and corporate perspective. The individual perspective encompasses how people from the congregation express love in their neighbourhoods.[161] The potential scenarios for developing the church's corporate presence in the area of neighbour love are as unique as the communities in which the churches are located. It is first important to understand what the community truly needs and then to prioritize how the church might be involved. Often, a long road of obedience and faithfulness will be needed in order to earn the reputation that allows the church to participate in meaningful ways.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness is a criterion that is intertwined with other evaluation indicators mentioned in the messages to the seven churches. Faithfulness suggests both consistency and coherence. Consistency is a long-term commitment of obedience even in the face of suffering. Coherence is the idea that actions align with espoused beliefs. [162] In this context, faithfulness is to Christ and his teachings, which requires particular attention to

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[160] Johnson and Snarr, *Faithful Witness*, 59.

[161] It is beyond the scope of this project to explore the area of individual and corporate neighbouring more fully on which see Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring* and Nelson, *The Economics of Neighbourly Love*.

[162] Koester, *Revelation*, 287.

and exegesis of cultural pressures. Christ's messages to the churches also indicates that faithfulness has a corporate identity. Christ specifically identified those churches had been faithful witnesses (Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia) and exhorted others whose witness had been ineffective or worthless (Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea).

The messages to the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia provide evidence that Christ values faithfulness and endurance over healthy budgets, numerical size, and power. This is not to say that wealth, size, or power are inherently wrong; however, these indicators may lull the church into a false sense of security. This false security is most clearly represented in the Laodicean church. That there are both faithful and poor churches is a caution to contemporary churches that faithfulness is not automatic or easy. One practical way that church board leaders and pastors can incorporate faithfulness into their work is to adopt the critical practice of missional alignment. The mission statement or purpose statement of the church must be aligned with God's mission and purpose. Decisions, strategies, and budget allocations are then aligned with mission. Finally, ministry programs are aligned with decisions and strategies.

Fruitfulness

Christ commended the church in Thyatira for its acts of service. Service encompassed a variety of activities, including spreading the gospel and providing tangibly for the needs of others.[163] Not only had the work of the church in Thyatira been exemplary in this regard, it had exceeded the works it did when it was initially established. Their progress is favourable, and it is recognizable. The evaluation and praise given to this church

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[163] Koester, *Revelation*, 298.

reveals that Christ expects progress over time. In contrast, Christ chastises the church in Sardis because their works are "far from complete in the eyes of God" (Rev 3:2 CEV). This implies that the service and work of the Sardinian church is not nearly as fruitful as Christ expects.

Jesus said that those who abided in him would be productive and fruitful. This fruitfulness brings glory to God and is a mark of true discipleship (John 15:1–8). Jesus' earthly ministry was the embodiment of the *missio Dei*. It was through Jesus that God's mission was fully articulated, demonstrated, and given to the church. Each gospel account highlights a different aspect of the holistic mission of Jesus. For example, Matthew emphasizes proclamation, teaching, and discipleship; Mark underscores the importance of deeds; and Luke carries a strong theme of social justice.[164] On the evidence of the gospel accounts, it is difficult to dispute the holistic nature of Christ's mission to the earth. Jesus proclaimed the wideness of his ministry when he said,

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18–19).

John Nolland argues that that there is both a literal and figurative meaning to this passage—that the restorative ministry of Jesus included both the physical and the spiritual dimension.[165] Thus fruitfulness as defined by the gospel of Christ includes not only proclamation, but also the necessity for the church to put its theology into action by bringing flourishing, reform, healing, and restoration to its communities. The

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[164] Flemming, *Full Mission of God*, 87–112.
[165] Nolland, *Luke*, 197.

contemporary church, then, must consider how it's acts of service align with Christ's example.

Attentiveness to Culture

The seven churches in Asia were under significant pressure to conform to the societal conventions of first-century culture. The literary form of the apocalypse was meant to be revelatory—to urgently warn the first-century Asian churches to be attentive to their surroundings and to see these external influences for what they really were. John's vision in the book of Revelation revealed that the empire, patron gods, and the satanic power behind them were counterfeit gods.

Contemporary church leaders must also be students of culture and the subtle or overt idolatry that exists in our world. Michael Goheen highlights the good, and yet distorted nature, of our world. He writes, "the world is God's good creation as developed in human culture, and the world is human culture as it is distorted by idolatry."[166] Specific examples of contemporary idols include narcissism, individualism, consumerism, and relativism.[167] Church leaders must be attentive to these forces so that idolatrous practices are not unwittingly incorporated into the life of the church. Church leaders must also ensure that people in the congregation are equipped in this area.

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[166] Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 151.

[167] For further resources regarding contemporary idols, see Power, *Confronting the Idols of Our Age* and Allender and Longman III, *Breaking the Idols of Your Heart*.

Attentiveness to Influencers

Two churches, Pergamum and Thyatira, are exhorted because they failed to monitor, evaluate, and correct influential leaders within their churches. In the contemporary church, internal influencers may serve in official capacities—such as deacons, small group leaders, greeters, and teachers—or they may be other individuals who are respected within the church.[168] Their sphere of influence could relate to any criteria—lack of love, false teaching, cultural assimilation, faithfulness, or service.

It is a fallacy that volunteer leaders in the church are not subject to guidance, monitoring, and discipline just because they are not paid. In terms of evaluating ministry, church board leaders should ensure that there is clarity regarding volunteer ministry role expectations and accountability to a designated church leader. The designated church leader should regularly, and with love, monitor the ministry of the volunteer, providing guidance and correction, if necessary. Church board leaders should have a defined church discipline process to deal with more challenging situations.

In addition to internal influencers, the contemporary church is also exposed to a plethora of external influencers. Church leaders must consider not only influencers within their congregations, but also influencers outside the church walls. Because it is impossible to keep up with every celebrity Christian or self-proclaimed guru, the church must equip people in the congregation to critically evaluate influencers within society.

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[168] The researcher acknowledges that pastoral and administrative staff can also be influencers within the congregation but has chosen to limit the discussion here to those influencers who are not subject to the conditions of an employment contract.

Evaluating False Teaching

While some of the seven churches were commended for their appropriate evaluation of false teachers, others were warned about false teaching among their ranks. In this regard, contemporary churches should evaluate three areas: the teaching competency of the pastor(s), the teaching competency of lay teachers, and the degree to which the pastor is engaging with and correcting the "false teaching" of the wider culture.

Teaching Competency of the Pastor

A tension is likely to exist when church board leaders attempt to evaluate the orthodoxy of the pastor's sermon or Bible study. Board leaders, though sincere, are often not well-equipped theologically to undertake such an evaluation, which may make it difficult for the pastor to receive this kind of critical feedback. In addition, church board members may find it challenging to evaluate someone they view as their spiritual guide.[169]

That being said, there are some practical ways that the church board leaders can support the pastor's efforts to be a faithful interpreter of Scripture. The board should design the job responsibilities of the pastor in such a way to ensure that adequate time is given for study and sermon preparation, so the pastor is not too overloaded with other ministry responsibilities. In addition, the board can support continuing education for the pastor and provide an adequate budget for commentaries and other study aids. Church board leaders who are connected with a denomination may use the statement of faith of their denomination as a guide for orthodox preaching and teaching, asking the pastor to

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[169] Pellowe, "Unique Challenges of Church Boards," para. 3.

positively affirm that they are in alignment with the confessional documents of the denomination.

Teaching Competency of Lay Teachers

Churches rely on volunteers to lead Sunday school classes, small groups, and other discipleship initiatives. In some churches, there is overall coordination, selection and/or production of curriculum, which minimizes the risk that unorthodox teaching will occur. However, there are also churches where individuals select curriculum and teach with substantial freedom. Additional support could be provided in regard to curriculum selection. This support could include having options of pre-evaluated curriculum or training teachers how to select good curriculum. Accessible resources and commentaries could be purchased and made available to teachers who wish to do further research. As noted in the section related to influencers, church board leaders should ensure there is clarity regarding volunteer ministry role expectations and accountability to a designated church leader. The designated church leader should regularly, and with love, monitor the ministry of the volunteer, providing guidance and correction, if necessary. Church board leaders should have a defined church discipline process to deal with more challenging situations.

Correcting False Teaching in the Wider Culture

The contemporary church is living in a time where people in the congregation are bombarded with teaching 24/7 through podcasts, blogs, vlogs, social media, memes, quotes, books, television, and the list goes on and on. Although it would be impossible

for church leadership to examine all these avenues of teaching individually, the message to the Ephesian church highlights the importance of being aware of significant trends and addressing their fallacies. Church leaders must consider not only the orthodoxy of their own teaching (especially with the decentralization of Bible study through small groups), but they must also equip people in the congregation to critically evaluate teaching they consume from other sources.

Christ's Evaluation Methodology

The literary form of the messages to the seven churches provides a consistent format for Christ's evaluation methodology. I submit that Christ's formula forms a credible outline for an organizational evaluation process in the contemporary Canadian Protestant local church. Moreover, this method is not limited by the church's size, resources, or condition. Below I elaborate on the elements of Christ's evaluation method, which includes the acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty (character of Christ), the importance of context in evaluation (each message addresses the situation of a specific church), the need for an authoritative and aligned evaluation (listening to trusted voices—the prophetic formula), the balanced approach of commendation and exhortation ("I know" speeches), the call to action (imperative admonition), the practice of discernment (exhortation to listen), and the focus on the long-term mission of God (eschatological promise).

Acknowledgement of Christ's Sovereignty

In each of the messages to the seven churches, there is a description about an element of Christ's deity, power, or faithful witness. These opening sentences served to reinforce the authority of the message and Christ's supremacy over the earthly power structures in which these churches resided. In Ephesus, Christ "holds the seven stars" (the churches) in his hand (Rev 2:1), which signifies Christ is sovereign over the church.[170] In Smyrna, Christ is "the first and the last, who died and came back to life" (Rev 2:8). Here Christ asserts his claim to deity and as the one who provides eternal life and future hope.[171] In Pergamum, Christ is the one with the sharp two-edged sword (Rev 2:13). In this context, the sword is likely symbolic of Roman judicial power. Christ here declares his power over the might of the state.[172] In Thyatira, Christ again confirms his deity because he is God's Son. The Sardinian message references Christ who holds the "seven spirits of God" (Rev 3:1), reflecting the intimate connection between Christ and the prophetic Spirit active in the church.[173] In the message to the church in Philadelphia, Christ is "the one who is holy and true" (Rev 3:7). Christ is authentic, genuine, and faithful, which is in stark contrast to the false security of the empire.[174] Finally, in the message to Laodicea, Christ is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness (Rev 3:14), which emphasizes the "truthfulness and divine origin of the message."[175]

The understanding about Christ's deity, power, and faithful witness is a critical orienting introduction to the messages that follow. If the churches do not understand and

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[170] Osborne, *Revelation*, 111.
[171] Osborne, *Revelation*, 128; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 125; Koester, *Revelation*, 274.
[172] Osborne, *Revelation*, 140; Koester, *Revelation*, 286.
[173] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 160.
[174] Osborne, *Revelation*, 187; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 172.
[175] Osborne, *Revelation,* 204.

submit to Christ's message and lordship, they will not be successful. Contemporary churches must approach organizational evaluation with a similar posture. Not only is Christ sovereign over all spiritual, economic, and political power structures, but he is also a faithful witness and an active participant, through the Holy Spirit, in the evaluation process.

Evaluation is Context Specific

In each of the messages, a specific address is given to the church signalling that the evaluation is customized to the unique circumstances of each one. While there were some common themes, Christ delivered an evaluation based on accurate information about each church. The text reveals that Christ walked *among* the church (Rev 2:1), he *knew* their works and their particular circumstances intimately (Rev 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), and he *examined* the hearts and minds of the people (Rev 2:23). Christ was *present* among these seven congregations.[176] The evaluation that Christ conducted went beyond what was apparent at a surface level—it was a deeper examination of motives.

Christ's deep understanding of each context provides guidance for contemporary evaluation practices for church board leadership teams. The level of specificity included in each church's evaluation points toward the importance of a customized, intentional evaluation process. Churches leadership teams may be tempted to look at what others are doing and import those ideas without critical reflection about whether or not the specific initiative or call to action fits their particular circumstance. Admittedly, the messages to these churches were meant for broader distribution and learning. The intent

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[176] Aune, *Revelation*, 142.

of the letters was that they be circulated and read in other contexts, which also implies that other churches might have seen some of their own triumphs and failings as they heard the message.[177] While the message was specific and contextualized, it likely addressed common problems experienced by other churches. In the contemporary context, then, it is right and important to learn from others; however, the learning must be combined with a discernment process to listen and consider where the Holy Spirit is leading in the specific context of the church.

Christ's specificity in evaluation was supported by current, reliable information, not based on past success or a false perception of current realities. Ephesus had lost a foundational ethic of love, Sardis was relying on a past reputation that looked nothing like the present circumstances, and Laodicea did not have a true understanding of their condition. Christ's evaluation was designed to awakens the churches to their current condition—they had a false sense of their progress. Christ was not unaware of the past—in fact, he used past accomplishments to remind the churches about their capabilities. Christ does not remain in the past; he clearly identifies problems that must be addressed in the current context.

Arguably, it is easier for board members and pastors to be more familiar with their specific context in a smaller church. Board members may be more involved in operational decisions in a small church, and there is greater opportunity to observe more ministry activities first-hand. In contrast, board members in a large church will likely need to rely on information from other sources. Christ's example of understanding the "hearts and minds" of individuals calls contemporary leaders to be sufficiently thorough

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[177] Osborne, *Revelation*, 105; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 22.

in gathering information in order to identify root issues. The practice of evaluation is not conducted in isolation, nor detached from reality.

Evaluation is Credible, Authoritative, and Aligned

The evaluation of the churches in Revelation was credible, authoritative, and aligned both in terms of the content of the messages and the people involved in delivering the messages. The content of the messages was aligned with Christ's initial direction to the churches through the various apostles and teachers. In some cases, the church was called to remember a previous instruction (Rev 2:5; 3:3); in other cases, the critique given reveals the standard Christ was seeking.[178]

The evaluation process Christ employed was also credible because the message was given to a trusted prophetic servant to write down. Further, the person (or people) entrusted with delivering the messages to the seven churches must have been trustworthy. The method of delivery, through the reading of a prophetic message in the context of a worship setting, would have increased the perception of an authoritative evaluation process. Together, the content of the message, the person delivering the message, and the place of delivery would have made a significant impact.

This idea of an authoritative process suggests that organizational evaluation in the contemporary church should involve people who are trusted and that a credible communication process about results or direction should be planned and implemented. Of particular note here is that the laypeople in each of the seven churches were not

[178] During a meeting with Cynthia Long Westfall on January 29, 2019 she shared this idea that the standard that Christ desired was revealed in the critique of the churches.

shielded from the messages, even when there were stinging rebukes.[179] On the contrary, a blessing was promised for all who heard the messages (Rev 1:3). That there would be a blessing when hearing challenging messages suggests that it is healthy and necessary for the congregation to understand what is going well and where changes are needed.

Evaluation Balances Affirmation and Critique

Despite the unhealthy conditions that existed in some of these churches, Christ was fair and balanced with his assessment, commending them wherever possible, yet also providing needed correction. Christ clearly identified what the churches were doing well: dealing with false teaching, being a faithful witness, enduring in difficult situations, serving, and loving others. At the same time, Christ did not give praise where none was warranted. He was extremely direct and honest with his evaluation—some of the churches were in very precarious situations. Christ revealed that the Sardinians and Laodiceans had a false sense of their condition (Rev 3:1, 17), that the Ephesians missed the prime directive of love, and that some in Thyatira and Pergamum were being led astray by influential, rogue leaders. Christ's evaluation was a jarring reality check for the leaders and people in these churches. Even though Christ's corrective message was difficult, it was clearly motivated by love with the end goal of disciplining and strengthening the churches to accomplish their mission (Rev 3:19). It also appears, despite the desperate conditions at two of the churches, that churches who are nearly

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[179] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 69.

dead can be brought back to a place of flourishing as a faithful witness if they will heed the message and change their ways.

Leaders in the contemporary Canadian church must likewise have the courage to identify the reality of their situation—they must avoid perpetuating a false sense of their condition. Church leaders must also check their motivation toward those being evaluated, particularly when correction is necessary. The goal must always be to restore the church to health so that it can accomplish its mission.

Evaluation Facilitates Discernment

The overarching message to the seven churches in Asia was the imperative to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying to them. Though their circumstances were varied, the churches had the same Spirit available to help them understand the message, honestly assess their spiritual condition, and enable them to take concrete steps toward change. Although Christ did not provide a detailed action plan, he did not leave his church without the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8–15). Discernment and listening to the Spirit, therefore, is an essential element in the evaluation process.

The practice of listening to what the Spirit is saying requires a posture of humility, trust, and openness. To be humble is to understand that human wisdom is finite, and that human effort alone is an insufficient resource for understanding and solving all problems. To trust is to remember what God has done in the past and to believe that God has our best interests in mind. To be open is to create space to listen to the Holy Spirit. Though inundated by the cacophony of influences from their culture, these churches were urged to listen to what the Spirit was saying. Contemporary church

leaders must also cultivate the discipline of discerning the Spirit's direction not only within their individual spiritual experiences, but also in a corporate setting.[180]

Discernment may be developed and supported by engaging Scripture in a robust way, laying aside personal preferences, praying for indifference to anything except God's will, and making time to reflect on where God is leading.[181] Church board leaders and pastors can make time to listen to the Holy Spirit on a regular and/or an episodic basis. Many church boards meet monthly. A valuable practice is for the board and pastor to spend time together in prayer and in the Scriptures. In addition to regular times of prayer and study, it may be fruitful to set aside a larger block of time, perhaps a retreat day, where there is a time of communal discernment without the time pressure that a monthly agenda can bring. With a posture that is oriented to discerning and following God's will, there will be an environment where it is possible to have robust conversations about where the church is succeeding and where it may be falling short.

