"Charles Christian has provided the church with a long overdue resource in *Ethics in Christian Ministry*. Reading and following this prayer for the church will enrich and make healthier the ministry and mission of church leaders and the congregations they help lead."

—The Right Reverend Gregory Rickel
Eighth Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia
The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

"My work of pastoral oversight and support provides regular evidence that lack of healthy practices can have disastrous results. Pastor Charles Christian provides a practical, yet deeply thoughtful, resource for pastors to think about and implement healthy practices. These advices are proverbial in nature; they are rooted in wisdom, not simply formulaic. Dr. Christian is working at a deeper level than fatherly advice, although these chapters are filled with love and warmth. These practices of preventative maintenance are rooted in the Bible and in careful theological reflection. I will be glad to provide this generative resource to the pastors under my oversight."

—Dr. Jeren Rowell
District Superintendent
Kansas City District Church of the Nazarene

"Having dealt all too many times with the fallout of ministerial failure, I am glad to see this book. It is timely, filled with wisdom, and very well written. I urge that this be a resource for every minister in active service and for every student in preparation for ministry. Recent news reports that the clergy is among the lowest of professions in public confidence. This is the resource needed to address the tragic stories of ministerial failure."

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General Superintendent Emeritus, Church of the Nazarene
Founding Director, Center for Pastoral Leadership, Nazarene Theological Seminary

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—Dr. Henry W. Spaulding II
President
Mount Vernon Nazarene University

"Ethics in Christian Ministry offers well-honed wisdom drawn from a life of pastoral ministry and Christian education. The author understands that what one 'purposes in the heart' requires clear practices and boundaries to stay on track. In a time when Christian ministers receive more scrutiny than ever before, it is essential that integrity be at the center of effective leadership. I will commend this book for courses in ministry ethics and pastoral leadership. Learners need not wait until a crisis arises in the field to address key markers that will sustain the vocation of ministry."

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—Dr. Andrew Dearman
Associate Academic Dean
Fuller Theological Seminary

"What a timely book for the clergy. I love the focus on the proactive side of ministry rather than the reactive approach. The author challenges those going into the ministry to prepare well and to set the tone for ongoing ministry as they lead local churches. This is an overdue book that balances theology and everyday life. I highly encourage those with a ministerial calling to read this book first!"

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"Based on years of pastoral experience, Dr. Charles Christian provides theological and practical guidance on preventive maintenance in ethics, counseling, preaching, and finances. I recommend this book to those beginning in ministry and for ministry veterans."

—Dr. Mark A. Maddix
Dean, School of Theology and Christian Ministries
Northwest Nazarene University

ETHICS IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

A Guide for Pastors and Mentors

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THE ART OF MINISTRY ETHICS

Baseball player Ichiro Suzuki is an unlikely major league star. He is only five feet nine inches tall and weighs about 170 pounds. He is from Japan, and since 2003 the right fielder has become the most successful Japanese position player (non-pitcher) in Major League Baseball history. Suzuki discovered early on that he had baseball talent, but even in Japan, where people tend to be smaller in stature than those in the United States, there were concerns about his size. Ichiro spent most every day doing basic drills—hitting, fielding, and throwing—and keeping his body in the best shape possible. He added muscle to his small frame, which weighed only around 120 pounds when he got the opportunity to play professional baseball in Japan in his early twenties. Before long Ichiro got a contract in the majors, and the rest is history.

To this day, Ichiro, who is now over forty, wakes up twice a night to stretch. He is usually the first person on the field, stretching and warming up before the game, and he is known for doing a series of stretches before each pitch. He says that these disciplines not only keep him loose but also prepare him to make big plays when needed. He knows his body and mind will be ready when extraordinary opportunities arise. These practices have paid off because Ichiro has amassed nearly 3,000 career hits, a milestone few players have accomplished.

As a little league coach for several years, I found that young players often wanted to practice the big plays. Long before they had mastered the basics of the game, they would say, "Hit a pop-up that I have to chase to the wall" or "Throw me a pitch I can hit out of the park." Many kids even tried to adopt the unusual hitting style of Ichiro. Time and time again these young players would be disappointed that they were not able to produce the same results by simply copying Ichiro's mannerisms. "Put in the hours and years of stretching, practicing, and doing the basics that Ichiro has done, and then you can maybe try using his style," I would tell them. "Until then, try a basic stance!" In any sport, the best plays—those that show up on the television highlight reel—happen when players who are well trained in the basics of the game respond instinctively, based upon their years of preparation and experience. One does not start with the highlight plays.

