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## **Volatile congregations : crisis sensemaking in a Southern Baptist Church**

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VOLATILE CONGREGATIONS: CRISIS SENSEMAKING IN A SOUTHERN BAPTIST  
CHURCH

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by  
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August 2013

To my father, Robert Joseph Bannon

To my mother, Martha Lanell Bannon

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“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

2 Corinthians 12:9 KJV

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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to test the assertion that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process. In addition, through the application of Sensemaking Theory, the secondary goal was to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits.

The analysis utilized in the current study was specifically selected to develop a history of participant interpretation within a church in order to determine how members made sense of the crisis. To that end, this study followed the procedures of Miles and Huberman (1984) as modified by Dutton and Dukerich, which were set firmly within the primary Sensemaking Theory components of enaction, selection and retention (Weick, 1995).

The 11 themes that were drawn from theory were the basis for research questions as well as for the four-step method of collecting, describing and analyzing the data. The extent to which the themes were applicable was the determining factor or test to determine whether Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate theoretical lens for understanding crisis within a church context.

The primary research objective was accomplished by demonstrating how communication within the Unity Baptist Church (UBC) congregation spoke the crisis into existence (Weick, 1995). Rich description of conversations in which UBC members made sense of the crisis exemplified how communication is the essence of sense because sensemaking is an “issue of language, talk and communication” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). The research questions underlined the communicative properties of sensemaking because concepts such as enaction, commitments, capacity, expectation, emotion, selection, retention, identity and sensegiving were all formulated, mediated and confirmed through communication. Throughout

the crisis-cycle, communication within the UBC membership exhibited a clear procession through the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages. Therefore, results indicated that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens from which to study church crisis. Finally, the secondary objective was approximated because the study provided a context for prevention discussion. Both organizational and church leadership were offered recommendations concerning the potential avoidance or mediation of crisis.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Introduction

Because the aftermath of church splits are detrimental to the missiology of a Southern Baptist church, making sense of pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication is vital to the future health of the Convention. I contend that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate theoretical lens from which to understand the role of communication during the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases of a church split. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to test this contention by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to approach the secondary goal, which was to assist congregations as they attempt to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Unfortunately, the communicative nature of church crisis is greatly understudied. This reality is detrimental to the Southern Baptist Convention's ability to both prevent and deal with crisis. The current study is an effort to begin to fill this gap in research.

The current study applies Sensemaking Theory to help understand the experiences of participants of a Southern Baptist church that once were unified, but due to conflict between emergent factions, split. The crisis examined for the current study resulted in a mass depletion of attendance, as well as the revocation of 15 memberships (Tom, 2011). The focus is on communicative interaction as it shaped participant reality and prompted action as the church moved from normalcy to crisis. Paramount to the study is the question: How does Sensemaking Theory help us to understand the evolution of crisis that led to the split? The study highlights how interactions among paid staff leadership (i.e., pastor, associate pastor, and student pastor), elected and appointed church leadership (i.e., deacons, elders, and committee members) and church laity, are understood through Sensemaking Theory. In light of these interactions, I

contend that the church crisis outlined in the current study was the result of a clear and identifiable event where someone noticed something that was so out of the ordinary that it caused the individuals and groups of individuals (factions) to bracket the experience and feel a need to make sense of the event (Weick, 1995). Following the enactment of the event, I assert that individuals retrospectively made sense of the event and labeled it as negative or noble, which caused organizing action (Sutcliffe, 2001); that organizing eventually led to the crisis that resulted in a church split. Participants of this study were current and former members of Unity Baptist Church (UBC), located in Louisiana.

This chapter begins with an overview of organized religion in American life as well as the church crisis phenomenon in Southern Baptist life. Following the context is the problem statement and the statement of purpose. This introductory chapter includes a discussion of the research approach, perspectives, and assumptions. Finally, the chapter concludes with the rationale and significance proposed for the current study.

### Organized Religion in Contemporary American Life

According to Scheitle and Finke, major past and present U.S. influencers of faith include immigration, ethnicity, innovation and creativity. The first two components, immigration and ethnicity, point to a sociological understanding of church affiliation, while the third and fourth components, innovation and creativity, mark a more economic approach to church affiliation. In the new economy of church where, for example, in the South, the church market is flooded with consumer options, churches that are able to innovate, contextualize and make relevant their message thrive. Though spirituality in terms of affiliation is still quite high among American citizens, 83.1%, the number of Americans that adhere to an organized religious group is

declining (Lugo, 2007). This decline is most vividly realized through the religious attendance of the 18-29 year old population (termed the Millennial generation). The Millennial generation has a 26% religious no affiliation rate as compared to 20% for Generation X (born 1965-1980), 13% for the Boomer generation (born 1946-1964), 8% for the Silent Born generation (born 1928-1945) and 5% for the Greatest generation (born before 1928) (Lugo, 2010).

Among these 83.1% of the population who are religiously affiliated, 78.4% are considered Christian, of which 51.3% are protestant (not Catholic) (Lugo, 2007). Finally, among the 51.3% that make up the protestant section, the largest denomination within this demographic is the Southern Baptist Convention (Yeakley, 2011). By cross applying Scheitle and Finke's economic view of church to Southern Baptist Churches, it is obvious that in a saturated market the church body that experiences a split is naturally at a marketable disadvantage in terms of community perception. Therefore the study of church splits enables the researcher to highlight what the church should avoid.

Church organizations are similar to secular organizations in that both groups compete with existing groups (churches) within their same "industry" (denomination). Though churches are not mass producing widgets to market, they are in the production of such intangible services as self-esteem, a sense of purpose, salvation, social networking, and status (Johnstone, 2006). In a free society where the religious landscape is typified by denominationalism and undergirded by a pluralistic view of religion, *competition*, as crude as some religious leaders may interpret it, is a suitable analogy. Support for the idea of the proliferation and acceptance of the competition analogy is found in an article by Joseph and Webb (2000) in *The Journal of Ministry Marketing & Management* entitled "Marketing Your Church With Advertising and Promotion Strategies That Work". The idea of marketing a church connotes competition with other churches.

Church organizations also compare with secular organizations in that both must attend to customer expectations. From this perspective churches must face another aspect of competition: the law of supply and demand. The law of supply and demand interacts with church life on two separate fronts. In a consumer driven society, churches that offer programming (ministries) that markets to or services a diverse population will flourish, whereas those that have a limited program schedule will decline for lack of group specific focus (Garrison, 1996). Thus, satisfaction is linked to programming. In a less programmatic and more existential manner, churches face the law of supply and demand concerning the felt need of spiritual experience. Consumers approaching church from this vantage point are more interested in the experience of church rather than the programs of the church, which may speak to why some church groups are able to grow membership in the face of what some might interpret as a program deficit (Rainer & Geiger, 2006). The explanation of program and experience is not to be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as an example of the equivocation that is inherent in why some individuals go to one church and not another and the varied types of religious *markets* that are subject to the law of supply and demand.

### The Church Crisis Phenomenon in Southern Baptist Life

Churches are failing to fulfill their corporately agreed upon mission, not for a lack of tangible resources, but for a lack of intangible unity. This crisis of conflict can also be termed a crisis of sensemaking. By intangible unity, I mean that the primary cause of church crisis has its roots in interpersonal and organizational communication episodes. This phenomenon has become a serious problem in Southern Baptist Church life, as there is now ample evidence of the widespread problem of church conflict due to relational issues (Atwood, 2007). According to Chris Turner of LifeWay Christian Resources department of pastoral ministries (a direct affiliate



of the Southern Baptist Convention), 1,300 staff were dismissed in 2005, of which the top 5 reasons for dismissal were all relationship oriented (Turner, 2005). In Southern Baptist Convention life, the top five reasons for termination (a result of crisis) include 1) Control issues: who should run the church; 2) Poor people skills; 3) Church's resistance to change; 4) Pastor's leadership style: too strong; and 5) Church was already conflicted when the pastor arrived (Turner, 2005). In a similar study by the Southern Baptist Convention, on average an estimated 23 pastors and their families are affected by forced termination every week (Willis, 1999). These statistics indicate an increase in forced terminations when compared to studies completed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984 and 1988 (Norris, 1988; Tharp, 1984).

The result of conflict is painfully tragic for both the church body (Becker et al., 1993) and the pastor (Edwards, 1987). Church conflict, according to Branson (1990), is associated with divorce, depression and illness among pastors. In a survey of pastors within the Southern Baptist Convention who had been terminated, 56% experienced depression, 44% felt spiritually drained, and 63% felt rejected as a result of conflict that lead to their termination (Tharp, 1984). As a result of conflict induced stress, 33% of wives (from a study on conflict, pastors and their spouses) indicated that they either wanted their husband to quit or were uncertain if they were willing for them to continue in the ministry (Branson, 1990). Speaking about his personal anguish in a written statement to the church concerning their current conflict, a minister writes, "let me share my concern for the lack of understanding and unity in our church. *Concern* is too mild a word. *Agony* and *pain* come closer to it" (LeFevre, 1975, p. 23). Church conflict, especially conflict that leads to splits, is a highly emotional and tragic experience for the family of the staff and the church as a whole. Church conflict is counter-missional. Unfortunately, church conflict is rampant.

Historically, the study of church conflict has been rooted in an examination of the interplay of generic sociological concepts within a group(s) such as conflict of goals, values and methods (Becker, et al., 1993; Leas & Kittlaus, 1973; LeFevre, 1975). Competing goals in church crisis often correlate with change issues. For example, one pastor indicated that he would like to redirect the focus of the church to reach out to the community to a larger extent than was previously the case and expend less energy on what he considered less evangelistic and more social maintenance oriented programs. Tensions within the congregation over which programs would be eliminated led to a socially constructed and shared uncertainty, which was one of the primary catalysts to the pastor's forced termination (Willis, 1999). This example illustrates how reasons for termination can be attributed to conflicting goals, values and methods. Though church crises might be viewed from this frame, the primary concern of this study is how church members enact crisis situations and make sense of them via communication. I argue that this crisis of conflict can also be termed a crisis of sensemaking.

A substantial contribution to crisis communication literature offered by this study is the notion that problems escalate to crisis levels as a result of enacted environments, the result of which would not be considered a catastrophic bifurcation (loss of life or property). For example, crisis literature cites catastrophic bifurcation points and then, often via Sensemaking Theory, works backwards to outline the series of sensemaking events that led to the catastrophic event, such as: the Bhopal explosion (Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2007; Weick, 2010), the North Dakota levee breakage (Ulmer, et al., 2007), and the Malden Mills fire (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003). The current study advances the scant amount of literature in Sensemaking Theory available that is applied as a means of understanding crisis of a smaller scale (Maitlis, 2005). Therefore, inherent to the purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory, in a

more concentrated context, is a valid application. The secondary purpose was to then to apply sensemaking in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits.

### Problem Statement

Current and historical data indicate that Southern Baptist Churches are in crisis as evidenced by an average of 23 ministers within the convention being terminated every week (Allison, 2011; Branson, 1990; Norris, 1988; Tharp, 1984; Turner, 2005; Willis, 1999). Though most pastors are not forcefully terminated, the result of church crisis is not limited to this subsection of Southern Baptist life. Approximately 6000 Southern Baptist pastors leave the ministry each year (Revell, 1998). The result of these crises are often splits within the congregation where a substantial group of members leave the church to either form a new congregation in the form of a new church, join a new church, or stop attending completely. Though this phenomenon is counter-missional and troublesome within the Southern Baptist Convention, there is little academic research that explores the communicative aspects of such crises. Willis (1999) calls this phenomenon within the Southern Baptist Convention a *Dirty Little Secret*.

### Statement of Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to test the assertion that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process. In addition, through the application of Sensemaking Theory, the secondary goal was to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Because the aftermath of church splits is detrimental to the

missiology of a Southern Baptist church and the convention as a whole, making sense of pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication is vital. I contend that Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1988; Yue & Mills, 2008) is an appropriate theoretical lens through which to understand the role of communication during the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases of a church split, because Sensemaking Theory allows for a complete understanding of the crisis phenomenon from its beginning. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test this contention by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits.

### Research Approach

Upon establishing approval with Louisiana State University's International Review Board (IRB), the research schedule was carried out. The purpose was to ascertain how Sensemaking Theory outlined the stages of a church crisis. Participants included were current and previous members of Unity Baptist Church who, once unified, experienced a heightened level of crisis that led to the split. The study represents an in depth approach to data collection and analysis in order to present the experience of this split from the perspectives of those who lived through the crisis.

### Assumptions

Based on a review of current literature in church crisis and Sensemaking Theory, as well as the researcher's close involvement and background in church polity, five primary assumptions were made regarding this study. First, churches, especially leadership within churches, are ill-prepared to prevent and combat the crises that plague the Southern Baptist Convention. This is based on studies both within the Southern Baptist Convention (Turner, 2005) and outside the

convention (Starke & Dyck, 1996) that outline the prevalence of and issues concerning church conflict. Second, the lifecycle of the conflict reflects Weick's Sensemaking Theory of enactment, selection and retention. This is based on Weick's model for crisis Sensemaking that asserts individuals experience an event (cue) that they bracket as discrepant to which interpretation and attribution are warranted that in turn works to affect future behavior (Weick, 1995). Third, the making of sense is a negotiated phenomenon in which individuals who have a stake in a given outcome compete for influence. This assumption is based on crisis literature in both sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and the politics of sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010) that asserts manipulation is a component of sensemaking within organizations. Fourth, crisis within the church is highly emotional and has a clear effect upon sensemaking. This assumption is guided by crisis literature that depicts the breaking of interpersonal expectations, as well as episodes that affect personal identity as a highly emotional experience (Fiol, 2002; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, et al., 2005; Yu, 2009). Finally, in the aftermath of the crisis, the congregation that remains in the original church as well as members of the faction group will enact renewing behaviors as a means of personal and organizational healing. This assumption is based on research that examines issues of renewal and growth over blame, responsibility and liability (Ulmer, et al., 2007; Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002).

The challenge of this study is that the crisis point, from which all other sensemaking will begin, may be more problematic to locate. Within a church crisis it is possible, even probable, that the bifurcation point occurred because of miscommunication among relevant parties. For example, the crisis could originate with a conversation that was interpreted as spiteful rather than constructive. Or perhaps the catalyst could be a message that was interpreted as mean-spirited rather than charging. The interpretation of a communicative exchange has the same potential for

crisis, as does a tangible event such as a new church ministry, a new hire, a large purchase or an experiment in worship styles or even a flood. The challenge is that a specific conversation, decision or event within the context of a church may be more difficult to locate than a fire, flood or explosion.

From a church crisis perspective, the structure that emerges from the enacting of an event is a dynamic, cyclical and ongoing communicative process of social construction from which differing group interpretations will spawn, be interpreted, reinterpreted and lead to crisis. Therefore, I contend that the crisis will follow Weick's (1979) outline of organizing: enactment, selection and retention. These concepts will provide a framework for application of Sensemaking Theory. Within the scope of Sensemaking Theory and in conjunction with analyzing the church from a crisis communication vantage point of enactment, selection and retention, I will assess the level of *mindfulness* within the organization. Therefore, it is assumed that the church in crisis will not exhibit the tenants of *mindfulness* that, according to Weick and Sutcliffe (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2000), are representative of high-reliability organizations (HROs).

### The Researcher

I am a Christian. My life stages have been prominently marked by religiously influenced socialization. As a result of these experiences, I have elected to adhere to the ecclesiology that is most closely associated with the current Southern Baptist Statement of Faith. I have served in several capacities both volunteer and via staff positions in areas of music, children's ministry, college and career ministry, associational leadership, sports leagues, Vacation Bible School and men's ministry. Positions currently held include serving as a part-time music director at Alpine

First Baptist Church and as an instructor and debate coach at Louisiana College at the rank of Assistant Professor. Louisiana College is a private Christian college that functions within the umbrella of the Louisiana Southern Baptist Convention. As a result of these experiences I have had the opportunity to sit through numerous church council, building, deacon, and finance meetings. During these meetings, possible direction for the church was offered and conflicting ideas debated.

I have never been a part of a church split in one definitional sense of a faction group leaving the larger whole in order to begin a new church. I have, however, experienced the phenomenon via some personal associations. I experienced a church crisis that resulted in a mass exodus of members moving from the original church to another church. This, for me and for my family, has arguably been the most intense negative emotional experience of our family life. The result of the crisis tore apart decade long friendships and rendered them forever frayed. Hurtful, dishonest and mean-spirited communication outlined two sides of a clear divide. Unfortunately, the early stages of the crisis were never brought to the forefront and properly dealt with until the issue had reached crisis levels. Members who had little communicative access were forced to draw conclusions (enact environments) based on limited and biased information. Though this experience did not result in a new church start, it is presumed to have had all of the communicative ingredients to be categorized as a church crisis or church split.

As a result of both my philosophical and experiential background, I admit my susceptibility of bias toward church crisis in two areas. These two biases may be summed up as positive attribution error toward church members, as well as a tendency to attribute the majority of causation to leadership. In reference to the initial bias, it is steeped in the assumption that churches are full of loving, accepting and kind people. Even though it is clearly demarcated from

a reading of Paul's letters to New Testament churches that church dissension is a part of the life of the church, the easiest way to understand why this happens is to analogize the church as family. Though families fight, they should be able to "make-up" and continue to love and care for one another. Churches should be no different; from a Spiritual perspective, any time that churches do not reconcile their differences it may be explained by our inherent depravity (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:2-3). This perspective has, at times, influenced me to assume that congregational associates have the church's best interests at the forefront with little consideration for an ulterior or selfish motive. This bias could have resulted in a propensity not to attribute causation to a church member, which could hinder theme analysis. However, by stating this possibility I believe I was able to guard against this bias. Furthermore, since the main focus of this study is not to assess causation, but to determine the validity of Sensemaking Theory in church crisis by outlining the role of communication in sensemaking, I firmly believe that this possibility did not negatively influence the study.

Second, I have a tendency to believe that the strength of an organization, especially a church organization, may be assessed by the way leadership sets (or communicates) the vision/mission clearly, membership accepts and internalizes that vision/mission and then takes responsibility to communicate that vision/mission to others. Therefore, leadership is an intricate and important part of the phenomenon of church splits, and my anecdotal experiences in church crises seemed to lean toward a failure of leadership bias. However, the data, not experiences, drove analysis.

Furthermore, in order to offer a clear overview of my perspective on church polity, it is important to note that from my personal interpretation of scripture set in both the New and Old Testaments, I value a priority of leadership and membership in constituting a balance. Inherent



tensions are obvious when you consider the different types of organizational structures in the Old Testament model of prophet (centralized) leadership and New Testament congregational rule (one person one vote) that most closely depicts the organizational structure of Southern Baptist churches. Prophet centered leadership did not allow for much deliberation, comparative to congregational rule, as vision and direction were given exclusively by God to the prophet, which they in turn communicated to the followers. From this perspective, church crisis could only be a result of the failure of membership to honor the authoritative direction of leadership. This approach, though potentially dictatorial, does inherently portray the doctrine of submission to Christ through submission to authority to leadership, which I value.

Southern Baptist ecclesiology however, is representative of a New Testament model that must manage the tension of shared responsibility/leadership, which I also value. The ecclesiastic shift here, in terms of authority, is from the prophet (exclusive) to the church (shared). This shared decision-making has the potential to fuel crisis as a result of discrepant goals and values. This dynamic, in the form of checks and balances among leadership and membership, provides a context for crises and an opportunity for sensemaking application.

The purpose of the previous section was to orient the reader with my background, potential bias and how I have attempted to acknowledge and manage the negative effects of bias. I believe that as I have read historical accounts of the church crisis used for this study and as I completed this research study, I was able to view the inherent multiplicity of sensemaking in church crisis. In order to link church crisis with Sensemaking Theory I believe I maintained a critical stance toward my own personal experience, assumptions, and ideological perspectives. Here it might be advantageous to again assert that my interest is primarily that of linking Sensemaking Theory and communicative process to better describe and understand church crisis.

Secondary to this goal are interests in causation or how the data might generalize to a larger population.

### Rationale

The rationale for the current study stems from a desire to help churches avoid crisis by outlining how communication is paramount during a crisis. If the scriptural metaphor “army” may be applied to the commission of the church, in the sense that it has an agreed upon mission, it must also be applicable that a house (or army) divided against itself cannot stand. Therefore, if the church is to have any pragmatic influence upon the communities in which it functions it must learn to both avoid and effectively mediate crisis. Since I have a personal connection and stake in the success or failure of the convention and in the mission outlined in scripture, conducting the current study was both important to me personally and practically.

Therefore, the contention offered in the current study is that increased understanding of the impact that communication has on sensemaking will afford congregates a preventative skill set from which to avoid crisis. It is important to note that an understanding of Sensemaking Theory will not cause all Southern Baptist congregations to completely prevent crisis situations as they often times are the result of unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances. However, by understanding the role of Sensemaking Theory concepts such as *selection*, congregations can begin to assuage the impact of crisis. Finally, taking a sensemaking approach to crisis communication within the church context empowers leaders to actively monitor the environment in which they minister.

## Significance

According to a study of research centered on intrachurch conflict, less than 15% of the studies examined approached conflict as their main unit of analysis (Kniss, 1988). To date, no current study has been published that has focused exclusively on church conflict from a Sensemaking Theory perspective. The current study begins to fill a void in theory and provide insight into the communicative nature of church crisis, particularly how church crisis develops as a response to interrupted expectations that are grounded in previous socially constructed and reliable sensemaking behavior that eventually evolves into a crisis situation (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, the goal of the current study was to outline the antecedents to church crisis as firmly placed within the Sensemaking process. By approaching church crisis in this manner, links between interaction, action, cognition and organizational change/crisis are highlighted.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens from which to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Specifically, the intent was to understand how Sensemaking Theory explains pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication and how these sensemaking episodes lead to the crisis of a church split. In order to effectively test and apply Sensemaking Theory, it is necessary to complete a critical review of current literature, as well as historical articles that provide the basis of Sensemaking Theory.

This review of literature explores the ways in which congregational members recognize crisis events (enaction), negotiate and justify the perceptual stance of the crisis event (selection), and how their previous experiences and established framework, (pre, during and post crisis) offered a plausible cause map for action (retention) (Weick, 1995). In light of this effort, two major areas of literature are critically reviewed, (a) church conflict and (b) Sensemaking Theory. A review of church conflict provides an understanding of the context from which church crises arise. Sensemaking Theory is utilized as means to outline the way congregational members make sense of a crisis. During the course of this study, no literature was found specifically pertaining to church conflict and Sensemaking Theory. I found one conference paper, three journal articles and numerous books that approach church conflict in a direct way (Becker, et al., 1993; Branson, 1990; Edwards, 1987, 1989; Frangipane, 2002; Kniss, 1988), and three journal articles concerning church culture and change (Amerson & Carroll, 1979; Carroll, 2000; Carroll & Marler, 1995). I have also located articles within the *Southern Baptist Convention Journal* (SBJ)

(Atwood, 2007; Willis, 1999). Within the SBJ, communication is mentioned only as something that needed to be improved and not as a primary unit of analysis. As a result, I have mined and attempted to synthesize current literature from crisis communication, Sensemaking Theory, and church crisis literature as a basis for my research.

Important to the current literature review is the conceptual approach taken by the researcher. Since the focus of the study is to understand how Sensemaking Theory informs a better understanding of church conflict, it is vital that the literature review connect current church crisis as well as Sensemaking Theory issues to the context. To that end, literature included in this review was selected and gleaned specifically for how it highlights research literature that is directly applicable to the context being studied. The structure of the literature review includes: 1) organization by topic, 2) correlation/application to the current study and 3) rationale for research questions relevant to the topic being discussed.

The order of the topical review includes an overview of Sensemaking Theory. What follows are conceptual topics, which stem from the three primary components of Sensemaking Theory: enactment, selection and retention. Subcategories within the theoretical framework that influence the sensemaking (See Figure 2.1) depict the convergence and mutually influencing nature of Sensemaking Theory's main components. To understand Sensemaking Theory - how it develops and how it works as an explanatory device for action and consequences - one must first understand the questions to which Sensemaking gives answer (See Figure 2.1). The following literature review outlines these concepts and subcategories of Sensemaking Theory in order to answer the questions that immerse in daily life, but are most notable during crisis situations: 1) What is going on? 2) What can I do about it? 3) How can I know what I think until I see what I

say? 4) What is the story here? 5) Who am I in all this? 6) What should I think? 7) What did I expect?