Evaluation Leads to Repentance and Action

Following the analysis of each church's situation, Christ issued a specific call to action. Christ clearly identified the problem, urged the churches to repent, and offered specific solutions for moving toward the end goal.[182] Mark Boda elucidates the various ways that the first-century believers in the seven churches were called to repent. He writes,

> Repentance refers to a reorientation in the inner affections (a return to one's first love), to a shift in viewpoint (the teaching of the Nicolaitans), or to a change in behaviour (immorality and idolatry). In 2:5 repentance

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[180] Barton, *Pursuing God's Will*, 37.

[181] Barton, *Pursuing God's Will*, 40–45. It is beyond the scope of this project to delve deeply into the practice of discernment on which see Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together* and Morris and Olsen, *Discerning God's Will Together*.

[182] Osborne, *Revelation*, 106.

> involves first remembering from where one has fallen and then doing 'the deeds you did at first', while in 3:3 it involves remembering what has been received and keeping it. In 3:19 repentance is linked to a recovery of zeal.[183]

Repentance is the response to the corrective voice of the Holy Spirit. That Christ called the churches to do something suggests that the process of evaluation must move beyond analysis and understanding toward action.

It appears that Christ gave the messages to the churches before they were beyond salvage. There was an urgency to act, but there was still time to prepare for the future or to correct the problems that existed. Smyrna and Philadelphia received no exhortations and were warned that they would face more difficult circumstances and testing. Perhaps the dire correctives given to Sardis and Laodicea were given in just enough time to keep them from a premature demise. For leaders in the contemporary church, this idea of ensuring that an evaluation is conducted before it is too late could suggest the benefit of a regular evaluation process.

Evaluation Keeps Long-term Missional Focus at the Forefront

Within each message, Christ offered hope connected to God's long-term plan to reconcile people to himself. Each church received a future promise of the good that God had in mind (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 20–22), which gave the churches hope to persevere in difficult circumstances. Things are not as they should be. The power structures of the world are in opposition to God.[184] By providing a future focus, these churches were reminded that everything that was happening was set in the context

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[183] Boda, *Return to Me*, 179.
[184] Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 162.

where God is ultimately victorious. This focus gave the people hope in the midst of challenging circumstances as well as their own failures. These prophetic messages would also remind them of their role as a faithful witness in the world. As Richard Bauckham notes, "The church does not exist for itself, but in order to participate in the coming of God's universal kingdom."[185] Contemporary church leaders need to have this same missional focus and hope.

Summary

Christ used a trusted prophetic servant named John to record and communicate his evaluation of seven prominent churches late in the first century in the wealthy province of Asia. The Pax Romana had allowed for the development of burgeoning trade routes and seaports that facilitated the movement of goods throughout the empire as well as false teaching that threatened to dilute the faithful witness of some of these churches. These Asian churches found themselves in a context that prescribed worship or the emperor and the pantheon of patron deities in order to survive socially and economically. Tensions were rising between the Jewish synagogue and the Christian church. While there was no systemic persecution of Christians in the province at this time, trouble was looming on the horizon.

The messages to the seven churches in Asia were prophetic calls to each church to be attentive to their spiritual condition, to stay focused on their mission as Christ's faithful witnesses, and to exercise appropriate engagement with culture. The purpose of the messages was to awaken churches to the seriousness of their situation, to remind

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[185] Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 162.

them of what they had been taught, to encourage them to repent, and to motivate them to act. They were called to be transformed into churches that were a more faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

Within these messages Christ set out various criteria for evaluation as well as an evaluation process methodology. Christ brought the churches back to first principles by exhorting them to practice love, maintain a faithful witness, and produce fruitful service. Christ also warned them about the dangers of assimilating with culture as well as the importance of being attentive and diligent about false teachers and influencers within their churches. The criteria that Christ used to evaluate these churches included love, faithfulness, fruitfulness, relationship with culture, attentiveness to influencers, and evaluating false teaching. The process of Christ's evaluation methodology follows the literary form of the letters and includes acknowledging Christ's sovereignty, the importance of context specific evaluation (the address to a specific church), the need for an authoritative and aligned evaluation (prophetic formula), the balanced approach of commendation and exhortation ("I know" speeches), the call to action (imperative), the practice of discernment (exhortation to listen), and the focus on the long-term mission of God (eschatological promise).

In this chapter, preliminary criteria and a process framework for the practice of organizational evaluation was proposed. This work provides a lens for discovery and further development in chapter 3 where I turn to an in-depth examination of the actual practice of organizational evaluation through a broader Canadian survey and case studies with five congregations.

CHAPTER 3: EXAMINING THE PRACTICE OF EVALUATION

The primary research for this project included a significant online survey about the organizational evaluation practices in Canadian Protestant churches as well as a deeper exploration of organizational evaluation practices in the case studies of five congregations. In the case studies, the researcher was a consultant/facilitator who assisted the governing board in developing and/or enhancing the practice of organizational evaluation in their context.

As a practice-led research project, it is important to locate this research within Smith and Dean's paradigm. Smith and Dean's model illustrates how the researcher moves between practice and theory, allowing practice to augment, refine, or sharpen theory and vice versa.[1] The elements of this project were designed to create a dialogical cycle that moved between the previous experiences of the researcher, theological work completed during the coursework of the researcher's studies, primary survey research into the practice, and the experience of working with the case study churches.

Because a consultant cannot provide services without prepared content, the researcher developed the preliminary consulting materials as part of her doctoral coursework, which was then tested with one of the researcher's clients. The consulting materials were then revised for use with the case study churches. Before engaging with the case study participants, the researcher launched and analyzed a broader survey about the practice of organizational evaluation in Canadian Protestant churches. The early analysis of that research provided additional insight into what might be experienced in the case study context. In addition, the learning from each case study experience was

[1] Smith and Dean, "Practice-led Research," 21.

integrated into the training materials for subsequent case study participants. After the field research on the case studies was completed, a more comprehensive literature review of organizational evaluation was undertaken, and the biblical component of the evaluation paradigm was expanded and refined. This synthesis of learning and practice greatly influenced the richness of the analysis presented in this chapter.

Organizational Evaluation Survey of Canadian Protestant Churches

One of the potential biases that can occur in a consulting practice is normalizing one's own experiences with clients as representing what happens in all, or mostly all, contexts. The online survey research assists in ameliorating this bias by providing essential background information about ministry evaluation in churches within various traditions of the Protestant faith community in Canada. The result is a more robust, research-informed understanding of current organizational evaluation practices. This research may also have value in the wider community, particularly for denominational offices who develop resources for their member churches.

Survey Results

This section reviews various categories of the survey demographics—geographic location, denominational affiliation, age, gender, and church size. In addition, analysis and interpretation of the open-ended content questions about evaluation practices are provided. While the researcher does not claim that these results are representative of all Canadian churches in the Protestant stream of Christianity, I argue that the participation is broad enough to provide a research-informed understanding of organizational

evaluation practices within this tradition. From time to time anecdotal stories or quotes from the survey have been incorporated to provide additional insight and have been footnoted as "anecdote from survey participant."

Demographics

Geographic participation in the survey was reasonably consistent with the geographic distribution of Canadian Protestant churches, as shown in Table 3.1. The majority of pastors and board members participating in the survey, 73 percent, were located in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta. Quebec was significantly under-represented because the survey was offered only in English and because the survey was not actively promoted in that province. Ontario was slightly over-represented, while participation in the remaining provinces and territories were relatively consistent with the proportion of Canadian Protestant churches in these geographic areas.

Churches in centres with population greater than 100,000 made up 39 percent of the total survey population, while 47 percent of churches were located in small and medium population centres. Churches in rural areas accounted for 13 percent of the study population. The majority of participants were from small churches of less than 75 people (39 percent) and medium-sized churches with 75–249 people (46 percent). Large churches with 250 people or greater represented 15 percent of the survey population.

Table 3.1
Geographic Location of Participants
Compared to Geographic Location of Canadian Protestant Churches

	Survey	All Protestant Churches[2]
Ontario	49%	42%
British Columbia	13%	15%
Alberta	11%	13%
Saskatchewan	8%	6%
Manitoba	5%	5%
Nova Scotia	4%	4%
Newfoundland & Labrador	3%	2%
New Brunswick	2%	4%
Quebec	1%	8%
Prince Edward Island	1%	1%
Northwest Territories	0%	less than 1%
Nunavut	0%	less than 1%
Yukon	0%	less than 1%

The participants in the survey, both pastors and board members, were predominantly male (76 percent) between the ages of forty and sixty-nine (75 percent). The majority of participants, 68 percent, were over fifty years of age, with only 14 percent of participants below the age of forty. Forty percent of board members who responded to the survey were female, while significantly fewer pastor respondents were female (14 percent). As a result of these age and gender characteristics, it should be noted that the perspective on organizational evaluation in this research is significantly influenced by males over the age of fifty. As such, these results may not accurately reflect the experiences of female leaders or younger leaders.

[2]This information was obtained from an analysis by the Canadian Council of Christian Charities of the CRA T3010 data set for 2015—released by CRA in 2017 (Unpublished). This content may be requested by contacting John Pellowe through mail@cccc.org.

A variety of denominational affiliations were represented in the survey; however, Pentecostal (20 percent), Baptist (17 percent), Presbyterian (15 percent), and Lutheran (15 percent) traditions were the largest groups. A complete listing of survey participants by denomination is shown in Appendix 3, question three.

Survey Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, the responses for the open-ended questions of the survey are analyzed and interpreted. This analysis includes the evaluation processes and tools used, the theological principles and biblical passages that guide the evaluation process, evaluation criteria used, barriers or obstacles faced, and positive and/or negative outcomes experienced. Statistically significant differences at the ninety-five percent significance level, whether between pastors and board members or size of church, have been highlighted wherever applicable.

Is there a Clear Mission Statement?

As previously discussed in the literature review of this project, mission is a key anchoring point for organizational evaluation. If the mission of the church is not articulated clearly, confusion is likely to arise about the importance of desired outcomes or initiatives that are undertaken. As a result, the evaluation process may become more difficult because competing ideas about "success" may be unresolved. The purpose of this survey question was to understand to what extent participant churches had a clear mission or purpose statement. Seventy-six percent of survey participants reported that their congregation had a clear mission or purpose statement. Another 14 percent indicated that their church had a mission statement, but that it was not clear. The

remaining participants either did not have a mission or purpose statement (9 percent) or were not sure about its existence (1 percent). There was no significant difference between the responses of pastors and board members for this question; however, the survey results did reveal that small congregations were significantly less likely to have a mission or purpose statement (64 percent) compared to large congregations (94 percent). In addition, small congregations were more likely to have a mission statement that was unclear (19 percent) or to have none at all (16 percent) compared to their large counterparts—3 percent and 1 percent respectively.

The potential impact of these statistics for small churches is concerning. While it is possible that people within small churches have an intuitive sense of their direction, this potential lack of clarity puts the small church at a significant disadvantage when conducting an organizational evaluation. What is the measure against which evaluation is made? Does the evaluation process become arbitrary or less useful when the mission of the church is not clearly defined? This statistic has alerted the researcher to consider whether or not potential clients have articulated their mission/vision clearly as part of a pre-engagement checklist. If churches do not have a clear mission or purpose statement, there would be significant preparatory work to be done before conducting an organizational evaluation.

What are the Characteristics of the Evaluation Process?

The next section of the survey examined the characteristics of the organizational evaluation process at these churches. Specifically, the participants were asked how often they conducted an evaluation, how formal or informal the evaluation process was, who

was involved in the evaluation process, what steps they followed in the evaluation process, and what they did with the results of the evaluation.

In terms of the frequency of evaluation, a modest 29 percent of respondents said they evaluate ministry at least annually, with 22 percent revealing that they rarely or never evaluate ministry. A significant segment, 36 percent, declared that they conduct an organizational evaluation informally, on an ad hoc basis. In addition, size seems to matter when it comes to how frequently, or if, an evaluation occurs. Small churches with less than seventy-five people were significantly more likely (29 percent) than congregations with two hundred and fifty or more people (11 percent) to answer that they rarely or never conducted an organizational evaluation. When those who indicated that they never conduct an organizational evaluation were asked what barriers or obstacles they faced, most indicated that they were not sure how to go about doing an evaluation (67 percent) or that they had no interest in conducting an evaluation (40 percent).[3]

If survey participants indicated that they conducted an organizational evaluation at their church, they were asked to describe the steps they followed in their evaluation processes. A significant portion, 52 percent, indicated that they have a loosely defined or unstructured process, which meant either that the process was not explicitly defined in terms of the steps undertaken and/or that the process was not deliberately managed in terms of how often it was completed. In contrast, 47 percent of survey participants indicated that they evaluated ministry in an intentional way in terms of having a clear series of steps followed and/or a regular interval for undertaking evaluation. There was

[3] Due to a relatively small sample size for this statistic, results, though informative, should be viewed with caution—broader generalizations should not be made.

no statistically significant variance between the responses of small churches and large churches or between pastors and board members for this question.

These findings, taken together with the low frequency with which organizational evaluation is conducted and the popularity of an ad hoc approach, may reveal a lack of intentionality toward the practice of organizational evaluation. Alternatively, these results may indicate a need for resources that assist churches in understanding how to conduct evaluation well. In terms of the researcher's own practice as a consultant, these findings highlight the opportunity for developing a clear methodology for conducting the evaluation as well as a recommendation about how to schedule this practice into the board's regular rhythm of work. In addition, these findings underscore the importance of understanding what has influenced historical attitudes and approaches toward evaluation in the past. By understanding potential areas of concern or inattention, the consultant is better able to propose a process that will fit with the specific context.

In terms of who is most frequently involved in the evaluation process, results from this question revealed that the pastor who reports to the board (75 percent) and the church board (76 percent) were most often involved in the evaluation process.[4] Churches large enough to support more than one pastor include other pastoral staff in the evaluation approximately one-third of the time.[5] Lay leaders provided input into the process approximately 12 percent of the time, while the broader congregation was involved 21 percent of the time. There were no statistically significant differences for this question due to size of congregation.

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[4] It is interesting to note that 95 percent of the pastors participating in this survey said they were involved in the evaluation process.

[5] The researcher's assumption is that a congregation of greater than 250 people would likely have more than one pastor.

Few participants, 7 percent, mentioned that denominational support or resources were used to conduct their evaluation. This was an unexpected statistic since many denominations who assisted the researcher in promoting this survey have dedicated staff or programs that emphasize church health. Another unanticipated response from this question was that the annual general meeting or annual report was rarely included as part of the evaluation process (8 percent). Perhaps people completing the survey did not consider these channels as part of the evaluation process. The annual general meeting and annual report may be underutilized forums for engaging and communicating with the broader church family both in terms of a stewardship evaluation report and as an opportunity to connect ministry activities with the mission of the church.

In addition to inquiring who was involved in the evaluation process, this open-ended question sought to understand what specific evaluation methods were used. A summary of these results is shown in Table 3.2. Notably, boards and pastors rely heavily on dialogue (54 percent), whether formal or informal, as the most common method of engaging in the evaluative process. These discussions might take place during the regular board meeting or at a board retreat or special day set aside for evaluation (10 percent). Even though 76 percent of congregations have a clear mission statement, only 28 percent specifically mentioned that they used their mission or vision statement as a guide during their evaluation process. Perhaps pastors and board members are informally incorporating mission in their evaluation; however, from these responses it would appear that an intentional focus on mission could be further emphasized.

Table 3.2
Methods Used in Organizational Evaluation

Discussion, dialogue, meetings	54%
Mission and/or vision as a guide	28%
Results in a plan of action	22%
Research – internal	13%
Research - external community	1%
Develop evaluation indicators	12%
Retreat or special time set aside	10%
External tool or consultant	6%
Discernment and prayer	6%
Evaluation during transition/revitalization	5%
Evaluation as part of budget process	3%
Celebration	1%
Other	14%

A small segment of the survey population conducts some type of research as an additional input into the evaluation process. This research could involve gathering specific information (e.g., through surveys, focus groups, interviews, background information) about the internal environment of the church (13 percent) or the external environment of the community they are trying to reach (1 percent). One might assume that official internal research is not as necessary in smaller congregations because board members and pastors are more likely to be familiar with many aspects of church ministry. This survey revealed that smaller churches were more likely than their larger counterparts to conduct external research (6 percent). The lower emphasis on obtaining additional information may be connected to the ad hoc nature of evaluation previously discussed.

Fewer than one-quarter of survey participants indicated that their evaluative process resulted in a plan of action, such as program changes, solving specific problems, or setting future goals. One board member expressed concern about lack of action. He

wrote, "We all too rarely move from words to action…we keep going in circles holding forth great ideas but timidity of action…our God on the move calls us to leave the shore and 'launch into the deep.'"[6] From a consultant practitioner perspective, these findings highlight the importance of facilitating concrete conversation about implementation following the evaluation process.

Two components of evaluation were mentioned infrequently in this question. Only 12 percent noted that they develop specific indicators or metrics in their evaluation process, which is more pessimistic than the responses from question twelve where they shared their evaluation criteria. Large churches with 250 people or more were much more likely to use indicators or metrics (23 percent) than smaller churches (10 percent). In addition, the practices of discernment and prayer (6 percent) and celebration (1 percent) were rarely mentioned. The relative absence of prayer and discernment practices may indicate that organizational evaluation lacks a robust, intentional spiritual foundation.