Preventative maintenance is about preparing as much as you can up front while staying within the ethical boundaries of your calling as a disciple and minister of Christ. Through constant, ethical preparation, actions, and reflection, you will become more prepared to improvise when the opportunities arise.

Often I have been amazed at an athlete who makes an incredible play or a jazz musician who improvises a captivating solo. More than once I have heard players I have coached or fellow musicians ask, "How do they do that?" The answer is

that they have prepared up front in basic ways that allow them to excel and even do the extraordinary when called upon. This is the idea behind preventative maintenance.

MINISTRY JAZZ

Great jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and Wynton Marsalis are known for their improvisational skills. At first glance, these musicians and others like them appear reckless or untrained. That is, until you hear them play a solo! Then something amazing takes shape. Yet those amazing "off the page" solos are not made up of random notes. Nor do they happen simply because the players abandon the written score. One need only to listen to a beginning jazz player to understand that bad improvisation is worse than badly played written notes! Every jazz player knows that it takes more than freedom to create good improvisation. That *something* is what I am calling preventative maintenance. In the case of the jazz musician, just as in the case of the athlete, the ability to improvise when called upon is the result of careful preparation in basic areas. The best jazz musicians, such as trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, are intricately acquainted with the basics of music: chord structure, key signatures, music theory, and even the limits of their instrument. From this springs the freedom to improvise in a way that contributes to the overall piece they are performing. Improvisation also is a way of stamping something of their own personality upon the song, but good improvisation is more about being true to the spirit and parameters of the song being performed by the whole group.

Ethicist Samuel Wells titles his introduction to the study of Christian ethics *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*.[1] His central aim is to remind the church that the consistent practices of the church "shape and empower Christians" to become a "community of trust in order that it may faithfully encounter the unknown future without fear."[2] Likewise,

Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson remind us that Christianity through the ages has "passed down the unfinished drama of God" and that like well-trained actors in an unfinished Shakespeare play, we "immerse ourselves" in the acts we do have so that we can adequately "improvise the parts that are missing."[3]

This is an ideal starting point for ethics in the context of Christian ministry. Preventative maintenance is not about preparing for every possible outcome or conflict. Rather, preventative maintenance assists us in creating healthy environments up front, using suggested boundaries and tools of reflection to prepare us in the best way possible for the unexpected. And ministry is definitely full of the unexpected! As Dawn and Peterson remind us, we immerse ourselves in the language of faith, sing the songs that draw us together in this faith, and "talk with the church throughout the ages as it expresses what it means to follow Jesus."[4] Furthermore, making adequate preparations and being intentional about creating a healthy ethical environment express our confidence in God's ability to work through us in the long run, not simply on the spur of the moment.

The preparation involved in becoming an ethical minister—that is, a minister whose personal and professional ethics reflect the ways and mission of Jesus Christ—suggests that there will be certain key principles that will inform our decisions regardless of the consequences we may experience. In other words, there will be "to die for" principles upon which we will stand no matter what. At other times, we will evaluate the goodness of our actions by evaluating the likely results of our actions. That includes times when we do our best to weigh the results of what could be two good choices. Weighing which of two or more good choices to make is usually the majority of the decision-making in which we engage in ministry. Some call this "ministering in the gray." At all times, we are called to be bathed in prayer, to consistently participate in worship and discipleship, and to evaluate our actions and decisions

in light of the ways of God acted on our behalf through the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Stated in a more formal way, as will be explained briefly in the next section, our ethical decisions come from *deontological* approaches (up-front values that we hold regardless of consequences), *teleological* approaches (determinations based upon the overall result or goal of an action or decision), and approaches that are identified with *virtue ethics* (good actions and decisions produced by a transformed character through participation in the community of faith). What follows is a very brief overview of these key principles, which provide foundational paradigms for the study of and the participation in ethics.

HOW WE MAKE ETHICAL DECISIONS

"What is right is right!" "Don't let our secular culture dictate our ethics!" "All's well that ends well!" These sayings remind us that there are varying ways to understand right and wrong. These phrases also remind us that a variety of factors influence how we decide what is good.

