

THE COVENANT GROUP

A Case Study

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Meet Marcia, Nancy, José Maria, Paul and Gerald. Over the next few days you will help them discuss a number of challenges facing this group of friends. So, as you read, get to know these folks. List issues and questions that come to mind as you read.

Email sent to Nancy Carson's covenant group May 18, 2005:

Hey Gang-

Looking forward to seeing you all after Conference! I've made all the arrangements for us to have a meeting room at the hotel and I've ordered lunch for Thursday. As I look toward our time together, I am calling on one of our organizing principles for the group - "When we need each other's advice and counsel, any member of the group can ask to set a meeting agenda." Well, dear friends, I am in need of your help.

Without going into too much detail, let me just say that this first year as a DS has been eye-opening, challenging, and even daunting sometimes. While there have been many blessings and lots of good work, right now I am in a tough place, both personally and professionally. In fact, last night - even after several hours of prayer - I couldn't sleep and am troubled more than I have ever been in my work! It's affecting my relationship with Jeff, too. He wants to help, but doesn't really understand "how the Church, for goodness sake, can be so darn dysfunctional!"

So, I'm calling the group, or as our Quaker friends say, "calling the Circle" to help me in this time. Unless I hear back from you by Friday that there are other pressing things to talk about, I'll plan on scheduling most of our time. Just so you can begin thinking and praying about this, let me give you the "topic sentence" of what I'm struggling with: Friendship UMC - Ray Wilson's church in Austin - is in a real mess. I know, I know - from the outside it looks like a model church - big growth and lots of press - but, as my grandmother (and Shakespeare) used to say, "something's rotten in Denmark."

Christ's blessings,

Nancy

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Covenant Group Background Information

A five-person covenant group in the United Methodist Church (UMC) meets three times a year in person and corresponds regularly via email. They also conference call monthly for about an hour just to “check in” with each other. The group formed three years ago.

Nancy Carson, a District Superintendent in Austin, Texas, has been in her position one year. Before the superintendency, Nancy was the pastor of a 1000-member traditional United Methodist Church in a Dallas suburb. She is married to Jeff Carson, a manufacturer’s representative. They have two daughters, Katie and Marcia, who are in school at Duke. Nancy is known as a “can do” person in the church. Her energy, enthusiasm, and charisma have served her well. In fact, that is probably what led to her DS appointment last year.

José Maria Estrada has been the pastor of an inner-city multi-cultural church in Oklahoma City for the past five years. He came to the United States from Chile as a Duke undergraduate in the early 1980s. José Maria’s family has been in the wine business in Chile for several generations. A large, close Catholic family, they were aghast that José Maria left the church and became a protestant when he was in school. Only in recent years has their family attempted to heal the rift. (The covenant group has been instrumental in helping José Maria reach out to his estranged loved ones, particularly since the death of his father last year.) José Maria and his wife, Sophia, have a 15-year-old son, David. José Maria often serves as a calming force for the covenant group. He is sensitive to each member’s needs and is often the one others come to individually when they “just need to talk.”

Marcia Bain pastors a medium-sized suburban church in Dallas. With an eight-year tenure, Marcia is active in the community and is well known as a thoughtful, eloquent speaker. A true Bible scholar, she brings a quiet but brilliant perspective to any group she is part of. Marcia never married; she travels extensively when time permits, and she enjoys leading trips to the holy land.

Nancy Carson, Marcia Bain, and José Maria Estrada were at seminary (Duke) in the 1980s and became fast friends. In fact, Nancy and José Maria met as Duke undergraduates. She was part of a group of campus United Methodists who befriended José Maria when he struggled leaving the Catholic Church and became a United Methodist. These three kept in touch throughout the years. Marcia officiated at Nancy’s marriage to Jeff Carson, and their second daughter is Marcia’s namesake. José Maria and his wife Sophia always exchange Christmas cards with Nancy and Marcia and visit them whenever their travel schedules coincide.

Gerald Lewicki is a long-time DCM from Dallas. He met the others at Annual Conference several years ago. As part of his duties, Gerald oversees one of the largest camping enterprises in the UMC. He is an avid outdoorsman, environmentalist, and youth advocate. Gerald has been called a “Pied Piper” because any organization he has

been associated with always has a strong, growing youth ministry. Gerald genuinely loves the covenant group members and they know it, but he often plays the role of “devil’s advocate” in their discussions.

Paul Gentry is a religion professor at Southern Methodist University. Paul’s family lineage reads like a history of Protestantism in the United States. His mother’s family (Dow) is descended from Lorenzo Dow (the famous circuit preacher in West Virginia), and his father and grandfather were United Methodist ministers. His great, great grandfather came to this country from England and was a lay preacher in South Carolina. Paul is older than his covenant group colleagues; he will be 61 this year, and he brings a level of wisdom that the group values tremendously. A master teacher, he is beloved by his students and by all who know him. He has a deep understanding and appreciation of United Methodism.

Friendship United Methodist Church Background Information

Ray Wilson pastors a church in a rapidly growing neighborhood in Austin, Texas. About 10 years ago, Friendship was struggling, losing members, and almost bankrupt. Jim Delany was appointed pastor there, and after some soul searching, prayer, and outright challenge of “the way it had always been,” things turned around. Jim was heralded in the church as a “turnaround master” and went on to a Nashville spot five years later. Ray came five years ago, and the church continues to grow under his leadership. There are about 400 in worship on Sundays.

In support of their efforts, the Conference awarded Friendship Congregational Revitalization Funds of \$50,000 per year. The money was intended to help with the marketing and communication needs of the church. The Conference DCM has been consulting with Friendship about how to tell their story to the community.

Friendship’s congregation is multi-cultural, including both working class and professional folks. Students from the University of Texas make up a growing campus ministry connection for the church, and the number of students attending is growing. After-school care, youth ministry, weekend programs, seniors initiatives, and music are all exceptional. The congregation is vibrant, engaged, and renowned as among the “best in the city” by those in the know.

Friendship’s staff is largely “home grown” from the laity of the church. Ray, the only staff person with a seminary degree, is proud of the fact that people have “stepped up” and answered a calling to serve. There is a Staff Parish Relations Committee that meets annually, mostly as a formality. Church leadership committees really haven’t changed much in the time Ray has been there. He relies on his staff to let him know when things need his attention, and he is an active participant in all leadership decisions. He wants to maintain the growth, the innovative initiatives, and the positive recognition Friendship has garnered under his leadership.

Recognized nationally as a charismatic preacher, Ray prides himself on the church's growth and on the fact that he is attracting people to his church who have a wide variety of beliefs about Christianity. While the church is United Methodist, most of Ray's recognition is largely outside UMC. He doesn't actively teach UMC polity and theology, believing that his more inclusive message is one that attracts more parishioners. Ray goes to District and Annual Conference meetings, but he really doesn't have time to hold leadership roles there because of his home and church commitments.