What Evaluation Criteria Are Used?

Survey participants were asked to describe the evaluation criteria they used to determine how well their church is fulfilling its overall mission and purpose. Approximately 17 percent gave no response to this question. A significant proportion, 28 percent, indicated that no specific criteria were used. A further 25 percent indicated that they would like to make more progress or improvement in this area, that they struggle to identify meaningful indicators, or that they are currently in the process of developing indicators.

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[6] Participant anecdote.

Also included in this category were those who gave a vague response that did not relate to specific criteria. These statistics indicate that there is an opportunity for more work to be done in terms of resourcing churches in the area of developing contextually appropriate criteria for ministry evaluation.

The most common criteria identified by survey participants were attendance or numerical growth (31 percent), discipleship and maturing faith (25 percent), leading people to Christ (23 percent), offerings and financial health (22 percent), criteria connected to mission, vision, purpose (21 percent), and volunteer engagement in ministry (20 percent). A summary of responses is shown in Table 3.3. It is interesting to note that many of the most common indicators employed by survey participants are measured quantitatively. Attendance and offering numbers are easily counted and analyzed as are the number of decisions for Christ and the percentage of volunteers engaged in ministry. However, determining whether there has been progress in terms of spiritual growth—those areas where qualitative methods must be used—is more challenging. In the area of ministry evaluation criteria, there also are some differences in criteria depending on church size. As shown in Table 3.4, large churches with 250 people or more were more likely to emphasize ministry engagement, small group ministry, leading people to Christ, baptisms, as well as maturing faith and discipleship than small churches.

Table 3.3

Evaluation Criteria Use in Organizational Evaluation

None	28%
More progress needed or vague response	25%
Attendance or numerical growth	31%
Discipleship, maturing faith	25%
Leading people to Christ	23%
Financial (offerings, financial health)	22%
Connected to mission, vision, purpose	21%
Volunteer engagement in ministry	20%
External or community focus/service	18%
Internal church relationships (love, fellowship)	13%
Goal achievement	12%
Baptisms	10%
Internal satisfaction	10%
Worship experience	9%
Leadership development	9%
Small group participation	7%
Missions	5%
Membership	5%
Analysis of effectiveness, fruitfulness	5%
Other	22%

Table 3.4
Statistically Significant Differences in Evaluation Criteria
by Congregation Size (number of people)

	<75	75 – 150	151 – 249	250+
Volunteer engagement in ministry	13%	20%	17%	35%
Small group participation	3%	5%	7%	22%
Leading people to Christ	17%	22%	20%	37%
Discipleship, maturing faith	21%	18%	31%	42%
Baptisms	5%	10%	8%	23%

That a larger church would place more emphasis on measuring small group participation is expected. Small group ministry facilitates relationship building in a large church. However, the concern about discipleship and maturing faith would seem to be equally important criteria for all church sizes to consider. The results from this question, in addition to previous questions, underscore the need for evaluation approaches that allow churches to evaluate qualitative areas.

How Are Theological Principles, Biblical Passages, or Spiritual Practices Incorporated? Participants who indicated that they conduct organizational evaluations were also asked if they had incorporated theological principles, biblical passages, or spiritual practices into their evaluation processes. It is noteworthy that 36 percent of participants gave no response to this question and that another 11 percent did not know whether theological principles or biblical passages had been incorporated into their evaluation practices. Pastors (79 percent) were much more likely than board members (55 percent) to indicate that they had incorporated theological principles, biblical passages, or spiritual practices into their evaluation process. In addition, it was significantly more likely that board members (20 percent) did not know whether a theological, biblical, and spiritual foundation had been incorporated into the evaluation process. These statistics do raise questions about how well board members are intentionally incorporating a theological and biblical foundation into their evaluation practices. From a consulting practice standpoint, this represents an opportunity to incorporate a stronger theological and biblical foundation into board training and facilitation material.

The biblical passages mentioned by survey participants related primarily to organizational evaluation criteria, as opposed to how the evaluation process should be

undertaken. The most common responses were quite broad in scope and included making mature disciples (Matt 28:18–20, Eph 4:15, Matt 4:19, Col 1:28, and John 15), the command to love each other (Mark 22: 35–40; John 13:34–35, 15:12; Gal 5:14, 6:10; 1 Pet 2:17), the need for Holy Spirit empowerment (Acts 1:8, John 14:6, Gal 5:16, 23–24), and the goal to mature and equip the church (Eph 4). The top two responses for this question mirror the general criteria identified in the literature review of this project. The messages to the seven churches in Revelation were only referenced by two churches in the sample. From these results it appears that the biblical foundation material developed for this research project may provide a fresh perspective for churches, not only because of the passage examined, but also because the criteria examined are more specific and evaluation process considerations are included. The responses for this question are summarized in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5
Biblical Passages that Inform Organizational Evaluation Practices
(percentages based on all who responded to the question)

Making mature disciples	26%
Loving one another	11%
Holy Spirit empowerment and guidance	6%
Equipping the church	6%
Helping poor, marginalized	3%
Acts 2 Church	3%
Other passages	16%
Passage not specified	21%

Theological principles were not identified to any great extent by those participating in the survey. If used, the primary sources were denominational statements (7 percent) and external resources such as consultants and books (4 percent). In terms of spiritual

practices, prayer (16 percent), discernment (8 percent), and Scripture reading (8 percent) were the most common mentioned by the survey group. Recalling that this question was in an open-ended format versus a list of items to be checked off, it appears that there is significant room for growth in the spiritual practices of prayer, discernment, and Scripture reading to be an intentional and integral part of the organizational evaluation process.

What Are the Barriers, Obstacles or Challenges?

Another aim of this primary research was to gain a better understanding of the types of barriers, obstacles, or challenges that pastors and board members face when conducting an organizational evaluation. In this question, participants were supplied not only with a list of options from which to select, but they were also given the opportunity to provide free-form answers that were subsequently analyzed and categorized. What is exceptionally clear from this research is that the vast majority of churches face some type of barrier, obstacle, or challenge—only 4 percent of participants indicated that they faced no barriers at all.

Besides lack of missional clarity (29 percent), the most significant barriers identified were that these leaders were not sure how to go about doing an evaluation (39 percent), that there was not enough time to do an evaluation (30 percent), and that there was no interest in conducting an evaluation (29 percent). While there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of pastors and board members, Table 3.6 demonstrates that a wider range of values was evident when the data was segmented by church size.

Table 3.6
Barriers, Obstacles, and Challenges When Conducting Organizational Evaluation by Congregation Size

	<75	75 – 150	151 – 249	250+
Not sure how to do it	30%	45%	43%	43%
Not enough time	25%	31%	33%	39%
Lack of interest	38%	26%	24%	12%
Lack of mission clarity	33%	28%	33%	20%
No barriers	4%	3%	3%	8%

Churches with under seventy-five attenders are significantly less interested in conducting an organizational evaluation than churches of greater size. It is unclear why such a difference exists. More fruitful exploration could be completed in this area. A key learning for the researcher's consulting practice from these statistics is the importance of building a stronger theological case for why organizational evaluation is valid and needed, particularly for churches with under two hundred and fifty attenders. Other consultants in my network share that they have observed not only a lack of interest in organizational evaluation, but also a reluctance by church board leaders to engage in ministry evaluation. The two most prominent reasons offered for this reluctance are that results should be left up to God and/or that business processes, such as organizational evaluation, do not belong in the church. A few anecdotes from the survey illustrate a similar point. One church board member lamented the lack of biblical principles utilized when they engaged an outside consultant. He wrote, "[We] had one [evaluation] done before by an outside group. Results were 'mechanical' (worldly business wisdom) as opposed to seeking God's word for biblical principles."[7] This board member gives voice

[7] Participant anecdote.

to the idea that church leaders desire a method based on biblical principles. A pastor also expressed concern about an overreliance on quantitative measures versus some other method that is more holistic. He wrote, "It [evaluation] has not always been easy as the people tend to use a business model of measuring quantitative things rather than overall how is the church doing."[8] Another pastor reflected on the importance of discernment and prayer, which moves beyond a strictly business approach. She wrote, "Wondering and praying about what God is calling us to do moves us beyond the language of business and business style measurement."[9]

Churches with seventy-five or more attenders said that they are significantly less sure about how to go about doing an organizational evaluation than smaller churches, which is a very curious statistic. One might have expected larger churches to have more expertise available to them either within their congregation or through an external resource, such as a paid consultant. These results indicate that a lack of clarity about how to conduct an evaluation is a significant barrier. There appears to be an opportunity for resource development that provides a clear implementation process.

Churches with two hundred and fifty or more attenders were significantly more likely (39 percent) than small congregations (25 percent) to say that they did not have enough time to do an evaluation. In my opinion, this perceived lack of time reveals the priority (or lack thereof) that is placed on organizational evaluation. If churches perceive that they do not have time to conduct an organizational evaluation, I submit that they have not placed a high priority on this exercise, perhaps because they are not sure how

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[8] Participant anecdote.
[9] Participant anecdote.

to conduct one, that they do not see the value of the exercise, or that they feel it will take too long.

What Positive or Negative Outcomes Have Been Experienced?

In the final question of the survey, participants were asked to share what positive or negative outcomes they had experienced as a result of doing an organizational evaluation. In this open-ended question, 75 percent of participants provided one or more positive benefits that resulted from their organizational evaluation, while 43 percent provided one or more negative outcomes. A very small number, 3 percent, indicated that neither positive nor negative outcomes were experienced. A summary of these results is presented in Tables 3.7 and 3.8.

Table 3.7
Positive Outcomes of Organizational Evaluation

Greater emphasis on mission, purpose	19%
Clarity and focus	19%
Catalyst for change	19%
Results or progress made	14%
Broder engagement and communication	11%
Excitement, celebration	11%
Other	11%

Large churches with 250 attenders or more were significantly more likely (88 percent) than small churches with less than 75 people (66 percent) and between 75 and 150 people (76 percent) to report a positive outcome as a result of organizational evaluation. One of the most common benefits cited in this survey was a greater emphasis on mission, purpose, or vision (19 percent). Pastors were more likely (22 percent) than

board members (13 percent) to express this view. One pastor of a small congregation captured this sentiment well. She wrote, "the positive is for everyone to appreciate a wider view of the mission of the church. When approached in a playful, non-judgmental way, it gives wings to the imagination of what we could do."[10] This comment also highlights the importance of the attitude towards evaluation. Another pastor expressed that the leadership team became more energized and took greater ownership of the congregational vision and mission as a result of the evaluation process.[11] The very process of evaluation brought people to a fuller understanding of and engagement with the mission of the church.

A related benefit of organizational evaluation expressed by survey participants was greater clarity and focus for the church (19 percent). A board member in a small church articulated this well. He wrote, "this [evaluation] has helped us to stay focused and has helped us explain why there are things we are NOT doing."[12] Churches have limited resources and the clarity that an evaluation process brings assists them in making decisions about where to focus their energy. The criteria and rationale developed during the process helped them to explain the rationale of their decisions to a wider audience. Participants also noted that evaluation was a catalyst for change or innovation (19 percent). Some reported discontinuing programs and replacing them with more effective initiatives. When evaluation was considered to be positive, there was a bias toward action and making changes for the better. Other positive benefits of evaluation reported

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[10] Participant anecdote.
[11] Participant anecdote.
[12] Participant anecdote.

by survey participants included making progress (14 percent), broader engagement and communication (11 percent), and a sense of excitement and celebration (11 percent).

Table 3.8
Negative Outcomes of Organizational Evaluation

Change is difficult	11%
Communication, giving feedback	8%
Implementation	8%
Lack of engagement	5%
Evaluation process	4%
Impact on staff	4%
Other	13%

While organizational evaluation was viewed as a positive catalyst for change for some participants in this research, others experienced considerable difficulty with the change that often accompanies evaluation. A pastor of a small church expressed this frustration well. He wrote, "The negative has been the creation of 'sacred cows' for those items evaluated as perfect once, even if their purpose has become less clear over time."[13] Sometimes people in the congregation are not able to see that change is needed. People can be focused on their own needs versus those of the congregation or the broader community. For some participants, there was a sense of disappointment that change comes slowly (or not at all) in the church. For others, change was especially difficult if it required termination of pastoral staff when giftings did not match the needs of the church.

[13] Participant anecdote.

Online Survey Summary

This research survey provides several insights about the current practice of organizational evaluation in Canadian Protestant churches. While 76 percent of survey participants reported that they had a clear mission or purpose statement, less than one-third of respondents mentioned that they intentionally use their statement as a guide during the evaluation process. Slightly more than half of those who conduct an organizational evaluation have a loosely defined process either in terms of the steps undertaken and/or how the process was managed, and/or how often it was completed. In addition, 39 percent of respondents shared that they were unsure how to go about doing an evaluation.

A significant proportion of churches in the survey do not have specific evaluation criteria (28 percent) or indicated that they need to make more progress in this area (25 percent). Churches who do establish criteria are typically using quantitative measures (e.g., how many in attendance, how many people led to Christ, what percentage of attendees are engaged in ministry, offerings) as opposed to outcome-oriented criteria in their evaluation practices. Nearly half of survey respondents gave no response or were not sure how they incorporated theological principles, biblical passages, or spiritual practices into their evaluation process. Board members were significantly less likely than pastors to consider these elements in their processes.

The results from this broader survey confirm key conclusions from the literature review—that Canadian Protestant church board leaders and pastors would benefit from the development of clear, biblical evaluation process methodology as well as mission-specific, outcome-based evaluation criteria. In addition, these results confirm that the

messages to the seven churches are an under-utilized organizational evaluation paradigm. These insights heightened the researcher's understanding of potential challenges for the board leadership teams in the case studies, and significantly influenced the development of the consulting materials used as well as the facilitation approach used in the sessions.

Case Studies with Five Canadian Churches

This segment describes, analyzes, and reflects on the practice of organizational evaluation in five Canadian Protestant churches before and after their participation in two three-hour training sessions offered by the consultant researcher. The training sessions were designed to provide a theological foundation for evaluation, facilitate critical dialogue among the participants, and assist each leadership team in developing theologically informed evaluation criteria and processes for their church. These case studies provide a deeper engagement with the practice of organizational evaluation to better understand, in Osmer's words, "what is going on."

Introducing the Five Churches

The fictitious names of the churches in these case studies are Pine Falls Church, Grace Fellowship – Urban West Campus, Base Camp Church, Hilltop Church, and Garden View Church. The case studies are presented chronologically based on the order in which the research consulting engagements were conducted. The names of the five churches as well as their denominational affiliation and specific geographic location have not been disclosed in order to protect their identity.

Denominations represented in the research sample include Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anabaptist, and non-denominational. In terms of rural or urban setting, two churches were in rural or small-town settings while the remaining cases were located in larger urban centres. The case studies included two churches with less than one hundred people attending each week, one mid-sized church of approximately one hundred and seventy-five people attending, one satellite campus church with three hundred and fifty attenders, and one very large church with approximately eight hundred and fifty people attending. One case study participant was a second-generation immigrant congregation.

Each church board leadership team received two three-hour training sessions. The first session provided a biblical foundation for evaluation based on the criteria and process considerations identified in the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2–3. Participants were invited to express their hopes and concerns about evaluation and to consider the relevancy of the material in their own context. It should be noted that two elements of Christ's evaluation methodology were not explicitly developed when these sessions were delivered but were developed based on further study and reflection after the sessions. The two areas were acknowledging Christ's lordship and considering an eschatological focus.

Between the first and second session teams were asked to discuss the content of the first session and reflect on how the Holy Spirit might be leading them. A devotional resource was provided to facilitate the discussion. A second training session was delivered approximately two months after the first session. The aim of the second session was to assist the teams in prioritizing evaluation criteria, selecting appropriate

measures and/or indicators, and defining an ongoing evaluation process. Session feedback was solicited within a week of the second session. The researcher conducted post-session follow-up with each pastor between five and seven months after the second training session.

The case studies are presented below. For each church a brief context is presented, the results from the training sessions are described, and significant observations are highlighted. Following the case study descriptions, analysis and reflection on the results are segmented in four categories: general observations, evaluation criteria identified and prioritized by the participants, evaluation processes employed by the participants, and feedback received from participants about the training sessions.

Case Study #1: Pine Falls Church

The first case study is a small church of seventy-five people located in the picturesque town of Pine Falls. Pine Falls Church (PFC) desires to be "a congregation who worships, a family who loves, and a team who serves." Despite having limited financial resources, PFC makes a significant effort to serve their community by hosting free community breakfasts from Thanksgiving to Victoria Day.

As solo pastor, Owen Cook chairs the board and actively engages board members in strategic and operational decisions. In contrast to some "corporate" approaches to church health and revitalization, Pastor Owen felt a biblically grounded approach would work well with the relational nature of his board. Although this leadership team was not obsessed about numbers, attendance was a regular point of

discussion and the report on church finances was always at the top of the board agenda. With a modest budget of $140,000, this church often experienced financial pressures. Usually there was just enough money to pay the pastor and maintain the church building with a small amount left for missions and ministry programs of the church.

Ministry evaluation at PFC was typically very informal and occurred when there was a change in ministry leadership, when problems arose, or at the end of the ministry year. Although organizational evaluation was seen as valuable, being more intentional and focusing on the mission of the church was a relatively new aspect of evaluation for this group. During the first training session, individual church board members interacted thoughtfully with each other and with the criteria and process considerations shared by the consultant. Throughout the meeting, Pastor Owen was careful to leave space for board members to put forward their own opinions and actively engage in the conversation. Between sessions, Pastor Owen worked through the devotional resource *If You Can Hear, Listen to What the Spirit is Saying* with the board to reinforce the learning about the messages to the seven churches in Revelation and to prayerfully engage with the board to discern what Christ might be saying to them.

