



TAYLOR
S E M I N A R Y

To develop Christ-minded leaders who make a difference in the world.

FE Ministry Event Study

SAMPLE M.E.S. (MINISTRY EVENT STUDY)

Introduction

I have had the privilege of serving in two different ministry settings this past year. For the purposes of this Ministry Event Study, I thought I would trace the trajectory of both ministries as I reflect on what God might be calling me to. The two ministry sites are Deadwood Baptist Church where I serve on the board and Atlanta Student Church at the University of Oklahoma where I serve as a mentor and “lead-team” member.

Narrate

The following is a summary of significant events at both churches.

Spring 2000 – Deadwood

I am approached by the nominating committee and senior pastor to sit on the church board. I am encouraged to make a decision based on “what choice will take the most faith?”

June 2001 – Deadwood

A mediator from the Baptists of Atlanta is brought in to deal with conflict in the church. Topics addressed include distrust in church leadership by certain members of the congregation (and certain actions taken by those members on behalf of the church without a mandate from the board), conflict within the congregation and the future direction of the church.

February 2002 – Deadwood

The senior pastor of Deadwood resigns citing insurmountable conflict and personal stress. Interpersonal conflict and mental health issues surface.

September 2002 – Deadwood

A transitional pastor is hired with a mandate to help the congregation sort through conflict issues and to help cultivate a church vision.

March 2003 – Student church

I meet with Pastor Dave Brown at the U of Atlanta. We discover a common interest in sports, Lord of the Rings and missional church. I visit the Atlanta Student Church at the Student's residence, of which Dave is the pastor, on the U of Atlanta campus for the first time.

June 2003 – Deadwood

A report to the congregation, asking that they approve a motion that would allow a committee to further investigate the possibility of putting Deadwood "to rest" and in its place, start two new church plants – one with a more traditional expression and one more "post-modern". Discipleship is at the core of our vision. After much heated debate, the motion carries by one percent (67%).

Summer 2009 – Student church

Dave and I meet to pray about and my possible involvement. We both share that our hearts' desire is for discipleship: to see our students grow deeper in their faith and reach out to their communities. I agree to become a mentor for the Atlanta community, consulting with the lead team and mentoring students within the university.

September 2003 – Deadwood

The entire pastoral staff at Deadwood resigns. A common theme in all of the resignations was that ministering at Deadwood had simply become too difficult and very unhealthy for those serving on staff.

September 2003 – /U of Atlanta

I begin serving at the University. The Tuesday evening gatherings are not large but there is a genuine excitement to see what God is doing in the student community. As part of the gathering, guests are interviewed by Dave, including non-Christian people on campus. One of these is Bill, the leader of "Eliminate Aids" – a student social justice group. Dave partners with this group to help raise funds and awareness for aids. Dave stays for the "sermonette" and discussion in which Bill shares Jesus' concern for the poor and disenfranchised. Bill is interested and searching. A couple of weeks later, I run into Mark at a Thanksgiving dinner. The conversation about life and faith continues. Mark and Dave continue their relationship, as both are executives of student groups.

Early October 2003 – Deadwood

Half of the board resigns. The other half is asked to remain until the end of the year so that discipline can take place. I volunteer to remain on the board at this time. Further details emerge from the committee, including a vote that was held at their first meeting that asked for the entire pastoral staff to resign and for the board to be restructured with people representing both church plants. Sunday morning attendance hits a new low.

Thanksgiving Monday, 2003 – Deadwood

I feel God has been calling me to be reconciled with Elaine over the previous week and even the morning of Thanksgiving. Elaine phones that afternoon. We share and begin the reconciliation process. We agree to disagree on several points but forgiveness is

asked for and received both ways. We pray together at the end and as we are praying, the words “please make us agents of grace among the hurting” come out from me.

Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2003 – University

I share my testimony in an interview, highlighting God’s goodness in all of my ups and downs. Dave preaches a strong word of reality and encouragement from Jer. 29, drawing comparisons between us and the Israelites in Babylon. People are challenged and encouraged. I ask Matt about the possibility of doing my internship at the university church. He enthusiastically agrees.

Friday, Oct. 23, 2003 – University

I have the privilege of praying with a fellow university mentor throughout the entire day as his engagement to his fiancée hits a major crisis.

Sunday, Oct. 25, 2003 – Deadwood

A committee announces that they’ve been meeting. Priorities are soothing over hurts and launching the plants. They propose that they will not dissolve Deadwood in order to start the plants as was originally proposed but keep the same governance structure in place. Thursday nights would become the “post-modern” plant and that a “traditional” plant would start Nov. 29. The board chair and youth pastor later reveal that they have been the subjects of more abuse at the hands of the leader of a committee, sending inflammatory e-mails from the US while he and his wife vacation there. The transitional pastor demands that this person cease his bullying and not contact the board chair or youth pastor anymore.

Analysis

I apologize for the length of the narrative but I thought it might be helpful to provide some background. For the analysis, I’d like to focus on events from Thanksgiving Monday onwards.