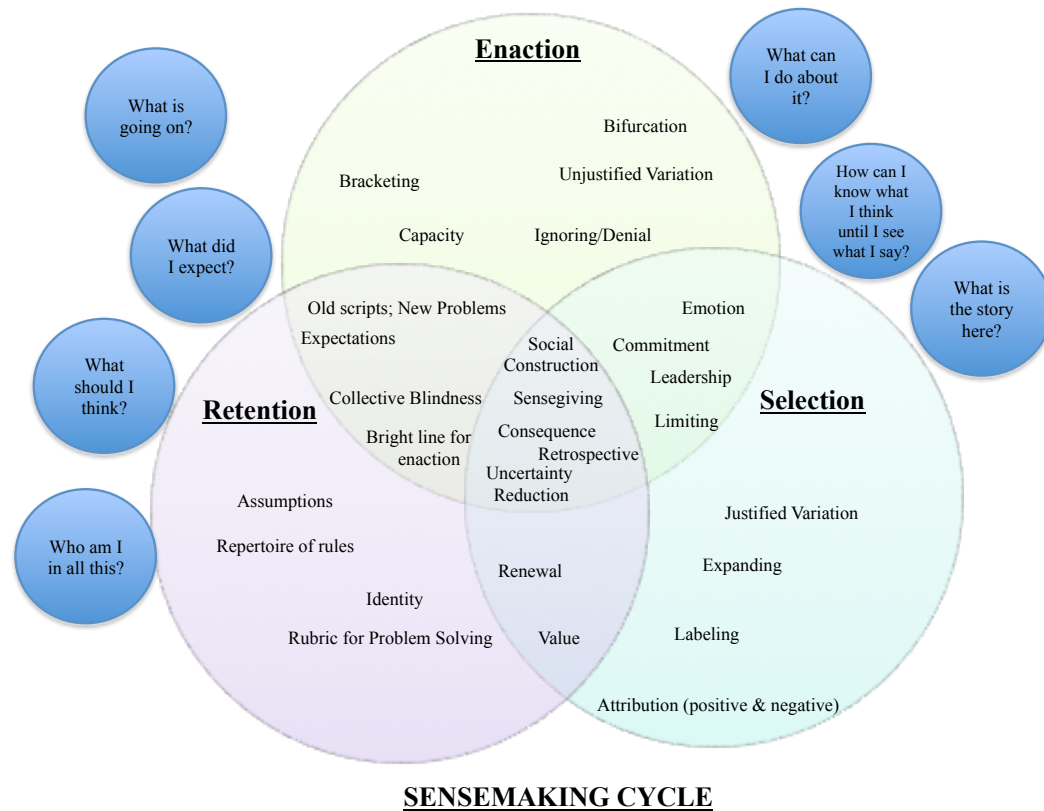


Figure 2.1 Sensemaking Cycle

## Sensemaking

Sensemaking Theory was born out of a shift in crisis/organizational theory from that of causation attribution during technological crisis from machines to human error (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1979). This shift in focus marked an opportunity for researchers to expand how they viewed organizational processes, of which Karl Weick's Sensemaking Theory is an example (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Sensemaking Theory has been applied most consistently to crisis, which underscores the often turbulent nature of sensemaking as beginning

its enactment in chaos (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, et al., 2005). Notably, Sensemaking Theory has been applied in such contexts as fire disasters at Mann Gulch and South Canyon (Weick, 1993, 1996), an explosion at a Bhopal Union Carbide plant (Weick, 1988), fire at Maudlin Mills (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002), the NASA Challenger explosion (Ulmer, et al., 2007), and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (Ulmer, et al., 2007). Though Sensemaking Theory has historically been applied to large-scale disasters, current application research has provided evidence for studies of a smaller scale (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Weick, et al., 2005; Westley, 1990).

Since sensemaking is concerned with how people “construct what they construct, why and with what effects” it is logical to apply Sensemaking Theory in a multitude of contexts (Weick, 1995, p. 4). The logical contexts of sensemaking are found in every organization where circumstances that do not make sense, most often during crisis, challenge deeply held beliefs and frameworks (Weick, 1993). A disruption of the ordinary is called a *cosmology episode* where “people suddenly and deeply feel as if the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system...a cosmology episode feels like *vu jade* – the opposite of *déjà vu*: I’ve never been here before, I have no idea where I am and I have no idea who can help me” (Weick, 2001, p. 105). From this vantage point of uncertainty, individuals begin to enact sensemaking behaviors in order to answer the basic question of *what is going on* (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The potential answers to these question come in the form of plausible stories that “animate and gain their validity from subsequent activity” (Weick, et al., 2005, p. 410). The previous statement highlights a central idea of sensemaking in which action precedes justification and “focuses cognition” (Weick, 1988, p. 307).

Therefore, to truly understand sensemaking, one must consider the process by which people cope with disconfirmed expectations of how their world was expected to function (Weick, 1988). To cope, one must first bracket the event. By a bracketing of environmental cues people are able to frame or attach meaning to the event (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

From an organizational communication perspective members create structure in an attempt to make sense of or construct their environment (Sutcliffe, 2001). This process is inherently communicative, dynamic, and follows Weick's (1979) social constructivist summary of the sensemaking process where he asserts "how can I know what I think until I hear what I say?" (p. 5). Therefore, a central organizational and sensemaking theme, according to Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005), "is that people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make the world more orderly" (p. 410). Therefore, sensemaking is cyclical where the enaction and selection of an event generates retained knowledge, which again impacts what we choose to see (enaction) and care about (selection).

The previous sentence denotes how the sensemaking process is inherently retrospective. During crisis, individuals make sense of an event as they look back in order to construct meaning. This is a process by which individuals are able to manage the tension of uncertainty and surprise. According to Seeger et al. (2003), "there is an ongoing need to determine how to know what to think" (p. 22). People are averse to the ambiguity of an open-ended story; therefore, we enact the sensemaking process to fill in the gaps, which establishes impetus for action. Weick (1979) identified three stages of organizing in Sensemaking Theory: enactment, selection and retention.



Concerning sensemaking, Louis (1980) defines the three stages of sensemaking as he discusses how they are intertwined as a means to explain surprises:

Sensemaking can be viewed as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events [retention]. Subsequently, individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions [enactment]. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation, or post-diction, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed. Interpretation, is attributed to surprises [selection]...it is crucial to note that meaning is assigned to surprise as an output of the sensemaking process, rather than arising concurrently with the perception of detection of differences. (p. 241) [bracketed information added]

To facilitate the purpose of this study, I highlighted Sensemaking Theory's processes of enaction, selection and retention within the context of a church crisis in order to better understand how congregations might avoid such conflict. Patterns of sensemaking, though not explicitly addressed in a Starke and Dyck (1996) article concerning church splits, nevertheless offer insight to how people make sense of church conflict post crisis. In this study, 11 congregations split which resulted in 11 new congregations being started, for a total of 22 churches. According to the authors, members of the 11 original congregations cited authority-based issues as being the main criterion for conflict, whereas members from the 11 new congregations perceived the main criterion for conflict to be doctrinal. Results from the Starke and Dyck study highlight the divergent aspects of sensemaking - in order to maintain a positive perception of personal culpability, each group made sense of the crisis in a different way. How

both groups involved in the current church conflict bracketed, developed and retained their perceptions is an example of the main focus of this dissertation of which it was asserted Sensemaking Theory provided the most applicable lens to explain the evolutions of perception/sense during not only post crisis but also during the pre-crisis and crisis stages.

### Enactment

Enactment, the first stage, involves acting toward an informational input by saying something or by choosing to notice it. According to Weick (1988) “the term enactment is used to preserve the central point that when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion” (p. 306). Informational inputs are linked to events that may be the product of a multiplicity of causation such as a malfunction, a decision, a discussion, a flood, or a fire. However, it is what the organization or the individual chooses to notice and act towards that constitutes enactment. Noticing an informational input is also called bracketing (Weick, 1995). When an organization chooses not to bracket or notice an informational input, it runs the risk of also ignoring a crisis warning (Seeger, et al., 2003). To ignore the informational inputs may be an act of volition or omission. Reasons for denial are identified by the concept of *collective blindness* where issues are ignored because they are too large, too complex, present an immediate threat, or the input is beyond organizational control (Ulmer, et al., 2007). This blindness is perpetuated via communication within the organization.

Though organizations take part in activities such as boundary spanning and environmental-monitoring, it is impossible to attend to the expanse of informational inputs. Seeger et al. (2003) assert this impossibility in that “factors such as history of attending to an issue; previous commitment; the relative prominence of information, the capacity to perceive, the

perceived saliency of the information; background and experience of top management; and issues of access are all factors of enactment” (p. 22). For example, firejumpers who died in the Mann Gulch disaster were not prepared in the sense that they had never been trained to respond to fires of that magnitude. Upon arriving at the fire that would eventually take many of their lives, they interpreted the fire in exactly the same manner they would have approached a normal fire. The crisis fire was not termed a crisis at all. Rather the firefighter in charge labeled the fire a routine “10 o’clock” fire that was interpreted as a fire that could be easily extinguished and would not retain the firefighters past 10:00 am the following morning. As a result, the environment that they enacted was suited for a routine rather than a crisis level fire (Weick, 1996). Their action was interpreted in such a manner that greatly influenced future action, which leads to the next aspect of enactment: it is action-oriented and retrospective.

The retrospective nature of enactment should be noted. The sequence of enactment is that of *Ready, Fire, Aim!* According to Weick (2001) it is “doing that produces knowing” (p. 176). The bracketing of that which is to be made sense of happens in retrospect. Not only is the enacting of an event a post-action phenomenon, the action that is taken provides the basic elements used for further sensemaking which may have a direct impact on the severity of the crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1988). Enaction has the propensity for both positive and negative results. As previously noted in the Mann Gulch disaster, the firejumpers’ enaction proved to be fatal. However, Weick (1979) alludes to the idea that it is better to have any plan rather than no plan at all when he reviewed an incident concerning a group of soldiers lost in the Alps. They assumed that they were going to die until someone found a map. At the moment that the soldiers located the map, they devised a plan that followed the route indicated on the map, and later the soldiers were rescued. Upon the soldiers’ return, however, they found that the map

they had used was not a map of the Alps but of the Pyrenees mountains (Weick, 1979). Here, enactment in the form of commitment proved to be advantageous even though it was not the *correct* plan. To develop a better understanding of how the groups bracketed the initial crisis event the following research question is posited:

RQ1: What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?

### Commitment

Another important aspect of enactment is that of commitment. According to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) “commitment serves as a foundation of sensemaking...because individuals often generate explanations retrospectively to justify actions to which they have committed” (p. 562). Commitment creates structure and simplicity out of a plethora of possibilities, allowing for the sensemaking process to take shape. However, to commit is also to exclude which has the propensity to engender crisis. Weick (1988) notes that unflappable commitment has the propensity to create blind spots, which in turn may lead to unexpected crisis cues. These commitments may be the product of positive or optimistic evaluations that result in a false sense of control, which may lead to crisis (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

One example of fatal optimistic evaluation is described in the Mann Gulch wildfire that claimed the lives of several firefighters. The tragic failure on the part of the firefighters was a commitment to a false reality concerning the severity of the environmental cue that delayed the response time needed to save themselves (Weick, 1993). Also, this commitment on the part of the firefighters created a blind spot to pending danger. According to Weick (1988), “once a person becomes committed to an action, and then builds an explanation that justifies that action,

the explanation tends to persist and become transformed into an assumption that is taken for granted” (p. 310).

In church polity those histories of enactment and commitment toward issue management are evident in church crisis because churches are organizations that are built over time. When analyzing an oft-cited church crisis in the 1960’s, Daily eludes to the power of commitment by asserting “the most effective industrial managers are normally those who make use of time without fighting it. The attempt to revise, within only two or three years, an entrenched social system which had built up precedent over 75 years, strikes one as exceptionally naïve” (LeFevre, 1975). Tracey Morgan (2011), a Louisiana Baptist Convention Pastoral Leadership team member, spoke about the issue of an overzealous minister entering a church that had fired three pastors in the past three years. Morgan’s advice was not to attempt a major change initiative until he had been there three to five years. The church’s commitment to a swift termination process was part of their enacted environment that informed how they dealt with pastoral conflict. Here, membership driven commitment to rigidity to change, and a pastor’s commitment to swift change initiatives, quickly collided. Unfortunately, the young pastor became the fourth pastor to be fired in three years due in large part to his reluctance to acknowledge the level of commitment within the church and how it could not co-exist with his committed approach to the direction of the church. Rather than viewing the church as a collection of enacted environments of retained commitments, the young pastor viewed the church as more of a clean slate that would assume his commitment.

From a different vantage point, commitment may be understood as a conscious choice on the part of leadership to label dissention as a normal aspect of church life that does not require a major response. This is a commitment to denial. When pastors make assumptions about their

church, it is likely based on faulty commitments; thus, they will create blind spots to possibilities (interpretations) that, left unattended, will create or enhance crisis. In this situation where a pastor enacts a commitment to ignore the cue, or when the cue is passively ignored, the pastor runs the risk of crisis, because what leaders passively and committedly ignore others may enact. When members make sense of a crisis cue without a comprehensive understanding of all the factors involved in an issue, the situation is vulnerable to crisis. According to Weick et al. (2000), “higher-level errors tend to fuel lower-level errors, making the results harder to manage” (p. 37). To develop a better understanding of how the group bracketed the initial crisis event the following research question is posited:

RQ2: Did member or leadership commitments that were either enacted or ignored facilitate and/or intensify crisis?

### Capacity

According to Weick (1988), “action in the form of capacity can affect crisis management through perception, distribution of competence and control within a hierarchy, and number and diversity of actors” (p. 311). This idea of capacity is both realized and unrealized capacity to deal with undesired information. Weick (1988) goes on to assert that “if people think that they can do lots of things, then they can afford to pay attention to a wider variety of inputs because, whatever they see, they will have some way to cope with it” (p. 311). From an unrealized capacity perspective we see how firejumpers at Mann Gulch were hesitant to enable themselves to run faster from the fire because doing so would require them to drop their tools (Weick, 1996). They had been taught to never drop their tools because that was the most important fire shielding apparatus. The thought of dropping their tools, as logical as it might seem to someone viewing

the incident from an outer vantage point, seemed impossible for some of the firefighters. Here we see how capacity is directly linked to identity in that it was assumed that firefighters do not drop their tools.

Furthermore, capacity can affect the way leaders and organizational members manage crisis based on their perceived capacity to act with the hierarchy of the organization. Here we link the concept of capacity with the concept of perceived freedom or perceived effectiveness of acting on a cue. In other words, one idea of capacity deals with an individual's perceived right to act as well as a valuation of the level of effectiveness such an act would have on the system. According to Perrow (1984), "operators need to be able to take independent and creative action because they are closest to the system, yet centralization, tight coupling and prescribed steps prevent decentralized action" (p. 10). However, because of perceptions of a lack of capacity individuals do not act. This was true of NASA engineers who voiced their opinion about the fragility of a possible crisis concerning the flight of space shuttle *Challenger*. Once top managers within NASA ignored them they did not perceive any other available options concerning their ability or authority to stop the *Challenger* flight based directly on their perceived capacity due to organizational hierarchies within NASA (Seeger, et al., 2003).

Speaking about church polity and church crisis, Allison (2011), who is the founding president of Mid-America Theological Seminary, commented that Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries are not equipping their students to combat crisis within the congregations but are concentrating their efforts on equipping them to expound scripture. Here it is obvious the divergence between two distinct terms used to label a pastor within the Southern Baptist Convention: preacher and shepherd. The term preacher carries with it a connotation of an individual who is adept at the communication or expounding of scripture. In contrast, the term

Shepherd has the connotative meaning of one who responds to the felt needs of the congregation. Pastors who do not feel equipped to attend to these more interpersonal needs associated with pastoring may label for themselves and others the title of preacher and as a result ignore possible and avoidable precursors to crisis. Furthermore, from both a pastoral and congregational vantage point, the affective power and authority to enact a crisis cue may be ignored due to a perceived lack of authoritative capacity to do something about the cue.

### Leadership

Sensemaking Theory has been applied to answer how leadership positively or negatively impacts a crisis situation when viewing leadership from the seven properties of Sensemaking Theory (Weick, et al., 2000). In accordance with current Sensemaking research, an assumption was developed that asserts that those in leadership (pastor, associate pastor ,exe) will not display the proper *capacity* to effectively deal with crisis (Seeger, et al., 2003; Weick, 1979).

Though there are myriad definitions and published styles, traits, and measures of leadership, one explanation that encapsulates a symbolic approach is Smirich and Morgan's (1982) definition that "leadership is the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others" (p. 258). In crisis, the leader's ability to frame information sources in some type of hierarchy will have an organizing and uncertainty reducing effect. During crisis leaders offer cues, give reassurance, reduce turmoil, give comfort, and manage responses (Ulmer, et al., 2007). In the politics of sensemaking, leaders empower and restrain sensemaking entities (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). At the heart of crisis and leadership is the inexplicable nature of crisis (Weick, 2002) and the inherent communicative role that leadership plays in framing possible responses (Seeger, 1997).



Weick (2002) outlines the communicative aspects of crisis leadership and sensemaking as he builds on Schutz's (1979) three stage model of crisis response – superficial simplicity, confused complexity, and profound simplicity. According to Weick (2002) moving from the superficial involves the realization that the solution to the crisis is “not quite that simple,” which leads to confused complexity in which organizational leaders should lead members to “build a more nuanced explanation” that becomes “seasoned” and lead to more profound simplicities (pp.29-30). The skill of the leader is striving not to become paralyzed when he/she is flooded with the complexities and equivocation inherent in the inexplicable. Rather, Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) offer key resources that aid leaders in the sensemaking process which is depicted by the acronym SIR COPE: social, identity, retrospect, cues, ongoing, plausible, enactment.

Leaders and organizations are defined by what they enact and what they ignore (Weick, et al., 2000). Organizational members seeking to reduce equivocation value the sensemaking of the leader(s). In church polity this will become manifest by the repertoire of retained positive responses that the leader has previously offered. The preoccupation with failure that is exhibited by *High Reliability Organizations* (HRO) allows leaders to project possibilities and frame responses during pre-crisis stages.

As previously mentioned, leaders are also a product of their capacity to perceive crisis via perception, response repertoire (retention), and self-awareness (Weick, 1988). Leadership, according to the LifeWay study, indicated that the eighth reason for forced termination was a weak leadership style. Those leaders who do not possess strong interpersonal skills might also lack the ability to perceive when the most common crisis or relational issue manifests in their local church. I contend that an inability or lack of capacity to make sense of crisis environmental cues will lead to a pastor ignoring those cues and not taking an active part in scanning either

personally or through delegation. To develop a better understanding of how leadership and group members exhibited their level of capacity to mediate crisis, the following research question is posited:

RQ 3- Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

### Expectations

According to Weick (1988) “the assumptions that top management make about components within the firm often influence enactment in a manner similar to the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 311). Weick (1995) goes on to assert that expectations also connect with cues to create meaning in that people filter cues and compare them against their expectations in order to justify their expectations. In this sense, expectations are supremely consequential. Furthermore, the consequential natures of expectations are evident in that they inform future decisions and blind people to other possibilities for crisis.

A recent study that observed sensemaking during a festival Pearl Jam concert found that few individuals recognized that the herding behavior of the crowd had such a crushing impact on the frontline spectators (Vendelo & Rerup, 2009). The expectations for the crowd did not encompass the possibility for a collective understanding of the crisis situation, which resulted in nine deaths. This study suggests that sometimes people who are able to view crisis in the pre-crisis stage are ignored because their interpretations do not match the deeply entrenched expectations shared by the group. Because people did not expect that neither they nor anyone else would get crushed at a concert, they fail to both sense and respond to crisis.

Since church crises are generally a more interpersonal phenomenon, it is possible that one precursor to crisis may spawn from pastoral and congregational expectations. Pastors may

assume that cues from members they label or expect to be insignificant will have little influence on outcomes, and, therefore, they will be ignored. However, these assumptions or expectations may cause or escalate crisis due to the fact that both ignored systems and people *act out*.

Furthermore, much like the NASA example, numerous factors may combine that cause leadership to ignore or undervalue cues within the pre-crisis stage. However, broken expectations are also catalysts for heightened emotional response.

RQ 4- Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

### Emotion

Emotion and sensemaking are included in this review because of the amount of influence emotion has during crisis interactions. According to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) “the sensemaking process thus has emotion – or at least arousal – at its core” (p. 566). Weick links emotional arousal and sensemaking as:

When people perform an organized action sequence and are interrupted, they search for an explanation and a remedy. The longer they search, the higher the arousal and the stronger the emotion. If people find that the interruption has slowed the accomplishment of a sequence, they are likely to experience anger. If they find that the interruption has accelerated accomplishment, then they are likely to experience pleasure. If they find that the interruption can be circumvented, they will experience relief. If they find that the interruption has thwarted a higher-level plan, then the anger is likely to turn into rage, and if they find that the interruption has thwarted a minor behavioral sequence, they are likely to feel disappointment or minor irritation. All these emotional experiences are

accompanied by redoubled efforts to complete the original sequence that was interrupted.  
(Weick, 2001, pp. 163-164)

This heightened emotional response may be connected to a violation of expectations.

Weick et al. (2005) assert that as people learn more and more about each other's and their own personal expectations, their capacity to violate and sense violations increases. The point at which this expectation is violated, interactants may respond by reacting to the expectation as well as reacting to the reaction which may cause emotional outburst. Therefore, as a crisis communication exchange is being enacted, it provides the "raw materials" that both make and affect sensemaking. Through this communicative process, individuals are able to cognitively determine a positive or negative evaluation based on their initial expectations concerning numerous variables.

Emotion is also connected to church crisis. In one example the church was viewed as having lost an emotional connection to their pastor (LeFevre, 1975). A result of this unexpressed emotion of a loss of "love", the expressed emotion, was that of assertions that the sermons made the congregation uncomfortable or that the pastor was sarcastic. This example makes evident the tensions that lead to a high negative emotional response that results in negative filtering of the pastor's messages. Linking back to Weick's (2001) review of emotions as being positively or negatively interpreted via interruption outcomes, we see how a relatively minor comment, that happens to be about a minor change in direction, may negatively impact a person's or group's goals thus elicit an emotional response. The end result of this emotional response and interruption of goals is that future messages might be filtered negatively. At this point, the politics of sensemaking may begin to take the form of dissention within the congregate.

## RQ 5 - Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

### Selection

The selection phase of sensemaking involves attempts at generating meaning based on previously enacted cues (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The point at which a person brackets an event and then labels the concern as good or bad, selection has taken place (Weick, et al., 2005). The reason that individuals select interpretations from environmental cues is because it reduces uncertainty, simplifies the otherwise unending expanse of variables and because it justifies, as well as, offers a rubric or guide rule for action (Weick, 2001; Weick, et al., 2000). To understand the role of selection in sensemaking it is important to note that crisis situations are defined by what is and is not selected as well as to what extent.

Weick (2001) notes that “it is often tough to separate enactment from selection. Interpretation, embellishment, variation and improvisation, all of which are forms of enactment that vary in their reliance on scripts, are also all activities associated with labeling retrospectively whatever actions and artifacts are noticed” (p. 237). Therefore, it is important to view selection as it concerns justified variation (I have attached a sensible interpretation to the something that was out of the ordinary), whereas enactment is viewed as unjustified variation (I choose to notice something that is out of the ordinary). Selection gives the answer to the question, *what’s the story here?* The equivocal nature of possible interpretation is why sensemaking is less about discovery than it is about invention (Weick, 1995).

In sensemaking crisis communication research, such as the Mann Gulch disaster (Weick, 1993) where all but three of twelve firejumpers burned to death, we view the fatal influence of selection that depicts the situation to be ordinary when it is actually rife with crisis. In the Mann

Gulch disaster spotters gave the jumpers a false sense of the ordinary by interpreting a fire of a size that they had never seen before as something that the firejumpers would have under control by morning. These jumpers adopted the sensemaking offered by the spotters and died as a result. This error of positive attribution is inherent in church crisis as well, though in a slightly different application.

Within the context of the church setting we can see selection in action through possible errors of attribution. Much like a wildfire, member disagreement is not uncommon. As with any group, when discrepant goals compete for available resources, or when a decision comes in the form of a zero sum result, tensions will often rise. Most of the time, like wildfires, these disagreements are easily extinguished or they merely fizzle out on their own. This pattern has the potential to prove fatal in a church setting, because leadership who notices that enacted event (bifurcation) may tend to select the severity of the disagreement as being representative of previously patterned experiences. At which point leadership within the congregation attempts to approach the disagreement from the vantage point of previous or less threatening episodes, they immediately set themselves up for disaster, much like the firejumpers in the previous example. I compare this approach to crisis as bringing a knife to a gunfight - though the knife is a valid approach to some contexts, it is supremely insufficient when the context includes firearms.

The qualified meaning that is generated, a result of selection, is often interpreted positively or negatively, which will in turn influence retention and further action on the part of the individual. The selection phase allows an answer to the question *how do I feel* about *what is going on?* which in turn will justify *what I do next*. The sense that is made during the selection process is the product of previously formulated personal and organizational frameworks or

mindsets which allow people to attend to or ignore potential inputs (Weick, et al., 2000).

Therefore, even if the response to a stimulus is apathy, it is still a consequential selection.

Take for example the hypothetical scenario of a pastor who is approached by a member who has a concern about the direction of the church. The pastor has no choice but to enact the environmental cue afforded by the member. However, his consequential selection or labeling of the cue could be indicative of an error of positive attribution. The pastor may surmise that the giver of information is unattached to the larger opinion of the congregation. He might seek out a person who validates this view and avoid speaking with that member for some time. As a result, the pastor chooses to enact collective blindness (Ulmer, et al., 2007; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick, et al., 2000) and/or stunted enactment (Seeger, 1997; Weick, 1979) which is viewed as when members watch other members avoid certain procedures, objectives, activities, issues, and statement concluding that there is a substantive reason for their avoidance. Leadership's selection of the cue may delay an appropriate response in time to delay the tragic consequences of crisis, as was the case with the Mann Gulch fire-jumpers. To develop a better understanding of how the group based their selection of the initial crisis event the following research question is posited:

RQ 6: Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?

### Retention

Retention is the process by which organizations build up a repertoire of rules that are used to inform future sensemaking (Seeger, 1997). Sensemaking as a means of uncertainty management is a product of responses that have been retained due to their ability to effectively reduce equivocation (Seeger, et al., 2003). These response patterns become institutionalized as

policies, procedures and routines which are all part of what Weick (2001) calls the preserved “organizational memory” (p. 305). These retained responses serve as a type of script or an answer to a quiz that has been administered numerous times. In application, these retained responses can have positive and negative effects. From a positive perspective they allow people to make sense out of and solve common problems quickly. However, the error that leadership often makes is attempting to solve new problems with old answers (Weick, 2002) or attempting to make sense of an anomaly by categorizing it in a common typology.