After a lengthy, honest, and fruitful discussion during the second session, the board agreed on five criteria for evaluating ministry. The highest priority would be on developing a foundation of love at the church. It was unanimously agreed that internal relationships must be healthy before the congregation would be able to effectively express love to others outside the church. Deeper connections would allow for accountability, belonging, and care. The group also decided that spiritual growth and

maturity, external community engagement, world missions focus, and board leadership development were important criteria.

With their top priority in mind, the board discussed how to engage the congregation at Pine Falls in the evaluation process. It was in this moment that Pastor Owen made a significant statement about exercising board leadership and allowing the Holy Spirit to move in the congregation and draw people in unity toward where God was leading. He said, "I believe that the same God who is leading us will also speak to the congregation." The board agreed and decided to have more conversation about congregational engagement before moving forward with any ministry program changes.

In terms of a more intentional evaluation process, the board resolved to set aside a separate time each year to take a thorough, reflective look at how things were going at Pine Falls based on the criteria they had agreed upon. In addition to the annual focus on ministry evaluation, the board decided to include informal times of evaluation during their monthly board meetings to share stories and observations related to the criteria they had chosen. They would also continue to monitor financial information as an overall component of evaluation, but it would not be the first item on the board agenda.

Following the training sessions, the leadership team at Pine Falls Church moved beyond discussion and analysis of issues and began to make changes. Almost immediately after the second session, Pastor Owen began an extended sermon series on love based on 1 John to lay a biblical foundation for their highest priority evaluation criteria. The pastor and board moved forward with a congregational vision meeting three months later to invite the congregation into the ministry evaluation process. Forty-five people from the congregation attended the meeting. The board shared what they had

been doing with respect to ministry evaluation and how they felt they had heard the Holy Spirit speak to them about concentrating on connectedness and love within the congregation. The entire group prayed, shared dreams, and considered what the Holy Spirit was saying to them. Together, the congregation, board, and pastor decided to discontinue the community breakfasts that had been an important part of the outreach ministry of the church for the previous seven years and instead consider a new format for connecting with each other through small group ministry. This new ministry was launched three months later. Speaking with the researcher six months after the second session, Pastor Owen felt that the church had been able to make this change because the board leadership team had critically evaluated the overall ministry of the church and was attuned to what the Holy Spirit was saying to them. Pastor Owen was thrilled with the response of the congregation noting that there has been widespread support for the change. Two months after the congregational vision meeting, the church board met at Pastor Owen's house for a BBQ and to conduct their first annual evaluation process.

Case Study #2: Grace Fellowship – Urban West Campus

A second-generation immigrant congregation, Grace Fellowship is a satellite campus that ministers to approximately 350 adults and children. One of Grace Fellowship's significant challenges arises from being a "commuter" church. Besides the time it takes to travel to church activities, everyone seems to have a busy lifestyle, which affects their capacity to serve in church ministry. All of the campuses are jointly governed by one elders' board, with each campus also having an elected deacon board. Grace Fellowship has three key areas of ministry focus: developing a relationship with God through

worship, developing a relationship with one another centered around discipleship, and engagement with the world through missions projects. With an annual budget of approximately $500,000, Grace Fellowship is well resourced financially.

Pastor David described the current church ministry evaluation method as "loose, flexible, and adhoc" and confided that at the present time the leaders were feeling "a bit stuck." He found the idea of conducting ministry evaluation with a strong biblical foundation compelling and hoped it would actively engage his deacon board and be a catalyst in helping the church to move forward. Two members from the board of elders also joined the workshops.

During the first session, the researcher noticed that the opinions of the elders were highly respected and sought after; however, once the dialogue began in earnest, the deacons participated thoughtfully and whole-heartedly. Between sessions, Pastor David requested that each board member review the devotional resource *If You Can Hear, Listen to What the Spirit is Saying* and reflect on what Christ might be saying to them. Pastor David surveyed the group about their reflections as well as their views about the spiritual health of the church. Many identified Grace Fellowship with some of the characteristics of Ephesus and Laodicea. Grace Fellowship has strong doctrine, teaching, and leadership, but perhaps needed more passionate love for God and neighbour. Some also wondered whether, in their financial security, they had become spiritually lukewarm.

During the second training session, the group chose to prioritize the evaluation criteria of discipleship, worship, and leadership. In terms of discipleship, the group identified both individual and group components. Specific characteristics of a mature

disciple included having a vibrant prayer life, engaging with Scripture consistently, and applying what was learned. It was proposed that small groups be evaluated in terms of how they supported discipleship by providing a sense of belonging and care as well as accountability. Pastor David agreed to facilitate further discussion following the session on how to engage small group leaders in the evaluation process and how to best collect information whether it be by using a survey or by having an individual conversation with small group leaders.

The group also considered what would cause them to sense that worship was flourishing at Grace Fellowship. After a facilitated discussion, the group prioritized congregational participation, attendance, a sense of unity, and post-service fellowship as indicators of flourishing worship. There was a brief discussion about how to measure these criteria, including general observation and survey method. The group also suggested that there might be a need for teaching about this topic, both in terms of preaching and/or small group discussions. Pastor David agreed to lead in further discussions in this area following the session.

Following the discussion of evaluation criteria, the group had a brief discussion about the process of evaluation at Grace Fellowship, concentrating specifically on deacon leadership. The group discussed the need to receive more frequent communication about the church as a whole, which they felt would lead to a deeper understanding of how to pray for the church, how to have better budget discussions, and how to foster unity among the deacons. The group expressed a desire for an annual retreat day that would provide a significant amount of time to review how the church is doing and to consider steps for the following ministry year. This meeting would be

separate from budget discussions to allow time for prayer and discernment without being rushed. As the second session concluded in prayer, one deacon commented that the evaluation exercise had helped to shift the perspective from a micro-level toward the overall health of the church. It had been refreshing to consider God's perspective on ministry evaluation.

Five months after the second session, Pastor David shared that although no further work had been done by the deacon board, he had been working with individual deacons and other leaders to prepare for the next small group ministry season. A new ministry structure had been implemented to strengthen individual and corporate discipleship by providing additional support as well as accountability. Pastor David was also excited that the church was intentionally investing in leadership development for ten apprentices, who will eventually step into small group leadership positions.

Case Study # 3: Base Camp Church

Base Camp Church has experienced explosive growth since it was founded in the fall of 2015. Today there are five services in three locations with a weekly attendance of approximately 850 people, including children. The mission of Base Camp Church is "to see people come into relationship with God through a Christ-centered church that loves God and loves others." This high-energy, young, technologically savvy church is financially secure with an annual budget of nearly $500,000. Base Camp Church is co-led by millennial pastors Theo and Lisa Walker. These pastors are supported by three leadership teams. The Executive Team is responsible for the spiritual well being of the church and assists the lead pastors in establishing overall vision and direction. The board

of directors oversee all the business aspects of the church while the Overseers Board brings accountability and governs the pastors. The Lead Pastors are responsible for the ministry evaluation process at Base Camp Church but decided to include the Executive Team in the training sessions.

The Base Camp Executive Team already viewed evaluation as a positive thing. They continually foster a culture of learning, which naturally leads to measurement, evaluation, and change. The church has significant technological infrastructure to measure various quantifiable items (e.g., attendance, offering, salvations, baptisms), which are analyzed and produced in a weekly dashboard. The team is focused on results and whether or not goals are being met. Conversations and stories are also an important way that Base Camp Church evaluates ministry.

Base Camp Church's hopes for the two training sessions on ministry evaluation were to gain new theological ideas, to become more unified in their goals, and to take time to pause and reflect. Throughout the first session, this young leadership team was highly engaged, and it was clear that a culture of openness and transparency had been cultivated. The team was especially intrigued by the idea of being attentive to influencers in their church (i.e., small group leaders). A key issue that this group identified was how to promulgate their values and culture in the context of rapid growth.

The Executive Team had not had time for additional discussion after the first session. However, they were energized and looking forward to the next steps in the second session. After brainstorming potential indicators for each section of their mission statement, a preliminary list of evaluation criteria was developed, including number of salvations, serving the community, people growing and maturing in faith, stories of life

transformation, Christ-centered decision-making, attendance, number of new ideas, biblical content of preaching and teaching, biblical literacy in the church, financial health, and inviting others to church. The team agreed that they would need to take some time to pray and prioritize the list.

The team had previously identified small groups as a significant part of ministry at Base Camp Church and the primary venue where people will be "pastored." In light of this, it was agreed that establishing specific criteria to evaluate progress in small groups would be important. After individual reflection and group discussion during the second session, several key areas were identified including pastoral care for group members and leaders, spiritual growth, deeper relationships, small group multiplication, and alignment with the vision of the church. It was agreed that these criteria for evaluation were preliminary and that further clarification would be needed in terms of defining what each category meant. The group did not have time to consider if/how to change their current evaluation processes during this session.

Four months after the second session, the researcher checked in with Pastor Lisa about how things were going. It had been a busy summer preparing for the launch of a new site and they had not been able to return to the discussion about adding outcome evaluation criteria to their current system. However, the lead pastors did discuss involving the board of directors in this process in the future.

Case Study # 4: Hilltop Church

A small congregation of about seventy-five people, including children, Hilltop Church is located in a rural setting near several economically prosperous centers. Most people in

the congregation have a short, twenty-minute commute to the church. The leadership of Hilltop have a vision to be "A heaven on earth community" that lives out their mission to "Live and Love like Jesus. Peacefully. Compassionately. Together." The members in this church community truly care for each other and are actively involved in ministry. Whether it is maintaining flower gardens, mentoring youth, preparing Sunday morning refreshments, or hosting community open houses, this church with limited financial resources continues to minister effectively because of volunteer participation.

Pastor Deanna Blake was very open to the idea of evaluation and especially interested in a process that had a biblical foundation that would allow her board leadership team to bring faith and discernment into the equation. Although the church had a clear mission statement, there was a desire for greater clarity to understand what "success" looked like, how to collect relevant information, and how to engage the congregation. More recently the board had begun developing a logical framework with three outcomes or goals in mind: community ministry, congregational ministry (discipleship), and next generation leadership.

During the first session the board engaged well with the training material. Board members at Hilltop express a hope that they would develop a valuable process that would lead to tangible results—that they would be able to make strong connections to their stated outcomes. At the same time, they wanted to ensure that they did not squelch the Holy Spirit by focusing too much on metrics and measurement. Although the board was supportive of the process on which they were about the embark, they were concerned that they might not know how to fix problems identified or that they would not have the resources to fix the problems.

Prior to the second session, Pastor Deanna and the board reflected individually on what they felt Christ was saying to their church. They each imagined what Christ would say to them and creatively expressed this in the form of a letter. A few common themes emerged. There was a clear sense that the church has been faithful, even though they are small in number. The church also has a very positive atmosphere of love internally. However, there was a strong conviction that the internal love experienced by the congregation needed to be directed outward to the community in a greater way. There was also a sense that the church was holding back—the consensus was that Christ might be encouraging them to be bolder as they considered their future plans.

During the second session, the group discussed more specifically how they would evaluate ministry. The board returned to the logical framework categories that had previously been developed. In terms of congregational ministry, the board thought that worshipping God authentically (centering their lives around God's authority, listening to and talking with God, and responding during worship), experiencing Jesus-like relationships within the congregation (both for newcomers and the established core), and spiritual growth through discipleship (learning, putting understanding into practice, exercising faith) were important criteria. For community ministry, this leadership team focused on what it would look like to be a faithful witness to both personal and corporate neighbours. Personal neighbouring would consider what each person individually would do (know neighbours, express love to neighbours, make time for neighbours). Corporate neighbouring would involve listening to what the community needs/wants, joining with other churches, serving on community boards, and considering how the church and property itself may be used. Finally, the group

considered leadership development for younger people in the congregation. They concluded that missional focus, holistic leadership (spiritual and practical), and providing leadership opportunities would support their desire to develop next generation leaders at Hilltop Church. As the meeting drew to a close, the board recognized that although they had made substantial progress, more time would be needed to confirm the final criteria, decide how progress should be measured, and integrate an evaluation process into the rhythm of the board's work.

The researcher connected with Pastor Deanna four months after the second training session to see what kind of progress the board was making with respect to ministry evaluation. Over the summer, the board leadership team had decided to concentrate on creating a culture of invitation at Hilltop Church by first considering how they could invite the community to use their facility and then by moving out into the community sphere. Pastor Deanna shared that there was more work to do in terms of defining the board evaluation process and considering how to measure various initiatives. Now that the fall season was upon them, it had become more difficult to make space for that discussion within the regular board agenda. Pastor Deanna is considering a separate meeting for this in order to keep momentum going.

Case Study #5: Garden View Community Church

A mid-size church of about 175 people, including children, Garden View Community Church is located in an economically prosperous municipality in the Greater Toronto Area. Garden View has two key statements that reflect the mission of the church. The orienting statement is "Helping those in our church, community, and beyond to make a

life changing commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and together become more like him." The result they desire is to be REAL (Relevant, Enthusiastic, Authentic, Loving) people reflecting Jesus. Prior to the first session, Pastor Charlie held a special day of prayer, fasting, and discernment with the congregation to begin to discern where God might be leading in terms of future ministry. There was a clear sense that God was calling the church to have faith, courage, and boldness in the days ahead. The church also felt that they should continue to address the relational needs within the families in their community and expand their gift of hospitality and welcome even further.

This church is a beehive of activity during the week with classes for English as a second language, preschool and parent hangouts, and art classes to name a few. The small group ministry of the church is focused on helping members to be visible and connected within their own neighbourhoods. Financial resources must always be prioritized carefully, and monitoring of finances is a key part of the board's agenda. The leadership structure at Garden View Community Church includes a board of elders, who handle pastoral care matters, the church board, who attend to organizational and finance matters, and a ministry council of staff and volunteers who coordinate and discuss ministry and neighbourhood care.

During the first session, the board acknowledged the importance of staying in tune with their environment—to recognize that the culture around them is constantly changing and to respond faithfully. The board has engaged in self-evaluation—whether they are doing their fiduciary duty—but has not done a more intentional evaluation of the ministry of the whole church. That being said, the board informally gauges how they are doing by listening to the stories of their congregation and considering what God is

doing among them. This group also places a high priority on involving people outside of the board in the overall evaluation process. Notably, the group wants to ensure that any evaluation process does not focus on blaming people. At the end of the day, the board wants to ensure that they act—they do not want the evaluation process to be a waste of time.

As the second session began, the board briefly reflected on what Christ might be saying to them as a church. Like the churches in the book of Revelation, leaders at GVCC feel the pressures of contemporary culture. The board reflected on their mission to invite people to make a life changing commitment and become more like Jesus in their church, community, and beyond and the related statement to be relevant, enthusiastic, authentic, and loving. As the comments were posted on the wall, the group realized that they had not considered how to impact their city beyond their immediate community. There was consensus that to be relevant was to engage well with culture and to understand community needs. To be enthusiastic included serving and tithing. To be authentic meant to offer stories and testimonies of where God was moving.

The group had a brief discussion about the type of process that would make sense in their context. The deacon board already has an annual retreat that involves the elders and ministry leaders of the church. This might be an appropriate time to consider a more in-depth evaluation process. Information from the retreat could be refined and included in the Annual Report for the congregation. The group also consider how to connect the evaluation process to the annual ministry planning and budget process. In terms of regular board meetings, the board would like to continue to hear stories at each meeting. Another possibility would be to examine one criterion each month so that over

the course of the year it would be reviewed once. The group agreed to have further discussion to finalize the criteria and process to be used.

Four months after the last session, Pastor Charlie was excited as he shared about an opportunity to merge another struggling church into the Garden View family. Although considering this significant opportunity meant that the board would need to set aside the work on evaluation for a period of time, Pastor Charlie realized that he probably would not have recognized the opportunity as fulfilling part of their mission if they had not done the evaluation session. For Pastor Charlie, the exercises were almost like an advance discernment process. This merger might actually be seen as "a God thing." Now to plan how to move forward at the upcoming retreat for elders, board, and ministry council.

Case Study Analysis and Reflection

Most churches in this study, though generally positive about the idea of organizational evaluation, did initially express a few reservations about how the evaluation process would be conducted. By the end of the sessions, these leaders had a more positive, healthy, and biblical view of organizational evaluation. In this section, learning from these case studies is considered using four categories: general observations, evaluation criteria identified and prioritized by the participants, evaluation processes employed by the participants, and feedback received from participants about the training sessions.