Ray and his beautiful wife, Lucy, have three small children – one-year-old Karen, three-year-old Kevin; and five-year-old Kate. Lucy is a stay-at-home mom who somehow manages to be actively involved in almost all the church's activities despite having three little ones to tend to. In their community, people characterize them as a perfect family – gorgeous children and a handsome couple. Recently, however, Lucy has been encouraging Ray to take some time off because she has noticed how tired he is. With all the things going on in the life of the church, and Ray's need to continue his hands-on style of leadership, she and the children are seeing less of him these days. When he is home, he is often so tired he just falls asleep on the couch after supper. When she talks with him about it, Ray acknowledges that he is worn out, but he says, "Lucy, you know I don't have enough help, and if I turn things over to others, they just won't be done right. God will give me the strength to do what needs to be done."

THE COVENANT GROUP

PART ONE

“Thanks, friends, I feel better already. But give me a few minutes . . .” Nancy laughed ruefully as the group broke from their time of worship.

Gently Marcia prodded Nancy. “So, Nancy, this year has been all you’d expected and more. Both your email and our brief conversations at Annual Conference suggest you need some listening ears. While I won’t guarantee the wisdom of our response, you know we’re glad to hear you out. What’s going on?”

Nancy took a deep breath and her colleagues glanced apprehensively at one another. “Well, you all are familiar with the Friendship Church (FUMC)?”

The group’s responses confirmed that, indeed, they all knew FUMC, and Nancy wondered how wide the circle of information was and how much they knew.

Gerald’s resigned headshaking suggested a long-term challenge dealing with numerous contentious issues. “You know, they have a poster up on campus just calling themselves ‘THE FRIENDSHIP CHURCH.’ That speaks volumes in my book. Ray knows all the answers so I have just given up dealing with him except when it’s absolutely necessary.”

“I thought you would be Ray’s biggest supporter.” Marcia’s surprise showed in both her tone and expression. “Their after-school programs are bursting at the seams. And the college students are coming in droves. Their message is obviously resonating with the community.”

“OK, so you clearly know the setting. Let me get on with the most urgent crisis. Phyllis Crouch, the secretary over at FUMC, has kids who were in school with Marcia and Katie. We ran into each other at Starbucks and, over a latte, she told me a horrifying tale. Phyllis was working on ordering materials for next year. The church is involved in Bible Study Fellowship instead of using UMC Disciple Bible Study materials. They use literature from a variety of suppliers, so she was online trying to find the best prices. She was interrupted mid-search and reluctantly put her task on hold.

“It was the next morning before she got back to her search. She began typing in misremembered approximations of the supplier name. Now Phyllis is no computer

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crackerjack, so she was pretty pleased with herself when she came upon the internet history function. Imagine that the computer kept track of the addresses accessed!

“She scanned the list looking for the home of the free shipping deal. Looking down the display, there were addresses she didn’t recognize. Cursing another senior moment, she clicked on the first listing that was unfamiliar.

“Her scream brought everyone on the floor running into the office. Later she wished she had been more discrete and talked with Ray privately. However, at the moment, her shock had trumped her good sense.

“When she opened the unfamiliar website, she found herself smack in the middle of a pornographic scene—that was graphic beyond her imagination. In the first moments of horror, all she could do was stare at the screen, unaware that the volume of her surprise was summoning her colleagues.

“At first, her attention focused on the vulgarity of what she saw before her. She knew such sites existed. She’d reared teenaged children. In fact, she recalled the time her daughter was doing Internet research for a report on the Spice Girls. The whole family was amazed at the yield of a Google search on *that* subject.

“But as the ministerial staff gathered around her and the gasps of horror registered one by one, she remembered where she was. This was the church office computer.”

Paul smiled a sad little smile. “I know we have these kinds of problems on campus. Our computer tech folks are constantly trying to build firewalls that block access to these kinds of sites, but both the students and the pornographers are quicker. Believe it or not, students try to raise issues of academic freedom and freedom of the press.”

“Déjà vu all over again,” José Maria moaned. The sick feeling that had haunted him when he heard similar news in his own church quickly washed over him. “Fortunately,” he heard the irony in his own voice as he said this, “we have a gal in our church that is a pro at this. She works with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and local police to gather forensic investigative evidence. She helped us figure out that the users were some kids in our after-school programs who were using our network to do ‘homework.’ She installed some pretty sophisticated blocks for us and continues to monitor activity. I went home and moved the computer out of David’s rooms into the family area so that he is always working in public. Sophia still believes I overreacted. I think what bothered her most was having all of David’s school stuff cluttering our living space. We compromised by having some new bookcases built with desks for everyone that can be closed up.”

Marcia patted José Maria gently on the back, and thought of her own mixed blessing of no children. She met Nancy’s eyes and silently encouraged her to go on with the story.

“Well, of course, I called Ray first thing the next morning. I told him I had heard about the pornography episode and wanted to talk through it with him. I met him in his office that afternoon. I was quick to clarify that I knew this challenge was more common than most people realized and coveted the benefit of Ray’s experience. With that preamble, Ray told me the story. Here is his account.”

“The rest of the staff was as dumbfounded as Phyllis. Their responses graduated from stunned silence to anger to questioning. I was stunned to silence. At the same time, we all seemed to reach the common query – WHO?

“After half an hour of startled and directionless observation, I broke up the group and suggested that everyone return to their individual task at hand. I needed some time to think about what to do next. That evening, Lucy noted my distraction, but she knew better than to ask questions. ‘You’ll work out whatever is bothering you and let me know how and when I can help.’ After supper, I abandoned Lucy and the bath and bed- time rituals and went to my study to think and pray for guidance in how to approach this issue. By midnight, I had developed a plan of action. Lucy was already asleep when I went to bed.

“The next morning, I began by asking Phyllis to make a list of all the folks who had access to the office computer. The password needed to access the internet (‘Friendship’) was taped to the front of the monitor, so anyone who could enter the office could use the Internet. Then, we looked at the sequencing of Internet history log to try to pinpoint at least the most recent connection.

“With these two lists in hand, I met with each staff member to identify everyone who had been seen in or around the church office over the last few weeks, as well as the timing of their visits. The list was longer than I had hoped, and the chronology was less clearly remembered.

“As I studied the list of names I couldn’t help but shake my head. These folks are the salt of the earth. From staff to volunteers, I had hand selected each and every one. I knew them so well. Beyond our work together, I had been a spiritual counselor to many of them. While they had all faced challenges, none would take this route. My logical conclusion was that someone from outside the church was coming in after hours to use the computer to dredge up this filth.