In the formal study of ethics, there are several categories of values, which are the things we hold dear individually and as a society. Developing a system of values—things considered good or right—begins with cultural *norms*. *Norms* are consistent modes of behavior that a culture adopts as acceptable over a period of time. In established communities, cultural norms become ways, for example, that a community recognizes who is "in" or who is a normal part of the community. In church life, a norm may express itself in something as small as seating arrangements in the worship service or the order of service itself. Over time, key norms become ingrained into the community and more universalized as acceptable. In these cases, the norms become *mores* or *values*.

Cultural *mores* are those consistent behaviors that the community deems as key to the community's identity. The set

of beliefs that elevate norms (normative behaviors) to the level of *mores*, or "moral behaviors," are *values*. *Values* are deeply held beliefs of individuals and communities that become normative representations of what the individual or culture deems as good. These values become the basis for ethical systems, sometimes called *systems of morality*. Key aspects of these ethical systems become codified into *laws*. Every system runs the risk of elevating culturally specific norms to the level of universal values. This is why a consistent ethical system becomes the key to filtering out what is essential and what is a passing fad or simply preferred by a particular group.

For instance, the so-called Jim Crow laws, which enforced racial segregation in the United States, especially in the South, are examples of accepted norms that were codified into laws. However, these laws and mores explicitly excluded certain groups (especially African-Americans but also poor Caucasians at times). Although most of us today would rightly consider those mores and laws unjust and unfair, their power was so prevalent that, as one Southern historian observed, questioning them at the time was as difficult for most whites to do as it would have been for a fish to critique its water![5]

As members of the church of Jesus Christ, we, too, are immersed in a system—called a kingdom by Jesus—that has norms and mores. But these ways are not based in power, nor do they find their authority in ever-changing human opinions and comfort levels. We are called to operate from a system that shines light in a dark world and can face even the gray without fear.

Ethics is a systematic approach to assessing what is right or wrong, or what is good and bad. As H. Ray Dunning reminds, mores are what we learn to do, and ethics describes why we do what we do.[6] An ethical system measures right and wrong in regard to some *authority* (a term we will describe in more detail below) and in the context of a *community*. All of these

elements are crucial to a full-fledged *ethical system*: a way of consistently measuring right and wrong based upon an accepted authority in the context of a particular community. Since this is a book about Christian clergy ethics, it is important now to examine those key elements of an ethical system in this particular context. We will consider each element of the ethical system below.

Authority

In popular thought, authority is closely associated with power. Someone or something is an authority simply because he or she is in a position of power. While there are power-based approaches to authority, the technical definition of authority is as follows: that which someone *allows* to change his or her actions and/or attitudes. Note the key word *allows*. Real, lasting authority, according to the technical ethical definition, is granted.

Authority also results in consistent change in actions or attitudes or both. This is why authority granted upon position or power is limited: it does not produce long-term change in attitude or behavior.

Consider one of the most extreme forms of power-based authority, torture. The victim of torture may indeed consent to say or do something in response to the immediate power-based manipulation he or she experiences. However, studies show that this sort of manipulative control is short-lived and often inaccurate where information or change of behavior is concerned. When the one being overpowered is free from the torturer's grasp, he or she will most often resort back to previous ways of thinking or acting. This demonstrates the relative short-term influence of power-based authority.

Jesus came without power or prestige. For Jesus, the basis of authority—which, again, in ethics describes a consent-based change of actions or attitude—is love. The love of God

expressed through Jesus has a compelling, not a coercive, effect. As Paul writes, "For Christ's love *compels* us" (2 Cor. 5:14, emphasis added). For the Christian, especially the Christian minister, authority is derived from love-based actions that are compelling rather than coercive.

For Christians, God and, more specifically, God's ways as revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ, is the source of authority. We learn of the story of God's redemptive love culminating in the person and work of Christ through Scripture, which Christians consider a special or specific revelation from God through human authors. This means that we allow God's ways as expressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ to change our attitudes and actions in accordance with God's purposes as expressed in Scripture.

An unbeliever does not consider God or the ways of Jesus Christ as an authority in the technical sense. A casual Christian who more consistently allows other loyalties (besides loyalty to the ways of Jesus Christ) to change his or her behavior and attitudes does not acknowledge or accept the authority of God either. Likewise, a minister who is driven, motivated, and changed by something other than the love expressed in the person and work of Christ and the purposes of God revealed in Scripture does not accept God as his or her authoritative guide.