Unfortunately, churches often are one of the last organizations to adapt new approaches to problems as they cling to outdated models and approaches (Rainer & Geiger, 2006). The means by which churches and pastors deal with crisis are the result of retained sensemaking. According to Ingram (1981), pastoral authority among pastors who had been trained through the Southern Baptist convention was greatly influenced by their specific church culture from which they were nurtured and socialized. That retention displayed by both structure and socialization is often the result of two separate and often contradictory sources. Churches that build retained structures over time have deeply ingrained behavioral responses. Likewise, the socialization process of the pastor may be quite different. In some cases where the Pastor of a church had been a member for a long time, such as from childhood, they would be either explicitly aware or implicitly guided by the retained structure of the church. However, as the example of the overzealous pastor who became the fourth pastor fired in three years highlights, it is evident that the socialization of both the church and the pastor were at odds philosophically. Concerning this example, Morgan (2011) asserts that there is an epidemic of effective leadership skills or the ability to understand leadership, which is tied to efficient communication skills. You have to be



able to build relationships in a long lasting way. When you do not learn interpersonal skills you are either an autocrat or a puppet.

Applied to retention, the final sentence alludes to the result of rigidly retained personal and organizational behaviors as being either a church where the pastor is dictatorial or merely a figure head that has little to no influence. Both churches and pastors may enter situations where their retained responses to decision-making and crisis are opposed to one another. To develop a better understanding of how individuals both accessed prior retained responses and developed new retained responses the following research question is posited:

RQ 7: Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?

### Identity

According to Weick, the self is made up of numerous identities depending on the contexts that are enacted in interaction. This idea asserts that sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, that the self is predicated upon constant definition and redefinition, and that individuals are constantly creating and recreating identity. Therefore, the genesis of all sensemaking is the self-conscious sensemaker.

The view that individuals constantly juggle an ever-evolving number of identities based on their context has a tremendous impact on both enactment and selection. Most notably is the idea that what one chooses to see (enactment) and how one processes and attributes meaning to what one sees (selection) is ever changing depending on what identity is enacted. Though individuals vacillate among different identities, some identities are maintained more vigorously

than others. The preoccupation with identity as the means through which people make sense of their environment makes identity construction a key property of sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

How individuals manage these changes, according to Erez and Early (1993) is based on three particular needs: 1) The need for self-enhancement, 2) The need for self-efficacy, and 3) the need for self-consistency. The result of these needs is that the self is both mediated and maintained. Applying this logic to the current study, individuals who have been involved with church conflicts so heated that they led to splits could be interpreted as individuals who are attempting to maintain a positive self image (need for self-enhancement), view themselves as competent and/or righteous in their decision making (the need for self-efficacy) and believe that past, present and future decisions are all consistent with their previous behavior (the need for self-consistency).

It is important to note that self-concept is not a completely intrapersonal process. Rather, our self-concept is often linked with how others view both us and the organization of which we are a part (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). The result is that individuals are “personally motivated to preserve a positive organizational image and repair a negative one through association and disassociation with action on issues” (p. 548).

To summarize, Weick (2001) shortens the phrase grounded in identity construction to personal identity when he asserts that:

A person’s sense of who he or she is in a setting; what threats to this sense of self the setting contains; and what is available to enhance, continue, and render efficacious that sense of who one is all provide a center from which judgments of relevance and sense fan

out. When identity is threatened or diffused, as when one loses a job without warning, one's grasp of what is happening begins to loosen (p. 461).

Unlike in an immediate crisis situation where ideas of personal identity are not afforded the same amount of time to develop, thus having less of an impact on sensemaking, personal identity and sensemaking within the current study is clearly evident and immensely important. To develop a better understanding of how individuals selected their interpretation and valuation of the crisis event, the following research question is posited:

RQ 8: Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?

### Communication

Communication is a primary aspect of sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005). According to Taylor and Van Every (2000):

We see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk...symbolically encoded representatives of these circumstances. As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it. (p. 58).

Therefore, communication is more than just a conduit from which sense travels; it is the 'stuff' of sense. Furthermore, it is assumed that these communicative exchanges take place in interactive, coordinated, cyclical verbal and nonverbal interactions that draw upon a shared and co-constructed reality.

Concerning communication and sensemaking, Weick et al. (2005) assert, “when we say that a meaning materializes, we mean that sensemaking is, importantly, an issue of language, talk and communication...situations, organizations and environments are talked into existence” (p. 409). To make sense of something it must be noticed and then bracketed from a seemingly unending expanse of possible cues, variables or inputs. Communication acts as a catalyst for the phenomenon to be. As Chia (2000) asserts, what is “forcibly carved out of the undifferentiated flux of raw experience and conceptually fixed and labeled so that they can become the common currency of communicational exchanges”(p. 517). Therefore, what we elect to talk about creates, limits the scope of, and provides a starting place for both exploration and an understanding of the phenomenon, which in turn justifies an impetus to further action. Taylor and VanEvery (2000) assert that “sensemaking is a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action” (p. 275) where at the way station the cues or circumstances are understood expressly through words that move people to action.

Vital to an understanding of crisis communication is the interdependency between sensemaking and communication. In fact, numerous statements concerning communication and personal, interpersonal and organizational effectiveness may be viewed in concert as a sensemaking phenomenon. For example, Westley (1990) asserts that “the ability of any organization to be cohesive depends on the structure and quality of its communication system” (p. 337). The phrase ‘structure and quality of its communication system’, could easily be replaced with the term *sensemaking* and state [the ability of any organization to be cohesive depends on their ability to make sense of their environment]. Here, the idea of structure and an organization’s communication system are both conflated in the comprehensive term

sensemaking. This symbiotic view of sensemaking and communication informed the scope and application of the study.

Applied to crisis in churches, it is evident that communication is at the forefront because of two very important aspects: 1) the organization as a whole and 2) the intangible and interpersonal qualities of church crisis. First, the act of organizing is communicative in nature in that “organization is an attempt to order the intrinsic flux of human action, to channel it toward certain ends, to give it a particular shape, through generalizing and institutionalizing particular meanings and rules” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2000). Thus, to organize is to communicatively enact environments toward a common purpose. To illustrate the role that communication plays in church crisis specifically, consider the study of the 11 congregations that split, resulting in 11 new congregations being started, for a total of 22 churches (Starke & Dyck, 1996). According to the study, members of the 11 original congregations cited authority based issues as being the main criterion for conflict, whereas members from the 11 new congregations perceived the main criterion for conflict to be doctrinal (Starke & Dyck, 1996). Irrespective of perspectives of culpability, the main crisis-enacting phenomenon was communicative as members on either side of the divide defined the crisis event in different terms, thus assigning different meanings.

By comparing this example to the extant literature concerning crisis and sensemaking a clear divergence emerges. In general, studies of crisis and sensemaking, on an organizational level, begin with some type of tangible event (e.g., a fire, a snowstorm, an explosion, a flood), whereas the bifurcation point in the current study was verbal. The micro means by which the current study crisis began corresponds with literature in sensemaking and organizational communication where students of sensemaking understand that the order in organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the

momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained. To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences (Weick, et al., 2005).

Again, though numerous studies in crisis communication offer extreme and tangible bifurcation points, it is clear that an intangible bifurcation point, such as a message or a change initiative, can have similar negative consequences. Now that the role of communication has been outlined and placed firmly within the framework of sensemaking, the review transitions to how purposeful sensemaking, termed sensegiving, takes on a political influence perspective that is preferable for both understanding and analyzing the current study.

RQ 9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?

#### Sensegiving: Politics of Sensemaking

Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) reviewed Weick's approach to sensemaking and crisis and argued that the politics of sensemaking is an area that would benefit from research. These authors assert that "promising direction for future sensemaking research that accounts for politics and power would be the investigation of how multiple accounts compete in crisis and change situations, and with what effect, allowing insight into the politics of organizational sensemaking" (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 571). The politics of sensemaking at the micro level concerns the procurement, production, synthesis, manipulation and diffusion of information in such a way as to give meaning, purpose, and direction to an organization (Daft & Weick, 1984; Westley, 1990). At the point when sensemaking is an act of volition, pursuant of specific goal(s), then sensemaking has become sensegiving. Furthermore, concerning sensegiving, "sense cannot be

injected in others in a unidirectional process of communication; it is apprehended only through discourse and response” (Westley, 1990).

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) illustrate sensegiving by examining a case study of strategic change processes. A newly hired university president enacted sensegiving behavior in order to gain agreement among stakeholders as well as to achieve a multitude of personal goals for the university. Key decisions and swift restructuring of departments as well as allocation of resources was cause for uncertainty of how faculty and staff were to make sense of the changes. To that end, the president met with important stakeholders where he explained key initiatives, explained hypothetical scenarios and even controlled membership in certain groups. According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), “the clear intent [of the university president] was to provide a viable interpretation of a new reality and to influence stakeholders and constituents to adopt it as their own. Thus, rather than making sense of an ambiguous situation for himself, he was now in a mode of making sense for others” (p. 443). As previously stated, the sense that was *given* by the president to the faculty and staff was not the result of a direct infusion of the sense deemed appropriate by the president. Rather, the sensemaking and sensegiving processes happened simultaneously as each faction involved with the change effort gave, took and negotiated sense (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Though sensegiving initially may be perceived as a volitional act of the will based on a single or multiple ulterior motives, sensegiving can also be an act of ignorance on the part of the sense-giver. Consider the social dynamics involving the Mann Gulch fire (Weick, 1996). Again, the firejumpers were instructed to drop their tools. However, and for whatever reason, one crew member did not follow that order. When a second crew member caught up with the first and noticed the failure to follow orders, the sense was enacted that the crisis was not at a serious

level (Weick, 1996). In this case, the initial firejumper was oblivious to the impact on the second crew member. It is possible that the second firejumper had the same justifying effect on the initial crew member; that is, reinforcing the decision not to drop the tools, which highlights the reciprocal and negotiated aspects of sensegiving.

By studying church crisis from a sensegiving perspective, insight into the effects of politics and power are made possible by assessing how different or competing interpretations of the crisis struggle for supremacy, who has the opportunity to make sense of situations, and how hierarchies of meaning (sensemaking) were established. Since the interpersonal dynamics of the crisis studied resulted in irrevocable interpretations, there were at a minimum two competing means by which to make sense of the crisis. To develop a better understanding of how the group members competed, advocated and negotiated meaning during the initial stages of the crisis, the following research questions are posited:

RQ 10: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified crisis?

### Mindfulness and High Reliability Organizations

From a theoretical perspective, Weick et al's (2000) definition of a high-reliability organization (HROs) as one for which failure is potentially catastrophic is applicable to church organizations. According to most church doctrine, and especially the doctrine pertaining to the focus of the current study, the result of organizational failure is gloomy for the community at large. Weick et al (2000) assert that HROs that thrive display what they term *collective mindfulness* which is "the capacity of groups and individuals to be acutely aware of significant details, to notice errors in the making, and to have the shared expertise and freedom to act on what they notice" (p. 34). Organizational behaviors that portray collective mindfulness within



successful HROs include a preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify the interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resiliency and fluidity of decision-making structures (Weick, et al., 2000). Because churches exist and function within a highly competitive and pluralistic religious market, mindfulness should be at the forefront of church organization strategies.

*Mindfulness*, according to Ulmer et al. (2007), “requires us to constantly adapt our perceptual skills to account for the ever-changing world around us...to be aware of new information [and to] be aware of more than one perspective” (p. 157). The characteristics of HROs provide a rubric to assess an organization’s level of mindfulness: First, a preoccupation with failure indicates that the organization operates at a heightened perceptual level. Instead of being ignored, small problems are, from a sensemaking perspective, enacted as potential indicators of a more systemic problem (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick, et al., 2000). As a result, HROs encourage the reporting of errors (Weick, et al., 2000). Important to the current study is the assertion by Weick et al. (2000) that HROs that are preoccupied with failure consider their lower level members (such as maintenance departments) as central to the sensemaking or learning process. This is true because the lower level members experience more failures when they are typically at their earliest stages of development. Therefore, as smaller problems are enacted, they can be readily dealt with before they result in bifurcation.

Applying the concept of a preoccupation with failure to church polity, it becomes evident that leaders should dare to be cultivating relationships with more than just their peer group, paid church staff, or elected church leadership. Church leaders that are accessible and encourage dialogue will be made aware of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their programming. Before new programming is launched, lower level members provide a perspective from the largest

portion of the organization. As programming continues, lower level members are able to offer insight and rationale for altering or terminating a specific program. Jeff Adams, a pastor of a Mega-church in Missouri (Kansas City Baptist Temple) has two primary means of scanning the vast environment of KCBT. First, he maintains a blog where members are free to respond and ask questions concerning his current blog topic. Second, he has a weekly non-programmed question and answer session where he encourages members to ask him anything about the church, Christianity, the Bible, and so forth. Both the virtual and face-to-face conversations offer the pastor a wealth of information allowing him to assess failure or success on a multitude of issues.

The second characteristic of HROs is their reluctance to simplify interpretations. The way that humans attend to complex situations is comparative to that of a cognitive miser (Orbell & Dawes, 1991). In other words, the way that humans deal with complexities is via simplification. However, with simplification comes exclusion. The simplified approach to crisis that is representative of a worldview, mindset or framework is that it allows people to ignore information that will weaken their ability to react to crisis and make effective decisions (Weick, et al., 2000). Simply stated less simplification allows you to see more (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). Resistance to over-simplification is resistance to groupthink by valuing diverse experience. Rather than melding problem instances categorically, HROs that are resistant to simplification seek out nuance that allows them to see more.

Applied to the current study, church leadership is often guilty of ignoring what they do not understand. In order to deal with the uncertainty that a complex problem brings, leaders often ignore the problem or reduce it to a level that they perceive as undeserving of attention. Take, for example, the second and fourth leading cause of termination in a LifeWay study: poor people

skills and pastor's leadership style being too strong (Turner, 2005). A lack of people skills combined with a rigid leadership style may be interpreted as inflexibility due to a lack of an ability to perceive categorical complexities. From a sensemaking perspective it may be viewed in a pastor receiving a passing critique of church programming and ignoring rather than enacting the exchange as a potential crisis situation. What we choose to enact is what we choose to act upon.

Thirdly, HROs are sensitive to operations, meaning that they make attempts to notice the front line operation as an enterprise-wide task (Weick, et al., 2000). The idea of sensitivity to operations from a holistic perspective has the idea of empowerment. Because of the impossibility of leadership to be everywhere at all times, HROs give access to members to both be aware of what they see and empower them to give feedback, make predictions and solve problems. In examining the consequences of a lack of sensitivity to operations, insensitivity to operations is often due to a lack of information because of relational tension. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) assert that "if managers refuse to examine what happens between heads, they'll be eternally puzzled by what appears to happen inside individual heads" (p. 13). This statement may be routinely applied to church crisis situations.

As has been described earlier, the trend in Southern Baptist Convention life seems to be one of relational discord as an impetus to crisis. Unlike other HROs the result of lapses in operation sensitivity are less apparent at the onset. A lack of empowerment leads to a lack of cooperation which can lead to heightened tensions and a crisis that ignites over time. Or, the result of a lack of empowered sensitivity to operations could lead a thriving church into stagnation. This is often typified by the third and fourteenth reasons for forced termination in the LifeWay study: church resistant to change and rapid growth (Turner, 2005). Growth presents

challenges of resources, particularly space. Growth often leads to a need for additional services to accommodate the influx of people. The solution to an overflow of growth is often easily solved via incorporating an additional service time. When church constitutions and budget issues cause a stalemate in the decision process the result may be the closing of a window of opportunity. From a sensemaking perspective, differing enacted sensemaking environments about what is needed cause people to act in one way or another. The challenge for the leader is the need to relay and interpret multiple informational inputs in order to reach consensus. In this case, the challenge would be for the leadership to be sensitive to the operation of the church (aka service size), enact the information/problem of rapid growth and then act accordingly through sensegiving means.

One of the characteristics of HROs that makes them successful is their commitment to resilience. Resilience is more than anticipating crisis; rather, it is the ability to quickly organize and respond to crisis situations in an ad hoc manner. Following the crisis, HROs are able to learn from the error induced crisis and glean a greater capacity for (retention) crisis prevention (Weick, et al., 2000). This ability to improvise and learn from improvisation is a “combination of keeping errors small and of improvising workarounds that allow the system to keep functioning” (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007, p. 14).

From a church crisis perspective a commitment to resilience is also viewed in the ability or inability to deal with an influx of growth. For example, if a church chose to enact a sports league to reach area youth, it would be wise to provide a staff member that would coordinate activities and disciple them. If a staff member could not be brought in, the resilient church would adapt by volunteerism. Furthermore, influxes of young people, especially those that do not attend with a parent, present a clear and potential crisis. Children, left unsupervised are prone to destroy

property as a result of play. Perhaps adults - who are not their parents - may view the young children breaking something and then enact the situation negatively, select the insensitive response of labeling the child as a trouble maker, and yet walk away without an attempt to instruct the child in proper behavior. Rather, they will enact new informational inputs with other members that portray their interpretive selection of the event. This is not an empowered congregate; it is a problem inducing congregate.

Finally, HROs are distinctive due to their deference to expertise. Here decision making responsibilities are pushed down and around to the front line members (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). These members are able to formulate creative solutions to the problems they enact. Some churches are able to allow members missional freedom by what some might consider strategic ambiguity. They assert a simple mission statement: *Love God, Love Others, Serve the World*. From there members determine how they will fulfill this mission. While other churches are consumed by scheduling and rigidity, the opportunity for creative methods from the ‘front line’ members is lost in a sea of programming (Rainer & Geiger, 2006).

RQ 11: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?

### Renewal

Ulmer et al. (2007) define renewal as “a fresh sense of purpose and direction an organization discovers after it emerges from crisis” (Ulmer, et al., 2007, p. 177). Of course, the aftermath of crisis is not indicative of a new and better ‘normal’ unless commitments to renewal and change are enacted. In other words, if your house was flooded because you built the foundation 10 feet from a river whose levees are prone to burst, you have not moved to the renewal phase. You have only begun another crisis cycle. Therefore, renewal post-crisis is as

much about a sense of relief as it is about change. Organizations that do not respond to the genesis of crisis are destined to fall right back into the same crisis cycle. These change efforts that depict a new normal are the product of a new vocabulary for enacting risk. By increasing the organization's vocabulary for crisis it is empowered to notice the onset of crisis. In other words, more words produce more labels which increase our capacity for sensemaking during equivocal circumstances. In still other words, renewal offers more mind maps (Weick, 1995).

Churches that have experienced the crisis of a split should move toward a place of renewal by clearly outlining the interpersonal and organizational indicators of failure. These pitfalls should be named, and scripts for a new approach to squelching these pitfalls should be retained. Process is not exclusive to post crisis renewal, but should be a part of any organization's healthy environment scanning and perception checking protocol. In some cases this may mean a change of non-staff leadership or a reshuffling of how decisions are made. It also may mean that whole policies, values and goals should be reworked and then made available for sensemaking. The important aspect of renewal is that it is active rather than passive and it is continual rather than incident specific. To develop a better understanding of how the group moved toward the renewal phase following the initial crisis event, if they did at all, the following research question is posited:

RQ 12: Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?

Finally, because sensemaking that is enacted before the crisis influences how the crisis and post-crisis sense is made, I end this review with a brief explanation of the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages. This review of pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis is meant to provide

structure for understanding the evolutionary phases of the crisis in terms of how sensemaking in one stage informs and influences the next.

### Crisis Stages

Crises do not just happen, they are the product of numerous variables that were either mismanaged, improperly understood or ignored. According to Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2003), “crises begin with a period of incubation during which an organization is operating in what is seen as essentially normal, routine manner...worldviews, interpretive schemes, sensemaking structures, procedures, rules, norms and policies are considered adequate to avoid risk” (p. 105). During this incubation phase, signs of decay in terms of how well past procedures meet the demands of current issues are improperly dealt with or ignored. When these pre-crisis indicators are ignored and faulty precautions are perceived to be adequate, the chance of a full crisis is heightened. Pre-crisis tendencies also revolve around ignoring, thus continuing their implementation, inadequate solutions even when they are deemed faulty. According to Turner (1976), “a simple failure to observe existing regulations is one problem, but a more complex situation arises when existing precautionary regulations are discredited, because they are out-of-date or inapplicable to the case in hand, but not yet changed” (p. 394). It is often these small-scale pre-crisis failures, unfortunately, that move the organization to the crisis stage.

When outlining the components of the crisis stage Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (2003) assert that:

Crisis, the shortest of the three stages, is the stage of greatest intensity, where the radical bifurcation of the system becomes evident. It begins with crisis sensing, usual through a crisis trigger event, and continues until the organization returns to some sense of

normalcy. Within this period, sometimes only lasting for a matter of minutes or hours, intense confusion, uncertainty, and emotional arousal occurs. Harm to the organization and to stakeholders accumulates. Decisions must also be made and actions taken under conditions of high uncertainty, which will subsequently structure both understanding and additional action. (p.126)

Important to the current study is the idea that decisions have to be made in conditions of high uncertainty that structure understanding and future action. This is sensemaking. At the moment of crisis, people are looking for answers to questions. These answers serve as a perceptual lens that is retained for future understanding. Because, crisis is both extremely brief, yet extremely consequential, the selection of the event is deterministic of crisis outcomes.

Finally, the post-crisis stage involves numerous organizational concerns such as salvaging legitimacy, learning, and healing (Seeger, et al., 2003). In order to salvage legitimacy, organizations must defend the legitimacy of their actions through attending to issues that led to the crisis, how they will be avoided and what would be the current organizational new normal. According to Ulmer & Sellnow (2002) “this apologetic discourse focuses on one or more a combination of strategic positions such as simple denial of the act, evasion of responsibility, reduction of the offensiveness, compensation, corrective action, and mortification designed to repair or restore image” (p. 362). In terms of learning, organizations and organizational members enact retrospective sensemaking to determine what lessons can be gleaned in order to avoid a crisis of a similar kind. At this stage, organizations have the time complete these tasks of reevaluating current hierarchies, protocols and policies. Healing, according to Seeger et al (2003), “is a multifaceted process that allows the organization and stakeholders to reconstitute themselves and move past the crisis” (pp. 148-149). Identity management, healing and moving



past the crisis happen in concert. Here members reframe the crisis and their involvement in a way that allows them to manage their identity in acceptable ways (Payne, 1989).

### Summary of Literature

Through both an examination of current trends within the Southern Baptist Convention and a review of literature concerning Sensemaking Theory, it may be surmised that crises that arise within congregations may be labeled as a crisis of sensemaking. Therefore, the current context is appropriate in order to both explicate and move Sensemaking Theory forward.

Sensemaking Theory is highlighted through a clear correlation of the context of the current study and the concepts that outline Sensemaking Theory. Sensemaking Theory is applied to a crisis where individuals find themselves in a situation with heightened uncertainty and a desire for answers i.e. a reduction of uncertainty. Sensemaking Theory, therefore, seeks to explain the process and influences that cause individuals to notice (enact), justify/label (select) and reproduce (retain) certain behaviors. Though sensemaking happens in everyday life, it is often most evident in the context of a crisis.

Within the context of the current study there is a desire to know how to better avoid or mediate crisis. Congregations within the Southern Baptist Convention seem to be ill suited to respond to crisis. The prevalence of ministers willfully or forcefully being removed from their place of service is a glaring indicator that there is a real problem within the denomination. The crisis within these congregates is not that of dilapidated equipment or wildfires; they are communicative in nature. The point at which members are thrust into the equivocal nature of crisis they must create structure that allows them to cope with this uncertainty. Sensemaking Theory highlights this process via enactment, selection and retention.

The three main pillars of Sensemaking Theory - enactment, selection and retention - portray how the theory is an asynchronous and mutually influencing cycle. This point cannot be understated. I designed a diagram (Figure 2.1), which is a graphical depiction of the sensemaking cycle. To summarize, the concepts outlined in Figure 2.1 are explained along with what I believe to be guiding questions concerning the sensemaking process.

First, at the moment someone chooses to notice something out of the ordinary [enactment], they ask themselves the question: What is going on? However, before someone notices a bifurcation and brackets this unjustified variation they must have a bright line or a repertoire of rules from which to compare the anomaly. In other words, they must have a set of retained assumptions from previous sensemaking episodes in order to bracket or label an event – a result of retention. Here the question is asked: *What should I expect and what should I think?* We see through a review of literature, however, that not all individuals have the retained experiences to be able to notice or bracket an event. Furthermore, some who are able to bracket the event may elect to ignore or deny the event because they either do not feel as if they have the ability to properly handle the problem or they are hoping that it will simply go away. Finally, identity plays a part in how one might enact a phenomenon as a result of juggling multiple identities. From this perspective, depending upon which identity that a person assumes when approaching a bifurcation will determine if and to what extent the bifurcation will be mediated. Again, depending upon the assumed identity at the time of the bifurcation one may not feel as if he/she has the capacity to deal with the anomaly, thus making a judgment based on the answer to the question of: *What can I do about it?*

Because sensemaking is retrospective in nature, at which point emotion and commitment are a priori behaviors it is not until this *look back* that a valuation of the bracketed phenomenon

can be made. Selection moves past the fact that something is out of the ordinary and begins to answer the question: *What is the story here?* At this point an effort to manage uncertainty is in full force where positive and/or negative attribution of the bifurcation is made. However, to select an interpretation is to limit possible behavioral responses. Though the limiting aspect of sensemaking is not exclusive to the selection stage, but is also a factor of enaction, the key aspect is that to focus or to attribute is to exclude other possible interpretations. The literature is clear that once an individual brackets and subsequently selects his/her interpretation of the event, that justification becomes rigid and resistant to alternative explanations.