“So, my next check was to look at the security system. With the help of the trustees, I investigated how someone might enter the building and the office. I don’t know if you’ve heard, but several years ago we had some pretty significant vandalism in our building. One of our members was totally committed to providing a safe environment and led the charge (and raised the money) for a state-of-the-art church security system. It was uniquely designed to provide maximum safety with minimum intrusion. Folks don’t feel like they are entering a fortress, but they are. You know, we have had more than one visit from other churches to benchmark us.

“On the basis of those conversations, I was back to the lists Phyllis and the rest of the staff had developed. I started mapping out the people, visit times, and Internet chronology. On four different occasions, the three lists connected in a single person, Carolyn Dwyer. Nancy, I confess, I laughed aloud at how coincidence can lead to impossible conclusion. Carolyn has been responsible for staffing our Sunday school program with teachers ever since I’ve been at this church. The second month I was here, I officiated at her husband’s funeral. Her children were grown and lived out of state. In counseling her, I suggested some volunteer therapy and she was a willing respondent. Starting with various one-time assignments, she threw herself into the work. Soon, I asked her to take on the Sunday school job. You and I both know it can be challenging to find someone for that role. The job seems to never end and is pretty thankless.

“So, the absurdity of this conclusion was the first amusing thought I’d had in this whole mess. Grateful for the moment of levity, I turned back to the task, starting over in my analysis. When I came to the same conclusion the second time, I chided myself for overlooking the other answers that must be there. I dove in a third time, deliberately searching for other possibilities. None appeared.

“I put the whole business aside and took up some reading I had been doing. But I couldn’t concentrate. Each time I would start a paragraph a new contradiction would come into my mind. I mean, only men access those kinds of sites . . . It’s young people who turn to that sort of entertainment . . . Lonely, secretive, quiet types . . . None of the descriptions fit Carolyn. Everything I knew about her and everything I believed about Internet porn seemed in direct conflict.

“After an hour of fretful and unproductive reading, I packed up and went home. Once there, I couldn’t settle either. Noting my pacing, Lucy gave me the dog-walking task for the evening. Trudging through the dusk, I realized there was no way around a conversation with Carolyn. She would be at the church the next evening for a Council on Ministries meeting. I would speak with her after the meeting.

“You can imagine what a long day it was. I couldn’t focus on anything. Minutes dragged. I wanted the meeting time to come and go, and I wanted it to never arrive. The Council on Ministries met. I found myself thinking that our conversation was trivial compared to the chore set before me, but the moment came and Carolyn and I chatted with amazing ease as we walked into my office.

“The confrontation was startlingly brief. When presented with the charge, Carolyn quickly admitted that she had used the office computer to access these sites. She offered no explanation, only a heartfelt apology. I was unprepared for this response. I expected denial or at least rationalization. When offered neither, I thanked Carolyn for her honesty and asked that we talk again in a week or so.”

Nancy described to the covenant group her rapt attention as Ray conveyed this tale. She felt great empathy for him as a pastoral colleague and wondered what she would have

done if faced with the same circumstance. As she had met Ray's gaze with warmth, she had asked "What now?"

Ray's sigh was deep. "I know I have to ask her to step down from her position. I'm not sure how I'll do that, but I know it's the right thing to do. I'll tell you one thing. Lucy and the children will be happy when I work through this. Last night I was so distracted I lost my place in *Goodnight Moon* and had to be reminded to say prayers at bedtime."

Marcia saw the frustration on Nancy's face. Each of the group knew dismissing Carolyn was a necessary step, but it was not a task any of them would relish. Nor was it one at which any of them was particularly skilled.

José Maria spoke for the group. "You know, Nancy, all of us have been up against something like this. If it were me, I would appreciate your help. I mean, this Carolyn is a volunteer and a church member."

"But it's not you, it's Ray Wilson. Appreciating help is not his particular gift." Nancy replied, almost without thinking. She looked to Paul, hoping that his wisdom would provide some new perspective for her.

"United Methodists have never had their heads in the clouds. We are a people of 'practical divinity.' What does it mean to live out faith and love in this circumstance? To whom is your responsibility as a leader? Sorry, Nancy. You should know by now I have no easy answers," Paul responded to her glance.

"Before we solve this problem, there is another part of the story I need to tell. As I was gathering my things at the conclusion of my session with Ray, I remembered a call I had gotten from the Austin Habitat for Humanity manager. He had just received a notice from the bank that the check they had deposited from Friendship had bounced. Before he called the church and got someone in trouble, he wanted to let me know. Of course, I was sure there was clerical error somewhere that had likely already been corrected. I encouraged him to call Clyde Blankenship, the financial manager at Friendship to get things straightened out.

"In an effort to end my time with Ray on a somewhat lighter note, I mentioned this to him. I expected we would share a chuckle over some system glitch, and he would be able to report a solution already implemented. I would leave having affirmed his problem-solving skills in the face of this latest challenge.

"Ray's response could have made me laugh had I shown less restraint. His face was a cartoon-like image of confusion. Clearly, this was the first he had heard of this mistake. My plan had backfired. Given Ray's obvious lack of information, I made a hasty exit, extracting his promise for an update on both situations in the next couple of days.

"Driving back to my office, I began the usual rehearsing of the session with Ray. I questioned my decision to bring up the bounced check. It was a good thought, I

reassured myself. After all, Friendship is thriving financially. By all accounts, their gifts are increasing more than proportionally to their membership. They went through a bad spot some years back, but they are on solid footing now. And Ray is the type of pastor that has his finger in everything. I am sure he studies the financial reports and probably signs all the checks himself. After chiding myself for this thought, I directed my attention to the traffic that was complicating my travel plans.

“Maybe because I assumed the bounced check would be easier to address than the situation with Carolyn, I pulled the Friendship financial reports when I got back to the office.

“As I suspected, the income figures looked strong. Tithes and offerings were slightly behind budget through May. They would likely fall even further behind over the summer and start to gain on budget during the fall and as the end of the year approached. I suspected their budget did not fully reflect the normal timing of regular contributions.”

José Maria nodded. “Yeah, all through the year we just assume we’re behind because of timing, and everything will get made up by December. Some years it does and some years it doesn’t. And we never know what kind of year it is until it’s over.”

Marcia’s face lit up. “A member of our finance committee has been studying that very thing. She has collected the amount of our tithes and offerings, omitting any sort of special giving initiatives, week by week for the past few years. She has built a model that projects more precisely when we should expect the cash to come in. So, now, once the committee determines the total budget amount for tithes and offerings, she can predict the timing of those contributions. Then, we can monitor where we stand.”