Jesus Christ is the Source of the value system we call Christian ethics. Scripture is the authoritative source of revealing God's redemptive work culminating in Jesus. The church, created by Jesus (Matt. 16:18-20), is the repository and interpreter of God's ways revealed in Christ through Scripture. So for Christian clergy there is a progression of authoritative voices that ultimately includes the following:

- *The scriptural and theological basis of one's calling.* This refers to how you know you are called into ministry, and the theological basis of that call. This calling begins

with a relationship with God through Christ, who is revealed in Scripture.

- *The voice of the church in affirming that calling.* One's place in vocational ministry, like one's authority, is granted, and in the case of the minister, this place is granted by the people of God, the church, to which (as stated above) is given the authority through Christ to affirm the call of those who serve as its servant leaders.
- *Creedal and governing statements and offices.* A strong ministry leader will be a loyal follower of his or her hierarchical authorities. For those in a congregationally governed, autonomous system, this may be simply the unified voice of a local congregation. For others, it is a formalized hierarchical structure that includes district and regional overseers or bishops. Even the apostle Paul, a strong and very vocal leader, calls upon Christians under his pastoral authority to "follow my example, *as I follow the example of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1, emphasis added).

When these sources of authority are taken seriously, the minister is free to improvise when needed in the gray areas of ethical decision-making. Furthermore, gaining credibility as a leader is easier when others see that we, too, are willing to be accountable to authority and to be loyal to those who lead us as they follow Christ. With a clear understanding and affirmation of the sources of our authority as ministers, we are better able to lead with consistency and integrity. We are not called to follow any authority blindly. This means that we must have some sense of hierarchy, a priority list of authorities, grounded in the authority of Scripture and sound Christ-centered theology.

Community

Ethics is never done in a vacuum. That is to say, all ethical decisions and behaviors take place in a particular con-

text: a community. For the Christian, that community is the church. The church consists of those who have been called together as Christ's community; they are the people who join together to live out the "way" of Christ: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:10). The church becomes the context in which Christian ethics is consistently practiced, while also being a cumulative voice through the ages of an authoritative means of interpreting God's revelation through Christ. Therefore, being rooted in consistent theology means being in harmony with the wisdom handed down through the church over time. This provides ethical consistency in our approach to ministry.

While not all local churches or church leaders consistently work from a place of health and integrity, being rooted in a Christian community gives us a far better chance of developing a consistently ethical ministry. As far as possible, then, the wisdom of the church (both local and global), the faith statements of the denomination with which one is affiliated, and the leadership and accountability personnel under which one serves should be taken seriously. In those rare cases where temporal church authorities in a particular church or denominational setting seem to oppose what the church has historically accepted as clear teaching, the minister must state clearly his or her doctrinal opposition to the will of the temporal authorities in place and be willing to accept whatever consequences may come, even if it means leaving a particular congregation or denomination. Jeren Rowell writes that for John Wesley, ecclesial authorities and the authority of the community of faith were to be held in highest regard. Rowell also observes that "the only exceptions Wesley seemed to tolerate had to do with those rare instances where a particular body would require its pastor to do something which Scripture forbids or if one were being required to omit something that Scripture clearly commands."[7]

Ethics, especially Christian ethics, is lived out in community. For Christians, this community is the community of faith—the church. The church is vital in helping us choose God's authority—God's ways—consistently in our lives and ministries. In Christ we are charged with assisting one another in keeping the main thing the main thing. While there are a variety of polities, or governmental systems, in church life, the consensus of the people of God who serve together in the church should guide the theological, ethical, and practical aspects of ministry.[8]

SYSTEMS OF MEASUREMENT

Consistency is a key concept in developing an ethical system. The consistency of Christian ethics is measured through the lens of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The question here is whether there is a consistent measuring tool for determining whether a decision or action is ethically sound. For Christians, that tool, or measure, is the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ. This is our ethical *system*, which is actually more than a system. This system is not a static set of principles but instead focuses on the goals of an action. H. Ray Dunning reminds us that Christian ethics is more teleological (from the Greek word *telos*, meaning goal or aim) than it is deontological (from the term *deon*, meaning duty, which describes a preestablished rule).[9]

There are three types of ethical systems. First, *deontological*, or duty-based, systems emphasize established principles that will not be altered regardless of the outcome of the ethical decision. Second, *teleological*, or goal-based, systems take seriously the outcome or consequences of an ethical decision in determining right and wrong. And finally, *virtue ethics* refers to systems that concentrate on the transformation of the individual into a person of integrity whose actions will therefore result in good.