This study examines how members and leaders of UBC enact their environments. Especially important to the current study is the idea that not all members are able to experience the bifurcation first hand. Rather, they experience the event through the interpretation of others, at which point the sensemaking process is dependent upon another individual's interpretation of the event and the politics of sensemaking or sensegiving enters into the equation. The establishment or selection of an interpretation assumes an opinion. Therefore, since selection is influenced by retained responses and factors such as identity, at which point when an individual willfully or unknowingly relays their interpretation of the event through the prism of personal goals and/or identity maintenance, politics will influence outcomes.

This brings the review of literature to the secondary purpose of the study: consequences. Though the primary purpose of this study is the testing and application of theory, the secondary goal was to aid churches in better avoiding and/or mediating crisis. I believe that the first step in this process is to help individuals understand how the process of sensemaking is inherently consequential.

To that end, previous concepts outlined in the literature review will be utilized in order to conduct a theme analysis of the current case study, which will be utilized to capture the Sensemaking process.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?

RQ2: Did member or leadership commitments facilitate and/or intensify crisis?

RQ3: Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

RQ4: Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

RQ5: Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?

RQ6: Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?

RQ7: Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?

RQ8: Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?

RQ9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?

RQ10: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified crisis?

RQ11: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?

RQ12: Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?

The following chapter will outline the crisis context and the methods utilized to gather data.

## CHAPTER 3: SENSEMAKING AND CHURCH CRISIS RESEARCH

### Overview

The purpose of the previous literature review was to explain both the process and impact of Sensemaking Theory and how it applies to the context of a local Southern Baptist Church. The concepts outlined in the review capture what will hopefully reveal how communication within the congregation led to the crisis of a church split.

### Case Study Approach

The case study approach is often qualitative in nature and involves numerous data collection possibilities in order to reach a triangulation of data. Case study research may be used to achieve various research goals such as to provide descriptions of phenomena, develop theory, and test theory. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), qualitative data is defined as “research that involves analyzing and interpreting texts and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon” (p. 3). Though it is important to understand the means by which qualitative data is gleaned, it is vital for researchers within the social sciences to validate the method. Sofaer (1999) succinctly articulates the numerous advantages of qualitative research:

Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomenon; tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles, giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducting initial explorations to develop theories and to generate and even test hypotheses; and moving toward explanations (p. 1101).

Furthermore, church conflict research and organizational communication research have historically utilized quantitative and qualitative approaches, of which the case study approach is a valid qualitative approach (Carroll, 1981; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Starke & Dyck, 1996; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

### Selection and Number of Cases

Case study approaches may be applied over numerous or individual cases (Yin, 2003). Traditionally, single case study approaches have been utilized to outline Sensemaking Theory in crisis situations (Weick, 2007, 2008). In addition, case study approaches to data gathering utilize unobtrusive measures, such as published material or company documents (Webb & Weick, 1979). This means of data collection is beneficial because it allows for rich data in a single case context. The single case study approach allows for an in-depth analysis of how theory outlines concepts in a chronological study while also providing for theory expansion when data warrants such action.

### Describing and Explaining the Data

“Analyzing data is at the heart of building theory from case studies” (Eisenhardt, 1989). The analysis utilized in the current study was specifically selected to develop a history of participant interpretation in order to determine how members made sense of the crisis from the onset of the crisis to the final split. Because sensemaking is set both in historical events (the result of retention) and how interpretation or sense is made as the crisis unfolds (enaction and selection), a case study analysis is able to describe patterns of interpretations both before and during the crisis. This ability is crucial because both a priori crisis interpretation or cause maps

and the real time interpretation of events are critical to understanding both the cause and effects of crisis.

To that end, this study follows the procedures of Miles and Huberman (1984) as modified by Dutton and Dukerich (1991) which is set firmly within Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1995). This four step method of collecting, describing and analyzing the data included 1) devising and coding using a contact summary form; 2) developing a complete theme list; 3) coding the interview data onto the themes; and, 4) constructing an issue history (p. 524). Through the process outlined by Dutton and Dukerich (1991), the themes and issues that arise will determine whether Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate theoretical lens for understanding crisis within a church context. This approach allows theoretical testing while also providing the latitude for emergent or data driven themes. What follows is a brief description of the four-step data collection and analysis process.

Step 1: Devising and coding using current literature and contact summary forms. Main themes, issues and problems that are driven by both Sensemaking Theory literature as well as emergent themes are constructed using a contact summary form. The contact summary form consists of interview data that was transcribed and mined for theme analysis. Themes are defined as recurrent topics of either/and discussion and action on the part of the participants (Bjorkegren, 1989). The process involves the identification of themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 258).

Step 2: Developing a complete theme list. Sensemaking Theory literature is grouped into three main process groupings (enactment, selection and retention). Within these main process groupings are interpretive themes that are generated from and fall within the parameters of the

three major groupings. Selection, for example, is a major theme of which emotion, commitment and attribution are examples of interpretive themes that work to describe the selection component of Sensemaking Theory. To reiterate that these themes do overlap within the sensemaking cycle is important (See Figure 2.1). While literature driven themes are important to the scope of the project, theory expansion from themes unique to previously cited themes are valuable and make the case for a content summary form approach because they allow for themes not initially included in the literature review to surface. Finally, it is also key to restate that one of the purposes of the themes generated from Sensemaking literature is in regards to theory validity.

Step 3: Coding the interview data into the themes. Each interview will be coded sentence by sentence on to a final theme list (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). The purpose of this list is to validate or invalidate the breadth of support for particular theory driven themes gleaned from participants. The coding process should determine the degree of agreement within and across participant data.

Step 4: Constructing an issue history. In this step, questions concerning what issue(s) were consistently considered as the bifurcation point will be detailed. In this step issues of what, why and to what effects are considered. In other words, by constructing the issue history, I am able to determine what issue(s) were considered most important by each set of stakeholders, how participants made sense of the catalytic issue(s) and how that impacted both communication and behavior. As a result, the issue history is not developed by the researcher but through interview data.



## Data Analysis Process

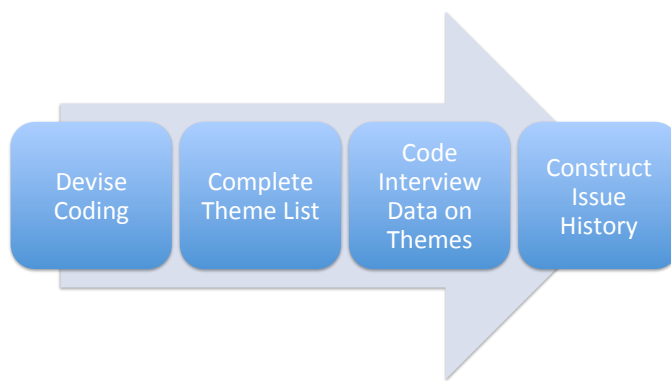


Figure 3.1 Data Analysis Process

## Enrichment and Depletion

Participants of UBC were gleaned from a snowball approach beginning with the pastor and the worship leader and from a list of names of individuals from whom the church voted to withdraw fellowship. The names of the individuals whose membership was revoked were listed in a September business meeting minutes document (See Appendix C). The purpose of the two approaches was to glean information from sources that represented alternate interpretations of the event. Furthermore, I was also concerned with speaking with individuals who had more and those who had less access to information during the actual crisis. To that end, though members who held various positions in the church were interviewed, members with less organizational standing were also interviewed.

Participants were interviewed either in their home, over the phone or at a public venue. The interview questions were semi-structured and are based on Weick's Sensemaking Theory. As interview data highlight both predicted and new themes, liberty was taken during the interview in order to explore those themes. All of the information was recorded on a digital voice recorder and later transcribed.

In-depth interviews, church documents and video were the main source of data collection. The interview process consisted of interviews with participants who were considered both deeply or peripherally involved with pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis developments. The determination of those deeply involved was decided by accessing organizational leadership and those individuals who had their memberships revoked. Though there are no clear rules that dictate how many individuals to interview, the guideline is to interview enough people so as to get a comprehensive view of the communicative event (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Because this study is comprised of three clear divisions, the sample was stratified into three major divisions: 1) those who supported the pastor by both voting in the affirmative and remaining at the church; 2) those who did not support the pastor by voting in the negative and left the church; and 3) those who were not directly involved with the conflict yet experienced the pre, during and post-crisis events.

Church documents of prior business meetings indicate that 15 members were removed from the church. The goal was to contact and interview at least 50% (7) of those who were among those members. All 15 members were contacted via phone. Six of the 15 initially agreed to be interviewed. Of those six, three honored their agreement. On one occasion when a gentleman who had agreed to meet was phoned the day before the interview for confirmation purposes, he replied that "if you call back again I will call the Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office

and have you arrested for harassment”. Another gentleman who had agreed to interview was called the day of the interview to confirm the appointment at which time he communicated that there was no need to come by because he was not talking to me. Immediately after saying this, and another derogatory phrase, he hung up. I called back and communicated that I was sorry that I had not understood what he had said, at which point he was much more civil but reiterated that he would not speak with me. The third individual, Wren, who had initially agreed to meet, upon verifying her date indicated that she “did not feel led” to talk to me, and that I would probably not be able to talk to the other 15 members who had their memberships revoked as she communicated to me that she had spoken to most of them. This revelation validated the mean-spirited responses that I had received from the two prior cancellations. Furthermore, Wren would prove to be a major protagonist and sensegiver in this case study. Even though she had said no, I urged her to interview and even had a mutual acquaintance advocate for an interview at a later date, but it was to no avail. Other individuals that were contacted, who had their memberships revoked, declined due to having “moved on” or because the memory was still too hurtful to discuss. Therefore, I was able to interview four of the individuals who were against the pastor, two of whom had their membership revoked.

To balance the sample I planned to interview members who supported the pastor. I was able to interview five individuals who supported the pastor and would agree to an interview. It is important to note that the results indicate that those members who supported the pastor did not necessarily approve of how he responded to the crisis.

There was a third division of peripheral members contacted. I had a contact list of the entire church population via a directory in order to seek out interviews. Important to the study is not just how the participants that were most closely involved in the conflict interpreted the

conflict, but also how members who were not directly part of the conflict interpreted or made sense of the conflict. To that end, cold calls and referrals garnered another seven interviews.

In addition to securing interviews with individuals who were not directly involved with the crisis, I also interview individuals who were former members but not members when the split took place. I interviewed one person who was intimately involved with the process and had dialogue with both sides of the crisis divide yet was not a member. A total of 37 members were approached and asked to complete an interview.

The total interview population was 15 representing these three divisions: current, former and nonmembers. The information gleaned from the interview data provided the basis for analysis of the current study. Each interviewee is identified with a pseudonym and code in order to preserve anonymity and all interview participants were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. There were ten males and six females interviewed for the study. Each interview averaged a timespan of 1 hour with no interview lasting less than 45 minutes or more than 1.5 hours. The identifying codes for each participant is comprised of a three letter sequence and a number that identifies the subject as being for (F), against (A) or neutral (N) to the pastor; the subjects level of involvement as being high (H) or low (L); and their membership status as member (M) or non-member (N). Except the pastor, who was male, the genders of the remaining participants were purposefully masked in order to approach a deeper level of anonymity. Four of the six nonmembers were former members of UBC at the time of the study. All four members who were against the pastor were members in good standing at the time of the event but had been either voted out of the church or had left the church at the time of the study.

The study approached the data via a broad and comprehensive review of the literature in order to cultivate and hone analysis. Coding categories were initially created based upon conceptual themes within Sensemaking Theory. Careful attention was paid to interpretive themes that outlined the three phases of sensemaking: enactment, selection and retention. Other concepts that fit within this three phase conceptual frame and were profitable for theme analysis include: communication, sense-giving, politics of sensemaking, emotion, identity, commitment, expectations, capacity, mindfulness, leadership, crisis, and renewal. Interview questions were constructed based on the interpretive theme clusters and the major themes. (Interview Schedule in Appendix F).

## The Site

### History

Unity Baptist Church was organized September 29, 1946 with sixteen charter members. The congregation continued to grow, and in the early 1950's a brick sanctuary and educational building were erected. In 1997, a gymnasium was constructed, and by 2003 the debt on the gym had been paid. Soon after completion of the gym, expansion on the current sanctuary began which was completed by 2004, increasing the church capacity from 320 to 650. In 2007, the upstairs portion of the gymnasium was updated to include theatre-sized screens, electric game rooms, computer stations, pool tables, a rock wall, and a café.

### Ministerial Staff

Pastor Tom has been pastor of Unity Baptist Church since June of 1999. His education consists of a Bachelor's Degree from Louisiana College and a Master's degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has served in staff ministry positions since October

of 1968 and as pastor since 1981. In his early ministry he served as Music Minister, Youth Pastor, and Associate Pastor. Pastor Tom has also served in the Southern Baptist Convention and the Louisiana Baptist Convention and as Moderator of two associations.

The Minister of Music and Technology, Alex Barns, has been the Music Minister at Unity Baptist Church since July of 2005. He received his bachelor's in Mass Communications/Media Production from College of the Ozarks in Branson, Missouri. He earned his Master's in Church Music at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.

Student Minister Jordan Ivey came on staff with Unity in January 2008. As Student Minister, Chad's ministry involves children from kindergarten through their college years.

Non-ministry staff consists of a custodian, receptionist and financial secretary. None of the previous office staff remained following the crisis.

### Church Programs

Children's ministry consists of Sunday classes that are organized by grade level, Children's worship (an alternative to children attending the adult service which runs concurrently), summer week long children's programs labeled VBS (Vacation Bible School), and a mid-week children's class labeled TeamKid. Children are also encouraged to take part in Children's Choir through the music ministry department. Youth ministry programs (Grades 7-12) meet for Sunday classes, mid-week classes and take multiple summer trips for mission or learning purposes. Adult classes are offered at similar times as children and youth. In addition to these classes, adults are encouraged to take part in community outreach events. The Senior Adult division meets monthly for meals and interaction as well as periodically for out-of-town trips. The Senior Adults also take part in community outreach events. Music oriented opportunities

include choir, band, soloist and technology driven avenues. There are also exclusively male (Brotherhood) and female (Women on Mission) oriented ministry groups that meet regularly.

## Structure

Unity Baptist Church (UBC) frames its organizational structure via the 2009 revised edition of the policies and procedures manual. The manual is quite extensive at 106 pages in length. The major aspects of the manual include:

Church Schedules

Church Programs

Church Officers

Committees

Ministries

General Personnel Policy

Ministerial Staff & Personnel

Appendix A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I

Important to the current study is how roles are structured specifically with regards to church officers, committees, ministerial staff and general personnel. Unique to UBC is the fact that the church had no bylaws or a church constitution. In the absence of such, the policies and procedures manual serves as the basis for organizational procedures, duties and expectations.

## Attendance

Pre-crisis, the average attendance ranged between 220-260 for Sunday morning classes and approximately 300 during worship service. Post-crisis, the average fell to approximately 110-130 attending Sunday morning classes with approximately 150 attending the main worship service.

## Context

The context of the crisis is comprised of approximately 207 years of collective membership at Unity Baptist Church (UBC) spanning from 1962 to 2011 from 15 sources (See Table 3.1). What follows is a brief compilation of each of their accounts to comprise a breadth and depth of background information. In an effort to determine how and if the church operated within Weick's Sensemaking Theory concepts of enaction, selection and retention, ten members, one non-member and four former members were interviewed. Of the ten members outlined in this case, four are no longer members. The four former members who had no involvement in the current crisis inform the initial background in terms of the history of decision-making and culture of the church. Three of the four former members served with Pastor Tom for 6 years and one did not. The 15 participants have held numerous offices within the church such as: pastor, youth pastor, music minister, deacon, choir member, instrumentalist, Sunday school teacher, children's choir coordinator, hospitality, church council, and finance committee member. A participant chart that offers a participant pseudonym, their level of commitment to the pastor following the crisis, their level of involvement and their membership status at the time of the crisis is included in table 3.1.



Table 3.1 Participant Chart

Name/Code	Assessment	Level of Involvement	Membership Status
Tom – Pastor	For Pastor	High	Member
Chad-FHM1	For Pastor	High	Member
David-FHM2	For Pastor	High	Member
Sue-FLM3	For Pastor	Low	Member
John-NLM1	Neutral	Low	Member
Joy-NLM2	Neutral	Low	Member
Peter-AHM1	Against Pastor	High	Member
Mary-AHM2	Against Pastor	High	Member
Jim-AHM3	Against Pastor	High	Member
Jane-ALM1	Against Pastor	Low	Member
Paul-NHN1	Neutral Non-Voter	High	Non-member
Sally.-NLN1	Neutral Non-Voter	Low	Former Member
Sam-NLN2	Neutral Non-Voter	Low	Former Member
Pam-NLN3	Neutral Non-Voter	Low	Former Member
Eli-NLN4	Neutral Non-Voter	Low	Former Member

This context also initially outlines the two main sensegivers and protagonists from whom, according to the sources that comprise this case study, the crisis generated. In giving descriptions of both Pastor Tom and Wren, careful attention was given to ensure that information from all 15 sources was included. It is supremely important to note that neither Pastor Tom nor Wren were ever mentioned during the interviews until the interviewee made a specific reference to them. The fact that each source interview highlighted the clash between the two without prior priming gives weight to the validity of their role in the crisis. The context provided here is meant to serve

as both an outline and a timeline for the events that were mined for data. Specific references to sources have been removed from this description but are representative of all 15 sources.

In August of 1999 Pastor Tom was called to be the pastor of UBC. Early in his ministry he makes clear his views of women being in leadership within the church. His view is that women were not to be the chair of major committees. This stipulation is not contested until December of 2009 when the chairperson of the nominating committee informs the pastor that there has not been a deacon or any other male that will agree to serve as the chairperson of the finance committee. At a December meeting of the nominating committee it was made clear that no man wanted to serve in this capacity leaving the only available option the very willing Wren. Wren, acutely aware of the pastor's stance on women in leadership, agrees that if she were elected she would only serve one term. Pastor Tom reluctantly agreed to name Wren as chairperson, but, due to his view of women in authority, he refused to attend any finance meetings for the balance of the year until budgets were to be set the following year.

In December of 2010 the pastor approaches Jack, a deacon, a prominent businessman and a current member of the finance committee, and asks if he would serve if nominated. Jack agrees. Since the pastor serves as a non-voting exofficio of all committees, he could not nominate Jack. However, when the initial 2010 finance committee chairperson opened the meeting and asked if anyone wanted the position, Jack could have said yes then. He did not. The chairperson then asked for nominations. No one nominated anyone. Finally, Mary, a finance committee member, nominates Wren. Pastor Tom interjects that Jack would be willing to serve as chairperson at which point Wren claims that due to his lack of attendance over the past year, as well as his lack of experience with committees, he would not be capable. Both Jack and Pastor

Tom attempt to make the case that he was both willing and capable, but in the end no one nominated him and the nomination for Wren was upheld by a second motion.

Following the upheld motion that secures Wren a second term as finance chairperson, the Pastor slams his hands on the desk and exclaims:

“I will see you at the end of the year to set up the budget, because I will not sit under the authority of a woman,” then proceeds to leave the meeting.

Over the next year both the Pastor and Wren make accusations concerning each other’s honesty. On one such occasion, Wren sought to be reimbursed at a staff rate, though she was just a volunteer. Pastor Tom objects to this practice in a monthly business meeting, citing it breaks tax law. The church votes in favor of the staff rate regardless. The Pastor cites numerous issues where Wren had been reimbursed when she used her personal, rather than the church credit card, which was against policy. Wren accuses the Pastor of not compensating her for time spent as Nursery Coordinator, which was later found to be false. Wren also accuses the pastor of stealing.

Later in December of 2010, Pastor Tom asks Tessa, a church secretary, to retire due to poor job performance and other indiscretions. In front of two witnesses, she agrees to retire. Tessa, at the monthly business meeting asserts that she was fired. She accused the pastor of lying about her on several occasions. Tempers flare. In the same meeting, grievances concerning the music minister’s use of the Shofar, a horn blown in ancient Israel as a call to assemble and used today as a call to worship, ensued from the audience. One female member exclaimed “I can’t worship either. I think that David [music minister] needs to be fired and take that damn horn and throw it away.” Pastor Tom is irate with the outburst and ends the business meeting before the remaining business could be completed and subsequently walks out.

In February of 2011, concerning the accusations made by Tessa and Wren, Pastor Tom requests that the deacons form a grievance committee. Jacque, a deacon and the church parliamentarian, asserts that the grievance committee is the pastor's attempt to kick someone out of the congregation. The pastor and deacons agree to pray before making a decision concerning the grievance committee. After the prayer meeting, they form the grievance committee.

The grievance committee hears from both sides concerning the accusations levied against Tessa and Wren and determines that the two ladies were at fault. The findings of the committee were subsequently logged and reported in the next month's business meeting but no formal action was taken against Tessa or Wren.

On February 9, 2011 the pastor mailed all of the deacons a letter stating, in summary, he had lost faith in them. He cited numerous issues, called in question their level of activity in terms of their role as a deacon, and finally said that he would meet with them monthly but would not trust their counsel. He ends by asserting that though he intended for only the deacon body to read the letter, he knew that it would be widely disseminated via their wives and another woman (assuming Wren). The letter had three enclosures, one financial and two refuting Tessa and Wren's false statements.

In July 2011, the nomination committee chairman begins investigation to ensure that everyone who holds a position does so in accordance with the \$2000.00 minimum tithe stipulation found in the policies and procedures manual. The nomination committee chair was young and newly appointed, and perhaps as a result submitted an elderly lady who was a retired teacher on a fixed income who tithes regularly but does not meet the \$2000.00 minimum. The pastor finds out, calls the female retiree to apologize, but she is hurt and embarrassed and

relinquished her post of 10 years on the counting committee. This causes numerous hurt feelings that erupt in a business meeting.

On July 3, 2011, the chairman of the committee on committees informs the pastor that someone had asked to nominate someone other than Wren to be the chairman of the hostess committee. The chairman was not aware that in 1996 it had been made a lifetime appointment; the only other position in this same lifetime category status was the pastor. Pastor Tom informed the chairman that the only way that he would do something like that was if there were signatures of other members asserting that they would like to consider a new individual. In two days the chairperson has 40 signatures. In the interim, when the chairperson was accepting signatures, numerous people approach him to sign the request for a new person to be nominated, not appointed, as a hostess chairperson alternative. Billy (acting deacon) angrily comes to the church demanding to have the “petition against Wren”. The pastor’s wife (also church secretary) leaves before Billy can confront her because her husband and pastor, who is not in the office that day, instructs her to. Billy calls Pastor Tom asking where the petition is. Pastor Tom claims the petition is not there. Billy, thoroughly frustrated, threatens, upon acquiring the petition, that he will read the names of the “ungodly people” on the list before the whole church during Sunday morning worship.

The next day, July 9, 2011, the committee on committees chairperson calls the pastor to inform him that their upcoming meeting was cancelled due to a recently scheduled deacon meeting that was to take place the next day, Sunday July 10<sup>th</sup>. The meeting of the deacons that was scheduled was done so without the consent or the invitation of the pastor, which is in direct conflict with the current UBC policy and procedure manual. The pastor agrees to cancel the committee on committees meeting. He calls other deacons that he deemed loyal and considered

his confidants and asked if they were invited to the meeting and they responded that they were not. On July 10, 2011, the deacons hold their “secret” meeting without the consent of the pastor.

On July 17, 2011, the pastor enters the worship service and states that they are canceling the service and that the following week there will be a stand-up vote on who UBC will have as pastor. His statement read:

For twelve years and one month, I have shared my life with you, comforting you in your loss and sorrow, praying with you during sickness, standing with you and your family for hours in surgery waiting rooms, standing with you in ICU rooms claiming God’s promises. I have buried your loved ones, married your children, counseled with you during troubled times.

I have loved you and forgiven you as well as asked your forgiveness. I have allowed you to upbraid and accuse me in public, and then accept your private apology. I have sought to teach you God’s word and how to apply it, encouraging you to reach out to a lost and dying world with the wonderful message of Christ.

We have survived church wide trauma and have become stronger for it. We have paid off our debt on the T Center and owe only \$73K of the \$450K we borrowed to enlarge this auditorium. But, over the past two years UBC has developed an increasing division in our fellowship coming to a climax in December when once again I came under verbal attack and was lied against during a business meeting with no repercussions for the offenders. I have sought the help of the deacons, but they have been unable or unwilling to bring sides together and deal with the issues.

The turmoil has been smoldering for seven month and now, both of our young Ministers have come under attack. Therefore, as Moderator of our church, I am calling a special called business meeting next Sunday morning for a vote on whom you choose to lead you. I will ask you to vote to continue following me as your Pastor under the leadership of the Holy Spirit or you may choose Wren and her followers. Should you choose Wren and her group I will clear out my office after the vote and will ask for no compensation. Should you choose for me to remain as pastor I will expect Wren and her followers to be removed from all places of service and leadership and will encourage them to find a pastor they can follow, allowing us to carry on the ministry of this church in peace and harmony.

God called me to pastor in Pineville and I have sought to be faithful to that calling. He has not relieved me of the call, but you will have to decide next week whether I will pastor here or not.

I will wait on your decision next week. I will be here at 6 PM to make the announcement for a second time and I will be here Wednesday at 6 PM to give the required third

announcement, but I will not stay in this auditorium today I will not pretend to worship when my heart burdened and grieving.

Seek the Lord this week and if He leads you in choosing to follow me next week, I will lay out the plans I believe the Lord has for us and we will begin a new era for Unity Baptist Church.