“What else did you see in the reports?” Gerald prodded Nancy.

“Well, like most churches, their biggest expense is personnel. Of course, I’m including in that number more than just salary – housing and car allowances, retirement, health insurance, payroll taxes – all the usual suspects. Between 55 and 60 percent of total contributions goes to cover personnel-related expenses. That’s right in the ballpark.”

“What about designated funds?” José Maria asked.

“They look about normal. Of course, the reports don’t show that funds were expended appropriately, but the amounts are reasonable. I would need to look at meeting minutes in which expenditures were approved to verify that appropriateness.”

“How do you know amounts approved were actually spent for the intended purposes?” José Maria pushed on. Paul knew that this persistence derived from José Maria’s own experience as a new pastor. Though expenditures were approved for particular programs, the actual costs were much less and the extra money was spent for purposes not consistent with the church’s intentions. Since this episode, José Maria had developed a keen sense about the fiscal responsibility of church leadership. José Maria had valued

Paul's counsel during this experience. Paul had helped José Maria guide his church through reliance on the "do no harm" principle.

"What else did you look for?" Gerald quizzed Nancy.

"Well, since the spark for this whole thing was a bounced check, I looked at what balances were reported. Once again, everything was about what I would have expected. The cash balance looked, if anything, a little high. So, my questions about the bad check were unanswered."

"Back to Ray?" Marcia asked.

"I didn't know any thing else to do," Nancy replied. "He was due to call me back with an update anyway. I tried to think how I would bring up the subject gracefully. I was certain he would have been looking into it.

"When Ray called, I could tell he was uneasy and I sensed that he didn't have all the answers he needed. I suggested another face-to-face meeting and offered to bring along a financial 'expert.' I was a little surprised, and a lot worried, when Ray readily agreed. I suggested he bring Clyde along, but immediately heard reluctance in Ray's voice.

"This time I thought it best that we meet somewhere other than Friendship. So, Ray came to our place and we sat down in the conference room. Nicole Barolla, an accountant for the district, joined us. What I like about Nicole is her ability to see the big picture in the details, and her grace in not making me feel stupid when I am less perceptive.

"Nicole had had an opportunity to look at Friendship's financial reports for the last several months. She was prepared with some good questions for Ray. As I expected, Ray had engaged in his own examination since our last conversation. He had spent several hours with Clyde trying to get his head around the numbers. In his own words, he's not 'a numbers guy.' His trust in Clyde was implicit.

"Clyde Blankenship is the half-time financial manager at Friendship. Ray suspected he put significantly more than 'half time' into the position. Ray was particularly appreciative of the fact that Clyde took his responsibility so personally. He wouldn't even let someone else make the deposits, always taking them to the bank himself. He had built a model for the weekly offering counters that minimized their time and required Clyde to do the hard work of making sure that everything balanced and was accounted for.

"Given this description, I wondered why Ray was reluctant to bring Clyde along to the meeting. Nicole's questions and Ray's responses brought two issues to the surface. First, Ray was totally reliant on Clyde for all of the financial systems of the church. Second, Clyde had created a one-man show in the area of fiscal responsibility.

“Ray quickly pointed out that both he and the finance committee appreciated Clyde’s management style. Finance committee members really didn’t want to be involved in the daily financial operations of the church. They wanted to make the big decisions, and were grateful to Clyde for taking care of the grind.”

“Sorry to interrupt, Nancy, but can you be a little more specific?” Gerald asked. “What exactly was Clyde doing?”

“Well, he apparently did it all. He recorded the offerings, balancing to the total counted by the ushers on Sunday. He prepared the deposit and took it to the bank. He wrote and signed all checks, with only checks of over \$1,000 requiring a second signature. He prepared the payroll, made the transfers to cover required direct deposit to employee accounts and prepared the payments to the various government agencies and insurers. You get the idea.”

“He must have been a pretty busy guy,” Marcia commented. “And he did all this in half-time. He sounds like a real gem. Do you think he would like to add my church in the other half of his time.”

They all laughed. Finding good financial help was always a challenge. Besides technical competence, the accountant needed to be the soul of discretion. Leaking contribution data could sound the death knell for churches.

“Let me cut to the chase.” Nancy’s comment brought smiles all around. She was a great storyteller and they all valued her attention to her characters’ thoughts and feelings. “After a couple of hours, Nicole, Ray and I had hit on only one area that needed investigation. The bounced check prompted an examination of the movement of money between the church’s various bank accounts. That particular problem had derived from a deposit being made to the general account rather than a special local missions account, and had been easily resolved. However, other irregularities were not as easily explained.

“We all knew that we had good control over the salaries expense. It was highly visible to both the church from the expenditure side and the employees on the revenue side. At a conference, Ray had heard that some churches were beginning to outsource the processing of payroll. Payroll service providers were professionals at computing not only the payroll amounts, but also the related taxes and benefits. They even understood the different tax and retirement issues for ministers, and had experts on staff to help in maximizing those benefits to the minister and minimizing the cost to the church. Ray had suggested to Clyde that they explore such a service, but Clyde had protested at the additional cost. He was happy to keep preparing the payroll. They did not have that many employees, and he had his own system.

“Nicole, however, noticed some irregular fluctuation in the payroll tax liabilities. Payroll taxes, both the component withheld from the employees’ check and the part contributed by the church, were due to the IRS within a couple of days of the payroll. Since the majority of this money was withheld from the employee, it was really just a pass-through

for the church. The liability should exist for only the briefest amount of time between the withholding and the payment. Only on rare occasions would this brief time span the financial reporting date necessitating the reporting of a liability.

“Friendship, however, had an ongoing and growing liability. Ray volunteered to quiz Clyde about it. His words professed confidence that it was just ‘part of Clyde’s system’ but there was a shadow in his eyes. Both Nicole and I offered to participate in this conversation, but both offers were rejected.

Ray’s next step was to talk to Clyde. As we ushered him out of the building, Nicole and I both murmured words of encouragement. We offered our presence again, and again were refused. Ray promised to talk to Clyde the next morning and to call to fill us in immediately.

“As I re-entered my office, the phone rang. In a brief check in conversation, Jeff picked up on my weariness and suggested Chinese takeout. He’d pick up our favorites and meet me at home. As we sat the table, tears welled up in my eyes. Jeff immediately recognized something more than tiredness. At his gentle pressing, I shared my feeling that I was letting Ray down. The only thing I knew to do was to offer to be there with him, and he turned me down – twice!

“As usual, Jeff helped me understand Ray’s position. If he had been too trusting. . . If he had been less than effective in his oversight . . . He needed to discover that himself, not be caught in the act by the DS. And if Clyde was his friend, he needed to speak with him in confidence without having ‘an interloper’ listening in.