No one system of ethics is completely isolated from the other two. However, if we are to evaluate our decisions and how they are made in order to be *consistent* in our ethic, we must understand these approaches in a bit more detail. The following is a very basic overview, so consulting an introductory ethics text is recommended for a more detailed analysis of these approaches to ethics.

Three Types of Ethical Systems

Duty-Based Systems

Some ethical decisions are made up front. In other words, some values are so dear to us that we will act in that particular way regardless of the outcome or consequences. An early mentor of mine once said, "Know what you are willing to die for, and know what is not worth dying for." If we have a true sense of calling, we likely have some "to die for" issues. After all, as Martin Luther King Jr. often said (as paraphrased here), "If we have nothing to die for, then we have nothing worth living for."[10] Of course, some of these issues may change over time. This is a healthy part of our growth as ministers of the gospel. As we mature, some methods or even theological positions we once held as essential will seem less important. Regardless, any time we take an ethical stand or approach that has little or no dependence upon consequences or outcomes, we are acting *deontologically*. This approach to ethics is based upon the thought of Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth-century philosopher who wrote: "Do everything you do as if it will become universal law."[11] This means that some aspects of ethical decision-making rely on the principle involved, regardless of what the outcome may be. Firefighters who rush toward a burning building even though everyone else is running away and know they may experience some harm, but they do this because it is their duty to do so. This is deontological ethics in a nutshell: doing one's duty for a higher purpose, regardless

of the immediate consequences. In ministry, this may involve refusing to make certain changes in a particular theological position, even though changing the position would likely bring about immediate growth in church attendance.

Deontological approaches to ethics are also called nonconsequentialist since the determination of right and wrong does not depend upon the consequences or results of the ethical choice made. This approach also is sometimes referred to as Kantian ethics due to Kant's influence upon this way of thinking. This approach reminds us that there are things worth dying for—worth doing because they are considered innately good regardless of the outcome. Weaknesses of deontological ethics include its inflexibility and its inability to assist us when two or more important principles or duties compete. At its worst, deontological ethics can become legalistic. Fortunately, there are other ways to measure ethical decisions.

Goal-Centered Systems

Teleological ethics emphasizes the determination of good or right from the consequences of a choice. Since consequences or results matter greatly in this approach, it is often referred to as consequentialist ethics. In Christian ethics, teleological ethics measures the goodness of an act or of a decision based upon the way in which the act or decision amplifies the love of God. That which produces the most Christlike, loving result is good according to a teleological approach.[12] At its worst, teleological ethics can seem to allow the ends to justify the means. This means that the most extreme versions of consequentialist ethics may advocate virtually any approach or method of achieving a particular goal or end so long as the goal is achieved. Fortunately, this is not normally the way in which teleological ethics are employed, especially in Christian contexts.

At its best, a teleological approach can assist us in determining right or wrong when two duties or values seem to be in

competition. For instance, I may believe that it is my duty to be a good citizen and obey the law. I may also believe that human life is valuable. If I were to walk past a pond posted with a "No Trespassing" sign and hear the voice of boy who had fallen into the pond and was drowning, I could no longer rely upon my sense of duty alone. I would choose to elevate the value of human life over the value of being a good citizen, which means I would ignore the sign, jump into the pond, and save the drowning boy. By doing so, I would be demonstrating a teleological, or consequentialist, approach to ethics. In church life, there are times when ministers and church leadership teams evaluate a decision based upon the outcome—that is, will this decision move us closer toward the goals of our mission, or should we attempt another approach, one that is also within the scope of our mission but possibly more effective?