After reading the statement and dismissing the congregation, emotions run high. Two men had to forcefully separate Wren's husband from another man. Most people left; all were in shock. The following evening and the next Wednesday evening, per UBC policy that stipulated that a meeting must be announced a minimum of three times, the specially called business meeting was announced. On July 20, 2011, the pastor sends a letter announcing the stand-up vote. It is important to note that a stand up vote meant literally that. It was not a secret ballot, though some petitioned for it. When the vote was to be taken, it would be done so by sitting or standing. Standing up for Wren, in the event that Pastor Tom won the vote, also meant that they would lose their position in the church. Though Pastor Tom was asked not to move with the vote from some members, the next Sunday morning the vote was taken and it passed 118 to 110 that they would retain Pastor Tom, with approximately a third of the people abstaining. Abstention did not involve the loss of a church position. After the vote, several members left. The service that followed was very solemn with only roughly the 118 people who stood for the pastor remaining for the service.

On July 27, 2011, the pastor sends a letter to all church members enumerating the multiple reasons why the stand-up vote was necessary (See Appendix B). In brief summary, Pastor Tom said his reasons for the quick vote were due to the threat of Billy reading off the names of the members who had signed the "petition against Wren" before he could stop him. He also gave explanation for why he named Wren to the list, which included her resolve that she

would seek a second term of finance committee chairperson, though she had said she would not. He also included her credit card and millage indiscretions, as well as her behavior concerning her calls to numerous people encouraging them to vote one way or another or that that they should divert their giving to special designated funds rather than to the church budget as a whole. Finally, he asserted that his cause for a stand-up vote was to “mark those causing dissension” (July 27 letter). The members who lost the vote quickly begin a campaign to call for a formal vote to remove the pastor, which would take place on September 14, 2011.

On July 28, 2011 Paul (LBC Strategist), was called by two members of the group who lost the stand-up vote. These members inquired if the motion for a stand-up vote was appropriate in terms of Robert’s Rules of Order. Paul explained that it was in fact a legitimate maneuver that, as moderator, the pastor could call for a stand up vote at any time. They were informed that they could have blocked the motion should they have known the correct procedure for doing so. Paul then calls Pastor Tom to inform him that he has been contacted. On August 5, 2011, a member of the UBC deacon body called Paul and asked if the procedure was right in terms of Robert’s Rules of Order and if it was Christ-like. Paul informed the gentleman on the first but not the last point. On August 6, 2011, Pastor Tom and Paul meet for lunch, and Pastor Tom asks Paul if he would be willing to moderate a business meeting on September 14, 2011. Paul agrees. On September 11, 2011, both the pastor and the opposition send letters to church members concerning the vote.

Members on both sides of the divide accused the other of drawing on people who were not members; those who were but had not attended in a long time, nursing home residents, wheelchair bound members and more. There were also several accusation of cyber politicking



that included numerous texts, emails, and Facebook messages. Numerous friends were unfriended via their Facebook accounts.

On Wednesday, September 14, 2011, UBC, a church that averaged less than 150 people during midweek meetings and 220-260 during Sunday classes, had over 400 members present. In order to vote in the business meeting members had to bring a photo ID and be able to prove their membership. Four different color ballots were used with the UBC logo on it to ensure that at the time of voting no one would know which color they would be using, thus guarding against counterfeiting. Police were called to patrol the parking lot and attend the meeting. Individuals who lived in nursing homes and numerous individuals who had not been active in many years presented their identification in order to receive a set of ballots. Three lawyers and a special mediator/parliamentarian expert from the Louisiana Baptist Convention were called in to conduct the meeting.

Pastor Tom feared that even a vote of confidence to retain him that evening would not keep the disgruntled members from calling further business meetings should they not win. In order to guard against this, Pastor Tom, who as the pastor of the church is the moderator and thus is allowed to set the evening's agenda, made the first item of business to vote to approve a two year moratorium on specially called business meetings in which the evening's agenda would include a vote on the pastor's removal. According to Pastor Tom, this moratorium was approved by a majority of the voting congregation. However, numerous individuals who were there to vote against the pastor actually voted for the moratorium in ignorance of the instant effect. As a result, the second item on the agenda, a call for a vote to remove the pastor was instantaneously out of order. The result of the moratorium was a great deal of debate that eventually led back to the

original decision. At that point over 100 people walked out and the pastor was retained on a procedural technicality.

When the majority began to surmise that they had no recourse, they began to leave. Paul, the LBC Moderator, asked for them to stay because they had other business to attend to. However, the mass of dejected members did in fact leave, and it was to their detriment. When order was restored to the room, the pastor asked the moderator for a vote to lay aside the notification rule. By this, he meant that the three meeting notification rule for major votes so that members could be duly notified was to be laid aside. This was a major policy change, and according to Robert's Rules of Order can only be done so with a two-thirds majority. This is to ensure that no major changes can be made in a hasty or, in this case, a heightened emotional state. The laying aside of the notification rule passed. On September 14, 2011, the pastor made a motion that 15 individuals who had been active in attempting to remove him as pastor, were themselves to be removed from both offices and membership at UBC (See Appendix C).

Concerning the moratorium that had passed, the irony of the situation is that the moratorium is actually only good until the next meeting when someone can make a motion to strike the moratorium and then subsequently reopen the vote to remove the pastor. In essence, the two-year moratorium was a bluff: a bluff that to this date has yet to be called. It is, however, a bluff that is much more difficult to call because 15 of the most influential instigators have been stripped of their member and voting privileges.

Following the vote, numerous people who initially voted for the pastor left because of the forced dismissal of so many prominent members. The crisis resulted in a mass exodus. In one instance over 110 people have left and joined a neighboring church. Another sizable section have

not rejoined any church; they are collateral damage in a war of a volatile congregations.

However, UBC is growing. Since the split, they have had 15 baptisms, and several families have joined. Soon after the split UBC stopped their normal percentage giving to the Louisiana Baptist Convention; the staff cut back to a three-day workweek and had to take a pay-cut. However, of the current and former members that were interviewed, all of them are happy and are where they feel like they should be.

What preceded is a condensed overview of the events that took place during the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages of the split. Attention was taken to include enough detail so as to be aware of the multiple contexts as they are approached in the results section. However, lengthy quotes and explanations have been reserved for future sections. Furthermore, in the attempt to determine if and how Sensemaking Theory better informs our understanding of church conflict, it is also important to mention that this multitude of contexts in the form of the politics of sensemaking is a new area of research. A simple reading of the prior context offers multiple options as to what event(s) was the true bifurcation.

Moving forward, the focus of this study remains to build or move theory forward by expanding its application. In this case, Sensemaking Theory, which has been utilized in more macro contexts, is tested at the micro level. The research questions outlined in Chapter Two were developed as means to test the plausibility of this application. The secondary goal also remains the same, to aid churches in better avoiding and/or mediating crisis. To that end, we move to the results section.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Research Questions and Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens through which to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Specifically, the intent was to understand how Sensemaking Theory explains pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication and how these sensemaking episodes led to the crisis of a church split. In order to effectively test and apply Sensemaking Theory, 12 research questions were created (See table 4.1).

### Overview

The results indicate one main bifurcation point and two other major incidents occurred during the pre-crisis and post-crisis stage that impacted sensemaking. The pre-crisis incident, the second election of Wren as finance chairperson, worked to facilitate the main bifurcation, the reading of the stand-up vote, which occurred approximately 1 year after the initial pre-crisis event, with the final major sensemaking event occurring one month after the main crisis event, when the pastor called for a vote, which passed, to revoke the membership of 15 UBC members. Initially, the emergence of three separate sensemaking points during the crisis were assumed to be three separate bifurcation points, which would be unique to the historic norm in terms of Sensemaking Theory research. The ability to point back to one specific crisis point that informs all future sensemaking is applicable in cases of less political crisis and was assumed to be less likely in the current context.

Table 4.1: Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
RQ1: What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?
RQ2: Did member or leadership commitments facilitate and/or intensify crisis?
RQ3: Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?
RQ4: Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?
RQ5: Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?
RQ6: Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?
RQ7: Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?
RQ8: Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis??
RQ9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?
RQ10: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified crisis?
RQ11: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?
RQ12: Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?

Though this case involves a hyper-political context, only 4 out of 15 participants indicated a major crisis event, which took place in the pre-crisis stage, other than the major crisis event. Only 2 of 15 participants indicated that the post-crisis event was major. It is important to note that of 2 out of 4 who named the pre-crisis issue, one was the pastor, and one was a non-member. Therefore, only 2 of the 15 members that made mention of the pre-crisis event were members of Unity. However, those that identified the pre-crisis and post-crisis events also specifically identified the major crisis issue. As a result, though the pre-crisis and post-crisis events are an integral aspect of the context, they will not be labeled as bifurcation points. Rather, they will be explained and expounded in terms of the research questions and how they fit within and inform the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages as well as Sensemaking Theory.

Fourteen of 15 participants cited the main bifurcation used for the current study as a major issue. This overwhelming response, combined with a reexamination of Turner's 6 Stage Model for Crisis, caused me to reconsider how these three main events were to be examined. The cross section of participants within Unity indicated one primary bifurcation point or sensemaking event. Whereas the pre-crisis event indicated a crisis variable of concern, the event took place among a small group of people. The data will indicate that this event, though not a major event within the whole of the congregation, did in fact have a tremendous impact on how a faction of members would make their selection of the main crisis bifurcation event (the reading of the stand-up vote).

Given that the nature of crisis communication research often follows a sequence of events or a narrative structure, a summary of the crisis was previously outlined. Though the context of the event has been previously explained, the results section will expand this context in order to obtain a better understanding of how Sensemaking Theory concepts were enacted. For the

purpose of this study each research question will be answered in light of how it emerged and influenced sensemaking during the pre-crisis, crisis and/or post-crisis stages. Therefore, the results are reported within the responses to individual research questions as it informs Sensemaking Theory. Thick descriptions of both theory driven conceptual themes as well as emergent themes are utilized to explore each research question. Each research question was linked to theme(s) that were developed a priori from concepts within Sensemaking Theory. What follows is a review of the research questions that will be addressed and an explanation of how Sensemaking Theory themes emerged and how they were enacted. Finally, each research question is accompanied by a chart that indicates the frequency of the theme within the data, as well as the percentage of the respondents from whom the themes emerged.

RQ1: Enactment. What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?

Table 4.2: Enacting Event Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Enacting Event	47	86%

Enactment involves acting toward an informational input by saying something or by choosing to notice it. According to Weick (1988) “the term enactment is used to preserve the central point that when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion” (p. 306). The data indicated 47 instances when a reference to a bifurcation was specifically mentioned. Data analysis also indicated that the paramount enacting event (bifurcation-point) was the pastor reading the letter on July 17, 2011 that called for a stand-up vote.

According to David-FHM2, who has been and remained a member in good standing of UBC for seven years, the earthquake was when the pastor read the letter for the stand-up vote:

There was a Sunday morning when Bro. Tom said “We can’t have service because there is disharmony. Next Sunday we will have a stand up vote on whether or not you want to keep me as pastor.”

According to Sue-FLM3, who has been and remained a member in good standing of UBC for eight years:

Earthquake is when the Sunday morning when it was told to Bro. Tom that they were going to vote him out. Then he didn’t preach, he said we are not having a sermon this morning.

According to Joy-NLM2 who has been and remained a member in good standing of UBC for three years:

I played like prelude music, then he walked to the pulpit and when he said something about you either want me as your pastor or you don’t. He said a little whatever, then he called – we are going to have a vote in whatever the proper time was... he read the letter, and said you are either going to follow Wren or you’re not, but that was the Sunday morning.

According to Chad-FHM1 who has been and remained a member in good standing of UBC for five years:

Bro. Tom got up and read a letter to the church. Basically, the gist of it was you’re either going to follow my leadership from this point on or you’re going to vote me out of the church and allow Wren to run the church the way she sees fit.

Jim-AHM2, a deacon who was voted out of the church after 34 years of membership, offered an interpretation of the enacting event that coincided with other members who remained members in good standing with UBC, as well as those who had only been members less than 5 years:

The one thing that he did that really broke the camel’s back – He had had some conflict with this particular woman and he wanted all the deacons to go against her, but we wouldn’t do it. Then the second Sunday in July of last year, he walked into the morning worship service, he walked to the microphone and said “I want your attention. Next Sunday you are going to have to vote to decide either to follow me or follow her.” Instead of saying “You’re going to have to vote to keep me as your pastor,” he said “you are going to have to vote to either follow her or follow me.” Then he walked out of the



service... I had never seen anything like that happen before, we had been Baptists all our lives, and we have been Christians since teenagers.

Peter-AHM1, a deacon who was voted out of the church after 4 years of membership, when speaking about the enacting event made the most concise description:

He just pulled it to a head, either vote for me or her.

Sally-NLN1, who was a former member of 20 years who had served under the last three pastors including Pastor Tom, indicated what she determined was the enacting event from telephone conversations that she had received during the crisis with UBC members from whom she continues to converse with:

Tom just went in to the pulpit one Sunday and just started talking to the whole church – this was before service – and said, next week, we are going to have a meeting and we are going to vote, who is going to run this church: either me or Wren.

Finally, Pastor Tom, who has been the leader of UBC for the past 13 years, describes his thought process and involvement concerning the enacting event:

I'm looking, I've got a guy who is going to stand up and read this out [a reference to the names of those who signed the letter to call for a vote for a new hostess committee chairperson], I've got a deacon's meeting called without me and that's when I said, If I am going to lose this church, it's going to be on my grounds. I prayed about how to and what to do. I wrote this thing, I called both of my attorney brothers and my son-in-law and I told them I was sending them what I was going to do to make sure I wasn't going to open myself up to a lawsuit or open the church up to a lawsuit. My younger brother is an attorney, but he is also the parliamentarian for the Louisiana Baptist Convention and he helped me tweak something and said don't use this word, use this word, so that's what I did. Not a vote of confidence, I called for the church to decide who was going to lead the church, Pastor Tom as pastor or Wren and her followers. I said, once you vote, if you vote to sustain Wren as the leader I will already be gone. I will have my stuff packed, I will not ask for severance, I won't ask for a penny from you, I will just walk out the door and get in my vehicle and leave. But, if you vote to sustain me, then I expect her and every one of her followers to resign their places of position.

The research question was to determine what was the enacting event. Though there were numerous signs of potential crisis in the pre-crisis stage, data indicated that for the congregation

as a whole and for members both intimately and peripherally involved, the enacting event occurred when Pastor Tom read the letter on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 calling for the church to vote whether or not to retain him as pastor. Yet, during the pre-crisis stage, leadership made commitments that enable the movement from the pre-crisis to crisis stage.

RQ2: Commitment. Did member or leadership commitments that were either enacted or ignored facilitate and/or intensify crisis?

Table 4.3: Commitment Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Commitment	10	33%

Commitment impacts enactment in that commitment creates structure and simplicity when numerous decisional and sensemaking possibilities are in play. According to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010), “commitment serves as a foundation of sensemaking...because individuals often generate explanations retrospectively to justify actions to which they have committed” (p. 562). Unfortunately, to commit also means to risk ignoring crisis-warning signs due to an oversimplification or optimistic view of reality that creates a false sense of control (Weick, 1988; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The datum indicate that early on in his ministry at UBC, as well as in the pre-crisis stage, Pastor Tom’s commitment to define Wren’s behavior in the church from a cost/benefit perspective caused him to ignore warning signs and avoid confrontation. Ten references to commitment were made that refer to the pastor’s commitment to define a problem as a benefit and how this commitment caused him to avoid action. Pastor Tom illustrates, in the

face of several verbal and written warnings from members, his commitment to label Wren's actions as tolerable due to the benefit she brought through her service:

I understood that she liked attention, but she was very good at what she did. You gave her a project, just lay back and wait for it to come to fruition because it was going to be done right. Now, she might run over all kind of people. I forever had people mad at me because I wouldn't kick her out of the church. Had a lot of church members leave, "If you would just make Wren leave the church, then we're going to stay." Of course, I would never do that. They called her a Jezebel. I have several letters, I always keep letters, stating this is if you'll do this. Well, I'm not going to do that, as long as this person is not a problem.

Rather than investigate the circumstances encompassing the complaints from UBC members concerning Wren's behavior, Pastor Tom ignores them. Pastor Tom specifically names Wren as a non-problem. In another example, Chad-FHM1 describes going to Pastor Tom with a problem concerning Wren's actions and his plans to limit her influence, yet was met by Pastor Tom with explicit instructions not to take action:

I went to Bro. Tom with an instance similar to that and I said look, this is what I'm going to do – I'm just going to tell them they can't teach anymore, they can't be a part of the youth group anymore, that I'm just going to find new volunteers. Bro. Tom said, well, you can't do that – that's just going to cause everything to blow up and explode. I said yes sir... I understand, I don't want to cause any more problems, but that was the way that a lot of the problems were being dealt with. Don't go after them because we are going to cause a bigger tremor in that sense. We are going to cause something more major to happen, so just put up with it. We put up with it for a very long time.

Another example of Chad-FHM1's frustration with Pastor Tom's commitment to ignore concerned his reluctance to deal with Wren:

I never was angry at Bro. Tom, but it was like, why? Do you not see? You know they're the problem. We would have meetings and we talked about – these people are problems and why don't we just tell them, don't help, you can't do this anymore.

David-FHM2, goes on to describe his view of Pastor Tom's commitment to ignore the problem:

Saying it as vaguely as possible, there is even church/leadership decisions that I highly disagree with and if they would have been different when they were brought to light would have

dealt with the situation before it became a church wide split. That was never done, and it got to the point where something drastic had to happen... Some key issues were ignored. When there was no choice it was dealt with, but for the most part was avoided.

In terms of Pastor Tom's history of response to Wren, Sue-FLM3 asserts:

Bro. Tom always gave in, but when he confronted her – as I put it, butted heads – she turned on a dime and then she started going after him big time.

At the point where the crisis became apparent, Pastor Tom was unable to reconcile Wren's behavior in terms of a cost/benefit analysis approach. At this point, the commitment to label Wren as a non-problem evolved into a commitment to ignore his responsibility to deal with the crisis. At the height of the pre-crisis stage, Peter -AHM1 explains how he attempted to encourage Pastor Tom to reconcile with Wren to no avail:

We as deacons wanted him to do that, everyone, he refused. He said he was above that, he didn't have to. Being a pastor, he didn't have to do that. That's his exact words. "As pastor, I don't have to do that"... We made phone calls trying to get Wren and him together. Wren agreed at one time, then couldn't get the meeting time together, and then she backed out. Bro. Tom was never really in agreement with it at all. I think he was willing to do it because of us. It never did come to a meeting. After a while, both of them refused.

The research question sought to determine if membership or leadership commitments facilitated crisis. The data demonstrate that Pastor Tom made a commitment to label Wren as a non-problem until late in the pre-crisis stage. Pastor Tom rationalizes his commitment from a cost/benefit analysis perspective in that he determined that Wren's inherent benefit to the church in terms of service outweighed any negative cost associated with her in terms of how she carried out that service. The commitment to label Wren as "not a problem" was in the face of members who informed Pastor Tom of problems. As Pastor Tom continued to label Wren as a non-problem, this enabled him to develop a habit of ignoring pre-crisis warning signs concerning her behavior. Therefore, results indicate that Pastor Tom's commitment to label Wren as "not a problem" caused a blind spot to her behavior and reluctance to mediation.

RQ3: Capacity. Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify crisis?

Table 4.4: Capacity Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Capacity	10	33%

The concept of capacity involves both the realized and unrealized capacity to deal with undesired information. Weick (1988) asserts that people who perceive themselves empowered to both recognize and attend to various informational inputs will notice more informational inputs i.e. pre-crisis warning signs, than those who do not perceive themselves to be empowered to notice or act. Data indicated 10 instances where a reference to leadership or membership capacity impacted or influenced the crisis. The most impactful example of capacity involved the pastor's lack of a capacity to perceive an alternative result concerning Wren's intention to seek a second term as finance chairperson.

Early on in the pre-crisis stage when Wren volunteered to serve as the chairperson of the finance committee because no male UBC members would volunteer, Pastor Tom reluctantly agreed to allow her to be chairperson based on the agreement that she would only serve in this capacity for one year. Pastor Tom recounts the agreement via a conversation with the chairperson of the committee on committees:

The only one who is willing is Wren and we know how you feel about women over authority. I said, let me talk to them, because we had three deacons on that committee. And they were right... They came back, my finance chairman and Wren in front of him, gave me her word, "If you'll allow me to do this this year, you know you can get anyone you want to on the finance committee next year. Find somebody who will be the chairman, and that will be it. I won't even look for a second term." I said, "Alright. I can live with that." ... A faith word, with a witness.

One year later Pastor Tom, operating under the perception that Wren would honor their agreement that she would not seek a second term, enters the finance committee meeting to elect a new chairperson. He had not attended any finance committee meetings the entire year previous due to his doctrinal stance on women being in authority over men. Throughout the year he had not suspected an alternative to their original agreement. However, when the year had passed and the finance committee was planning to meet to select new officers, Pastor Tom began to hear rumors that all was not well. Pastor Tom explains:

I went to that meeting and rumors were already going all over the place that Wren had already set up everybody or a bunch of them to vote for her to be chairperson again, after she had given me her word that she would not. So, I went into the meeting, and I knew she had done that, but I really felt like, with the people in the committee, they would respect what I was going to do and they would respect this other deacon.

Pastor Tom does not anticipate Wren's intentions, in a timely manner, to counteract the political maneuvering, because he assumed Wren would comply with their agreement and also that the committee, some of whom were explicitly aware of their agreement, would not agree to allow her re-election. This represents a lack of capacity on the part of Pastor Tom. At the point where he assumed compliance by both Wren and the committee, he lost the capacity to consider alternatives. His faith in both Wren and the committee to capitulate to his desire to have a male in a leadership role of all major committees caused his lack of capacity to consider taking further steps to ensure that his plan, right or wrong, was enacted.

The previous research question concerned whether or not leadership or membership capacity facilitated or intensified the crisis. The results indicate that due to Pastor Tom assuming that Wren would not seek a second term and that if she did, the committee who was aware of his desires concerning the finance chairpersonship, would ensure that it did not come to pass. His

faith in these two assumptions resulted in a lack of capacity to consider alternatives and thus devise a contingency plan(s).

RQ4: Expectations. Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate or intensify the crisis?

Table 4.5: Expectation Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Expectation	14	53%

A member's expectation offers a bright line from which sensemaking can occur. Those instances where actions meet or fall within an acceptable realm of expectation are not noticed. When cues are not noticed they are not enacted and thus are not part of the sensemaking process. Those instances that break expectations are often enacted. According to Weick (1995), these expectations connect with cues to create a filter from which to validate or justify expectations. In this sense, expectations are highly consequential because they are the basis for both enacting and ignoring possible crisis cues. The data indicated 14 instances when a reference to leadership or membership expectation was specifically mentioned. The clear expectations that had an impact on sensemaking during this case were the congregational expectation of peace at all costs and the pastor's expectation of women in leadership. Early on in the ministry of Pastor Tom and at the outset of the pre-crisis stage, Pastor Tom's expectation of women not serving in major leadership positions was a clearly defined expectation that impacted the escalation from the pre-crisis to crisis stage.

Where Pastor Tom expected women to submit to a defined role, UBC's expectation was that leadership would strive to keep the peace no matter what. During the pre-crisis stage as the infighting was held to a small concentrated subsection of the congregation, the conflict was never expected to escalate because of the expectation that leadership would work diligently until peace was achieved. In discussing the pre-crisis stage, Pastor Tom, defines his expectation of women holding high positions in the church:

The tremors, those things that occurred before the first quake – the first quake took place in December before the split. Really just about all hinged around one woman in the church. We had a situation where I had asked this church in 1999 when I came, to respect my belief about women in authority over men. Not to put women as chairpersons on the major committees. The major committees are finance, nominating committee, committee on committees, and personnel. And that held true for nine years, up until that point.

At the point when Wren was initially elected as chairperson under the consent of Pastor Tom, he asserts:

I even swallowed my pride, which took a lot to call up the chairperson of the finance committee to give reports. I would not say chairman, though it is probably an all right protocol, to me it's not if it's a woman, so I called her chairperson. And we had no problems that year. She really was efficient to do the thing right. But I wouldn't go to the meetings because I would not sit under the authority of a woman.

One year later, when Wren was to give up her chairpersonship as per their witnessed agreement, the meeting did not go as planned when Wren was elected to a second term to which Pastor Tom explains again his expectation of women in authority during the finance committee meeting immediately after Wren was elected:

That got me mad. One time in the ten years prior, they saw me get angry because I got caught off hand, caught not expecting something. I got mad and threatened to quit and walked out. The Lord made me go back and sit down and behave myself. But I wouldn't stand up and talk because I knew I was mad. When they did that I slapped the table with my hands and the Lord said "shut up" so I stood up and I said "I will see y'all at the end of the year to set up the budget, because I will not sit under the authority of a woman." And I walked out. It just went downhill from there.



It was at this point that a major pre-crisis cue was evident. However, the pastor's view of women in authority was not new information that was first made evident in the two years prior to the crisis. Data outlining the Sensemaking Theory concept of retention will demonstrate that Pastor Tom's view of women was evident to a large portion of the congregation, which, according to the data, was perceived and retained as a negative stance toward women.

As the pre-crisis stage began to come to an end and it was evident that something had to be done, member expectations continued to be: keep peace at all costs. Paul-NHN1, when speaking of UBC's disposition to keep the peace at all costs, asserts:

...they are predisposed, unless you can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Wren has done something that's the same, then you need to kiss and makeup. Let's move forward.