“Then Jeff asked me the hard question. ‘Do you trust Ray to do what is best for the church?’ While this very challenge had been nibbling around the edges of my consciousness, I had refused to give it credence. But I could not dodge Jeff’s thoughtful question. He would wait for a response, but he would have an answer.

“After several moments, I breathed the answer. ‘Yes, I trust that Ray loves the church, wants what is best for the church, and will hear and respond to God’s leadership.’ For the first time since my conversation with Phyllis, I slept through the night. I had no more certainty about the eventual consequences. But I was at peace that Ray and I wanted the same thing. I woke up with a renewed sense of the privilege of working as a DS and a determination to be what Ray needed as a colleague and a leader (even though neither of us knew what that might be).

“Shortly after eleven the next morning, Ray dropped in on me. Though my calendar was full, I knew from his face that I would make time. Thinking of my own cherished evening, I asked if Ray had had a restful night. Ray’s glare spoke volumes. He reported that, after supper (which was the usual riotous affair) baths and bedtime, he stood at the sink with Lucy as they loaded the dishwasher and scrubbed the pots and pans. He realized she was talking, but he hadn’t heard her. He knew his meeting with Clyde would not go well. At the very least, he was going to question the trust of a friend. At worst, he

would find that his lack of oversight had cost the church funds. Lucy (sure that he was overtired) encouraged him to make it an early night, and they went to bed. But sleep was impossible, and he got up and went to his study to keep from disturbing Lucy.

“The meeting with Clyde had produced results worse than imagined on both counts. First, Clyde was deeply offended by Ray’s decision to confront him. He felt betrayed that Ray had already consulted ‘outsiders.’ Then, he began to try to explain the irregularities. As Ray listened, he was grateful for his time with Nicole and me the previous day. Without Nicole’s preparation, he might have fallen for Clyde’s accounting. He was predisposed to trust him and, (on the surface) his story was a good one.

“Clyde had failed to make the payments to the IRS. The money had been withheld from employees’ checks, but had not been forwarded to the IRS. Clyde had used the money to increase the social programs that the church chose to support. First, he just stretched the IRS payment deadlines to the limit. Then, he went a day past the deadline, then two, until he missed one payment and then another. In December when the big offerings came in, he fully intended to make up the payments. In the meantime, organizations like Habitat needed money now.

“Clyde had already thought of what he would do should the IRS take a hardnosed stand (though he really expected leniency since, after all, this was a church,. He would sit down with the IRS representatives and come up with some kind of payment plan.

“Thanks to our conversation the day before, Ray was fully aware of the impossibility of this outcome. He knew that the church was immediately liable not only for the payroll taxes, but also for interest and penalties associated with the late and missed payments. He knew that the only way to avoid the interest and penalties was to agree to Clyde’s prosecution. Clyde and Ray both knew that Clyde would be dismissed from his position.

“As Ray drove away, my heart was heavy within my chest. I breathed a prayer that God’s presence would be visceral to him today. I ached for Ray. Now he had to fire two folks, both of whom he had selected and valued. They had violated their personal relationships with him as well as their discipleship vows. In addition, he had to be doubting his own leadership abilities. How can I help Ray in the short term? I know there are longer term issues that will need our attention, but right now I need to help survive this personal and leadership crisis.”

1. Were lines of confidentiality crossed? What lines of confidentiality need to be maintained? How can you speak honestly and honor the confidences that are an inherent part of your role? Is there some safe community in which these subjects can be addressed?
2. Who are the stakeholders in the decision to dismiss Carolyn and Clyde, and what are the implications for each of them?
3. What are the processes for releasing paid versus volunteer staff?
4. What are the legal responsibilities involved, and who is accountable?
5. What are the communication issues around the dismissals? Who needs to know what, when and from whom? What Conference communication is necessary?
6. Who should fire Carolyn? Clyde?
7. Prepare talking points for each of the dismissal meetings? Set the agenda for each session.
8. How can Nancy help Ray today?
9. How might you prepare yourself for the feedback and repercussions that are inevitable following the resolution of these situations? Can you be prepared? Proactive?
10. What role does the DCM have in the Annual Conference in education around these issues?
11. What actions could be taken for the longer term to improve the odds that such problems are avoided in the future?
12. Who can help? What UMC resources do Nancy and Ray have or could they develop to address this situation?

THE COVENANT GROUP

PART TWO

“So, gang, you’re right. Ray needs help,” Nancy sighed. “What strategies and ideas do you all have? After all, Ray is the kind of guy who wants to determine his own fate. He is a charismatic leader who goes his own way. I’ve got to do something! Ray needs me even if he doesn’t express it. With your help, I think I can save the situation. He might even appreciate it now!”

Gerald had been quiet for some time. He leaned back in his chair, scratched his head, and questioned Nancy, “What are you really after, Nancy? Do you want to be seen as coming in on your white horse again to save the day? Do you want to be the new DS heroine who looks good to the Bishop? The old ‘Here’s Nancy with all that enthusiasm and get-up-and-go to make things right’? I think you need to examine your own motives first. Bless your heart, Nancy, you have more talent in your little finger than most of us have in our whole selves, but you seem to need some sort of adulation from people you work with. What about helping Ray help Ray? You know, ‘give a man a fish....’ You’re going to have to get off this ‘savior’ thing.”

The rest of the group was silent. Nancy looked from one to another. Marcia was looking down. Paul fiddled with a pencil. José Maria looked like he’d been slapped. Nancy took those actions as assent – they agreed with Gerald! “Well,” she said, “that’s feedback I needed to hear, I guess. If I can’t hear it from you, I can’t hear it from anybody. Can we take a break for about 30 minutes? I have some thinking to do.”

Nancy left and Marcia saw tears in her eyes. “Were we too hard on her, Gerald? She’s already in a tough place. Did we make it worse? After all, her enthusiasm is her greatest strength.”

“I think you’re wrong, Marcia. Her greatest strength is her compassion. She just needs to find a way to channel that so that the solutions are ones Ray can use. Nancy has had it pretty tough and she’s always needed the affirmation of others to know she is doing a good job. I intend to help her see she can be an invisible hero, get the same results, empower others, and feel her own value without getting kudos from Bishop Walker.”

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“You may be right,” José Maria said. “When she comes back, let’s help her develop some scenarios that might help Ray’s leadership and help Nancy feel good about her own! Let’s break for a few minutes.”

Nancy walked outside the hotel into the sunshine and began a brisk walk just as she did almost every morning. She ruminated on what Gerald had said and what the others had said by their silence. “Okay,” she thought, “I just heard from people I love that I have an opportunity to improve my leadership. I need to examine my own behavior and decide if I agree with their assessment.”