Though we might think that deontological, or nonconsequentialist, ethics are the norm for the Bible, theologians including H. Ray Dunning argue that the Bible's approach is more teleological—that is, more goal-oriented or consequentialist.[13] This means that although there are many deontological aspects of Scripture (things that are considered right regardless of the consequences), the overarching goal of biblical ethics is to advance God's goals in the world (a teleological, or consequentialist, approach). Rahab the prostitute, who lied to protect the Canaanite spies from being discovered and killed, is called righteous for doing so (Josh. 2:4-6; Heb. 11:31). If we rely upon a strictly deontological view, we have a quandary in regard to Rahab's story: we value telling the truth, and we also value the lives of those who are fulfilling God's mission. Rahab's story is not a blanket excuse for lying. However, when two important duties or principles collide, we are called to take a further step and evaluate the situation teleologically. The question then becomes: How do we familiarize ourselves with the goals of God in the world so that our ethical decision-making furthers

the promotion of those goals? The answer lies in the third key ethical category: virtue ethics.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics describes an approach to ethics that emphasizes the character development of an individual. In philosophical ethics, one becomes more virtuous by exposing oneself to and acting upon key virtues such as courage, compassion, bravery, or patience. In Christian ethics, one becomes more virtuous by being, in the words of Scripture, "transformed into [the Lord's] image with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

This means that participation in Christian devotion, corporate worship, and the mission of compassion all work together to transform us into people who embody and share the love of Jesus Christ. We are transformed by consistently interacting with the liturgy—the worship of God by God's people using the elements of worship handed down through Scripture, the early church, and liturgies through the centuries. These include prayer (the prayers of the church found in Scripture and key liturgies, along with extemporaneous prayers), Scripture, giving, music, preaching, and the Eucharist. During worship, these words and interactions shape us into what we are to exemplify throughout the week.

Sundays, not Mondays, set the tone and rhythm for Christians and therefore develop within us the virtues that make us representatives of Christ and of his mission in the world. We will explore the specific contributions of each of these elements of worship in a later chapter. But for now, we note that *Christian virtue ethics* refers to the way in which we are shaped by consistent exposure to the ways of God, the people of God, and worship of God.[14]

ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES

The Ethics Grid

Given the foundational issues we have discussed so far, we can begin to utilize an ethical grid through which to process the key considerations in making Christ-centered ethical decisions.[15] This grid comprises four quadrants, each representing a related key element in ethical decision-making, moving from highest to lowest in importance of authority.

1. The Theological Quadrant

The theological quadrant involves asking questions such as these: What theological considerations are important in addressing this situation? Is our approach to this decision distinctly Christian, or does it follow some nontheological pattern or norm? Is this decision in harmony with our understanding of the mission of Christ in the world, the mission of the church, and the vision and mission of our local church?

2. The Priorities Quadrant

The priorities quadrant leads us to consider these questions: Does this decision reveal our desire to maintain scriptural priorities in our congregation? Does this decision take into account the boundaries of our theology and the boundaries of the law? Will this point individuals and families toward Christ, or will it simply clutter their calendar with items that may actually be in competition with Christ-centered priorities? Are we making the good name of the church more of a priority than a convenient or inexpensive opportunity? Are there up-front principles that we will follow regardless of the outcome or popularity of this decision (deontological elements)? What assessments should we make to estimate the outcome of the decision (teleological elements)?

3. The Character Quadrant

The character quadrant requires questions such as these: Is this something we can share publicly without fear of casting a negative shadow on the character of Christ? Will this cast a negative shadow on any of the decision-makers and participants in the decision? Does this decision and the manner in which it is made project integrity to the church, to the community, and to the world (virtue ethics)?

4. The Relational Quadrant

This quadrant delves into questions such as the following: Is our approach to this decision fostering a healthy environment for strong, Christ-honoring relationships? Does this decision take seriously the mission of Christ to the congregation with which we have been entrusted? Does this decision take seriously Christ's desire for everyone—even the traditionally marginalized voices of our community—to have a voice? Does this decision rely on healthy methods of communication or avoid approaches to communication in a way that may lead to long-term harm to the community in order to achieve the non-Christlike goal of appeasement? Does this decision pay due regard to established authorities in our local church and denomination?

A sample grid that can serve as a reproducible work sheet for decision-making is found in Appendix A.

The Usefulness of the Grid

All of these aspects should be considered when making an ethical decision in church life. Otherwise, it becomes tempting for churches to act pragmatically, basing whether a decision is good or right simply upon what is practical for the moment. Overuse of pragmatic approaches can cause well-meaning ministers and churches to gradually stray from their identity as theologically based communities of faith that

pattern themselves after the ways of Jesus Christ. They become like a ship whose captain forsakes the use of the compass in favor of personal intuition and eventually strays miles away from the intended course. Asking key ethical questions based upon our Christian identity keeps our ministry on course.