General Observations

This section summarizes the current evaluation practices, attitudes toward evaluation, and progress made for each case study. Only one case study participant had an existing, integrated system of evaluation in use. The current evaluation practices of the other participants varied from non-existent to informal or intentional dialogue. Both pastors and board members were positive and engaged in the experience. All case study leadership teams identified evaluation criteria, with some also prioritizing criteria and identifying methods for measuring progress. Several groups also defined an ongoing evaluation process. A summary of these general observations is shown in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9
Case Studies: Summary of General Observations

	Pine Falls	Grace Fellowship	Base Camp	Hilltop	Garden View
Size and location	-75 attenders -located in small town	-350 attenders -urban context	-850 attenders -urban context	-75 attenders -rural location	-175 attenders -urban context
Current evaluation practices	-informal dialogue -finances a key metric -reactive -board as mutual partner	-board not involved previously -rarely done in an intentional way by pastor	-board not involved -analyze attendance trends -share stories	-intentional dialogue -board as mutual partner -theory of change model in process -"a bit stuck"	-informal dialogue -regularly listen to stories of where God is working
Connected to mission?	-yes, intuitively	-not applicable	-yes, intentional	-yes, intentional	-yes, intuitively
Attitude–pastor	-positive -highly engaged	-positive -engaged	-positive -engaged	-positive -highly engaged	-positive -engaged
Attitude–board	-positive -highly engaged	-positive -want to be careful <u>how</u> it is done	-not applicable	-positive -cautious -don't want controlling system	-positive -concern about bias and being defensive
Outlined an ongoing evaluation process for the board	-annual retreat -stories at each board meeting	-annual retreat with time for prayer and discernment	-board not involved at this point but considering for future	-not yet defined	-annual retreat -connect to ministry plans -stories at each board meeting
Developed specific criteria and methods for measuring progress	-criteria identified and prioritized -method identified	-criteria identified and prioritized -method not defined	-criteria identified, but not prioritized -method not defined	-criteria identified and prioritized criteria -method not defined	-criteria identified and prioritized -methods of measurement defined

Mapping Evaluation Criteria Characteristics

The following section examines several aspects of the case study research related to evaluation criteria. First, general characteristics of the evaluation criteria chosen by each leadership team are examined. Following this, the criteria selected by the case study participants, including their highest priorities, are reviewed. Finally, additional criteria deemed important by the case study participants are highlighted. A summary of the analysis in this section is presented in Table 3.10.

As a result of the sessions, all churches developed outcome-oriented criteria that were directly connected to their mission or purpose statements. In all sessions, the researcher focused the dialogue around the various components of the mission statements. For a few churches, this mission-focused dialogue made them aware of areas that were not receiving much attention. All participants except Hilltop Church retained some type of activity-oriented measures (e.g., how many attended various programs) in their final evaluation model; however, the emphasis from activity to outcome shifted significantly for several of the churches. Pine Falls will continue to monitor their attendance and financial health, but these criteria were placed in a more balanced context with the outcome criteria they identified. Base Camp Church retained more activity measures than the others, which was expected given their current emphasis on attendance tracking and its integration into their existing evaluation process, but they showed considerable progress in thinking about outcomes, particularly around their small group ministry. Through dialogue and facilitation, Hilltop Church was able to clearly articulate behaviours they wanted to see in congregational ministry, community ministry, and next generation leadership.

Table 3.10
Summary of Evaluation Criteria Characteristics of Case Study Participants Mapped Against Criteria Identified in the Messages to the Seven Churches

	Pine Falls	Grace Fellowship	Base Camp	Hilltop	Garden View
General Characteristics					
Criteria developed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Connected criteria to mission statement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prioritized criteria	✓	✓	somewhat	✓	✓
Activity oriented	✓	✓	✓		✓
Outcome oriented	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Decided how to measure progress	no	no	somewhat	no	yes
Seven Churches Criteria					
Love - God	✓	✓ **	✓	✓	
Love - Internal	✓ **	✓ **	✓ **	✓ **	✓
Love - External	✓		✓	✓ **	✓ **
Faithfulness					
Fruitfulness -spiritual growth -service	 ✓ ✓	 ✓	 ✓ ✓		 ✓ **
Cultural Engagement					✓ **
Influencers		✓ **	✓ **		
False Teaching		✓	✓		
Other Criteria					
Financial	✓		✓		
Attendance	✓		✓	✓	
Leadership Development	✓	✓ **	✓	✓ **	
Missions	✓	✓			

A check mark in the chart above indicates that the participants identified the criteria as important in their discussions about organizational evaluation.

The ** in the chart above indicates that the case study participants identified these criteria as their highest priorities.

All churches made progress in terms of being more specific about the outcomes and transformation they were hoping to see. For example, instead of saying, "we want to see spiritual growth," the consultant researcher asked questions to lead them toward specifically describing what spiritual growth looked like. While the researcher celebrates this shift toward greater specificity in this area, all churches would be served well by pushing themselves to define their outcomes even more clearly. The church that made the most progress was Garden View Church. They were the only case study participant who clearly defined how they would know that they were making progress with their criteria. This exercise of defining measures seemed to help them to intuitively refine what they meant by the various criteria they had chosen.

Chapter 2 of this project proposed criteria for organizational evaluation based on an analysis of the messages to the seven churches. These criteria include love for God, love for others, faithfulness, fruitfulness (growth, service), appropriate engagement with culture, attentiveness to influencers, and attentiveness to false teachers. While recognizing the value of many of these criteria in their evaluation dialogue (indicated by a check mark on Table 3.10), each participant also prioritized one or more criteria that they wanted to emphasize more immediately (indicated by ** on Table 3.10).

Four out of five case study participants indicated that love for others inside the congregation was an area of key priority; however, this criterion manifested itself in slightly different forms. Pine Falls realized that the lives of their members would not be attractive to the broader community if they did not strengthen their internal church relationships first. The external focus of loving their community would be re-engaged at a later time. Grace Fellowship and Base Camp Church considered the importance of

pastoral care that was typically provided within the context of small group ministry—by small group leaders as well as among group members. The desired outcome is to ensure that small groups are functioning as loving communities. Hilltop church also prioritized the criterion of internal love by creating a more welcoming environment, being other-focused, and promoting reconciliation. And while Garden View Church did not prioritize this criterion for action, it was because they see the love that exists within the congregation as one of their current strengths.

Although most participants recognized the importance of showing love externally to their communities, Hilltop Church and Garden View Church prioritized this area as one of high importance. For Garden View Church, engagement with their community was already inculcated into their church culture. As a result, both loving neighbour as well as appropriate cultural engagement were both identified as important foci. In contrast, Hilltop Church emphasized serving the community, but did not overtly consider appropriate cultural engagement as an integral part of this initiative.

The case study participants interacted with the idea of appropriate engagement with culture or cultural assimilation in several ways. During the session where the biblical foundation was being established, all case study participants could identify ways in which specific churches, namely Pergamum, were assimilating with culture. Most recognized the power of culture to influence. However, Garden View Church was the group that had the most in-depth discussion about engagement and assimilation with culture. Between sessions, Pastor Charlie Balcomb had preached a series addressing current cultural issues. This series probably influenced the depth of discussion at the

board table. The leadership team at Base Camp Church was the only church to indicate that it wished to actively influence their community culture.

The message to the seven churches in Revelation warned leaders about influencers within their ranks. The two larger churches in this research study identified small group leaders as key influencers within their congregations. Base Camp Church questioned whether small group leaders were well-equipped in the area of understanding correct doctrine. This is a particularly valid concern since the growth at Base Camp Church has been explosive and they actively reach out to those who are "far from God." In addition, the Base Camp Church leadership team identified small group ministry as the primary venue where people will be "pastored." This team spent a considerable portion of the second session discussing the potential outcomes that would be important for small group ministry. Grace Fellowship also recognized that their small group ministry had significant potential to influence spiritual maturity and pastoral care. Notably, the pastor at Grace Fellowship took action following the training sessions to reformat the structure of small group ministry to provide closer pastoral contact and coaching to small group leaders. It is interesting to note that the criterion of faithfulness did not receive much attention in the final sessions and leadership team discussions.

Finally, there were several criteria that case study participants mentioned and/or prioritized that were not specifically identified in the messages to the seven churches. For example, four of five case study participants mentioned some type of leadership development. For both Pine Falls and Grace Fellowship, leadership development for the board leadership team was mentioned as an area for future exploration. Both Grace Fellowship and Base Camp Church saw the need for additional leadership development

within their small group ministry. Uniquely, Hilltop Church was particularly concerned with developing a younger generation of leaders. Other criteria mentioned by case study participants included financial health, attendance or growth, and global missions.

Mapping Evaluation Methodology

The literature review of governance resources in chapter 1 of this research project revealed that the process of organizational evaluation in church ministry is under-developed, both theoretically and theologically. This section explores how case study participants conducted their organizational evaluation during and following the training session. In particular, if/how the participants emulated Christ's evaluation methodology set out in chapter 2. The summary of this analysis is presented in Table 3.11.

The reader should note that the researcher had not fully developed the evaluation process methodology at the time the sessions were delivered. The full methodology was developed after reflection about the sessions and in conjunction with the process of writing the biblical foundation chapter of this project. As a result, two areas—acknowledging Christ's sovereignty and eschatological focus—were not strongly exhibited by the case study participants.

Table 3.11
Case Studies: Summary of Evaluation Process
Mapped Against Christ's Evaluation Methodology

	Pine Falls	Grace Fellowship	Base Camp	Hilltop	Garden View
Acknowledge Christ's Lordship*	-not explicitly	-opening time of prayer led by pastor -session dialogue -spiritual tone of session	-mission statement as being "Christ-centered"	-criterion "God is King and worthy of worship"	-pre-session fasting and prayer -mission statement as "reflecting Jesus"
Understand specific context	✓	✓	✓ -staff are aware—is board aware?	✓	✓
Develop a credible, aligned process -involves right people -credible communication	✓ ✓	-partially -not yet developed	-partially -not yet developed	✓ -thinking about how to do it	✓ -thinking about how to do it
Balance affirmation and critique -affirmation -growth areas	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	✓ ✓
Evaluation includes discernment, listening to the Holy Spirit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation leads to action	✓	-limited	-not yet	-limited	-limited
Evaluation considers eschatological focus*	-not explicitly	-not explicitly	-not explicitly	-not explicitly	-not explicitly

*These two areas were not explicitly covered in the initial training session but were developed based on further study and reflection after the sessions.

Acknowledging Christ's Sovereignty

In each of the messages to the seven churches, Christ introduced himself in a way that made the hearer understand that Christ ruled supremely over the earth. The most explicit expression of the lordship of Christ among the case study participants was Hilltop Church. One of the criteria they developed related to worship declared "God is King and worthy of worship." They also voiced the idea that one of the desired behaviours in this regard would be they would be "centering our lives around the authority of God." The desired ethos in their congregational ministry was one that exalted Jesus as Lord as an exemplar worthy of emulation. In a somewhat comparable way, the mission statements for Base Camp and Garden View Church contained the notion of being "Christ-centered" and reflecting Christ to the world. While more subtle, these components of the mission statements are indicators that Christ is central to their thinking.

During the evaluation process, participants also expressed their submission to Christ more generally. For example, Garden View Church set aside time for church-wide prayer, fasting, and discernment in advance of the board sessions on ministry evaluation. While this preparation was not specifically planned in conjunction with the board sessions, this set apart time provides evidence that the pastor and congregation intentionally place themselves in a position to hear where God is leading. The sessions conducted with Grace Fellowship also had a strong spiritual tone. The opening and closing times of prayer went well beyond a perfunctory request for God to bless the sessions. In addition, several points of discussion during the session revolved around the importance of submitting to God. All case study participants demonstrated their willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit, which is another indicator of being willing

to submit to Christ. In summary, although the training session did not explicitly include a dialogue about focusing on Christ's lordship, each participant did demonstrate some evidence of this within the evaluation process they followed.

Evaluation is Context Specific

The second part that Christ modeled in his evaluation process involved a specific understanding about the context of each church. The text reveals that Christ walked *among* the churches (Rev 2:1), he *knew* their works and their particular circumstances intimately (Rev 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), and he *examined* the hearts and minds of the people (Rev 2:23). All five case study participants exhibited this characteristic of specificity. For the smaller congregations at the Pine Falls and Hilltop churches, members of the board were very familiar with all aspects of their church ministry. During their discussion they provided specific examples about what was going well and where more attention was needed. At Grace Fellowship, each deacon was also active in some area of ministry, which provided helpful contextual information during the evaluation session. It was also clear, however, that there was a difference of opinion among the group related to how well the church was doing. The elders, for example, felt things were going much better than the deacons. It appeared that the deacons were closer to the front-line ministry context, whereas the elders were more familiar with the leadership level in the church.

In addition to being familiar with ministry in general, the pastor at Garden View Church had initiated a church-wide discernment process prior to the evaluation. This congregational involvement provided a rich resource to supplement the board's

understanding about the condition of the church and to consider where God was already at work among the members of the congregation. At Base Camp Church, the executive leadership team used technology to facilitate their understanding about how things were going. In addition to weekly updates and analysis about attendance in various programs, the project management software utilized by the church allowed them to "hear" stories in real time. This team also made effective use of text messaging to be in touch with their front-line leaders for encouragement and support. As noted earlier, the board at this church is not involved in the evaluation process.

Evaluation is Credible, Authoritative, and Aligned

Christ called the seven churches to evaluate how things were going based on a credible process. The messages were credible because there was alignment between the evaluation criteria used and Christ's earlier instruction to them through various apostles and teachers. In addition, the process was credible because the message was given to a trusted prophetic servant to write down. Further, the person (or people) delivering the message to the congregation also needed a high degree of credibility. The principle here is that the process was seen as having authority and that the appropriate people were involved in the process.

Four of the five case study participants involved both the pastor and the board. In Pine Falls and Hilltop Church, there was only one board within the governance structure. These two churches clearly involved all the appropriate church leaders in their evaluation process. Garden View's governance structure included both a deacon and elder board. The main responsibility of the elder board is pastoral care while the deacon

board carries the responsibility for organizational evaluation. Although the board recognized their authority in this area, they also had plans to involve the elder board in some way in the future. During the session discussion, these leaders also outlined how important it was to them to involve more people in order to "be aware of what is actually going on."

Grace Fellowship's governance structure also consisted of a deacon board and a board of elders. In their case, two elders joined the deacon board for the ministry evaluation training and discussions. This case was also more complex because it was one of several campuses for the church. In a perfect world, it would have been advantageous to have more groups involved in the process. That being said, the Urban West Campus at Grace Fellowship also functions like a pilot project that may benefit the whole church in the long run.

The Base Camp Church lead pastors elected to involve their Executive Leadership Team in the evaluation sessions, but not their church board leaders. At the end of the session two, it was clear that this team was not responsible for making final decisions about the evaluation process or criteria—the lead pastors had merely requested their input into the process. The pastors reserved final decisions about the evaluation process for themselves. Though the deacon board was not involved in the initial process, the pastors are considering including them in the future. As a result, I am suggesting that this aspect of their evaluation process was partially accomplished.

As noted in chapter 2, broader communication to the entire congregation (and beyond) was also part of Christ's evaluation methodology. There was a blessing attached to all who heard the prophecy and listened to what the Holy Spirit was saying.

Pine Falls Church stood out among the case study participants as having implemented a credible communication process with their congregation. The congregation was updated on the process that the board had undertaken and then invited to participate in the discernment process. During the post-session follow-up with each pastor, it was clear that the other case study participants were not yet at the stage of being able to share how they involved other church leadership teams or members of their congregations.

Evaluation Balances Affirmation and Critique

Despite the unhealthy conditions that existed in some of the seven Asian churches, Christ was fair and balanced with his assessment, commending the churches wherever possible, yet also providing needed correction. The discussions that the case study participants had during the sessions tended to focus on weaknesses. The prioritized criteria emphasized the changes that needed to be made. That being said, there was an element of affirmation evident within the conversations around the tables, even though constructive critique occupied more time. Pine Falls had a clear sense that they had been faithful, even though they were a small congregation. Grace Fellowship recognized that they were very strong in biblical teaching. Like Pine Falls, Hilltop Church recognized that they had been faithfully serving, even though they were small. They also identified that they had cultivated a loving atmosphere within their congregation. The leaders at Base Camp Church were the most positive of all the participants. They considered themselves to be innovators and strong in terms of technology and infrastructure. They

had grown very quickly and were becoming influential in their city. They had developed a culture of evaluation and declared that they "choose not to tolerate the bad."

All case study participants identified areas for improvement. The leadership team at Pine Falls Church realized that connectedness and love was the most significant area for improvement. Base Camp Church was quick to identify gaps in their assumptions about how effective their small group leaders were at pastoring small group members—that they had a false sense of how well they were doing this this area. Base Camp Church also realized that they had not intentionally thought about how to balance bringing new Christians into leadership while ensuring that these new Christians were brought to a place of maturity. The Base Camp Church leadership team also understood that their strength—using systems and technology—could also be a weakness if they did not also embrace an ethic of love.

During the reflection and dialogue about the messages to the Sardinian and Philadelphian churches, the deacons at Grace Fellowship agreed that they needed to honestly consider how "alive" their congregation really was. They recognized that they needed to focus on the spiritual progress of the congregation, not just the health of their finances. Through the process of imagining what Christ would write to them, the board members of Hilltop Church sensed that they needed to focus more attention outward to their community and to be bolder.

Evaluation Facilitates Discernment

In the sessions, each group had to grapple with questions that challenged their current assumptions about how well they were actually doing. Decisions needed to be made

about the criteria to be used for evaluation and the priority that would be given to each one. All groups in this study experienced direction from the Holy Spirit as they engaged in the process of organizational evaluation. Some experienced this leading during the sessions; others sensed God's direction between sessions or after the sessions. The leadership team at Pine Falls recognized the voice of the Holy Spirit when one board member suggested an area that needed prioritization. There was a hush in the room. Then the pastor directed the team's attention toward the comment, identifying it as the Holy Spirit's leading. The other members of the team, including the consultant researcher, agreed that the Holy Spirit was directing and guiding. Later, at the congregational vision meeting, the Holy Spirit also brought congregational unity around the priority previously identified.

The leading of the Holy Spirit was also evident when one of the elders at Grace Fellowship warned about the danger of a consumer approach to worship. Again, the voice of the Holy Spirit was recognized following an examination of Scripture passages and during the group's reflective process. The words spoken seemed to be more than an authoritative human voice speaking and there was a clear consensus in the room evident through words of agreement and nodding of heads.