According to Peter-AHM1, he expresses that even in the current crisis, his expectation is for leadership to unite:

I expect church leaders to try to show the example of holding a church together, not dividing it. At all cost, you try to hold a church together. Didn't Jesus leave the 99 to go get the 1? So, I think that's what we're to do. Of course, you are going to have those that may need discipline, but I don't think in this case that was the problem. In Bro. Tom's eyes it was. But no one else saw it that way. Including the deacons that were following him. But because we didn't agree with him, they voted us out.

Pastor Tom validates Peter-AHM1's perception that no one else felt like the pre-crisis situation between Pastor Tom and Wren was irreconcilable, when he asserts how the deacon body met to pray and consider forming a grievance committee. Pastor Tom recounts the experience:

I stood up and said, I need y'all to help me with the mess we have, what we just experienced at the last business meeting. I need you to come up with a grievance committee. That's when I found out that Bro. Jacques Bernard was really going to be a problem. He stood up and said "Y'all, this is Bro. Tom trying to kick someone out of the church, that's all it is. He did this once before and got away with it. He brought that thing in here from Eunice and got them to fall for that." I said Joe, I never had a grievance committee in Eunice, in 12 years. That started here. It didn't matter. He had it set up, and he made it look like I was trying to kick them out of the church. I never brought that up.

Even the letter I was going to mail had nothing to do with removing them. It was to get them out of their positions, to make sure they couldn't serve in any kind of leadership position. And it got bad. It got pretty ugly. Then I realized, there's a lot of these guys that had chimed in on Joe on this thing. Somebody said, we just need to pray about this. Praying about it is really not going to help because everybody knows what's going on and praying unless they come up with an answer saying we need to deal with these lies is not going to do any good. I said, "let's pray." So, we came back the next night and had this long prayer meeting and everybody prayed in a circle and it's going to end at me and I'm listening to the prayers and saying, Lord, all these guys, every one of them, are saying the same thing: "Thank you God that you are bringing us peace, thank you God this thing is going to be laid down," and basically they were saying, we're just not going to deal with it. So, when it got to me, I basically prayed, "God, you know my heart. I ask you right now, if I lied to these deacons that you not only strike me, but you strike my four children, you strike my 14 grandchildren with anything that you want to if I lied at all, I give You authority to strike my children because I have never lied to these men, nor have I lied to this church." My prayer was that we as a group of men could come to an agreement and find a way to resolve these issues. Nobody apparently listened to my prayer because they were just waiting on me to say Amen. Cause everybody said oh, this is so wonderful, this is so wonderful. I am sitting there saying, "What's wonderful?" All that has happened is that nobody's doing anything.

Finally, Sue-FLM3 gives the most concise description of how the church expected pre-crisis incidents to be managed:

Now, we can talk and square things away, that's how it should be. If you have some kind of dispute or if you feel wronged in some way, you talk it over.

The research question involved leadership and member expectations as an aspect of sensemaking that facilitated or intensified the crisis. Two expectations, the pastor's view of women holding leadership positions in the church and the church's expectation of peace at all costs, acted as both an igniter and incubator for crisis. The expectation of women in leadership held by the pastor proved to ignite the issues early in the pre-crisis stage. The church's expectation of peace at all costs enabled the crisis to metastasize because it delayed action. The reason that this expectation delayed action was because UBC's definition of peace in this circumstance was inaction, ignoring pre-crisis warning signs and not to come to true resolution. The expectation was that Pastor Tom and Wren should work it out among themselves, which

essentially meant to ignore the problem. They expected both the pastor and Wren, especially the pastor, to contend for peace. The point at which neither of the two main instigators would come together, that expectation was not met. However, the congregation continued to hold to the expectation or hope that resolution would in fact occur, which allowed the issues in the pre-crisis to compound and lead to crisis.

RQ5: Emotion. Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify crisis?

Table 4.6: Emotion Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Emotion	23	46%

Emotion impacts sensemaking and are referenced when participants indicated an emotional arousal response such as surprise, fear, disgust, joy, sadness and anger. Emotion or arousal, according to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010), is at the core of sensemaking. Arousal is the bodily response to a search for certainty; where the longer it takes for an acceptable level of certainty to be achieved the higher the emotional arousal (Weick, 2001). The data indicated 23 instances when a reference to emotion or arousal was specifically mentioned. The emotional responses centered on two main events, one in the pre-crisis stage, when Pastor Tom responded to Wren being elected for a second term as finance chairperson; however, the most common references were responses to the bifurcation point where Pastor Tom read the stand-up vote letter on July, 17, 2011.

Concerning the first instance of emotional arousal where Pastor Tom responded to the re-election of Wren as Finance Chairperson, Mary-AHM2 states that:

He slammed his hands on the desk and said, “I will not meet with you.” Because he felt like he was under a woman...He was really ticked off at that.

In reference to the same incident Pastor Tom recounts:

That got me mad.

Concerning the stand-up letter that called for the church to vote on, “who would lead the church,” data demonstrate that emotions ran high. According to Chad-FHM1:

Bro. Tom caused the explosion in the church because he did what he did on that Sunday. It was a huge mix of emotions because Bro. Tom read the letter, and Bro. Tom left right after that. He didn't stay or answer questions or anything. He read the letter and left. That caused a lot of anger because how do you get up there and read this letter and do what you did, call off church, say that, and just leave. A lot of mixed emotions, a lot of confused people. The letter, and I wish I had a copy to read, but basically you were called – you either supported Bro. Tom or you didn't. You supported that other group of people, headed up by Wren because when he said Wren by name, it was like the air went out of the sanctuary type...because he just called Wren out. It's so much of a mix of emotion, a lot of people that supported Wren were angry. Like, it almost came to blows, literally people fighting because there were people that supported Bro. Tom in it and people that didn't. One instance, one of the men grabbed another man by the shirt and they had to be separated that morning because of what was going on. It was just a huge mix of emotion. I couldn't quite figure it out. Everyone was confused. No one saw that coming. Wren, Billy, none of them saw that coming. Because their plan was for Billy to read that letter at the end of church and get everyone to see how bad those women were and [with the intent to communicate the message of] –why would everyone try to attack me and try to get me out of this position that I've worked so hard for and done for so long for the church. I'm just trying to serve Unity Baptist church and they're attacking me? That was what the point of their letter was going to be. The intent was to call all those other women out – call them ungodly and that they were attacking poor Wren, innocent in this whole thing. It threw them for a loop that Bro. Tom did what he did. The average person that wasn't on either side – they were confused, shocked.

Sue-FLM3 echoes Chad-FHM1 statement:

They were just dumbfounded and couldn't believe that this was taking place at Unity church. Some had been members there for 50 years and they left. It was the way it was worded more or less.

Joy-NLM2 explains her reaction and the reaction of other members to the stand-up letter:

I was shocked that he named her name...It was very dramatic...They just felt blind-sided...A lot of them were just kinda stunned. They didn't know what hit them.

Pastor Tom explains the emotional atmosphere as approaching the level of physical assault:

I told them, read the thing, and didn't say any extra words, called for prayer, then I said you are dismissed and I walked out. It almost came to hits. Wren's husband went after Brock and two guys had to pull him off of Brock. Brock wasn't going to hit him. Brock told me later, if he would have hit me, I would have hit him back. It got ugly, but it would have been worse if we tried to discuss it.

Mary-AHM2 said that:

We were just mortified that he wanted to call a vote.

The research question sought to determine if participant emotion facilitated and/or intensified the crisis. The data demonstrate that participant emotion did impact sensemaking and the escalation to the crisis stage. References to anger, surprise and fear were true descriptors of congregational response following the letter being read by Pastor Tom. The variety and intensity of emotional responses depended on the level of involvement in pre-crisis events as well as the level of knowledge of pre-crisis events. For those who were more involved or informed, such as the deacons, Wren, and committee members, their responses were most representative of anger, where those who were either peripherally involved or uninformed, their reaction is best characterized by surprise or shock. It is important to note the lack of information or clarification following the reading of the stand-up vote letter by Pastor Tom may have elicited the response of surprise from peripheral members.

RQ6: Selection. Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?

Table 4.7: Selection Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Selection	78	93%

Selection, according to Sensemaking Theory, is the logical next step after enactment. For at the point when a person notices something and labels it as good or bad, selection has taken place (Weick, 2005). Whereas enactment is best typified by unjustified variation, we know something is strange, different, or wrong but we have yet to attribute a positive or negative value. Selection takes place at the point when unjustified variation becomes justified (Weick, 2001). The data indicated 78 instances where a reference to selection was specifically mentioned.

On July 17, 2011, when Pastor Tom read the letter that called for a stand-up vote, which essentially pitted him against Wren, the congregation was shocked and confused. The data indicate that, though a majority of the congregation that knew of Wren and her antics and understood the path taken by the pastor, they were appalled that he would name her specifically in front of the church and that he would phrase the terms of the stand-up vote in such a divisive manner. While others, who were also shocked that Pastor Tom would name Wren, made their selection of the information in terms of their commitment to the office of the pastor.

Chad-FHM1, states how he noticed the tension brought about by naming Wren at the point of the bifurcation, yet he makes his selection of the event, and how he viewed others' selection of the event in terms of a commitment to the authority of the pastor:

The average person that wasn't on either side – they were confused, shocked.

When he said Wren by name, it was like the air went out of the sanctuary type...Because he just called Wren out.

Some of them basically said – well I'm here because of Bro. Tom; he's my pastor, so I have to just take faith that what he's doing is a Godly decision, and I'm just going to support him on that. Because Bro. Tom never got up and bad mouthed and talked bad about any of those people. He could have, but he didn't. He chose to remain silent through the whole time and not do that. Not try to convince anyone. He truly wanted people to support him as pastor and to know that he made the right decision because they trusted him as their pastor.

Sue-FLM3 offers another example of selection in that though she was conflicted and believed that Pastor Tom was wrong in the way that he went about confronting the problems at UBC, she too placed her ultimate selection in her commitment to the pastor:

Well, he went about it the wrong way, really. I love him, but he went about it the wrong way. He should have said – the way he said it was either vote for Wren and her group or vote for me. I would have said if you want me to remain as your pastor and continue to teach the way I'm teaching and with all honesty, but Wren and Tessa have got to leave the church. Well, he said Wren and all her followers, that included the deacons, Judge Dan, and even another pastor that was a member of our church. He put it wrong. I love him, but...

The people that were causing the trouble needed to leave, but it could have been worded a little differently. If he wouldn't have said Wren and her followers - her followers, if he would have left – just said Wren...because some of the people said, well he's making us choose between him and Wren. And some of them liked Wren even though they knew she was pushy, but they just thought it was not appropriate the way he worded her followers.

Bro. Tom teaches the Word of God. As long as the pastor teaches the Word of God and he doesn't commit adultery, I'm not going to leave him. Though some participants made their selection in terms of their commitment to the pastor, most participants, like Joy-NLM2, though she remained at Unity Baptist Church, perceived the bifurcation much more negatively when explaining how others understood the letter. Joy-NLM2 recounts conversations she had with other members of Unity concerning the way in which the call for a stand-up vote was phrased:

“I’m not following her”. They were disgruntled with him, but they were like – “I’m not following Wren, I’m following God”. A whole bunch of that. And Wren was stirring pots and stirring things, but there were people in the church that were disgruntled or whatever and they weren’t really in Wren’s camp necessarily. He made it sound like, it’s either me or Wren, and there was just junk in the camp period that wasn’t necessarily her. A lot of – if he had just said – you either want me or you don’t, it would have clarified things. Because there was a lot of – I’m not following Wren. It was – they felt like, we need A,B, C. You didn’t give me another choice because I’m not following her, but you’re saying if I don’t vote for you, I’m voting for her.

The perception that the pastor created an either/or dilemma is actually verified by Pastor Tom:

No one is going to vote against me and no one is going to vote against Wren. You are either going to say Wren needs to be the leader or Bro. Tom needs to be the leader. I just kept the focus. I wouldn’t let them get away from that.

Though Joy-NLM2, states that Pastor Tom should have worded the letter in such a way that made the choice between keeping him as pastor or not, therefore eliminating the need to specifically name Wren, Jim-AHM3, asserts that specifically naming Wren was Pastor Tom’s way of insuring that he remained as pastor:

Instead of saying “You’re going to have to vote to keep me as your pastor,” he said “you are going to have to vote to either follow her or follow me.” Then he walked out of the service. He had enough cunning about him to know that if he went in and said, “Next Sunday I want you to vote to either keep me or send me away,” he had enough cunning ability to know that if he put it like he did – vote for me or vote for her, that there were going to be so many people who wouldn’t participate because of the way he put that. This is the only reason why he’s there now.

Peter-AHM1 also agrees that way that Pastor Tom worded the stand-up letter was manipulative:

I believe if a pastor feels that either the Lord wants me here or not, let the church vote for me to stay or go. Not put a popularity vote between me and someone else.

Sam-NLN2, a long time former member of Unity, recounts a conversation with a member present at the day of the stand-up vote. The conversation demonstrates the tension and frustration that lead to their selection of the crisis:

I just talked to a guy there the other day that still goes to church there... The people that left, particularly the ones that we know, it’s not so much everybody knew Wren and either you liked her or disliked her. Wren had a lot of people, and still does, that dislike



her. It wasn't so much that they disagreed – they knew Wren and her capabilities of causing problems. It wasn't so much what he did, but how he went about doing it. That's what it was all about. That's what they told us. It was how he did it. That's what made people upset.

Pam-NLN3, concurs with both Peter-AHM1, Jim-AHM3 and Sam-NLN2 that Pastor Tom, was calculated in the manner in which he worded the letter and that it was perceived negatively by the congregation:

I think he knew how many people really did not like Wren. So, I think he thought it was a shoe in because nobody would “follow” Wren. But the people saw how he manipulated that, and they did not agree, and how he went about. I wish you could talk to all the hundred and something people that left and if they would be honest with you. If you could find 25 that said they really liked Ms. Wren, I mean really would stick by Ms. Wren no matter what, you'd be finding a lot of people. I think that's why he – he thought he was real smart in how he worded that, thinking by him saying it's either me or Wren, that maybe two people would leave because he knew that people, people did not respect Wren like Wren thinks she's respected.

Two members of Unity contacted Paul-NHN1, who moderated the final meeting and is a Louisiana Baptist Convention Church Strategist, after Pastor Tom had called for the stand-up vote. Both calls concerned the issue of calling for a stand-up vote rather than a secret ballot vote. The issue concerned the idea of intimidation since Pastor Tom, who was a main figure in the crisis, was calling for and moderating the stand-up vote business meeting. As a result, some members made their selection of the reading of the letter in terms of the stipulation that Pastor Tom would moderate the meeting and that it would not be a secret ballot. Paul-NHN1 recounts the conversation when a member asked him if calling for a stand-up vote and moderating the meeting was kosher in terms of Unity's bylaws, if it was the compliant with Robert's Rules of Order, and if the manner in which Pastor Tom managing and enacting the bylaws was a good idea:

The very next day I get a call from a gentleman, a retired pastor, and a member of the church. He asked me the same thing about parliamentary procedure. I knew him, had

known him for some years and just told him that it was allowable according to Robert's, how the meeting transpired, the stand-up vote... His concern, from a parliamentary procedure, was this correct. And it is. His concern was over the manner of the vote, and it lies with the moderator to determine how the vote should be. And I told him, "Brother, that's correct, your moderator said he wanted a standing vote, he is allowed to do that." His question then was, "We can't block that?" Sure you could, you could appeal the ruling of the chair. "Well, I didn't know to do that." Sorry, you know, in this case your lack of knowledge worked in the prevailing side's favor and worked against the losing side's favor. He acknowledged it and he was of a good spirit about it, and said, "Well, I guess I just need to study that some." He asked, "Well, do you think that was a good thing to do?" Now, those are two different questions. This is where the Word of God comes in to play, which is essential to this story. There are things that are allowable according to Robert's Rules of Order that the Word of God would not smile upon. So as Christians, we have to be careful to say as Paul said "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all are expedient." As Christians, we have a higher standard and it is the Word of God. That's crucial to this story because even though technically by the parliamentary procedure, what was done was right, and by all parties as far as I can determine was right. Well then, there is a higher standard in the Word of God that I don't think was met in terms of promoting and preserving unity.

Then I got yet another call the next week, a week removed, from one of the deacons, and again a man that was disgruntled with Bro. Tom and the results of the meeting. His call was regarding the same thing, same questions pretty much, and did I think this was Christ-like. Of course I refused to answer that because if we were in court they would say, "you're leading the witness." There's a no-win answer there. Whatever answer, there's a no-win situation. He said, "Would you have done this?" I said, "Probably not, I would probably allow a ballot vote because I would have wanted to know people's true conviction without my presence intimidating them." Then he asked, "Would you have moderated the meeting?" I said, "I would not have, because I was at the center of the issue." Even though I may have moderated perfectly fairly, the perception would be that I was not. Again, I would have been in a no-win situation then, so I would have had someone else moderate the meeting.

The research question was to determine how and upon what criteria did the congregation make their selection of the enacted event. The data, concerning selection, indicates that members made their selection based on relational and procedural concerns. Those members who were committed to Pastor Tom and Wren made their selection in a bisected manner. However, participants that were both for, against and neutral to the Pastor and Wren and those who were heavily to peripherally involved in the pre-crisis events, all concur that naming an individual from the pulpit and devising the way the stand-up vote was worded created a negative perception

or selection of the event. But by what criteria or set of rules did the congregation draw up that caused them to label or select the event as negative? The Sensemaking Theory concept of retention informs this inquiry.

RQ 7: Retention. Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?

Table 4.8: Retention Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Retention	64	93%

Retention could be considered the provisional final product of sensemaking. It is provisional because at the point where something novel is enacted and selected, retention may be altered. In other words, a new sensemaking sequence can create a new normal that develops a new set of retained responses. These retained responses serve as a repertoire of rules that are used to inform sensemaking (Seeger, 1997). Within the context of addressing problems, organizations consistently respond in routine ways because these responses facilitate uncertainty management (Seeger, et al., 2003). As a result, retention involves the retained and patterned responses in the form of policies, procedure, and routines (Weick, 2001). The data indicate 64 instances where a reference to retention was specifically mentioned.

Unfortunately, though retained responses to negative stimuli may result in a temporary reduction of equivocation, over time they may be detrimental to the life of the organization. Such is the case for UBC. The data indicate that UBC, as an organization, retained a common rule for inter-church conflict: ignore the problem and it will go away. This, to a large extent was

successful. Though the retained response of ignoring created a cycle of conflict, the result of these conflicts did not result in catastrophic crisis or church splits until the current crisis. It is important to note that the rule observed and retained by UBC to ignore conflict impacted the way in which members based their expectation of peace at all cost, even through avoidance, as depicted in **RQ4**.

Participants who had been members for as little as five years to as long as 45 years identified the cycle of conflict and the retained rule to ignore. Furthermore, from a leadership perspective, the pastor's policy concerning women holding leadership positions in the church greatly increased the way in which the pre-crisis stage escalated to crisis. Speaking about the cycle of conflict, and the tendency to become apathetic to conflict David-FHM2 states that:

Worship we could get close to 300 or a little over 300. The thing is, is that it would build to a certain point and it would build to a certain point, conflict arose, people would leave, build back up and basically that cycle that kept going. Which has been going on and the pastor will tell you has been going on for 15 years or more.

Because with years of conflict comes apathy, and I found quickly there was apathy within the congregation and it is a strange form of apathy where if someone new comes in, they get excited, there is enough people that wanted change, they would get excited and again the church would start growing, then this group would cause conflict, they would go back down. That person would get discouraged and they were back to square one.

There were a lot of instances where people with Sunday School teachers, let's just use that example, who were being political about the church and other things and instead of leaving and saying, "I can't stand for this I am going somewhere else," they say, "alright, I'm just not going to Sunday School"...If I don't face it, it will go away.

Chad-FHM1, also views UBC as a place of serial-conflict that routinely responded to negative information by just ignoring it:

I would say that with me being here five years, there was a lot of this going on even before with certain people. It was kind of an ongoing thing that kind of festered that never was dealt with.

In terms of how the church enacted the rule to ignore problems concerning Wren, Sue-FLM3 states:

The majority knew that Wren was a troublemaker at church. Even though they liked her, they knew she caused a lot of trouble, a lot of rift. She played one against the other sometimes, it was her way or no way.

One of the main sources of church or organizational wide avoidance was in how previous leadership and the church ignored the problem of Wren's political nature. Eli-NLN4 describes an interaction between Wren, a former pastor and himself that outlines how the church and former leadership ignored problems:

She was very much one that Chuck [former pastor] depended on to carry out some of his edicts, so to speak, with different people. She was a conduit of information on the committees. I hate to use the term busy-body – not sure that's the most correct word to use, but she was squarely in the know on a great majority of things, and she would feed him information, and she and Chuck, I know, used each other to their own ultimate ends.

I can't remember what prompted it, but it was something that I disagreed with both of them on. So that almost makes me think the two of them must have been in agreement, but what I kind of remember out of it is that he wanted me to go one way on an issue; Wren thought I should have gone another way. They both would actually open up for whatever weird reason, from time to time and tell me what they thought about the other. He thought she was a busy-body, and was working against him. She thought he was too much of a control-freak and wasn't open to God-shared leadership directly in the body of the church. He wanted to run everything. I think she felt that part of her call in mission to assume some of those duties and maybe to facilitate others in standing against the preacher on some different things. He thought she was a busy-body and that basically she ought to get out of trying to run the church. She thought he was too much of a control freak. And they would just share that individually, and repeatedly, somewhat freely, but never with each other. When you would see the two of them in the same committee meeting or whatever, you would have just thought they were best buds. Obviously they weren't, or obviously to me they weren't or they would not have expressed those views.

Paul-NHN1 when describing the culture of UBC and the culture of most conflicts the he deals with in his role with the LBC asserts their tendency is to ignore and avoid negative inputs:

The genesis – something happened before then – they avoided something in the past...Sweep it under the rug. Pacify.

Not only did the church as a whole create a culture of avoidance that led to cycles of conflict, leadership also stringently held to what would prove to be a detrimental policy. Pastor Tom makes references to his belief in how the hierarchy of church polity should be structured. This belief is based off of such scripture in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, “**11** Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. **12** And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. **13** For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (NKJV). The merits and practical impact of this verse on a macro-denominational level is commonly debated. A fundamentalist or literalist view of this text excludes women from the pastorate. Pastor Tom is a fundamentalist. However, though debates concerning women as pastors in the Southern Baptist denomination is not as greatly debated, the application of verse twelve in other areas of church polity are. In other words, Southern Baptists generally agree with the interpretation of scripture that precludes women from being pastors, but SBC congregations argue over how this verse extends to other offices such as Sunday School teacher, deaconship, committee chairman and various others. The data demonstrate that Pastor Tom’s policy or retained rule concerning women in leadership was strict, more strict than other UBC members. Pastor Tom explains his view:

We had a situation where I had asked this church in 1999 when I came, to respect my belief about women in authority over men. Not to put women as chairpersons on the major committees. The major committees are finance, nominating committee, committee on committees, and personnel. And that held true for nine years, up until that point.

Pam-NLN3, before she left UBC numerous years ago, recalls the pastor’s stance on women in leadership and asserts this is a cause for conflict:

A lot of women don’t like him because he is very – he doesn’t want women in his pulpit. That was another reason that Wren had problems with Tom.

Sally-NLN1, who also left the church numerous years ago, highlights her interpretation of the pastor’s rules:

He had his own self-made rules. He would not call on a woman to pray, he did not want a woman teaching men and women together. He did not want a woman to be over a committee, that's why Tabitha left because she was the chairman of the committee on committees or something else. I finally asked her about how it went down. I had been told that he had asked her to resign, she said she went to the meeting one day and that the assistant chairman was in her place at the table and I think he might have told her, I don't know if Bro. Tom even told her, that they were not going to use her as the chairman anymore.

Myrna-AHM3 felt a cause of conflict stemmed from the pastor's view of women:

Then there was a woman in the church who was the church hostess, she was very organized, and he resented her. I guess he thought she had too much power, because he certainly reminds me more of like ancient Jews or the Arabic's with the attitude against women. There was never a woman that prayed in church; he wouldn't allow that.

Jim-AHM3, perceived the pastor's adherence to a fundamentalist view of women as oppressive:

He had a very definite view of women to be subordinate. He wouldn't allow a woman to be the head of any committee.

Mary-AHM2 concurs with Jim's-AHM3 perception of the pastor's view of women in leadership:

He wanted her to do, and wanted all of us – we could be on the hospitality committee and we could bake cupcakes and we could do that sort of thing...we had our place.

The research question was posed to determine how retained rules held by leadership and membership facilitated and/or impacted crisis. The data indicate that rules retained by both leadership and membership impacted crisis. The retained organizational rule of avoidance facilitated a culture of conflict that has been the norm of UBC. In the past, small conflicts yielded small crises with minimal impact on church attendance. However, when the bifurcation of the current case occurred, the possibility of avoidance was no longer an option. As a result, the rule to ignore that was commonly enacted during crisis was not possible. This is an example of how retention impacts expectations which sets the bright line for enactment, where the sensemaking process begins at the point where old rules do not solve new problems.

The pastor's policy regarding women in leadership was retained to such a degree that it was a major aspect of the tension during the pre-crisis stage. Current and former members perceived his rule of women being precluded from serving as the chair of major committees as misogynistic. However, organizational avoidance and the pastor's policy concerning women in leadership positions were not the only rule driven variable that impacted sensemaking. The concept of identity within the scope of retention as applied to the two main protagonists, Pastor Tom and Wren, also expedited sensemaking.