On her walk, Nancy reflected on the past year as a DS. “What a difference from being a pastor! As a pastor, I was the one people came to for help, plus having a successful church, serving on conference committees, and being ‘in demand’ as a leader gave me a good deal of self worth. Now that I am a DS, I miss that feeling! My job is more RE-active than PRO-active. I make a difference, but in a very different way.

“I wonder if Gerald and the others are right. Might I be somehow searching for self worth in the approval of others? If that’s the case, then I might be vulnerable to abusing my leadership position to gain Bishop Walker’s or others’ recognition. I wish Jeff were here. He has a way of cutting through things to help me see clearly. Tonight, I’ll talk this over with him. Thank you, God, for that sweet man and for my covenant group who love me. And thank you for your guidance through them ... why, I’m just like Ray, aren’t I, Lord? Wanting everyone to appreciate me for my talents, afraid to let go of things, afraid of conflict?

“Ray needs to be a better leader, but so do I. I’m going back in there and get some help!”

Thirty minutes later, Nancy’s smile lit up the room. “I’m lucky to have you all in my life,” she said. “Let’s get to it! Poor old Ray won’t know what hit him... he’ll have stealth leadership development. And Gerald, thanks for your honesty. I won’t deny it didn’t sting, but we get God’s message in all kinds of ways, and I needed to hear it.”

“Whew!” exclaimed Marcia. “Let’s do it. Paul, you’ve got some ideas already written down, don’t you?”

“Here’s what I’ve been thinking, Nancy, and the rest of you chime in any time, okay? First, Ray needs some help fast because he’s going to be down two people. Let’s brainstorm for a few minutes to see who we might get in the short term to address the financial woes at Friendship. Then let’s address long term issues like Ray’s lack of shared leadership, and how Nancy and others can help him accept help around”

“I like that, Paul,” José Maria interrupted, “but there are going to be some long term awful consequences if Ray doesn’t get the right people in the right places in that church, and he doesn’t have much time before things explode. Is there some way to permanently staff the place differently and still stay in budget?”

They all knew that was the million dollar (or at least \$100,000) question. The church was going to have financial demands associated with clearing up the payroll tax issues. It hardly seemed like adding staff was feasible.

“Well,” said Nancy, “one of my negotiating tools is that Friendship hasn’t paid its full apportionment since Ray’s been there. Last week on the phone, Ray sounded so desperate about all that’s gone on, he laughingly alluded to feeling bad that he was getting so much help when he hadn’t even fully funded his apportionment. I told him (in the same laughing tone) that after all this was over, I’d expect it paid in full. Now, though, I may be able legitimately to have a conversation about it given all the resources that this ‘clean up’ is requiring. Too, one of our solutions may be to give him some qualified ministerial support. If it is someone Ray has input on, I’m certain he’ll be more than grateful, given the situation.”

“Not only that,” Gerald asserted, “the poor man is a wreck personally. He is embarrassed and reeling from the fact that all this has come to light, that two of his handpicked staff had to be fired, and that he no longer can ‘fix’ it. He needs you, Nancy, and I think he’s ready to receive some help.”

“Friendship has been growing rapidly; I can talk with Bishop Walker right now to make sure, but given my conversation with him last week about this, I’m certain I’ve already planted a seed. What do you all think about an associate pastor?” Nancy queried.

“Great!” said Marcia.” “Sure,” Paul agreed; the rest echoed “yes,” with the exception of José Maria. They all looked at him as if he were raining on the parade.

“Guys, I like the sound of that notion,” José Maria tried to sound positive. “I really do. But I see two problems. First, where will Friendship find the money? And, maybe more importantly, where are Ray and the Friendship leadership in all this? Creation of a new pastoral position is the church’s job. Nancy, do you think you and Bishop Walker can just pick someone and drop them in the middle of this mess? I appreciate that Ray might be in a position to accept some help, but I’m not at all sure you can (or should) make this work.”

“Spoken like the thoughtful pastor I know you to be,” Marcia responded to José Maria. “But it is a good idea. Let’s don’t close the door on it yet.”

“What about Congregational Revitalization funds?” Gerald brainstormed. “They certainly are going to need some revitalization!”

Gerald’s idea percolated through the minds of the group. “Well, that would obviously address the funding issue,” José Maria responded hopefully.

“And that would allow Bishop Walker to initiate the appointment,” Paul noted.

“It would also mean the DCM would be involved in the selection and hiring process,” Gerald added. “Ray would be included as well, of course, and maybe the Friendship Staff/Parish folks.”

Nancy’s face brightened, “This is sounding better by the minute.”

“There are still some practical problems. I mean, we haven’t even left Annual Conference and the announcement of new appointments. Is there anyone available?” Marcia wondered aloud.

“Not everything works on the UMC clock!” Paul joked, and they all laughed.

“Let’s get down to business, then,” said Nancy. And, I need your help. I’m going to help Ray assess his leadership, but first, I’m going to assess my own. It is a perfect time now that I’ve got a little experience under my belt!”

1. As a new DS, what new leadership challenges does Nancy face? (Address challenges that are common to all new DSs and DCMs)
2. What resources are available to new DSs and DCMs that might have helped Nancy had she availed herself of them?
3. Develop a process by which Nancy could evaluate her leadership?
4. Brainstorm ideas to get Ray some immediate help with his financial situation at Friendship. Make a good list! Remember the rules of brainstorming:
 - a. All ideas are welcome and worthy of consideration
 - b. Don't debate the value of any idea until brainstorming concludes
 - c. No interrupting of others or criticism of others' ideas
 - d. Record all ideas for consideration
 - e. Everyone participates
5. Who are the stakeholders in the selection of a new associate pastor for Friendship UMC? Recommend methods for discovering their needs in the selection process.
6. What do you see as the list of KSAEs (knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences) the ideal new associate pastor of Friendship UMC would have?
7. Prioritize your list in some way that indicates which KSAEs are essential and which are just "nice to have."
8. How will Nancy and the local DCM interact with Ray to lead, facilitate and influence the selection process?
9. How should Nancy engage Ray in the process so it is not her success but his? Develop a list of talking points that Nancy can use when she talks with Ray.
10. What UMC resources are available to Nancy, the DCM, Ray, and the selection committee? Make a recommendation as to how these key people should avail themselves of these resources.

THE COVENANT GROUP

PART THREE

“Friends, you are the best! I think we’ve got a plan for getting Ray some good help. And he’s gonna need it. I’ve saved the best for last,” Nancy began after their break.

“God’s providence is just unspeakable. When I asked for the agenda of this meeting to center on Friendship, I was thinking of the fraud, the porn and the leadership issues we’ve talked through. But the good Lord knew there was a deeper problem that lies at the foundation of that church.