The leadership team at Base Camp Church experienced a similar phenomenon in their session when they realized that they had made assumptions about the biblical and pastoral competencies of their small group ministry leaders. The dialogue began as a result of the discussion about key influencers (Jezebel, Balaam) in the messages to the seven churches. This time, it was a question from the consultant that was a catalyst for

discernment. There was a summarizing statement, a pause, and then sounds of agreement around the table.

In contrast, Hilltop Church experienced the Holy Spirit's leading between sessions through the letters that each person wrote. Each person reflected individually about where the Holy Spirit was leading. As the group came together and heard the themes presented, there was unity among the group that the Holy Spirit was directing and guiding. For Garden View Church, the seeds planted during the training session were recognized sometime later. The group had brainstormed indicators of growth for various components of their mission statement. For one area, there was nothing listed but an empty flip chart paper. The void was noted, but there was no particular action at the time. Later, the pastor began to reflect about what was missing in their missional focus. As a new opportunity arose in that area, the pastor recognized it as direction from the Holy Spirit.

Evaluation Leads to Repentance and Action

In the messages to the seven churches, Christ issued a specific call to action when changes were required. Christ clearly identified the problem, called churches to repent or remain faithful, urged the churches to respond, and offered solutions for moving toward the end goal. The participants in the case study research were partially successful at moving from understanding and discernment to taking action. It is important to note that the amount of time between the last session and the follow-up with each pastor ranged from five to seven months, including the months of July and August, which are typically months when church boards are less active or consumed with fall ministry

preparation. One church was extremely successful at taking action as a result of their evaluation, while others took smaller steps or were still considering how to move forward.

The leadership team at Pine Falls Church was the most successful at moving beyond evaluation, analysis, and discernment to actually implementing changes. Almost immediately after the second session, Pastor Owen began an extended sermon series to lay the foundation for their highest priority evaluation criteria. The pastor and board moved forward with a congregational vision meeting three months after the second session to invite the congregation into the ministry evaluation process. Together, the congregation, board, and pastor decided to discontinue the community breakfasts that had been an important part of the outreach ministry of the church for the previous seven years and instead consider a new format for connecting with each other through small group ministry. This new ministry was launched three months later. As I reflect on the reason for their progress, I believe it was because there was a respected person who championed the change—Pastor Owen. In addition to his personal engagement and leadership, Pastor Owen clearly had a very positive relationship with his board and viewed them as crucial ministry partners. Although this leadership team did not originally have an established evaluation process, they were successful in developing specific ministry evaluation criteria, implementing changes, and establishing an ongoing evaluation process that suited their context.

Three churches in the study made some progress in terms of acting on the results of their evaluation process. Over the summer, the pastor at Grace Fellowship had asked some of the deacons to work with him to revamp their small group ministry to provide a

support structure that had stronger connection and accountability to a pastor. This structure was launched during the fall ministry season. Pastor David also intends to work with the board chair to continue to build the board's capacity in the area of organizational evaluation. The Hilltop Church leadership team decided to focus on creating a culture of invitation with respect to the use of their facility by community groups. As a beginning step, they initiated discussions with a Hispanic Bible study group to explore what a mutual relationship might look like. Pastor Deanna scheduled an additional board meeting to continue to further define an appropriate evaluation process and consider how to measure various initiatives. Pastor Deanna was also sensitive about engaging people in the change process at her church—she did not want to create a leadership culture that was solely driven by her. Garden View Church also took some initial steps to implement changes. This group had identified that it was not accomplishing a particular component of their mission statement—to reach people beyond their immediate community. A couple of months after the session Pastor Charlie was approached with an opportunity to merge another struggling church into the Garden View church family. Pastor Charlie recognized this as a way to be faithful to their mission and has initiated discussions with his leadership teams. The other church in the study, Base Camp Church, had not been able to return to the discussion about priorities and evaluation processes for their church. The main issue appeared to be timing. It had been a busy summer preparing for the launch of a new site.

Evaluation Keeps Long-term Missional Focus at the Forefront

The final element of Christ's evaluation process focused the attention of the seven churches on the long-term outcome of God's ultimate mission in the world. This focus gave the people hope in the midst of challenging circumstances as well as their own failures. It is important to note that the researcher did not specifically include this element of Christ's evaluation process in the training sessions. This aspect of Christ's evaluation was not mentioned or emphasized by participants during the sessions. The one exception was Hilltop Church. Their vision to be a "heaven on earth community," while not explicitly eschatological in nature, did communicate a future focus on God's coming kingdom.

Session Feedback Analysis

Approximately two months after the last training session, each church was asked to complete a feedback survey about the value of the training provided, the change in their attitude toward evaluating ministry, what next steps the training challenged them to consider, what they found particularly valuable about the training, and what suggestions they could offer to improve the sessions (Table 3.12).

Table 3.12
Case Studies: Session Feedback Analysis

	Pine Falls	Grace Fellowship	Base Camp	Hill Top	Garden View
Did training provide a biblical foundation that was relevant to ministry evaluation?	-yes -the approach Jesus took resonated with our board	-yes - framework aided in understanding and applying the evaluation process	-yes -training brought relevance to issues in today's society	-absolutely! -grounded approach biblically -provided concrete examples	-yes -helpful template to look at different issues
In what way(s) has this training changed your attitude about evaluating ministry?	-more positive view of evaluation -evaluation is part of discerning	-evaluation is a good and necessary process -deacons previously hesitant became more positive	-it served as a good reminder -it gave us a stronger biblical perspective on evaluation	-move beyond fault finding to being mission focused -evaluation can be an avenue for discernment	-value in hearing others -method helped to take some of the fear and intimidation out of the process
What new questions has this training challenged you to consider?	-discerning what God is calling us to do right now as a church	-how can the process be simplified and unified across all ministries? -how do we follow-up on action items?	-narrowing down some key areas of priority	-we need to prioritize -we need to be specific about the words we use	-making time on the agenda -consider how the church can influence community
What was valuable about this training?	-training gave us specific action steps to follow	-facilitator preparation & prayer -the mix of facilitator sharing and deacons contributing	-questions asked by facilitator -realize that there is the need for clearer evaluation criteria	-we did this together as a board -gaining clarity from an outside perspective	-identified gaps in ministry focus -identified gaps in educating the board about mission

All five case study participants indicated that they valued the biblical foundation offered by the training. For some, the approach that Christ employed provided a framework in understanding the motivation for evaluation as well as important steps in the evaluation process. For others, the criteria revealed in Rev 2–3 moved them beyond "traditional standard measurements of numbers and finances." Some churches mentioned that the preparatory devotional "provided some excellent opportunities for discussion." One church noted that the insights from these ancient churches brought relevance to issues they face today.

At the start of the training session, churches expressed a variety of potential concerns about ministry evaluation. Some feared that developing a process that was focused on the negative would lead to blaming, micro-management, or discouragement. Others were concerned about developing a system that was very controlling or inhibiting to the work of the Holy Spirit. The four case study participants who expressed some potential concerns about evaluation indicated that they had a more positive view of evaluation as a result of the training sessions. Notably, Pine Falls and Hilltop Church expressed that they now viewed the evaluation process as a potential avenue for discernment. Base Camp Church, who already had an established system of evaluation, indicated that the training reinforced some existing values and gave them a stronger biblical perspective.

The training sessions challenged the participants to consider where they should prioritize their efforts, which proved to be especially important for smaller churches that had fewer resources. The training also caused some churches to be more precise with their words, particularly as they described the specific missional outcomes and potential methods of measurement. Grace Fellowship, part of a multi-site church, wanted to consider how the process could be simplified and unified across all ministries.

Finally, the participant churches valued the training provided. The training helped Garden View Church recognized that there were some gaps in their ministry focus as well as their board education. Pine Falls Church developed some specific action steps to follow. Grace Fellowship appreciated the biblical foundation as well as the combination of teaching and active engagement with the deacons. And for Base Camp and Hilltop, the most valuable thing about the training was the clarity that was brought through an outside perspective.

Summary

There are several valuable observations gleaned from working with the five case study participants or—to follow Osmer's thinking about practical theology—from reflecting more deeply about what practices existed prior to the sessions and what occurred as a result of the training sessions. Most churches in this study, though generally positive about the idea of organizational evaluation, did initially express reservations about *how* the evaluation process would be conducted. By the end of the sessions, these leaders had a more positive, healthy, and biblical view of organizational evaluation. The participants specifically mentioned that they valued setting aside time for the work, having dialogue

with their colleagues, using the Bible as a foundation for evaluation, and focusing on the mission of the church.

The survey of Canadian Protestant churches revealed that one of the most significant barriers to conducting an organizational evaluation was a lack of understanding how to do it. This was also true for most of the case study participants. All churches in the case study component of this research project made progress in establishing or improving their organizational evaluation practices. With one exception, the churches in this study had either no specific evaluation process or an informal, loosely defined process. Christ's evaluation methodology in Rev 2–3 provided a biblical framework for the evaluation process that encouraged the participants to consider their specific context, engage with others, balance affirmation and critique, reflect and discern where God was leading, and move beyond analysis to action. It was evident that the consultant/facilitator played a key role in providing the content for this framework—the two elements discovered by the researcher following the sessions (and not included in the initial training) were not explicitly incorporated by the case study participants. In some ways, the consultant/facilitator functioned like those who actually delivered the messages to the seven churches on behalf of Christ and John.

Churches in the study also made notable progress with respect to the type of criteria they chose for organizational evaluation. All criteria chosen were anchored to the mission or purpose statements of the churches. These choices were influenced by the facilitator because the mission statement was intentionally used as a focal point during the discussions. In addition, while some churches still retained common activity measures (e.g., attendance, finances), the facilitation techniques of the researcher

assisted them in moving toward creating outcome descriptions or behaviours related to their criteria. Several leadership teams, as well as the consultant/facilitator, recognized that there was more work to do in this area.

All churches in the study identified several indicators from the messages to the seven churches that provided valuable evaluation criteria in their contemporary context. In addition, each case study participant prioritized one or more criteria that they felt were especially important to them. This act of prioritization was particularly important for smaller churches that had limited people resources. The issue of expressing love within members of the congregations emerged as a common priority among the case study participants. Larger churches were also concerned about influencers within their congregations, particularly at the leadership level in their small group ministries. Interestingly, the churches within this study did not explicitly consider the impact of external influencers in their final evaluation criteria. The churches in this study, while recognizing faithfulness or being a faithful witness as an important value, did not mention this criterion at all as a separate category. Appropriate engagement with culture was also mentioned rarely among the participants, even though the consultant/facilitator gave particular emphasis to this idea in the training sessions. Churches in this study also chose other criteria not mentioned in the messages to the seven churches including the traditional measures of financial health and attendance. Leadership was also of interest to most of the churches whether it related to board, small groups, or next generation leadership development.

The amount of time it takes to do an evaluation was identified as a common barrier by the survey participants. This barrier was also a constraining factor

experienced for several of the case study participants. Though many churches made considerable progress in identifying their criteria and some measurement indicators, several had made little action-oriented progress five to seven months after the sessions. The key to successful implementation appeared to be the whether or not there was a person who would champion the process on an ongoing basis.

The primary research from this chapter provides a rich source of information for theological reflection about the practice of organizational evaluation. I now transition to chapter 4, where I reflect on the various components of this research project and propose several innovations from the perspectives of board leadership teams and a governance consultant.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND A REVISED PROPOSAL

A fundamental practice of the discipline of practical theology is critical and theological reflection that involves correlating theology with practices and experiences.[1] This reflection does not merely "apply" a theological idea to practice, but rather it involves a serious consideration of both theology and practice together. In this chapter, I reflect theologically on various components of this research project, including the literature review, primary research (case studies, online survey), Scripture, and experience (insights gained through the practice of board consulting activities). I propose several innovations for the practice of organizational evaluation for church board leadership teams within the local church. Following this, I present a revised training approach for organizational evaluation as a result of this research project. Artefacts developed during the research are also described.

Organizational Evaluation in the Church Boardroom

The content in this section includes two perspectives: theological reflection about the practice of organizational evaluation by pastors and board members and theological reflection related to the role of the consultant/facilitator working with church board leadership teams. In terms of the actual practice of organizational evaluation by church leaders, I posit that Christ's evaluation methodology validates the practice of organizational evaluation and that it is most appropriate that the nature of organizational evaluation in the church be viewed as Spirit-led discernment. I also propose several suggestions that directly relate to the role of the consultant/facilitator. These suggestions

[1] Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 30.

include changing the terminology of organizational evaluation to ministry evaluation; viewing the pastor as a catalyst for change; advocating for an intentional, integrated evaluation process; connecting individual evaluation criteria to the overarching purpose of the church as a faithful witness; understanding contextual factors of clients; being Spirit-led; and being a trusted fellow labourer. Each of these are explored below.

Christ's Evaluation Methodology Validates Organizational Evaluation

With few exceptions, Christian governance, pastoral, and secular non-profit resources on organizational evaluation contain little specificity about how to undertake an organizational evaluation *process*. The need for evaluation is widely accepted, but the method of effective evaluation is largely undefined.[2] In addition, the online research survey revealed that the most significant barriers to conducting an organizational evaluation were that church leaders were not sure how to go about doing it, that evaluation was not a priority for how the board spent their time, or that the board had no interest in conducting an evaluation. A board's lack of interest or priority for evaluation may indicate that boards do not view the process of organizational evaluation as valid.

Christ's evaluation methodology showcased in Rev 2–3 validates the practice of organizational evaluation. The evaluation of these first-century churches provides concrete examples of how Christ conducts unique assessments in varied conditions and circumstances. Case study participants were able to identify with various strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the seven churches. When case study participants observed

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[2] Hester, "Practicing Governance," 77.

how Christ encouraged, celebrated, and disciplined the churches in this biblical text, they were empowered to follow the honest, yet loving, posture that Christ modelled.

The evaluation methodology modelled in the messages to the seven churches also provides a Christ-centric pathway that allows pastors and board members to view organizational evaluation as something that is not only necessary, but also healthy for the church. The feedback from the case study sessions revealed that all five case study participants valued the biblical foundation offered by the training. There was also a sense that this biblical foundation provided validity for the practice of organizational evaluation. Put differently, because of the example of Christ's evaluation methodology, church leaders in the case study groups felt more assured that an organizational evaluation was both important and necessary.

Organizational Evaluation as Spirit-led Discernment

One of the most striking epiphanies of this research project resulted from feedback received from two pastors in the case studies who suggested that the entire process of evaluation really functioned like a discernment process. One of the steps in Christ's evaluation methodology is the urgency to listen to what the Spirit is saying—to discern if or how the message is applicable. In preparing for the case study sessions, I reserved time for discernment and prayer near the end of the training session. As I reflect on placing discernment at the end, I likely did so automatically because the call to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying to the churches came at the end of each message. However, this direction was an artificial compartmentalization of the discernment practice. The feedback from these two pastors has caused me to reconsider the entire

evaluation process as discernment, which I believe is a more holistic versus perfunctory approach. One needs discernment to understand the specific context, develop a credible process, see areas for affirmation and growth, and consider what action to take. Discernment, then, is not just an element of evaluation, but a practice to be embraced during each step of the evaluation process.

Ministry Evaluation: Nuanced Evaluation Terminology

As previously discussed, the biblical foundation of Christ's evaluation methodology provides credibility for the practice of organizational evaluation. Another way to add credibility is by ensuring that the terminology employed does not detract from the theological trajectory of the practice. In some ways, the term *organizational evaluation* is appropriate and helpfully emphasizes that the evaluation is broad in scope—this is not an evaluation of a single program or the performance review of the pastor. The process of organizational evaluation inquires whether the organization as a whole is achieving what it should. Is the organization fulfilling its intended mission and purpose? However, the term *organizational evaluation* is not a theological term. It originates in the non-profit and business sectors. For some, this connection with secular management concepts is concerning. Stated differently, the term organizational evaluation does not contain any element that would be commonly used in the church nor is it connected with biblical or theological themes.

In the biblical foundations chapter of this project I argued that the various evaluation criteria that Christ used related to the overarching need to be a faithful witness. These churches were being evaluated on how faithfully they were carrying out

the mission that God had given to them. Though the evaluation criteria addressed specific areas (teaching, serving, loving, etc.), each criterion also related to the mission and ministry being carried out by the church. It seems reasonable that new terminology which embraces this ministry aspect would be appropriate and perhaps would serve to reduce reluctance or hesitation on the part of ministry leaders. I propose that *ministry evaluation* is an appropriate term that is fitting for the local church context.[3] The term ministry evaluation still connotes a broader perspective, but it does not have the secular baggage associated with the term *organizational evaluation.*

The Pastor as a Catalyst for Change

The experience from the case study component of this research has galvanized my view that ministry evaluation and change is more likely to succeed if the lead pastor embraces the role of lead catalyst and change agent. While I believe that the pastor and board need to work together as respected partners in this process of ministry evaluation, it is often the pastor who is best positioned to provide leadership in this area.[4] In the case studies, the pastors were pivotal in initiating approval for the sessions, facilitating the consultant's preparation, leading discussions between sessions, and influencing implementation priorities. The degree to which pastors gave their time and energy to these tasks made a significant difference in how far the board leadership teams progressed.

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[3] The researcher also considered the term *mission evaluation.* While the word *mission* has advantages in that it brings focus to the mission of the church, it also is a word commonly used in the business context, which may raise similar objections as the term organizational evaluation.

[4] I make this statement based not only on the case study experiences, but also from my experience as a consultant researcher. The researcher acknowledges that there are also cases where the board chair provides primary leadership.