RQ8: Identity. Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified crisis?

Table 4.9: Identity Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Identity	36	80%

Though it is important to note that identities can vacillate depending on the situation, some identities are held more vigorously than others (Weick, 1995). Individuals manage their identity, according to Erez and Early (1993), based on three particular needs: 1) The need for self-enhancement, 2) The need for self-efficacy and 3) the need for self-consistency (p. 28). The data indicated 36 instances where a reference to identity was specifically mentioned. The data also demonstrate that Pastor Tom and Wren both held vigorously to their identities during the crisis, which impacted the way in which people made their selection of the crisis. For Pastor Tom, his need for self-consistency and self-efficacy was labeled negatively as authoritarian. For



Wren, her need for self-enhancement was labeled negatively as being power-hungry. Chad-

FHM1 explains how Wren liked to control:

Now, she would pull me off to the side and tell me – you don't need to do this, you don't need to do that, think about doing this. When you wouldn't take her suggestions and do what she said, then she had a problem with you because she wanted you to do things the way that she wanted them done.

David-FHM2 goes on to identify Wren as the controlling ringleader of the crisis:

The lady that was the ringleader kind of used other people, kind of brought them in and used them. The thing is, I have heard her talk bad about some of the people that adore her. That she would get to do some of her dirty work.

When I first got here, the first week I was here, I was approached by four different people about who ended up being the ring-leader of the conflict, and they all said, "watch your back." And I found that to be very true very quickly...I was told she was power hungry, she is manipulative, and all that rang true.

According to Sam-NLN2, Wren enjoyed attention and power:

She loved being in the lime-light, she loved being acknowledged...

Eli-NLN4 describes how Wren felt as if it was her role to challenge authority:

I think she felt that part of her call in mission to assume some of those duties and maybe to facilitate others in standing against the preacher on some different things.

I think in her mind, she was trying to accomplish a greater good. And it was like the ends justify any means to achieve this goal... Wren is a very friendly person. Engaging, intelligent, some level of financial success through the family, a strong work ethic by her husband – all of that. So, if you at all were impressed by position, and enjoyed friendly people, she could just befriend anybody that she wanted to. And, by and large I would say, befriended most people in the church. Including us.

Sally- NLN1 describes Wren's need for power:

A lot of people went to Wren, even men. She would tell me this. Her phone rang all the time. She used to tell me, I don't know...She tried to be friends with everybody, you know. People that want to be in power, they do that. They want – she – I would say she, the last, her power grew and she became church hostess and she used that to get in and do a lot of things, control a lot of things. She was a big control freak.

Sam-NLN2 depicts Wren's relationship with people in the church:

She's a likeable person. She really is. She just had a way to control people.

Paul-NHN1- states that once Wren was able to assume the role of finance chairman under the auspices of a temporary appointment, she was unwilling to relinquish that power in terms of submitting to the pastor's desire for a male to function in that role:

I've noted, once you get a taste of leadership and then you are asked to step down from that, it's the unusual person that can do that. It's a remarkable person. It takes tremendous humility to be able to do that. This sister in question, I know her, and she has a lot of admirable traits, but humility is not one of them. That's an area for years that she's needed to work on, so that surprised me. It was almost a perfect storm in that regard, because you had absolutely the wrong person that would step up and do it for a year [work as finance chairperson]. I could have almost seen it before hand; she is never giving that up; that's not going to happen without a fight.

Finally, concerning Wren's need for self-enhancement, Mary-AHM2 asserts that:

...and she liked to be in everything, I will admit. You know, she did, but if you wanted something done, let her do it because she did it well.

Where Wren's identity was steeped in her need for power and self-enhancement, the pastor's was much the same. He assumed and expected a certain level of submission from the congregante and control from a leadership perspective. Any variation from this view was inconsistent to his sense of identity as pastor-leader. Speaking of his experience as pastor of a previous church, Pastor Tom states:

...the way we did stuff in my former church – if I thought someone needed to be gone, they were gone. I just told them this isn't going to work. You have your choice, I can bring it before the church or if you resign we'll give you severance, and that's how we did it. This was a reverse.

Sally-NLN1 did not equivocate in describing her perception of the pastor's identity:

Bro. Tom was like a dictator.

When approached by Peter-AHM1 to go to Wren to reconcile their differences, Peter-AHM1 claims that:

Yes, we as deacons wanted him to do that, everyone; he refused. He said he was above that, he didn't have to. Being a pastor, he didn't have to do that. That's his exact words.

“As pastor, I don’t have to do that.” Scripture doesn’t exempt anyone... We had the special committee where he wanted us to do that.

Finally, Paul-NHN1 gives insight to how Pastor Tom’s assertiveness may be rooted in his ancestry:

Tom, I can speak to this, and you could play this for Tom, and I don’t mind because he and I are a lot alike in this way. We are both south Louisianians. I am half Cajun and he is registered. In Cajun culture, you don’t have to wonder where somebody stands on anything. What you see is what you get. That has a polarizing affect in relationship building, especially the further north you get in our state. Tom is a very loyal friend. Once you are friends, he is a very loyal friend to you, but if he doesn’t agree with you, he’s going to tell you. And if you can’t stand that, if that bothers you, well then, it’s going to bother you because he’s not going to change. That’s just part of South Louisiana culture by and large, but you will not find that in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

The need for self-enhancement and the need for self-consistency both impacted the way in which Wren and Pastor Tom communicated, sought or expected influence and were perceived by members of the congregation. Wren’s intentional assent to positions of power as a means to advance herself, were in direct conflict with the pastor’s need to maintain his consistency in terms of his beliefs and identity as pastor-leader. The result was pre-crisis conflict that lead to the crisis stage, as well as offering yet another means to select a valuation of the crisis enactment.

The research question served to determine if identity management impacted selection that facilitated or intensified the conflict. The data demonstrate that the identities vigorously held by both Wren and Pastor Tom did impact selection and escalated the crisis. The data also indicate that the identities previously outlined were held constant throughout the pre-crisis and crisis stages. The conflict between Pastor Tom and Wren is plausible from an identity perspective. For the pastor to capitulate to the desire of Wren to become a more active and influential office holder in the church would be against his principles, and thus incongruent or inconsistent with his identity as UBC’s authority. For Wren to submit to the desire of the pastor to adhere to his

view of orthodox teaching concerning women in leadership positions would have been an accost and impediment to her identity need for self-enhancement. With neither willing to move, the impasse only hastened the onset of the crisis stage.

The next two research questions differ only in the audience being analyzed.

Communication is at the core of sensemaking. As previously stated, communication is more than just a conduit from which communication travels; it is the ‘stuff’ of sense. When individuals communicatively call events into existence through talk, the sensemaking process is in full force. The intentional use of communication in the form of rhetoric or sensegiving is an extremely interesting facet of Sensemaking Theory. It is the politics of sensemaking that are concerned with the volitional communicative act in the pursuit of a specific goal that is being referenced. RQ9 question concerns the way in which leadership took part in sensegiving behaviors, while RQ10 concerns how the congregate took part in the politics of sensemaking.

RQ9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?

Table 4.10: Leadership Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership	39	80%

In crisis the leader’s ability to frame information sources in some type of hierarchy can have an uncertainty reducing effect and shape perception by influencing selection. At the point where leadership shapes messages in such a manner to achieve a goal, sensegiving has taken place. During crisis, leaders offer cues, give reassurance, reduce turmoil, give comfort, and manage responses (Ulmer, et al., 2007). In the politics of sensemaking, leaders empower and

restrain sensemaking entities (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). The data demonstrate that, in spite of the pastor himself asserting that he did not intentionally perform sensegiving behaviors, he did in fact take part in communicating messages in such a way that served in this capacity. The data indicated 39 instances where a reference to leadership communication was specifically mentioned. It is important to note that the pastor explicitly denied any means of sensegiving. He made this claim by asserting that he never verbally attacked a member from the pulpit, in public or in private. The data confirm this assertion; no data was identified that connected Pastor Tom to any verbal sensegiving events other than the initial reading of the stand-up vote letter. However, there was a means of sensegiving that Pastor Tom did not consider, the two letters he sent before and after the stand-up vote.

At the outset of the crisis, after Pastor Tom had read the letter, he was adamant that members should not take part in verbally defending him:

That morning was the vote, and I had sent a letter to everybody telling them I do not want anyone to defend me, I don't care what is said, do not defend me, I do not need to be defended.

However, the letter acted as a means for sensegiving. The morning of July 17, 2011, when Pastor Tom read the stand-up vote between pitting himself against Wren, he promptly ended the service and did not answer any questions. Chad-FHM1 viewed Pastor Tom's reluctance to speak as noble:

Bro. Tom never got up and bad mouthed and talked bad about any of those people. He could have, but he didn't. He chose to remain silent through the whole time and not do that. Not try to convince anyone. He truly wanted people to support him as pastor and to know that he made the right decision because they trusted him as their pastor.

However, reading the letter to call for the stand-up vote without any explanation and without calling for a time of questioning was not the only sensegiving behavior demonstrated by

Pastor Tom. While he refused to answer questions from the floor, which was viewed by some as principled, he did not remain silent. The next week Pastor Tom wrote and mailed a letter to the members of UBC that outlined actions taken by deacons that he considered improper. He again named Wren, a major source of contention that had been a problem long before he had been called pastor of UBC (See Appendix B). In this same letter he called for members not to speak on his behalf. Specific detail concerning the particulars of why he was calling for the stand-up vote were not outlined in the July 20, 2011, letter announcing the forthcoming vote. However, following the stand-up vote where he was retained as pastor and knowing that a call for him to be removed as pastor was being arranged, Pastor Tom sent another letter on July 27, 2011, that specifically and in great detail defined the reason for his call for the stand-up vote (Appendix B).

The letter lists Wren's name ten times accusing her of lying, financial impropriety, lobbying votes and encouraging members against giving their money to the general UBC church fund. The letter also mentions three other members who were in opposition to Pastor Tom. Though Pastor Tom never publicly made these statements from the pulpit, at the point where he sent these letters out to the congregation, both before and after the stand-up vote, he had enacted sensegiving. Mary-AHM2 is acutely aware of the lack of distinction between verbal and written forms of sensegiving made by Pastor Tom:

Talking about politics, Tom said "I'm not going to defend myself, I don't have to defend myself." But, when he puts stuff like this in the Trumpet [newsletter] and all that stuff he wrote in the Trumpet [newsletter], well that's politics. That's defending himself. He's using that avenue.

The previous research question was to determine if leadership communication mediated sensemaking. The data demonstrate that Pastor Tom did engage in sensegiving behaviors via the two letters that were mailed to the congregation before and after the stand-up vote. In the first

letter, Pastor Tom offered less specific information than the letter sent on July 27, 2011.

However, in each letter he identifies Wren as a malcontent. In the second letter, the pastor details numerous instances that, in effect, exonerate him from improprieties and demonizes by name and in detail other members of UBC. It is of little consequence whether or not the allegations leveled against the Wren and the individuals had merit. The prime concern, in terms of this research question, was whether or not leadership enacted sensegiving behaviors that impacted both sensemaking and the current crisis. The data demonstrate that, via the two letters sent to UBC members, this was in fact the case.

RQ10: Participant Sensegiving: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified the crisis?

Table 4.11: Sensegiving Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sensegiving	42	93%

Sensegiving among participants includes those references to individuals who purposefully and intentionally made efforts to shape the perspectives (give sense) to others as a means to achieve a goal. The only named member of UBC, other than the pastor, who was referenced as a source of sensegiving was Wren. There was a letter sent by an opposing faction that requested members to attend the business meeting where they attempted to vote the pastor out a second time, but, other than including the signatures of the disgruntled members, the letter was informational in nature. It is worthwhile to note that among participants who were and were not directly involved with the current crisis, which spans over four decades, Wren's political nature has been detailed. What references that are listed first are those that inform Wren's history

of sensegiving so that, in the face of a lack of references in the form of letters or phone call transcriptions, the information provided through speculation may approach plausibility.

Following references to previous instances, the final references are outlined as they apply to the current crisis.

Sam-NLN2 describes how Wren would call members of committees, of which she was not a member, to determine what had been discussed:

After every meeting, deacon meeting, after every personnel, finance, if she was not on that committee, she would get on the phone and start calling to find out what happened. Every. And any deacon that would talk to her or anybody on that committee that would talk to her, she would talk to them.

One of the reasons we left was I could see what was happening. Wren was trying to get too close to my wife and I didn't want that to happen, and then she constantly bombarded my telephone after every meeting, and I would tell my wife to tell her...probably not what I should have told her like it wasn't none of your business. I never would tell her what was said, but as soon as she didn't get an answer from me, she would just get on the phone and call somebody else.

Pam-NLN3 describes her frustration with Wren's sensegiving behaviors:

She wants to know everything. Because she claimed that everybody called her to find out information; therefore, she needs to have the information. She wouldn't tell everybody everything. She was very selective in what she told people. She doesn't think people realized that.

Describing the relationship between Wren and the pastor before Pastor Tom, Eli-NLN4 explains that:

She was very much one that Chuck [former pastor] depended on to carry out some of his edicts, so to speak, with different people. She was a conduit of information on the committees. I hate to use the term busy-body – not sure that's the most correct word to use, but she was squarely in the know on a great majority of things and she would feed him information and she and Chuck, I know, used each other to their own ultimate ends.

However, in terms of the politics of sensemaking, interview data only mentioned one example of allegation of sensegiving on the part of Wren. According to Chad-FHM1:



Mainly, and it all goes back to Wren, that was the orchestrator of a lot of this, but she never was in the forefront.

On the other side, there were phone calls being made, don't vote for Bro. Tom and they knew the people that they needed to call to get on their side. Wren was a big part of that, the calling, several of the people that were really close to her, the ladies.

In the absence of letters, email, phone records or voice messages, the evidence that Wren made any type of calls are complete speculation. However, the previous interviews of former members who had claimed that Wren routinely called them personally make the accusation plausible. Whereas Pastor Tom leaves a clear paper trail outlining his sensegiving efforts, the ability to provide empirical data that implicates Wren's sensegiving behavior is problematic.

Concerning the final business meeting held Wednesday, September 14, 2011, with over 400 members in attendance, it is interesting to note that of all the allegations from both the pro Pastor Tom, pro Wren, as well as neutral participants, each makes intimations that the other side politicked in order to gain a voting advantage by calling people, awarding membership the week of the vote and even bussing people to the business meeting. But when pressed for proof, none of them could make a case other than there were people at the stand-up vote and the second attempt to remove Pastor Tom that they had never seen before:

Chad-FHM1 asserts this, though no proof was ever offered:

It's documented. Yes, we have a list of them doing that. It's documented. We can actually get proof to show that these people that voted have not been to our church in 10 years, some of them and they were there to vote because they were still members and had that right as far as our church regulations.

Sue-FLM3 makes an even more outlandish claim:

They, Wren's group, had gone to the nursing homes, had some of the, I mean pitiful, little old nursing...in wheel chairs, they carted them in. Some, I had never seen in my life, carted them in to vote no to get Bro. Tom out.

However, it was not just pro Pastor Tom participants that accused Wren's group of politicking votes within the congregations. Pro Wren participants accused Pastor Tom's group of political manipulation. According to Jim-AHM3:

It was set up for a Wednesday night, that Wednesday night, there was people there that had never been to that church in years who were still on the roll. There were people there who were not members. Anyway, he managed to get enough people there that he would win that vote.

Peter-AHM1 also accuses the pastor's faction of making political maneuvers to win the vote:

...there were a lot of people I've never seen before there. He had gone out and they may have still had memberships there, but they weren't active there.

When told this was a big accusation and asked if the pastor called people in, Peter-AHM1 said:

Yes, absolutely yes. There were people all around that I didn't know and I had been there long enough to know the people there – well, I was a deacon.

It is in this aspect that ignorance of a person's identity or membership instantly becomes the nefarious product of unscrupulous and unchristian behavior from the opposing side. Several members interviewed were completely convinced of sensegiving improprieties of a political nature, and are no doubt still convinced this was the case, yet have no proof. This lack of proof, however, did not stop them from making the allegations. One can assume that if they would communicate this perception to a total stranger interviewing them, they would have had no reservation to communicate that during the crisis. Therefore, the sense that is in fact given is baseless, yet not harmless. However, though participants could not offer proof, it can be surmised that allegations leveled by both factions are in fact true, as Paul-NHM1 who has assisted numerous churches during crisis describes:

We know this from politics that reality is not reality; perception is reality. I think both sides were spinning the situation. I am not intimating that there was malice here, but both sides were describing what was going on from their perspective. From Tom's perspective, it was, I have a woman who is rebellious against pastoral leadership and is

causing others in the church to rebel against my leadership out of their loyalty to her. From her perspective, I have a fundamentalist pastor who doesn't value women or their contributions to the church, and he is just wanting to take this ministry that I have spent years building and just lay it aside.

The previous research question was offered to determine if members of UBC enacted sensegiving behaviors that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis. The data indicate that there were numerous allegations of sensegiving concerning the current crisis, and several verified instances of sensegiving behaviors enacted by Wren in the past. However, concerning the current crisis, none of the participants indicated that they had been approached by either Pastor Tom or Wren's faction. This does not mean that sensegiving was not enacted. Each participant that attended the business meeting on September 14, 2011, asserted that the opposing faction did in fact call and transport current members and nonmembers to vote. The data demonstrate that the most probable sensegiving behavior enacted by members of UBC on both sides of the divide was the communication of allegations of political maneuvering concerning the September 14, 2011, business meeting.

RQ11: Mindfulness: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?

Table 4.12: Mindfulness Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Mindfulness	30	40%

Mindfulness encompasses the idea of an organization that is resilient, pre-occupied with failure, reluctant to simplify interpretations, sensitive to operations, able to adapt and willing to defer to the expertise of others (Weick, 2000). Organizations that experience collective blindness are those that fail to attend to the issue(s) previously mentioned. The data demonstrate that the leadership of UBC exhibited behavior more closely associated with collective blindness than mindfulness. One example is Pastor Tom's lack of a commitment to resilience. To be resilient is to respond to pre-crisis stimuli in an effective manner. Pastor Tom was acutely aware of Wren's desire to gain control and influence in the church. In the early stages, he attempted to embrace Wren's willingness to assist in numerous aspects of church life, much like his predecessors. He and others confess that Wren was amazingly organized, personable, efficient and informative. Under conditions where there is an absence of mischievousness, these are admirable traits. However, when it became clear early on in Pastor Tom's ministry that Wren was working counter to his leadership, a commitment to resilience and reluctance to simplify interpretations at the outset would have been prudent. Of course there could have been a political risk to approaching a matriarch of the church from a position of rebuke. However, the data indicate that even the members who considered themselves amiable acquaintances with Wren perceived her to be somewhat of a troublemaker. Furthermore, Pastor Tom's interview data indicate that he never attempted corrective action in a private or semi-private manner. It was not until the circumstances had passed a point of no return, did Pastor Tom take action. At this point, the damage had to a large extent, already been done.

Furthermore, Pastor Tom was quick to simplify his relationship with Wren from an interpersonal cost/benefit analysis. Chad-FHM1 explains that their relationship was:

...it was always love/hate. As long as she was doing this, he would put up with that type thing. It was always a back and forth thing,

Pastor Tom confirms Jerney-FHM1's assertion in his description of the relationship:

Wren was this little lady that was just determined always to be in the pulpit. And I didn't have a problem with that because when she was, it was always for announcements and all that. And I understood that she liked attention, but she was very good at what she did. You gave her a project, just lay back and wait for it to come to fruition because it was going to be done right. Now, she might run over all kind of people. I forever had people mad at me because I wouldn't kick her out of the church. Had a lot of church members leave, "If you would just make Wren leave the church, then we're going to stay." Of course, I would never do that. They called her a Jezebel. I have several letters, I always keep letters, stating this is if you'll do this. Well, I'm not going to do that, as long as this person is not a problem.

In light of her benefit to him and the church, Pastor Tom labeled her defiance to him and ill relationships with others as a person who was "not a problem." Whether for political or practical benefits, or both, Pastor Tom chose to label a major problem as minor. He, as previously outlined, made a commitment to ignore the problem by accentuating the positive aspects of the relationship and minimizing the detriments. Combine Pastor Tom's commitment to ignore warning signs in the pre-crisis stage, UBC's retained organizational response of avoidance and collective blindness and Wren's need for self-enhancement and it is not surprising that UBC experienced such a crisis.

The research question sought to determine if the crisis was best typified as an example of collective blindness or mindfulness. The data indicate that the pastor failed to address Wren early on in his ministry at UBC. Rather than addressing issues at the outset deferring the problem to other committees, he labeled the relationship as "not a problem" because of the assumed inherent benefit Wren provided. The over-simplification where he perceived her benefit outweighed her cost allowed Pastor Tom to make the commitment to ignore and thus be blind to the possible detriments until it was too late to prevent crisis.

RQ12: Renewal. Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?

Table 4.13: Renewal Data

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Renewal	18	73%

As has been previously defined, renewal is the fresh sense of purpose and direction experienced by the organization post-crisis (Ulmer et al., 2007). Actually entering into the renewal phase, however, is dependent upon some level of organizational learning and adaptation. Therefore, actual renewal is a contingent concept that was the impetus for the current research question. If UBC did not make some significant organizational changes, they would have entered back into a crisis cycle. Data indicate that Pastor Tom and UBC took the difficult and painful steps in order to move into the renewal phase. Unfortunately, the means by which UBC avoided future problems, representative of the current crisis, was via leadership and the congregation voting in the affirmative to revoke the membership of 15 members.

This post-crisis event was not without consequence. Having already experienced the original crisis in which members were shocked that the that the pastor would specifically identify problem members from the pulpit, followed by a letter which identified other members in greater negative detail and having to experience the alleged political maneuvering by both factions, numerous members did not remain with UBC after experiencing yet another monumental organizational fracture. Pastor Tom describes how he managed the vote to revoke the membership of those 15 individuals that he felt opposed him:

I waited and Paul was supposed to give it [moderator control of the September 14, 2011, business meeting] back to me, and he kept calling saying, “this business meeting is not over.” He kept pleading with them – don’t leave because this business meeting is not over. They said it is to us. I just bide my time. When I saw they were gone, that’s when I stood up and asked for them to overrule the manual so I could bring a motion that was not prepared beforehand and that takes a 2/3 majority, but we had it. Then I read those names off, including those two women.

Paul-NHN1, when the moratorium vote had passed, describes the final scene and his thought process as the moderator to allow a non-advertised motion to be considered:

The other thing that’s interesting is that they have a standard within their guidelines, we laid a rule aside in order to bring that motion at the end [the vote revoke memberships], the notification rule was laid aside [three service notification rule on all major voting issues]. I am conflicted on that, I’m not certain that was a legal laying aside. The reason is since that meeting, whether you call them bylaws or not, they are bylaws, Robert’s Rule of Order says you simply cannot lay aside a bylaw, you can’t do it. So, I’m not sure, looking back on it, whether I ruled rightly on that or not, I did rule that it was a major policy change, which according to their document, required a two thirds vote. What’s interesting here is, if the dissenting group had not abandoned the meeting... if they hadn’t abandoned the meeting, then that move would not have passed, we would not have been able to lay aside the rule, those members would not have been dismissed.

It would be obvious to anyone there, it was a reactionary move, which is typically never a good idea. The whole idea that you can’t do anything quickly – anything of that magnitude, needs to be done with great prayer and gravity. Even in a secular body, apart from the church. So, in a sense, those folk that were dismissed – If you were to say they were victimized, I’m not sure...I’m certain that everyone would not agree that they were, but if you were to say they were victimized, they were victimized not only by the ones that voted them out of the fellowship, but also by the ones that abandoned the meeting. Because if they would have just stayed until the end, then...

Joy-NLM1 explains her reaction to the vote to revoke the membership of 15 members and the fallout that ensued as a result:

I had never experienced it, never. We actually did not... we voted against it. When he named off those people that he wanted to remove, we actually voted against that. Just because we didn’t think that was our place. It was enough turmoil that we were like – they don’t want you, and we’ve won the vote – it’s over with. We are just going to give them the opportunity to go. He said he felt like he had to church them, to literally remove their name off the roll.

There were some that left because he did that. Some didn’t like that he did that and they ended up going to another church. Because he called those names and said their name

will be removed from our roll. That was kind of a big deal to those who were kind of in – they weren't in the Wren camp, they were just kind of taken aback at the whole transaction that it was split, that things were happening and some of them I know, some of them didn't immediately leave, some came back for a little while, but they just had a problem with that, so it was another thing of "Bro. Tom is trying to ramrod everything."

Pastor Tom perceived that in order to avoid future crises of disgruntled factions calling for his removal as pastor of UBC, he not only sought a moratorium on such a vote, but took extreme steps to ensure that the leadership of the main disgruntled faction could not, as non-members, call for such a vote. The merits or wisdom of such a drastic move are debatable, and, by Joy-NLM2's account of the fallout from the vote, the action had definite consequences. However, the decision seems to have in fact moved the church into a renewal phase. To date, no further calls for Pastor Tom to be removed as leader of UBC have been attempted. Furthermore, the church seems to be experiencing some aspects of positive growth. Chad-FHM1 describes the progress:

The church as a whole I think understands and saw what little things can turn into. So there was a lot of healing that took place. A lot of relationships that were strained in the past, people have come and worked through those. Not to say we haven't had any bumps in the road, because we've struggled. We've struggled financially; we've struggled with different ministries and different things. But as a whole, the unity of our church is a lot stronger, and we are a lot healthier church even though our numbers are lower than we were and financially we're not where we were eventually. But we're building back up.