Paul’s curiosity was piqued. “You mean there is more to this story?! Please go on!”

“Do you know Teresa Hammond?” Nancy asked. “She’s a longtime delegate to Annual Conference from Friendship. In fact, I ran into her this week.”

“Am I thinking of the right person? She teaches over at UT?” Marcia asked.

“Yes. She teaches social work. Her membership at Friendship predates Jim Delany and Ray Wilson. I think she was on the Cradle Roll there,” Nancy confirmed.

“She spoke at a meeting I went to about The Hope Group. It’s a residential program there in Austin that helps prostitutes turn their lives around. It seems to be working really well and we were interested in starting a similar program in Midland,” José Maria added. “I was impressed by her attention to the organizational details without losing her compassion for the women involved. I remember thinking, ‘Wow, what a great advocate these women have in her!’”

“Funny you should mention The Hope Group,” Nancy grinned at José Maria. “They are at the heart of the freshest installment of this tale. When I ran into Teresa at the opening reception, she looked lost. As we did the usual reception chatter thing, her mind seemed far away. As we were leaving, she grabbed my arm and asked if we could talk privately.

“Teresa works with these women as a volunteer. She also coordinates other volunteers from her social work classes. She has helped some of these women accomplish amazing things. Some have gotten college degrees. They have even started a little business selling crafty kinds of stuff.

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“In thinking of helping these women move out of the residence and into the larger world, Teresa was trying to find a community they could be a part of. You know, a community that would love and accept them. Some folks who would notice if things started to turn bad and would be supportive. Teresa knew she had found just that sort of place at Friendship.

“Teresa felt this idea was Holy inspiration. What could be better than to get these women plugged in to a community of faith? And what better place than Friendship?”

“Nancy, this is sounding too rosy. You’ve got a good idea. It’s right up Ray’s alley of inclusiveness. It will boost membership. I’m looking for the problem here,” Gerald commented.

“I’m getting to it, but my response to Teresa was just like yours. I was totally unprepared for what was coming. Teresa broached the idea with the women of The Hope Group. Although some had had bad experiences with holy rollers, most were willing to give the plan a try. The idea of a fellowship group outside of The Hope Group was appealing to them. Looking beyond their time at the residence to their new lives was what created the ‘hope’ in The Hope Group.

“Teresa was delighted. She couldn’t wait to share the idea with Ray. He was due some good news. She didn’t know all that was going on, but she was worried about Ray. He didn’t look well, and he seemed preoccupied all the time. She’d also noticed Lucy watching him with extra care.

“Teresa made a point of getting to church well before Sunday school time the next Sunday. She knew she could catch Ray in his office then. Knocking gently, she opened the door to find Ray sitting behind his desk just staring into space.

“After apologizing for interrupting his pre-service quiet time, Teresa promised her good news would make the disruption welcome. Ray’s eyes brightened slightly at the prospect of happy tidings. Teresa shared her idea of inviting the women of The Hope Group into the Friendship fellowship.

“Ray looked at her in astonishment. ‘That won’t work’ he immediately responded. Teresa, thinking she had not explained her plan clearly, started over. All the while that she was retelling her story, Ray shook his head. As she finished, Ray put his hand on her shoulder and said again, ‘No, that just won’t work at all.’ Then he walked her to door, escorted her out and closed the door behind her.

“Teresa is one of Ray’s biggest supporters. As she recounted the story to me this week, both her face and her voice documented her confusion. I confess, I was stymied. Before I could gather my thoughts and offer some words of counsel, or at least consolation, Teresa quickly gathered her conference pack and left for another meeting. She started out of the room, then turned and came back to the chair where I was sitting. ‘Please understand, I am only grappling with where I went wrong in my thinking. I haven’t had a

chance to talk with Ray about it any more. I know he will help me think it through. My own misunderstanding is just weighing so heavily that I needed to talk with someone. And I know you are a good listener. So, out it spilled.’ Then she left.”

“I was frozen in my chair. The more I thought about it, the more convinced I was that Teresa must have misinterpreted Ray’s comments. Or maybe he had misunderstood her. He had likely been deep in thought and prayer before leading worship and couldn’t focus on what she was telling him.”

The Covenant group listened to Nancy’s recounting of her conversation with Teresa. Gerald could hardly contain his disgust! “That’s the craziest thing I’ve heard from a pastor in my tenure with the church. The very idea of turning The Hope Group away is so counter to what we as United Methodists believe that I’m about ready to say Ray deserves whatever he gets.”

Paul countered, “You all, we’ve dealt with this kind of thing in higher ed for years. Groups want to align themselves with SMU, but because of the nature of the group and our mission, we have to say ‘no.’ Mind you, I’m not agreeing with Ray here, I’m just needing to understand why he was so adamant about turning them away. I’ve always thought that Ray was more inclusive than exclusive; in fact, I’ve wanted him to be more ‘Methodist’ in his approaches—teaching more doctrine, using our materials, etc.”

Marcia nodded. “Whatever his reasons, though, Ray couldn’t have been thinking clearly. All this must be taking a terrible toll on him, Nancy. When I saw him yesterday as he and Lucy were leaving, he looked like he hadn’t slept in ages – circles under his eyes, and he’s lost weight, too. But, we’re interrupting your story; I know you must have addressed it with him.”

“Yes,” Nancy lamented, “I did – yesterday, as a matter of fact. And I must say, I expected a much different outcome. I had done my usual Pollyanna approach, thinking ‘of course Teresa must have misunderstood; Ray would never turn anyone away from the church. He’s so tuned in to growth and inclusiveness. Why, he gets more pleasure from seeing the worship numbers grow than any pastor I work with.’

“So when I saw him leaving the luncheon yesterday, I stopped him and asked if we could chat for a few minutes over coffee. Immediately, I recognized a wariness in his demeanor. He said, ‘Sure,’ but I heard in his tone I was probably the last person in the world he wanted to talk with. We walked out to the patio, got some coffee, and sat beside the fountain. Ray’s phone rang and he took a call as I sipped my coffee. We chit chatted about the meeting a few minutes and then I said, ‘Ray, Teresa Hammond talked with me after the opening reception.’ Guys, as God is my witness, his anger was palpable. If looks could kill, I’d have been a goner! ‘That makes me furious!’ he said through tight lips. ‘These conference meetings are nothing but political tongue wagging and tattling. Nancy, you keep telling me I need to improve my leadership, but when I make a decision, everyone second guesses me, including you.’ Ray’s diatribe was interrupted by another phone call, which he answered. I hoped the distraction would

disarm him, but he returned to his rant full force. ‘I know what Teresa talked to you about, but it wasn’t her place, and you coming down on me about it just makes things worse!’”