Pastors also have a unique avenue for encouraging the heart-change that is a requirement of Christ's evaluation methodology—preaching. Preaching was mentioned by several of the case study churches as a method for supporting change. The pastor at Pine Falls preached an extended series on loving others to support the highest priority of encouraging greater love among members of the congregation. The pastor at Garden View preached a sermon series on contemporary idols and appropriate engagement with culture. Grace Fellowship and Base Camp Church also discussed the importance of preaching in terms of supporting change in the wider congregation. This understanding will influence the way that I approach and coach pastors as they embark on ministry evaluation.

An Intentional, Integrated Evaluation Process

In one of the online survey questions, I asked participants to describe their current organizational evaluation processes. Some of the language used in this survey question included asking whether their process was formal or informal. As I coded the open-ended responses for this question, I realized that formal and informal were not good descriptors, particularly when considering different sized churches. In his book, *Small Church Essentials*, Karl Vaters argues that smaller churches have different priorities and that they tend to "prioritize relationships, culture, and history." This priority on relationships often favours a less formal process. In contrast, larger churches tend to be more formal in terms of their structure and processes.[5] In the messages to the seven churches we see a flagship church (Ephesus) as well as churches with little power

[5] Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 61.

(Smyrna, Philadelphia). Regardless of their size or influence, Christ called all of them to seriously and intentionally reflect upon their condition.

Reflecting on Christ's call to the churches in Asia Minor as well as the relational aspect of small churches, I conclude that different terminology vis-á-vis formality should be embraced. A process that is *informal* can sometimes be misconstrued as loose or ineffective, whereas a more *formal* process can sometimes be viewed as having better quality and results (which is not necessarily guaranteed), or perhaps it can even be viewed as one that stifles the work of the Spirit. My proposal is to adopt the language of an *intentional* evaluation process. Intentionality involves two things. First, intentionality suggests that board leadership teams need to turn their minds toward the subject matter in a serious way. It is not about how formal or informal the analysis is, but rather that it is purposeful and not an exercise that is passed over lightly. One church board may have the resources to conduct surveys, focus groups, or community research. Another church board may draw on the existing relationships and experiences of their board members within the congregation as a less formal input into the evaluation process. Both formal and informal approaches are turning their attention toward evaluation in a serious way.

Second, intentionality implies a regular process that is integrated into the natural rhythm of the board's work. It is not an accidental process. A specific recommendation that I am making based on learning from the case studies is to conduct an organizational evaluation on an annual basis at a time that allows reflection and planning before the next ministry and budget year begins. In this way, the evaluation is embedded into regular practices of the board.

A Written Evaluation Process

The writer of the book of Revelation was instructed to write down what he heard and saw (Rev 1:11) so that the messages could be delivered to the seven churches and beyond. As I reflect on this aspect of writing in the book of Revelation, I considered how writing preserves what was said more accurately and how it provides a medium for passing along that information to others. If we also consider that the evaluation process itself is a method for discerning how the Holy Spirit is leading, the value of writing the evaluation methodology for future reference and training is elevated even further.

During the sessions with the case study participants, I facilitated group discussion in order to guide them toward defining their evaluation process. As outlined in the artefact section below, I am proposing to devote more time in the training sessions to more clearly define the evaluation process—how it was to be done, Scripture that informed the process, the timing of the process, and who would be involved. I would then document this process so that it could be included in a governance guide or governance policy manual, if applicable. This act of writing down the process would then be a resource not only to the existing team, but also to new board members in the future.

The Overarching Purpose of the Church as a "Faithful Witness"

In the case study sessions, I emphasized the evaluation criteria that Christ employed: love, faithfulness, fruitfulness, attentiveness to culture, attentiveness to influencers, and attentiveness to false teaching. Upon further reflection, I believe that these criteria must also be connected to an over-arching purpose. Why should they exhibit love? Why

should they be attentive to culture? What is the outcome that Christ expects from his Church? I posit that each of these criteria is connected to the ultimate outcome of being a faithful witness to God's purpose and mission in the world. This connection is critical because it would be easy to separate markers of success from the mission of God.

This call to be a faithful witness like Christ may be illustrated with two examples. In the literature review, most resources consider the Great Commission and the Great Commandments as orienting Scripture for evaluation criteria. However, these criteria could get separated from the higher purpose of being a faithful witness. For example, without a strong connection to the overall mission of God, the making of a disciple could be reduced to someone who is merely spiritually mature in terms of understanding Scripture and serving in the internal programs of the church, instead of someone who is also externally focused. This tendency toward inward focus was something I noticed during the case study sessions. Similarly, if we separate the criterion of loving others from this idea of being a faithful witness to God's character, we risk being perceived by those outside the church as merely "good" people. We may not draw their attention to God.

This idea of being a faithful witness necessarily calls the church to appropriate engagement with contemporary culture, which seemed to be a gap in both the online survey research as well as the case studies. This message of appropriate cultural engagement, and its connection to the overarching theme of being a faithful witness, appears to be an area where further growth is needed.

Deeper Understanding of Evaluation Context

One of the elements of Christ's evaluation process was to understand the specific context of the church. The text reveals that Christ walked *among* the churches (Rev 2:1), he *knew* their works and their particular circumstances intimately (Rev 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), and he *examined* the hearts and minds of the people (Rev 2:23). In the case study training sessions, I encouraged the participants to embrace this practice. Upon reflection, I recognize that I also need to heed this message to a greater degree in my role as a consultant who facilitates these discussions.

To decide whether or not a church was a good candidate for this research, I considered whether the church had a mission or purpose statement, whether there were reasonably healthy relationships between the pastor and board members, whether the church was in reasonable health financially, and whether the leadership team desired to engage in the process of organizational evaluation. However, there are additional areas that need to be considered. For example, what is the role of the various people in the room? In one case, I did not recognize that the group involved in the discussion was limited to providing input for the pastors. Had I not assumed that all were participating in the full process and instead explored how each person would be contributing before the session, I believe I would have been able to design the sessions in such a way that would have facilitated more progress. Related to understanding the roles of people in the room is clarifying power dynamics that may exist. In one case study, it became evident that the elders who had been invited to participate were highly respected and that their opinions carried significant weight. There was hesitancy on the part of others to participate at first. Though I adapted my facilitation techniques midstream to engage all

the players, it would have been preferable to understand the power dynamics in advance. As a result of this reflection, I have expanded the pre-session work, which is outlined in the revised proposal for ministry evaluation below.

The Importance of Being "In the Spirit" as a Consultant/Facilitator

When the writer of Revelation received his vision and instructions from Christ, he was "ἐν πνεύματι" or in the Spirit.[6] John Christopher Thomas explains that the Holy Spirit enabled John to observe and interpret in a supernatural way. He writes: "the Spirit is the means by which the revelation of Jesus Christ takes place. Furthermore, it is in this state that John sees things, hears things, tastes things, touches things, and interprets things."[7] As I reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit for the writer of Revelation, I see parallels for the role of the consultant/facilitator.

Although I regularly pray for my clients and for my preparation for each session I lead, I desire to make more space for the Holy Spirit to guide observations and interpretations. For example, the questions that I ask, whether prepared in advance or asked in the moment, may help my clients to see and interpret things differently or open up a new pathway for consideration. The Spirit can also be at work as I summarize what has been said, propose areas of agreement, or suggest ways to move forward. I admit that I sometimes emphasize my professional preparation as primary. Have I chosen the right facilitation techniques? Does the presentation flow? Are the equipment and supplies ready? This phrase, "ἐν πνεύματι," reminds me that I must be cultivating a

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[6] Osborne, *Revelation*, 82.
[7] Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 100.

discerning posture and be listening for the voice of the Spirit in all these areas. The preparation is not unimportant, but it is the Spirit who leads and reveals.

Consultant as Trusted Fellow Labourer

Several commentators mention the importance of the connection of the writer of Revelation to his audience, and I perceive that a similar connection is important with my consulting clients. John is viewed as both a "brother" and as someone who is a participant in what they are going through.[8] John "builds rapport with his readers by drawing on what he and they have in common."[9] During the case study portion of this research, I noticed that the pastors and board members valued three qualifications that I possess: being a mature Christian, having professional and practical experience in church board leadership, and having a rigorous theological foundation through my education.

I am a fellow believer—a "sister" in the faith. As such, my clients and I are both working to advance God's kingdom. There is an expectation that proposed processes will be facilitated in a way that reflects Christ. In addition to being a "sister" in the faith, I have practical experience serving as a church board member and professional experience preparing training materials for board leadership teams. The case study participants appreciated learning what others had done and benefited from my practical experience as a board member and as someone who has also struggled with how to do organizational evaluation well. In addition, my theological education allowed me to build rapport with the pastor. This reflection about John's rapport within the community

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[8] Archer, *I was in the Spirit*, 129; Osborne, *Revelation*, 79; Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 98.
[9] Koester, *Revelation*, 250.

has reminded me that I have unique experiences—professionally, experientially, and academically—and has reinforced my own conviction and calling to this ministry to church board leaders.

Revised Proposal and Research Artefacts

This research project included a review of literature, the development of a biblical foundation for ministry evaluation, the exploration of the practice of organizational evaluation, and theological reflection. Based on these inputs, I now offer a revised proposal for ministry evaluation from the perspective of the consultant/facilitator. These revisions include additional pre-session activities as well as updated content and format for the training sessions. The section concludes by providing a brief description of the artefacts produced as a result of this research project.

Pre-Session Activities

Pre-session activities include all the steps that are undertaken before the training sessions actually begin, including approaching potential clients and planning the sessions with the pastor or board chair. Given the potential hesitancy about conducting ministry evaluation noted above, it will be important to market these sessions effectively by including information about the biblical foundation for ministry evaluation as well as a reference to the step-by-step methodology based on Christ's evaluation of the seven churches in Revelation. The church board devotional artefact and infographic about the online survey results are solid content pieces that will contribute to the credibility of my work. Referrals and testimonials from clients will also build rapport.

As I prepare the written proposal for the consulting work, I will also consider the context of the church in an expanded way. In addition to the usual documentation requested (financial statements, board minutes, mission statement, board policy manual, previous evaluations), I will press further to identify a person who will champion the process. This person will likely be the pastor or board chair. Together we will develop a draft timeline for the project that dovetails with other board time commitments. I will also ask questions in order to understand any power dynamics that exist within board relationships or between different leadership teams (e.g., elders and deacons), ensuring that the various accountability structures at the church are engaged at appropriate times in the process.

Another area for deeper examination of the context is the church's mission or purpose statement. The key is to understand whether it is connected to a biblical view of mission. It may be necessary to offer pretraining on creating an effective mission statement, since mission is a critical anchoring point to the evaluation process. It will also be important to determine to what degree the mission statement informs current ministry activities of the church. Is the mission statement filed away as an exercise that was completed long ago, or is it informing all church activities? Is it a statement that is "owned" by the pastor, board, and congregation? The purpose behind asking these questions is to determine whether there is additional work to be done before evaluation takes place.

A final step in the pre-session stage of the engagement is to understand both the hopes and the concerns of the participants relative to ministry evaluation. Are there any experiences from the past that need to be understood? Are there specific situations that

the church board leaders wish to avoid? Is there reconciliation that needs to occur? This exploration before the session and at the beginning of training provides a way for people to share their concerns with the entire group.

Training Sessions on Ministry Evaluation

Based on the experiences of this research project as well as theological reflection, I propose several revisions to the training sessions on ministry evaluation, including emphasizing Christ's evaluation methodology, facilitating a more advanced identification of evaluation criteria and measures, and planning for ministry evaluation implementation. These areas are outlined below.

Most of the case study participants were not able to complete all of the elements in the process during the two three-hour sessions. In addition, I felt the teams would have benefited from having additional time to discuss or think about various aspects between the sessions. The revised training plan includes three two-hour sessions with one or two months between sessions. The first session provides the biblical foundation for evaluation and allows for general principles to be formed. The second session is devoted to criteria selection. The final session guides the board in developing an ongoing evaluation process and a detailed implementation plan. In addition to the in-person sessions, follow-up coaching calls would be scheduled every four months for the first year with the pastor and/or project champion. While these revised sessions provide the process for moving toward full implementation, the experience from the case studies has also reminded me that it often takes time and practice to fully embrace a new way of

doing things. It will be important to manage expectations and to celebrate small changes along the way.

In terms of the content of the training sessions, I propose a greater emphasis on each element in the seven steps of Christ's evaluation methodology—this content was not fully developed at the time I was providing this training for the case study participants. Updated content areas include the acknowledgement of Christ's authority over everything, involving reputable people in the process, the possibility of repentance as part of the action plan, and the focus on God's coming kingdom. The entire evaluation exercise will be framed as a discernment process. One area that was lacking in the case study training was planning for implementation. The third session in the revised training will include group collaboration on a six-month action plan, outlining key elements of the evaluation process for inclusion in the board policy manual, and discussing about how to share the results of evaluation with others in the congregation.

Research Artefacts

A significant output of this research includes several artefacts—items that will be useful in my consulting practice as I seek to foster a biblically-informed practice of ministry evaluation with church board leadership teams. These artefacts include an infographic summary of the online research, a church board devotional resource, three presentations for client consulting, five case studies, a template for communicating results, and a template for creating an action plan. These are discussed in turn below.

Research Survey Infographic Summary

Creating a well-designed, scannable summary of the research findings is one of the best ways to communicate key findings.[10] This survey artefact includes a concise summary of key research findings, background information about the survey participants, and graphical representations of key insights obtained from the research findings.[11] The main message of this content piece is "There is still more work to be done." One of the key findings of this research is that church leaders are unsure how to go about doing an organizational evaluation. This artefact includes a link to a free devotional leadership resource to assist them in taking some first steps.

This summary of findings was shared with all denominational and umbrella groups who distributed the original survey on January 3, 2020. This resource was also shared through my blog, website, and social media channels.

Church Board Devotional Resource

A second artefact of this research project is an eight-session board devotional resource.[12] This devotional resource encourages pastors and church board leaders to explore Christ's evaluation of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Scripture readings, contextual information, and reflection questions are provided to facilitate discussion among church leadership teams. For each of the seven churches, Christ's praises and exhortations are examined. The reflection questions assist leaders in considering practical application of the material. In addition, this resource includes an outline of

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[10] In my previous employment with the Canadian Council of Christian Charities, content that shared what others in the community were doing was very popular.

[11] This resource may be downloaded at fivesmoothstones.ca/research.

[12] This resource may be downloaded at fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional.

Christ's evaluation method, which will provide preliminary guidance for leadership teams in their own evaluation processes. While this guidance is not all-encompassing, it will provide a free, helpful resource.

Supporting Presentations for Three Consulting Sessions

Based on the experience with the case study participants, I have reorganized the training sessions into three parts: biblical foundations for ministry evaluation; developing evaluation criteria; and developing an evaluation process, measures, and reporting. The first session provides the social context for the messages to the seven churches and engages leadership teams in an interactive session that helps them to discover the evaluation method and criteria Christ uses. The second session briefly reviews material presented in session one and facilitates conversations about evaluation criteria. The third session guides the participants in developing their ministry evaluation process as well as measures or indicators to be used. This last session also facilitates the formulation of a six-month implementation plan.

Case Studies

The primary research from the five congregations in this study has been formatted into five case studies. These artefacts may be used in the context of a client engagement as an additional way to engage board leadership teams in conversation about ministry evaluation. Some adults learn more effectively through discussion versus a lecture type format. These case studies may also be used in conjunction with other training sessions to be developed by the researcher for use in Bible college or seminary courses.

Creating an Action Plan Template

In the case study research, I recognized that some leadership teams would benefit from an action plan template—a planning tool that would help them to be clear about the next steps in their process. The questions in the template encourage teams to consider what needs to be done, what additional information or resources are needed, who will complete various tasks, who else needs to be involved, and when the work should be completed. By introducing this template, I hope to generate a sustained momentum.

Communicating Evaluation Results Template

In the prologue to the messages to the seven churches in Revelation, there is a blessing upon both the one who reads and the one who listens to the words of the messages (Rev 1:3). Scholars agree that the book of Revelation would probably have been delivered to the congregation within the context of a worship service.[13] Christ's evaluation was meant for a larger audience. In keeping with this idea, I encourage church leadership teams to consider how their evaluation results should be communicated to a wider audience. This template encourages leaders to consider who should be involved (staff, lay leaders, congregation, other) as well as questions to help them prepare (e.g., What information should they receive? When should this information be provided? Who is responsible to deliver the communication?).

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[13] Aune, *Revelation*, lxxii; Thomas, *The Apocalypse*, 10; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 123; Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, 3; Osborne, *Revelation*, 57.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter has outlined several innovations and improvements for the practice of organizational evaluation. The evaluation methodology in the messages to the seven churches validates the practice of ministry evaluation and provides a Christ-centric pathway for the practice that may be followed in both large and small church contexts. In addition, the entire process of ministry evaluation is repositioned as a Spirit-led discernment process. New terminology—ministry evaluation—is proposed in order to remove barriers that may prevent church leaders from embracing this practice.

Several improvements noted in this chapter relate to the way a consultant/facilitator supports the board leadership team through the ministry evaluation process. These improvements include promoting the evaluation process as intentional, documenting the evaluation process to retain learning, being attentive to the importance of connecting evaluation criteria to the overarching outcome of being a faithful witness, and expanding pre-session preparation. This chapter concluded by outlining a revised proposal for the ministry evaluation training sessions, including an overview of artefacts developed during this project.

CONCLUSION

Board leadership teams play a very significant role in many Canadian Protestant churches, yet theological resources for the essential work and ministry of board members is often lacking. This researcher's keen desire is to call Christians around the board tables of churches and Christian ministries to integrate biblical theology and practice. This project represents a beginning contribution to the practice of ministry evaluation around the church board table. This concluding section highlights the findings of this research and identifies several areas for further theological development and research arising from the project.