As I engaged in theological reflection about my reconciliation with Elaine, I started praying about what God meant when he introduced the term “agent of grace” in my prayer. I thought perhaps that God would use Elaine and I as an example of reconciliation among the church and that perhaps we could visit families who had expressed hurt in the church. One big difference that I would have to overcome with Elaine though, before we began this, was our difference in outlook regarding church “consumerism”. Elaine, in her late August outburst, had expressed fear that people who had left the church wouldn’t return if we didn’t have a traditional service in place right away to meet their needs. I disagree. If someone is truly interested and excited in seeing what new direction God may be calling a church, they would be patient and prayerfully support their leaders. If they disagreed with anything, they would engage in the process, in the dialogue, not simply complain and threaten to leave for good. It was my hope that Elaine and I could agree on this and start visiting people, not to see how we could tailor a church to suit them, but rather to see how they would like to get involved in shaping the

new plants. Elaine and I are both extremely busy but I thought that if this was of God, it would take shape.

But an interesting thing happened on Oct. 25. I talked briefly with Elaine and was thankful for our personal reconciliation – the conversation was friendly if not a bit impersonal. I realized that we were not yet at a point to talk about differences in church approaches and that that would take an incredible amount of time, prayer and energy. I started wondering again about the “agent of grace” word I’d been given. That’s when I talked with the board chair and the young man, both who were hurting and discouraged. As I encouraged them and prayed with them, I realized God was using me as an agent of grace then and there. And part of the encouragement I had to offer the young man was an opportunity to connect with others his age, looking to serve God through Epic. Deadwood has virtually no young adults left in attendance. I also saw that God was using me as an “agent of grace” outside of the context of Deadwood, more specifically with the friend I had prayed with and counselled on Friday, Oct. 23.

I also felt an incredible sense of release concerning my role at Deadwood during that service. For the past few months, I struggled with what my role at Deadwood would be during this time, considering the burnout I was feeling and the confusion over the direction of the church. After the committee announced its plan, I realized that it had moved far away from the original vision we felt God calling us to. I was also shocked at how quickly things were moving along, much of it without my knowledge. Many of the key discipline and relationship issues we felt important to address before any plants start were being pushed aside in order to expedite the formation of a traditional service by Nov. 29. Discipline of key individuals will not be possible before then because these people are travelling out of country. (It is interesting to note that the Atlanta Baptists said it would not recommend a pastor for our congregation until these discipline issues are addressed.) I felt that my role in the process had come to an end. To be honest, I was not disappointed or hurt at all, nor did I feel any guilt. I finally felt relief. As mentioned above, I also received words of release from our board chair and youth pastor, encouraging me to go minister where I felt excited and encouraged, namely Epic.

Meaning

As most of you know, I’ve struggled with my continuing role at Deadwood, wondering if I were to leave if I was abandoning God’s work, not persevering enough or running away from my fears. In light of my experiences on Sunday, Oct. 25 as well the encouraging experiences at the University of Atlanta, I now feel a sense of relief and release. God has also given me some Scripture to encourage me in this regard. The first is the story of the Israelites on the verge of entering the Promised Land in Numbers 13:1 – 14:45. Moses sent spies into Canaan who reported back that the land was good but that the people were strong. In their fear, they refused to take the land. God forgave their

rebellion but vowed that this generation would not enter the Promised Land. The people acknowledged their sin and then decided to go into Canaan. However, the LORD was no longer with them in this quest and they suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of their enemies. Is Deadwood like Israel? Did we, out of fear and suspicion not proceed in the vision God gave us forming the CR? Are we now trying to re-enter the vision with the committee when most of our God-fearing leaders are saying it's no longer possible? It certainly feels that way to me. More Scripture: Matt 10:13.

I have also been encouraged by many different people to see where and how God is already moving in the world and to join in that. My heart is for discipleship – to see people be disciples and make disciples for Christ's kingdom. Many people who have experienced the university Church have reaffirmed that God is moving in many tangible ways there as we build community and aim to disciple both Christ followers and those searching for truth.

Experience

I will continue serving in both a leadership and musical capacity at Deadwood. As well, I will continue to encourage and pray for those who are hurting at our congregation as God provides the opportunities. November 22 will be the last service for the pastoral staff. After that, the committee will transition Sunday morning services into the “traditional” church plant, a process that the board at this point will seemingly have little role in. At that time, I believe that my service at Deadwood will conclude. I may see how the Thursday evening ministry develops – whether it remains on site at Deadwood or begins to meet off site.

I have a sense of peace as I look forward to leaving Deadwood. All of my personal relationships are reconciled and I do not feel like I am running away from any conflict brought about by discipline, especially in light of the logistical difficulties created by the TTC's expedited timeline.

I will continue in my role as mentor at University Church and in the New Year, hope to become more involved, possibly doing my Field Experience Internship there, where I may have opportunities to help plan gatherings, preach and develop more discipleship strategies and relationships.

One big lesson that I have learned throughout this entire process is that God's church is bigger than Deadwood. I believe that we often get discouraged, disheartened and disillusioned looking at the problems and challenges of our individual congregations. However, God's church is larger than our own congregations and God is moving powerfully and tangibly throughout his kingdom. We just need the courage and open-mindedness to get out there, explore and to see what God is doing. Then we can join him in his work, extending his kingdom here on earth.

Please note: the length of the paper should be somewhere between 4-6 pages. This one has a long narrative section. Keep that section short and precise. You may also do it in point form to shorten it a bit. On this one I already took out half of the narration. I felt that the three other areas made up for the first so it is a good paper for you to use as a motivator. Notice too all the problems in Deadwood. They just got more boards and committees going without every resolving the real issues. If you have any questions please call and we can talk. You are free to question me and bounce ideas off me.