“Goodness gracious,” Marcia interjected, “that must have been a surprise, Nancy. After all you’ve been doing to get Friendship and Ray back on track, he attacks you like that!”

José Maria and Gerald just shook their heads in amazement. “What’s going on with him, Nancy?” Paul asked.

Nancy continued, “Ray’s phone rang the third time. I lost my cool. You all know I don’t lose my temper often, but when I do, it isn’t pretty. I snatched up the phone before he could answer and threw it in the pool. I hate it when I lose control because I’m angry. It looks weak and silly for someone my age and in the position I hold to lose it! I did, though. The angrier I got, the more articulate I was. So there I was, face red, steam coming from my ears, chewing Ray out. As my Katie would say, ‘ripping him up one side and down the other.’ I defended Teresa; I defended the Conference; I defended myself; and I accused him of lack of appreciation for all the Church had done for him and his congregation. For almost a full five minutes, I let him have it with both barrels.”

“You didn’t! Gerald exclaimed. “I didn’t know you had it in you! How did it feel?”

Marcia laughed, “There’s some biblical precedent for that ... that whole money lenders in the temple business.”

Nancy smiled. “Well, I have to admit, when I ‘wound down’ I felt better. I’d been harboring some anger at Ray anyway and this was the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back.’ But I was wrong, friends. I always regret losing control – I make bad decisions; I have trouble forgiving myself; and I didn’t do anything to help Ray. Instead of listening to understand, I listened to defend my own positions.”

“You’re being pretty hard on yourself, Nancy,” José Maria said quietly. “Maya Angelou has a quote I like a lot, ‘You did the best you could at the time, and when you knew better, you did better.’ My guess is that you couldn’t have stopped those emotions from coming out any more than you could have stopped a freight train. In hindsight, though, I guess you learned from that, too, didn’t you?”

“I did, José Maria, I learned more about leadership in this whole exchange than I’ve learned in a long time.”

“Keep going,” Paul encouraged. Nancy stood up and began to walk around the room as she talked. The group could tell she was still working through the conversation and her responses. As Nancy looked around the room at her friends, she took comfort and courage from the fact that she had this help, this encouragement, this freedom to be human from these four colleagues.

“When I finished my tirade, Ray just sat there with a stunned look on his face. He recognized that he had flipped a switch in me somehow that had let loose this ‘alien being’ who was supposed to be his DS. ‘Don’t leave!’ I commanded him. I went to the restroom, washed my face, took several deep breaths, and regained what little composure I could muster.

“When I returned, Ray stood up, extended his hand and said, ‘Nancy, I’m sorry. Let’s start all over with this conversation.’ I had been prepared to do the same thing, and I said so. We sat there and talked for the next hour. I remembered something my favorite teacher told me years ago, ‘You can talk about anything if your goal is understanding and not agreement.’ I made my goal understanding...understanding Ray, understanding why he made the decision he made, and understanding my role in helping him.

“I asked, ‘Tell me, Ray, why you couldn’t encourage Teresa’s plan to bring the HOPE women into Friendship?’

“‘Nancy, I have to look out for all my parishioners; their need has to take priority over the needs of a few potential new members. I know a great deal about the population we’re talking about. Remember, I was a prison minister in school. I’m not judging these women – only God can do that – but I do know the facts. Most prostitutes do drugs. And addiction is lifelong, Nancy. If these women are active in the life of the church, they will bring drugs into our midst. Our youth programs are the strongest in the city. We keep kids off drugs by keeping them in church. What would happen if kids were introduced to drugs in our church? Did you ever think of that?’

“I called on every communications course I’d ever taken and began to practice ‘reflective listening,’” Nancy continued.

“‘So what you’re telling me is that you’re afraid these women will sell drugs to our young people?’

“Ray responded, ‘Well, maybe not sell, but by associating with these women, the risk for our children is greater. I really believe that.’

“‘What else, Ray?’ I asked.

“‘Recidivism is high in that population. Most of those women will be back on the streets in less than a year. Do we want our church members to spend precious resources and invest themselves in people who won’t ultimately benefit? Think of the work we do for Habitat for Humanity. Would we give that Habitat money to people who ultimately won’t benefit from it? That’s throwing money down a rat hole.’

“I was sorely tempted to challenge him on the ‘rat hole’ thing, but I held my tongue. How could he think that way? Instead, I bit the inside of my cheek and continued, ‘Anything else that makes you think this is a bad idea?’

“‘Yes, indeed,’ he replied, ‘there’s the whole disease thing that nobody wants to talk about. I know from what I read and see on my hospital visits that prostitutes carry HIV and all kinds of blood borne illnesses – hepatitis C, too. Who looks out for the rest of our congregation? Why, the next thing you know they’ll want to be keeping the nursery! Nancy, it just isn’t for the greater good! Oh, and what about our teen boys who might just meet up with one of them for who knows what? I can hear the parents now – ‘How dare you bring that element in here to affect our children!’”

Nancy stopped walking, looked at her friends, and concluded, “I was able not to react much after that. I summarized Ray’s concerns; I thanked him for his time, and requested that we get together later this week for lunch. And, I apologized again for losing control before I understood his thinking on the situation. He said he was sorry, too, and thanked me for hearing him out. I think he knew I didn’t agree with everything he said, but he knew I had heard him and that he had given me a different perspective on which to reflect. So what do you think? How should I proceed?”

1. How would you help Ray get to the root source of his response to Teresa's idea? How would you explore the ways in which his beliefs are consistent with, and counter to, UMC doctrine and polity?
2. How does this revelation about Ray's doctrine affect Nancy's analysis of the fraud/porn and shared leadership situations? Should this new information change her response to Ray in those circumstances?
3. What steps can Nancy take to support Ray in the things he is doing well and affirm his leadership?
4. What clues might Nancy have seen that would have alerted her to Ray's lack of commitment to UMC doctrine and practice? How should she interpret and evaluate these clues to know when there is an issue that demands attention?
5. How can Nancy insure accountability in her ongoing relationship with Ray? What practices and structures can she put in place for Ray and other church leaders to create an environment of both trust and responsibility?
6. What are the roles of the DS and DCM in the teaching ministry of the church related to social justice and safe sanctuary?
7. Who can help? What UMC resources does Nancy have (or could she develop) to help her develop the tools she needs for effective leadership?
8. Can Ray and Nancy be effective? Prepare an action plan for Nancy with specific steps—beginning with what to do when she returns to work tomorrow.
9. Develop for yourself a plan of accountability. Write it down now, and share it with your group here. Identify a person or group (peer group, mentor, pastor, Covenant Group) to whom you will make yourself regularly accountable. As you return to your district, share this plan with that person or group.