Resources are Still Developing

Many of the governance resources examined in the literature review do a stellar job of educating board members about the fiduciary nature of church board work; however, the topic of ministry evaluation is underdeveloped both methodologically and theologically. Few resources written for church board leaders provide a detailed treatment of a process for ministry evaluation or a robust integration of Scripture and theology in proposed evaluation frameworks. Many of these resources borrow liberally from secular concepts, but do not necessarily include critical theological reflection regarding their use. On a positive note, some of these governance resources are beginning to emphasize mission accomplishment and the importance of considering outcomes in addition to activity measures.

The literature on ministry evaluation for pastoral leaders recognizes that the previous metrics of offering and attendance are insufficient indicators of ministry

success. Most of these resources consider the Great Commission and the Great Commandments as orienting Scripture for their evaluation criteria. The criteria of fruitfulness and faithfulness are also evident in some resources. Importantly, a few of these resources advocate for incorporating discernment into the evaluative process. Despite the positive developments in the theory, this segment of the literature is underdeveloped in terms of outlining a process for ministry evaluation, offering practical ways to assess progress (measurement tools), considering the challenges for small churches, and promoting collaborative engagement with church board leaders.

Non-profits, like churches, have struggled to consistently implement an effective organizational evaluation process. However, non-profit resources provide some important theoretical contributions that could be considered in the local church context. Where church literature focuses generally on mission, non-profit literature pushes further, using the mission statement as an orienting framework for segmentation and the development of specific indicators. Moreover, non-profit resources put forward the concept of a measurement system that includes prioritizing indicators, collecting information, as well as reporting and communicating results. Non-profit sources also advocate for a positive board culture that embraces curiosity, learning, forthright conversation, and change.

Ministry Evaluation Needs to be Strengthened

Primary research conducted with pastors and board members provides several key insights about the current practice of ministry evaluation in Canadian Protestant churches. Only one-third of participants evaluate ministry at least annually, with small

churches being significantly more likely to say that they rarely or never evaluate ministry. This lack of regularity with respect to ministry evaluation may be related to several barriers that make evaluation difficult—that leaders are not sure how to conduct an evaluation, that there is not enough time to evaluate, and that there is lack of clarity around mission and purpose. These findings indicate that there is perhaps a lack of understanding about the importance of ministry evaluation, hence the lower prioritization relative to other matters. This research makes it evident that pastors and board members need practical resources that outline a clear evaluation method.

In addition to weakness in terms of the evaluation process, pastors and board members struggle to identify appropriate evaluation criteria. Slightly more than half of the participants either did not have specific ministry evaluation criteria or indicated that they need to make more progress in this area. Churches that did establish criteria are typically using activity-oriented measures (e.g., how many in attendance, how many people led to Christ, what percentage of attendees are engaged in ministry, offerings) as opposed to outcome-oriented criteria. Churches and board members need further assistance in clearly connecting criteria being monitored with their mission. The results from the work with the case study congregations also indicate that more work is needed to connect evaluation criteria clearly to the idea of the church as a faithful witness and participant in God's mission and coming eschatological kingdom.

Results from this research survey show that the biblical passages mentioned by survey participants are related primarily to evaluation criteria, as opposed to how the evaluation process should be undertaken. These results indicate that a biblically

informed approach to the process of ministry evaluation would fill a gap in both the literature and practice.

The Messages to the Seven Churches Provide a Relevant Paradigm

The messages to the seven churches in Asia were prophetic calls to each church to be attentive to their spiritual condition, to stay focused on their mission, and to engage appropriately with their culture. The purpose of the messages was to encourage those who had been faithful and to awaken others to the seriousness of their situation. They were called to be churches that were a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

Within these messages Christ set out various criteria for evaluation as well as an evaluation process methodology. Christ brought the churches back to first principles by exhorting them to practice love, maintain a faithful witness, and produce fruitful service. Christ also warned them about the dangers of assimilating with culture as well as the importance of being attentive and diligent about false teachers and influencers within their churches.

These messages also included a process for ministry evaluation. Christ's evaluation methodology follows the literary form of the letters and includes acknowledgement of Christ's sovereignty, the importance of context specific evaluation, the authoritative and aligned evaluation, the balanced approach of commendation and exhortation, the call to action, the practice of discernment, and the focus on the long-term mission of God.

Case Study Churches Made Progress Using Paradigm

The evaluation methodology modelled in the messages to the seven churches provides a Christ-centric pathway that allows pastors and board members to view organizational evaluation as something that is not only necessary, but also healthy for the church. All five churches in the case study component of this research project made progress in establishing or improving their ministry evaluation practices. An important contribution of pastoral feedback was that the entire process of ministry evaluation could be reframed as a discernment exercise.

Churches in these case studies also made notable progress with respect to the type of criteria they chose for ministry evaluation. All criteria chosen were anchored to the mission or purpose statements. In addition, while some churches still retained common activity measures (e.g., attendance, finances), the facilitation techniques of the researcher assisted them in moving toward creating outcome descriptions or behaviours related to their criteria. All churches in the study identified several indicators from the messages to the seven churches that provided valuable evaluation criteria in their contemporary context. Additional reflection following the sessions also revealed the importance of connecting all evaluation criteria to the over-arching purpose of being a faithful witness. This nuance has been incorporated and emphasized in revised training material. Christ's call to be a faithful witness is a particularly relevant message for the contemporary church.

Areas for Further Research and Resource Development

Within a project such as this one, there is necessarily a limit to the scope of the work that can be completed. There are many areas that could be expanded. This section identifies areas for further research and resource development. Some areas relate to the actual practice of ministry evaluation. Others are more general in nature and relate to the ministry of the governing board of the church.

Faithful Witness: Appropriate Engagement with Culture

In the literature review, research survey, and case studies, very little attention was given to the idea of appropriate engagement with culture. Most sources that do mention external engagement consider how the church serves others or how the church can influence its culture. The case study participants acknowledged the tension between church and culture in the messages to the seven churches; however, this area received relatively little attention in their final evaluation matrixes. As the Canadian church continues to move toward the margins in a post-Christendom culture, this area will need further development.

Missional Clarity

Mission is a key anchoring point for ministry evaluation. If the mission of the church is not articulated clearly, confusion is likely to arise about the importance of desired outcomes or initiatives that are undertaken. As a result, the evaluation process may become more difficult because competing ideas about "success" may be unresolved. The results of the research survey suggest that small churches are significantly less likely

than larger churches to have a mission or purpose statement. This area of missional clarity is an area for further development, specifically for smaller churches.

Accessible Tools are Needed

It is likely that one of the reasons the church has emphasized activity measures is because it is relatively easy to implement. Now that churches are beginning to focus on outcomes, which are more qualitative in nature, a new set of tools is needed. Two tools that have been used in the profit and non-profit sectors include the Balanced Scorecard and Theory of Change. These tools may offer avenues for further reflection; however, these tools add a level of complexity, and adoption would likely be more challenging in a small church context. One tool that is very promising is David Grant's proposal to develop assessment rubrics to describe desired behaviours and to use these rubrics to more objectively consider whether or not progress is being made.[1] This tool has much potential, particularly when combined with a discernment process. The practice of ministry evaluation would be enriched by research and theological reflection related to evaluation tools and how they may be appropriately used in the church.

Pastoral Training for Small Group Leaders

Several churches in Rev 2–3 were warned about being attentive to key influencers (Jezebel, Balaam) in their congregations. The two larger churches in the case study portion of this research recognized that small group ministry leaders were key influencers and that more attention should be given to equipping them well. In

[1] Grant, *Social Profit Handbook*, 45–46.

particular, Base Camp church saw their small group leaders as lay leaders who pastor small groups of people on their behalf. With respect to ministry evaluation, there is room for further development of specific evaluation criteria for small group leaders. There may also be room for the development of theological resources to equip these leaders for this delegated pastoral role.

Accessible Theological Resources for Church Board Leaders

There is a phrase that that is often heard in church consulting circles that was also expressed in some of the survey participant responses—that the church board is to be most concerned with the "business" or fiduciary aspects of the church. While it is true that church boards typically approve budgets and consider legal ramifications, this phrase smacks of a sacred-secular dualism that is unhealthy. In my view, the work of the church board is ministry and should be built upon a strong theological foundation.

During my research on the literature review component of this project, comparably few theologically robust resources were marketed to church board leaders than to pastors. The church board leader could be better resourced in this regard. The board leadership teams in this research project were very receptive to the biblical evaluation paradigm proposed. This positive response toward biblical and theological resources for the work of the board is also consistent with the researcher's professional experience. There is a need for concise, theologically rich, reasonably priced resources. The price accessibility would be particularly important for small churches.

Additional Research for Underrepresented Demographics

The participants in the research survey were predominantly male between the ages of forty and sixty-nine. As a result of these age and gender characteristics, the perspective on ministry evaluation in this research project may not accurately reflect the experiences of younger leaders or female leaders. Base Camp church, who had a young leadership team, had already embraced ministry evaluation as a positive practice. Additional research would be beneficial in more clearly understanding the needs of younger leaders.

This research survey, while broad enough to provide a research-informed understanding of Canadian ministry evaluation practices, does not represent all major Protestant denominational traditions. This research also did not segment results by different cultural groups or include an understanding about ministry evaluation in Quebec. Additional research in each of the above areas would expand and enrich the understanding of ministry evaluation.

Final Thoughts

In the messages to these seven churches, Christ provides a paradigm for evaluation that is relevant for contemporary pastors and church board leaders, no matter what their circumstance. Christ addresses flagship churches, like Ephesus; small, faithful churches, like Smyrna and Philadelphia; and churches that are living on past glories, like Sardis. Christ encourages the faithful churches who are suffering, like Pergamum; and churches who have made great progress, like Thyatira. Christ promises to come and be present

with those who will humble themselves and listen to his voice, even when they have really gone astray, like Laodicea.

Christ is still calling his church to be his faithful witness to the world today. To these churches I echo Christ's words, "If you can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying."

APPENDIX 1: ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

A Survey About Ministry Evaluation in the Canadian Protestant Church

In this survey, I hope to learn how boards and pastors within Canadian Protestant denominations conduct organizational evaluations of church ministry and how board members and pastors are using theological principles in this work.
An organizational evaluation looks at how well the church as a whole is doing at fulfilling its overall mission. (This is not the performance review of the pastor.)

In this survey, the terminology of "pastor" is used in the survey questions. This term is meant to include other titles, such as minister, clergy, and priest. Similarly, this survey uses the term church board or church board member, which would include other titles such as deacons, elders, overseers, directors, session members, or wardens.

1. Where is your church located?
   - Alberta
   - British Columbia
   - Manitoba
   - New Brunswick
   - Newfoundland and Labrador
   - Nova Scotia
   - Ontario
   - Prince Edward Island
   - Quebec
   - Saskatchewan
   - Northwest Territories
   - Nunavut
   - Yukon
   - Outside of Canada
   - Prefer not to say, but located in Canada

Show if located outside of Canada in Q1.
Thank you for your willingness to participate. Unfortunately, this research is limited to those churches that are located in Canada.

2. Select the category that best describes the population centre where your church is located.
    - Rural area
    - Small population centre (between 1,000 and 29,999)
    - Medium population centre (between 30,000 and 99,999)
    - Large urban population centre (greater than 100,000) – suburban
    - Large urban population centre (greater than 100,000) – inner city
    - Prefer not to say

3. What is the denominational affiliation of your church?
    - Anglican
    - Associated Gospel
    - Baptist – Canadian Baptist (Western Canada, Ontario & Quebec, Atlantic Canada)
    - Baptist – Fellowship
    - Baptist – General Conference
    - Baptist - Other
    - Be in Christ Church of Canada
    - Church of the Nazarene
    - Christian & Missionary Alliance
    - Christian Reformed
    - Evangelical Covenant
    - Evangelical Missionary
    - Free Methodist
    - Foursquare Gospel
    - Lutheran
    - Lutheran - Evangelical
    - Mennonite
    - Mennonite Brethren
    - Pentecostal
    - Presbyterian Church in Canada
    - Salvation Army
    - United Church of Canada
    - Vineyard
    - Wesleyan
    - Other (please specify)
    - No denominational affiliation
    - Prefer not to say

4. Are you the pastor who participates in the process of evaluating the overall ministry of the church with the board? (Yes/No)
    Show if a pastor
    4a. Do you actively involve the church board in the process of evaluating the overall ministry of the church? (Yes/No)

Show if do not actively involve the board

4b. Please describe why you do not involve church board members in the process of evaluating the overall ministry of the church.
(free form answers)
☐ Prefer not to say

Show if not a pastor

4c. Are you a church board member who participates in the process of evaluating the overall ministry of the church? (Yes/No)

Show if not a pastor or board member

Thank you for your willingness to participate. Unfortunately, only current pastors or board members who participate in the evaluation process are being asked to complete this survey.

5. What is your age?
   - 18-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60-69
   - 70 and older
   - Prefer not to say

6. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other (please describe)
   - Prefer not to say

7. What is the size of your church congregation (the average number of people, members and non-members, who attend your weekly worship gathering.)?
   - Less than 75 people
   - 75 – 150 people
   - 151 – 249 people
   - 250 – 499 people
   - 500 – 999 people
   - 1,000 – 2999 people
   - 3,000 or more people
   - Prefer not to say
   - I'm not sure

8. Does your congregation have a clear mission or purpose statement?
    - Yes
    - No
    - We have a mission/purpose statement, but it is not clear
    - Prefer not to say
    - I'm not sure

9. How often does your church conduct an organizational evaluation?
   An organizational evaluation looks at how well the church as a whole is doing at fulfilling its overall mission. (This is not the performance review of the pastor.)
    - Informally, on an ad hoc basis
    - Every two years
    - Annually
    - Twice a year
    - Quarterly
    - Monthly
    - Rarely
    - Never
    - Other (please describe)
    - Prefer not to say

Show if Never:

10. What barriers or obstacles prevent you from conducting an organizational evaluation? (Select all that apply.)
    - Lack of clarity around our mission/purpose
    - Not enough time
    - No interest in conducting an evaluation
    - Not sure how to go about doing an evaluation
    - Other (please describe)
    - Prefer not to say

Show if does not conduct organizational evaluations
Thank-you for taking this survey. Your answers are a valuable part of this research. As thanks for your participation, a devotional resource about organizational evaluation is available for you to download here (https://fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional).

How to find the study results
If you would like a brief summary of the study results, you can access them at fivesmoothstones.ca. The results are expected to be posted by approximately November 2019.

11. Please describe the steps you follow in your evaluation **process** (e.g., whether it is formal or informal, who is involved, how you conduct the evaluation, what is done with the results).
(Free form answers)
□ Prefer not to say

12. Please describe the evaluation **criteria** you have used to determine how well your church is fulfilling its overall mission and purpose. (What are the indicators or factors you have used? What does it look like when you have accomplished your mission?)
(Free form answers)
□ Prefer not to say

13. Have you found a way to incorporate theological principles, biblical passages, or spiritual practices when developing the evaluation criteria and process used at your church? If yes, please describe any that you are currently using.
(Free form answers)

□ Our church hasn't really thought about this
□ Prefer not to say

14. What barriers, obstacles, or challenges have you faced when you conducted an organizational evaluation at your church? (Select all that apply.)
    - Lack of clarity around our mission/purpose
    - Not enough time to do an evaluation
    - No interest in conducting an evaluation
    - Not sure how to go about doing an evaluation
    - Other (please describe)
    - Prefer not to say

15. What positive or negative outcomes have you experienced as a result of conducting an organizational evaluation at your church?
(Free form answers)
□ Prefer not to say

Thank-you for taking this survey. Your responses are a valuable part of this research. As thanks for your participation, a devotional resource about organizational evaluation is available for you to download here (https://fivesmoothstones.ca/seven-churches-devotional).

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF GROUPS PROMOTING THE SURVEY

Denominations
Associated Gospel Church of Canada
Baptist General Conference of Canada
Be in Christ Church of Canada
Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada
Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – Eastern Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – BC Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – Synod of Alberta and Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada – Synod Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario
Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches – Canada
Free Methodist Church in Canada
Lutheran Church Canada – Alberta – British Columbia District
Mennonite Church - Manitoba District
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – British Columbia and Yukon
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – Eastern Ontario District*
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – Maritime
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – Saskatchewan*
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada – Western Ontario
Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland & Labrador
Presbyterian Church in Canada (23 presbyteries)
Wesleyan Church – Central Canada District

Umbrella Groups
Canadian Council of Christian Charities
Life Links Network (Non-denominational network of churches)

*Based on the preference of the district office, the researcher contacted churches directly by email in these districts.

APPENDIX 3 DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Question 3 -- What is the denominational affiliation of your church?	Total A	Pastor B	Board Member C
N	512	338	174
Associated Gospel	3%	4%C	1%
Baptist	17%	19%	13%
Be in Christ Church of Canada	4%	5%	4%
Christian & Missionary Alliance	1%	1%	2%
Evangelical Covenant	5%	4%	6%
Evangelical Missionary	1%	1%	1%
Free Methodist	7%	6%	8%
Lutheran	6%	2%	13%
Lutheran - Evangelical	9%	9%	9%
Mennonite	4%	4%	5%
Pentecostal	20%	25%C	10%
Presbyterian Church in Canada	15%	12%	22%B
United Church of Canada	1%	1%	2%
Wesleyan	1%	2%	0%
Other	3%	3%	4%
No denominational affiliation	2%	2%	2%
Prefer not to say	0%	0%	0%

Upper case letters indicate statistical differences at the 95% significance level.

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