The Grid for Ethical Decision-Making (see Appendix A) is not a simple plug-and-play solution, but it does broaden the discussion for ministers and leadership teams faced with day-to-day decisions, most all of which have ethical implications. When we are intentional in submitting theological and ethical decisions through this kind of discussion grid, we practice preventative maintenance by shaping an ethical environment that maintains the theological focus of the church we are called to serve. Use of this grid does not prevent conflict; indeed, it may very well lead to conflict. However, that conflict will result from transparency, honest disagreement, and addressing possible ethical red flags, and it will contribute to the long-term health of the organization.

Practices that Transform the Mind

Counselors are fond of saying that we learn to act ethically in two ways: Either we feel our way into action, or we act our way into feeling. If so, then sometimes our ethical actions flow from our internal values or feelings. At other times, we practice ethical actions and only later internalize them into virtues. The Bible and the history of Christian worship acknowledge the value of *both* approaches. In fact, Christian virtue ethics, as briefly introduced above, relies upon both approaches. This is why, in the context of Christian worship, we see repetition: repetition in our songs, prayers, Bible passages, and sacraments. Those of us who pray the Lord's Prayer each week would likely admit that there are weeks that these words are recited by rote. But because everyone else—the church body—is reciting it together, we say it as well. Over time, most

of us have experienced moments when those words were far more than a mere recitation. In fact, the repetition of those words over a period of time can produce a change in our attitude, in our ways of thinking, and in our ways of acting.

This is similar to Paul's description of transformation as "the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). The word *mind* (*nous* in the Greek) here refers to our mind-set or way of thinking. Changing *how* we think and *what* we think influences how we act. Exposing ourselves consistently to Scripture, which teaches love for our enemies, for example, eventually influences our approach toward our enemies and our practice of forgiveness in general—sometimes even before our feelings catch up to our actions. We do not always feel like loving our enemies. However, we learn to do so by repeating Scripture, songs, and actions that remind us that God, through Jesus Christ, loves God's enemies, who once included us![16]

THE TRUE NATURE OF OUR CALLING

The use of theologically grounded practices that take seriously the fact that, as ministers, we lead a *theological* organization creates a basis for actions in our transformed way of thinking: virtues that exalt the ethics of Christ. As Eugene Peterson reminds us, ministers today struggle to find their true identity and often wrestle with a variety of societally imposed roles: marketer, counselor, politician, human resources director, and administrator, just to name a few.[17] Certainly, aspects of these roles intersect with the oversight and care that pastors seek to give as part of their calling. However, as Peterson and others remind, it has become easy for pastors to forsake the scriptural and theological basis of their calling and substitute the duties and values of these other industries for the work of ministry.[18] This is where ethical dangers arise: ministers are not simply businesspeople who apply the values and models of the marketplace to the church. We are not elected officials

who seek to motivate constituents through the language and tactics of politics in order to achieve God's mission in the world. We are not simply counselors, whose approach to ministry is primarily therapeutic. Certainly all of these professions intersect with what ministers do and inform us to some degree. However, we speak a different language: the language of Scripture, tradition, and theology. We share different values: the values espoused and lived out by Jesus Christ and those whom he calls the church. We strive for different goals: our measure of success is rooted in Christlike love and humility, and not secular models of success grounded in consumerism and power.

Only when we take seriously the theological grounding of our calling to minister will we serve in a manner consistent with the ethics of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. The following chapters cast a vision for ministry and the key roles of the minister that function in harmony with this theological identity: measuring success based upon God's ways, even when the world's measurements differ; seeking outcomes that further the kingdom of God and God's ways, even when they are unpopular; and always seeking to be transformed individually and as the community of faith into the image of Christ.

Mentoring Questions

1. Can you think of occasions when you have seen ministry decisions made based upon simple pragmatism instead of theologically grounded approaches? Describe them.

2. Think of a key decision you have observed or have been part of making in church life and discuss it using the Ethics Grid described in this chapter. What would this grid have added to the discussion? How would it have altered the decision you are discussing?

Suggested Reading

Dunning, H. Ray. *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003.

Grenz, Stanley J. *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Trull, Joe, and James E. Carter. *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*. Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 2004.

Wilkens, Steve. *Beyond Bumper Sticker Ethics: An Introduction to Theories of Right and Wrong*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.