David-FHM2 refers to the concept of becoming aware of the need to prevent avoidance behaviors:

Because of the struggle we went through, everybody realized how important church discipline is and how often conflict is going to come up and what happens when you avoid it.

Sue-FLM3, views the decision to revoke the memberships as something that has resulted in positive renewal for UBC:

You can feel the spirit of the Lord when you walk into that sanctuary. When he preaches, there's so much love in our church. Everybody greets each other; everybody wants to help each other. The Lord weeded the garden and that's how I viewed this.



Even Joy-NLM2, who had opposed the motion to revoke membership by voting in the negative, feels as if the church is moving in a positive direction:

The spirit is awesome. New visitors, I don't know how many baptisms we've had: 15, 12 or 15 since the split. They've talked about – it's tight. The budget is tighter. They've cut way back. They've cut back on their salaries; they cut back on their cooling down all the buildings. They only work 3 days a week, that kind of stuff. We are managing as far as financially, but just the overall spirit is awesome. It is night and day because there is not big – before it was like a big negative spot. Everywhere certain people were in the congregation – there were more in the congregation, but it was a big black spot where all these people were sitting there. We immediately, right after the split, we had people getting saved and good things happening, and all that did to me was affirm that God is alive and well at Unity. He's not finished with us, and we're just there to worship, and you hate that all of that had to happen, but the bottom line is God what do you want from our church...what do you want for us to do? It is very evident because lots of positive things happened: little things, baptisms, and new faces.

By these accounts of members both for Pastor Tom and relatively neutral to Pastor Tom, UBC is moving in a positive renewal direction. However, this does not mean that from an individual perspective the people who left UBC or were voted out of UBC are still disgruntled. The opposite is true. Data demonstrate that of the four members who were against the pastor, two of which were voted out, they are happy with their current church affiliation and have moved on to their own personal renewal phase. Unfortunately, the crisis experienced by UBC did not end in complete positive renewal in terms of each member remaining at UBC or seeking out a new congregation where they are currently satisfied. According to Paul-NHN1:

I have heard through the grapevine that some of the families have just kind of fallen away, period. They worship nowhere, and that is regrettable; that is tragic.

The research question considered whether or not UBC had moved to the renewal phase by adapting and taking measures to ensure that a similar crisis would not take place. Though the measures to ensure renewal were debatable, risky and consequential, data demonstrates that UBC as an organization is functioning in a more positive manner. The members who left UBC that were interviewed were also positive concerning their current church membership status.

However, according to Paul-NHN1, some members have been reluctant to enter back into a formal religious organization.

### Summary of Results

In summary, the results indicate that members of UBC, who participated in this study, exhibited sensemaking behaviors that are representative of Sensemaking Theory. Table 4.14 summarizes the Research Questions and their results. The following table groups the concepts and themes derived from Sensemaking Theory that were outlined in the Research Questions, frequencies, and the individual who made the comment (Table 4.15).

In regard to RQ1, participants indicated the enacting event as occurring on July, 17, 2011, when Pastor Tom read the request for the church to take part in a stand-up vote. The vote essentially pitted him and Wren against each other by framing the request in such a way that forced the congregation to choose between his leadership and the leadership of Wren and her followers. As representative of Sensemaking Theory's enactment concept, it was at this point when Pastor Tom read the letter that the entire congregation chose to notice or bring the event into existence. Enactment concerns unjustified variation where members notice something is out of the ordinary but have yet to label it as positive or negative. The reading of the stand-up vote letter is representative of such an occurrence because it was not until people began to react and converse with one another did the sensemaking phase proceed to the selection of the event.

For RQ2, data indicate that Pastor Tom made a commitment to view the actions, both positive and negative, by Wren as resulting in more good than harm. This cost/benefit analysis approach to which Pastor Tom committed, allowed him to label Wren as a non-problem in the face of both written and verbal warnings from congregational members. As representative of Sensemaking

Theory, at the point where his commitment to the idea that Wren's benefits outweighed her costs was no longer a viable strategy for managing his relationship with her, he continued to ignore her or attempt reconciliation.

For RQ3, participants provided evidence that indicated that Pastor Tom's assumption that Wren would honor their agreement to step down after one year from her position as finance chairperson, as well as his assumption that those voting members of the finance committee, who knew his desires concerning Wren's second term, would not allow her to retain that position, resulted in his lack of capacity to generate alternatives or contingencies. Capacity is concerned with both the known and unknown capacity to deal with negative informational inputs. Because Pastor Tom believed Wren when they agreed she would not take a second term and because he believed in the committee that they would not allow her a second term, he could not devise strategies to ensure that he could guarantee his plan of a male lead finance committee. As representative of Sensemaking Theory, the results indicate that his faith in people limited his capacity to manage the situation in a manner that allowed him to achieve his desired outcome.

In regard to RQ4, data demonstrates that the leadership's expectation concerning women in positions of authority over men, and the congregation's expectation of peace at all cost functioned as both an instigator and incubator for crisis. Pastor Tom's expectation that only men could be the head of major committees resulted in an opportunity for divergent expectations to prompt crisis. Concerning the congregation's expectation of peace at all costs, participants indicated that they expected the pastor to strive to reconcile with members in order to avoid major crises.

Table 4.14 Research Question Results

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:	RESULTS
RQ1: What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?	Participants identified the enacting event as the reading of the call for a stand-up vote on by Pastor Tom
RQ2: Did member or leadership commitments facilitate and/or intensify crisis?	Data show that Pastor Tom made commitments to label Wren as “not a problem” causing a blind spot to her behavior and reluctance to mediation.
RQ3: Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	Data indicate that Pastor Tom’s faith in Wren to comply with their agreement and his faith that the committee would uphold that commitment lead to his lack of capacity to consider alternatives.
RQ4: Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	Data identify the congregational expectation of peace at all costs and the pastor’s expectation of women in leadership.
RQ5: Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	The primary participant emotional response involved surprise and anger in response to Pastor Tom reading the stand-up vote letter in July 2011.
RQ6: Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?	The data indicate that participants made their selection due to their commitment to the pastor and the public implication of a member.
RQ7: Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?	Data show an organizational cycle of conflict and a retained rule to ignore. Leadership retained a policy concerning women holding leadership positions in the church that escalated crisis.
RQ8: Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis??	Participants identified Pastor Tom’s need for self-consistency as authoritarian and Wren’s, her need for self-enhancement as power-hungry.
RQ9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?	Data show Pastor Tom enacted sensegiving behaviors through two letter mailed to the congregate that specifically targeted opposing faction and their activities in great detail.
RQ10: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified crisis?	Participant responses indicate that Wren enacted sensegiving behaviors by allegedly calling members to encourage them to vote against Pastor Tom.
RQ11: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?	The data indicate Pastor Tom failed to address Wren but rather labeled the relationship as “not a problem” because of the assumed inherent benefit Wren provided.
RQ12: Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?	Data indicate that Pastor Tom and UBC took steps toward renewal via voting in the affirmative to revoke the membership of 15 members.

Table 4.15 Frequencies

Enactment	Tom																Eli-			
	Sue- FLM3	Chad- FHM1	David- FHM2	John- NLM1	Joy- NLM2	Paul- NHN1	Peter- AHM1	Mary- AHM2	Jim- AHM3	Jane- ALM1	Sally- NLN1	Sam- NLN2	Pam- NLN3	NLN4		Total				
Bifurcation-Bracket	12	1	4	2	3	7	1	6	7	1	1	1	0	1	0	47				
Capacity	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	10				
Commitment	2	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	10				
Emotion	9	0	3	0	0	2	1	2	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	23				
Ignoring/Denial	6	1	4	7	0	0	4	1	1	0	0	1	2	2	2	30				
Selection																				
Attribution	9	3	1	1	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	1	2	0	36				
Leadership	9	1	3	3	1	3	0	8	4	0	1	2	2	2	0	39				
Communication	5	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	4	1	1	0	0	0	1	17				
Sensegiving	9	5	3	2	1	5	2	4	3	1	0	2	1	1	3	42				
Retention																				
Assumptions	2	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	14				
Expectations	5	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	14				
Identity	7	1	0	0	2	2	1	4	4	0	1	4	2	2	6	36				
Renewal	3	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	18				
Minfulness																				
Ability to Adapt	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7				
Collective																				
Blindness	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7				
Commitment to Resiliency	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3				
Preoccupation with Failure	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3				
Reluctance to Simplify																				
Interpretations	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4				
Sensitivity to Operations	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4				
Deference to Expertise	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2				

As representative of Sensemaking Theory's concept of expectation, both the pastor's and the congregation differing expectations concerning organizational roles and conflict mediation worked to facilitate the crisis.

For RQ5, participants indicated that emotional responses had an impact on how people made their selection of the crisis. Data indicated that participants who were intimately involved with pre-crisis events tended to respond to the bifurcation point in anger. Those who were not involved in pre-crisis events tended to react to the bifurcation in surprise. For those who were surprised, it may in part be due to the fact that no explanation was given for the impetus for the call to vote for Pastor Tom's or Wren's leadership.

In regard to RQ6, the data indicates that members made their selection of the crisis based upon their commitment and respect for the office of the pastor and their reactions to the way in which the call for the stand-up vote was framed. In reference to both RQ5 and RQ6, surprise may have been the product not only of ignorance of pre-crisis details but also due to the nature in which the vote was framed as an either/or decision between the pastor and Wren. As representative of Sensemaking Theory's concept of selection, at the point where participants began to label the actions of the pastor in positive or negative terms based on their relationship to the pastor and their reaction to the framing of the stand-up vote, selection had taken place.

For RQ7, data demonstrated that retained rules by both leadership and membership had an impact on crisis development. The congregation as a whole functioned from a rule based perspective of conflict avoidance. This rule driven behavior caused UBC to experience a cycle of conflict throughout its history. Until the point of the current crisis, this approach had proved mildly successful in terms of preventing a major split or member exodus. However, the rule of

avoidance, though stringently held to during the crisis, was not an effective strategy for the current case. Before the crisis had progressed, however, Pastor Tom's rule concerning women functioning in leadership positions over men caused friction among the membership that was a major aspect in terms of facilitating crisis.

In terms of RQ8, participant responses indicated that both Pastor Tom and Wren held vigorously to their identities, which worked to facilitate crisis. As representative of Sensemaking Theory's concept of identity, Pastor Tom managed the crisis with respect to his identity need for consistency in terms of his role as that of pastor-leader. Conversely, data indicated that Wren managed the crisis in terms of her identity need for self-enhancement. As a result of both Pastor Tom and Wren's management of the crisis in terms of their identity, they were unable to reconcile, which, as a result, moved the congregation toward the crisis stage.

For RQ9, data demonstrated that Pastor Tom did in fact take part in sensegiving behaviors. Though Pastor Tom denies attempting to persuade anyone to vote one way or the other because of his refusal to verbally engage the situation from the pulpit, his writing of two letters, (pre- and post-stand-up vote) functioned in a sensegiving manner. Pastor Tom identifies Wren and numerous other members who were opposing his leadership in these two letters. Though Pastor Tom never indicated that these letters were for anything more than informational purposes, they functioned as a rhetorical device. Rather than speak from the pulpit, Pastor Tom was able to disseminate his perspective message to the entire congregation through the medium of letters. This action is representative of Sensemaking Theory's concept of sensegiving or the politics of sensemaking.

In regards to RQ10, numerous allegations concerning both Pastor Tom's and Wren's factions making phone calls and lobbying for votes were made. Wren's penchant for political maneuvering was outlined by former members' reports. However, other than accusation and speculation, neither faction that was interviewed offered hard evidence in the form of voicemail, email or letters. It is obvious that some people had been called due to the large number of people who attended the business meeting to call for the pastor's removal for a second time. However, the participants who were interviewed assumed faction impropriety due to their inability to identify all of the people who were in attendance. At the point where participants could not identify members, they assumed that the opposing faction had initiated their attendance. Numerous participants reported this allegation as fact and not speculation. Therefore, another aspect of sensegiving that emerged were the mostly baseless allegations of faction political maneuvering that was possibly communicated by means of communicated allegations during the crisis. The allegations of political maneuvering coupled with the numerous individuals present for the business meeting on September 14, 2011, worked to solidify this perspective.

For RQ11, data indicate that Pastor Tom failed to address the issues concerning Wren because of his over-simplification of her potential harm. In fact, early on, Pastor Tom labels Wren as a non-problem and made references representative of a cost/benefits approach to their relationship. Pastor Tom, as did other participants, perceived many of Wren's flaws and indiscretions as acceptable due to her benefit to the church. This over-simplification and lack of a commitment to resilience prompted leadership and membership to enact collective blindness which is not representative of mindfulness.

Finally, for RQ12, leadership and the congregation took the needed, yet painful steps to enter into a renewal phase. As a response to the second call for his removal, Pastor Tom had



proposed a two-year moratorium on motions that would call for the pastor's removal. At the point that this measure passed, the opposing faction was disgruntled and left the meeting in spite of being asked to stay. At which point the disgruntled members left, Pastor Tom offered a vote to revoke the memberships of 15 members. Though this was a harsh tactic that was perceived as negative by some members, the result has been a movement into the renewal phase. To date, no calls for the removal of the pastor have been made, and positive growth has been reported.

The purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens from which to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Specifically, the intent was to understand how Sensemaking Theory explains pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication and how these sensemaking episodes lead to the crisis of a church split. Results indicate that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate and beneficial lens from which to view church crisis. Chapter 5 will examine in greater detail these findings and provide a more robust explanation of the results of this study. Suggestions for ways in which to avoid or lessen the impact of church crisis will also be offered.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following chapter analyzes, interprets and synthesizes the finding via a processional method and is thus structured:

1. Overview
2. A discussion of the assumptions generated before beginning data collection and analysis.
3. A discussion of the primary purpose of the study in terms of the validity of Sensemaking Theory as an appropriate lens through which to view crises.
4. A discussion of research question findings through synthesis of all the themes into participant beliefs (thoughts) and communication (action), to include interpretations, conclusions and recommendations.
5. A further discussion of suggestions for organizational members and leadership.
6. A discussion of limitations.
7. A discussion of possible future research.
8. A review of the research objective.
9. Conclusion

## Overview

As previously stated, the primary purpose of this study was to test the assertion that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process. In addition, through the application of Sensemaking Theory, the secondary goal was to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Because the aftermath of church splits is detrimental to the missiology of a Southern Baptist church and the convention as a whole, making sense of pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication is vital. Therefore, the primary contention was that Sensemaking Theory (Weick, 1988, 1995) was an appropriate theoretical lens through which to understand the role of communication during the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis phases of a church split, because Sensemaking Theory allows for a comprehensive understanding of the crisis phenomenon throughout its evolution.

The research utilized naturalistic inquiry of the experiences of present and previous members of UBC by conducting in-depth interviews, as well as utilizing unobtrusive measures such as letters, UBC by-laws, UBC website, and UBC financial and membership records. Participants in the study included 14 current or previous members of UBC. The data were coded and analyzed to help answer the research questions. Attention was also given to how data impacted previously established assumptions concerning the phenomenon of church splits.

The study was based on the following 12 research questions. Each questions is supplemented by the results indicated in Chapter 4:

Table 5.1 Results

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:	RESULTS
RQ1: What did participants generally perceive as the enacting event?	Participants identified the enacting event as the reading of the call for a stand-up vote by Pastor Tom
RQ2: Did member or leadership commitments facilitate and/or intensify crisis?	Yes. Data show that Pastor Tom made commitments to label Wren as “not a problem” causing a blind spot to her behavior and reluctance to mediation.
RQ3: Did leader or membership capacity facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	Yes. Data indicate that Pastor Tom’s faith in Wren to comply with their agreement and his faith that the committee would uphold that commitment lead to his lack of capacity to consider alternatives.
RQ4: Did prior leadership or member expectations facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	Yes. Data identify the congregational expectation of peace at all costs and the pastor’s expectation of the limited role of women in leadership.
RQ5: Did participant emotion facilitate and/or intensify the crisis?	Yes. The primary participant emotional response involved surprise and anger in response to Pastor Tom reading the stand-up vote letter in July 2011.
RQ6: Upon what criteria did members base their selection of the crisis?	The data indicate that participants made their selection due to their commitment to the pastor and the public implication of a member.
RQ7: Did leadership or membership draw upon retained rules during the sensemaking process that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis?	Yes. Data show an organizational cycle of conflict and a retained rule to ignore. Leadership retained a policy concerning women not holding leadership positions in the church that escalated crisis.
RQ8: Did identity management affect selection that facilitated and/or intensified the crisis??	Yes. Participants identified Pastor Tom’s need for self-consistency as authoritarian and Wren’s need for self-enhancement as power-hungry.
RQ9: Did communication among leadership and the congregate mediate sensemaking?	Yes. Data show Pastor Tom enacted sensegiving behaviors through two letters mailed to the congregate that specifically targeted opposing factions and their activities in great detail.
RQ10: Did participants enact sensegiving behaviors that facilitated or intensified crisis?	Yes. Participant responses indicate that Wren enacted sensegiving behaviors by allegedly calling members to encourage them to vote against Pastor Tom.
RQ11: Did participants manage the crisis in terms of collective blindness or mindfulness?	Yes. The data indicate Pastor Tom failed to address Wren but rather labeled the relationship as “not a problem” because of the assumed inherent benefit Wren provided.
RQ12: Did participants enact renewal behaviors in the aftermath of the crisis?	Yes. Data indicate that Pastor Tom and UBC took steps toward renewal via voting in the affirmative to revoke the membership of 15 members.

The overarching findings in this study were two-fold: 1) that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens through which to understand crises of smaller scales and by default church crisis; and, 2) that the participants in the current study believed and spoke/acted the crisis into existence. The initial finding supports the purpose of the current study while the second major finding offers an explanation in an attempt to understand how sense was made and to what effect. This discussion offers a synthesis to help understand the findings under the two basic Sensemaking concepts of belief and action.

According to Weick (1995), “in matters of sensemaking, believing is seeing. To believe is to notice selectively. And to believe is to initiate actions capable of lending substance to the belief...sensemaking involves taking whatever is clearer, whether it is a belief or an action, and linking it with that which is less clear. These are fundamental operations of sensemaking. Two elements, a belief and an action, are related” (pp. 133-135). The members of UBC, based upon their belief and/or action, made sense of cues that lead to the crisis. These two connected elements, belief and communication/action worked in conjunction to exacerbate the crisis. The following discussion seeks to distill the concepts utilized for the theme analysis into these broad categories of belief and communication/action. Following this discussion, suggestions are offered in order to assist organizations and especially churches as they seek to mediate crisis.

### Assumptions

Before discussion of the validity of Sensemaking Theory as an appropriate lens through which to view micro level and church crisis, six primary assumptions that were outlined in Chapter One must be addressed. First, it was assumed that churches and church leadership are ill-prepared to prevent and combat crisis. The data implies that this assumption is valid. In accordance with the goal of understanding the current crisis by distilling the major cause of crisis

as that of belief and action/communication, I will refer initially to an example of Pastor Tom's belief [retention] that women were to be silent in the church, that they should not be the head of a major committee, nor should they be allowed to speak from the pulpit. This belief, though quasi-extreme in today's SBC convention, is not completely non-existent. However, Pastor Tom was ill-prepared to deal with the backlash his beliefs would cause. Though this perception had been an issue since his hiring based on the experience of Pam-NLN3, he had failed to reconcile his stance with other members. At the point where this belief caused a major pre-crisis rift, for example during the finance committee meetings, Pastor Tom was ill prepared to manage these perceptions or the conflict as evidenced by his faulty labeling of crisis cues.

The church body of UBC was also ill-prepared when one considers their role in the crisis. Rather than take the needed steps to force reconciliation or removal, the church enacted the retained response of conflict avoidance. As a result, neither the pastor nor the church was prepared to avoid or mediate the crisis. The organization succumbed to the error of attempting to solve new problems with old methods (Weick, 2002).

The second assumption, which will be discussed in the next section, was that the crisis would follow the lifecycle of conflict as reflected in Sensemaking Theory's enactment, selection and retention. The data validate this assumption. The section of discussion concerning Sensemaking Theory specifically will address these assertions in detail.

The third assumption was that the process of sensemaking would be a negotiated phenomenon in which individuals who had a stake in the outcome would compete for influence. This assumption is predicated on Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) *Politics of Sensemaking*. The data suggest, and will be discussed in a future section, that both Pastor Tom and Wren took part in sensegiving behaviors. Because Wren did not have a formal position within the church, her

level of influence was much more complicated to detect, whereas Pastor Tom, though he asserts he did not take part in what would be considered political maneuvers, did in fact do so via the power of the pulpit and the pen. Pastor Tom's two different articles in the church newsletter served as an action device that forwarded subsequent sensemaking.

The fourth assumption was that crisis within the church would be highly emotional. This was certainly the case. Participant reports indicate that people were shocked, angry, saddened and even violent as a result of the bifurcation point of the reading of the stand-up vote letter. Finally, the fifth assumption was that after the crisis, the congregational members who remained would enact renewing behaviors as a means of organizational healing. This assumption was moderately supported in that some participants reported that they are stronger and more resilient while others have reported that some members have yet to come back or join another church.

Concerning an additional assumption that was not labeled as an assumption but rather as a challenge, the results were counter to my assumption. I made the assertion that given the political nature of crisis, a specific bifurcation point would be difficult to determine but rather there would be numerous, yet less catastrophic bifurcations. This complexity was not the case. An overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that the main bifurcation point was when Pastor Tom read the stand-up vote letter. Whereas there were indicators of crisis in the pre-crisis stage, corporate crisis was avoided or ignored until the reading of the stand-up vote letter.

These assumptions were utilized in order to formulate the research questions and subsequent theme analysis concepts. Each concept utilized in the theme analysis will be discussed as it informed understanding in terms of belief and action/communication. What follows is a brief discussion of how Sensemaking Theory was applied to the current context.

## Sensemaking Theory

Sensemaking Theory is concerned with how people “construct what they construct, why and with what effects” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). Historically, Sensemaking Theory has been applied to catastrophic events. At the instant of a major catastrophe it is much easier to analyze sensemaking within the context of a surprise, threat and short response time. The current study was concerned with catastrophe of a less physically harmful, but more political nature. Also, the study was concerned with the appropriateness of application of Sensemaking Theory in a micro context. In order to determine the appropriateness of Sensemaking Theory’s application to church crisis, the major stages, as well as the primary components of the stages were utilized. The data suggest that the members of UBC operated within the structure of the theory. At the moment of the major bifurcation, the reading of the stand-up vote letter, the congregation was thrust into crisis.

Louis (1980), outlining of the three stages of sensemaking, offers a conceptual model from which to outline the current crisis:

Sensemaking can be viewed as a recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time. The cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions, which serve as predictions about future events [retention]. Subsequently, individuals experience events that may be discrepant from predictions [enactment]. Discrepant events, or surprises, trigger a need for explanation, or post-diction, and, correspondingly, for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed. Interpretation is attributed to surprises [selection]...it is crucial to note that meaning is assigned to surprise as an output of the sensemaking process, rather than arising concurrently with the



perception of detection of differences. (Louis, 1980, 241) [bracketed information added]

Following Louis' description, the data suggest that congregates believed certain things concerning how a pastor should and should not identify other members from the pulpit [retention]. Though numerous members did not consider themselves as staunch supporters of Wren, they held to a belief that the pastor should never call down a congregate from the pulpit. The point at which the pastor acted in contrast to this belief/expectation, the congregation was immediately thrust into the uncertain world of enactment. As Chad-FHM1 suggests:

The average person that wasn't on either side – they were confused, shocked.

The uncertainty of the enactment phase is what drove individuals to the selection stage because according to Seeger et al. (2003), "there is an ongoing need to determine how to know what to think" (p. 22). The congregational confusion following the reading of the stand-up vote letter by Pastor Tom is also representative of the human aversion to the open-ended story. This aversion caused by events "discrepant from predictions" [enactment] (Louis, 1980) caused UBC members to enact information seeking behaviors. At the point when members labeled the reading of the letter as positive or negative, members had begun the selection phase of sensemaking.

Members made their selection of the event as negative or positive based primarily on their commitment to the pastor and their emotional reaction to the way in which the letter was worded. Members such as Sue-FLM3 who made a commitment to support the pastor still disagreed with the manner in which Pastor Tom worded the letter. Others, such as Peter-AHM1 and Jim-AHM3 viewed Pastor Tom's verbiage as calculated, which caused negative selection. Another participant who supported the pastor but not the process, Joy-NLM2, explains how a large portion of the congregation made their selection of the event:

“I’m not following her.” They were disgruntled with him, but they were like – “I’m not following Wren, I’m following God”... He made it sound like, it’s either me or Wren, and there was just junk in the camp period that wasn’t necessarily her. A lot of – if he had just said – you either want me or you don’t, it would have clarified things. Because there was a lot of – I’m not following Wren. It was – they felt like, we need A,B, C. You didn’t give me another choice because I’m not following her, but you’re saying if I don’t vote for you, I’m voting for her.

Again, in terms of theory application, Sensemaking is applicable when attempting to describe the decision making process concerning the members of UBC. The members of UBC who made their selection of the event in a negative manner did so based on their perception of the stand-up letter as, at best, a false either/or dilemma or, at worst, a calculated maneuver.

Finally, when describing how Sensemaking Theory is applied in the retention phase, the data support the model in that numerous retained belief structures impacted both Sensemaking and the enactment and selection stages. Both the pastor and the congregation retained different beliefs that aided in the escalation of crisis. Pastor Tom’s aversion to women in leadership positions, coupled with the congregation’s retained organizational memory of conflict avoidance, allowed the situation to reach crisis level (Weick, 2001). The following graph highlights the mutually influencing behavior concerning the sensemaking stages and how they were enacted during the crisis.

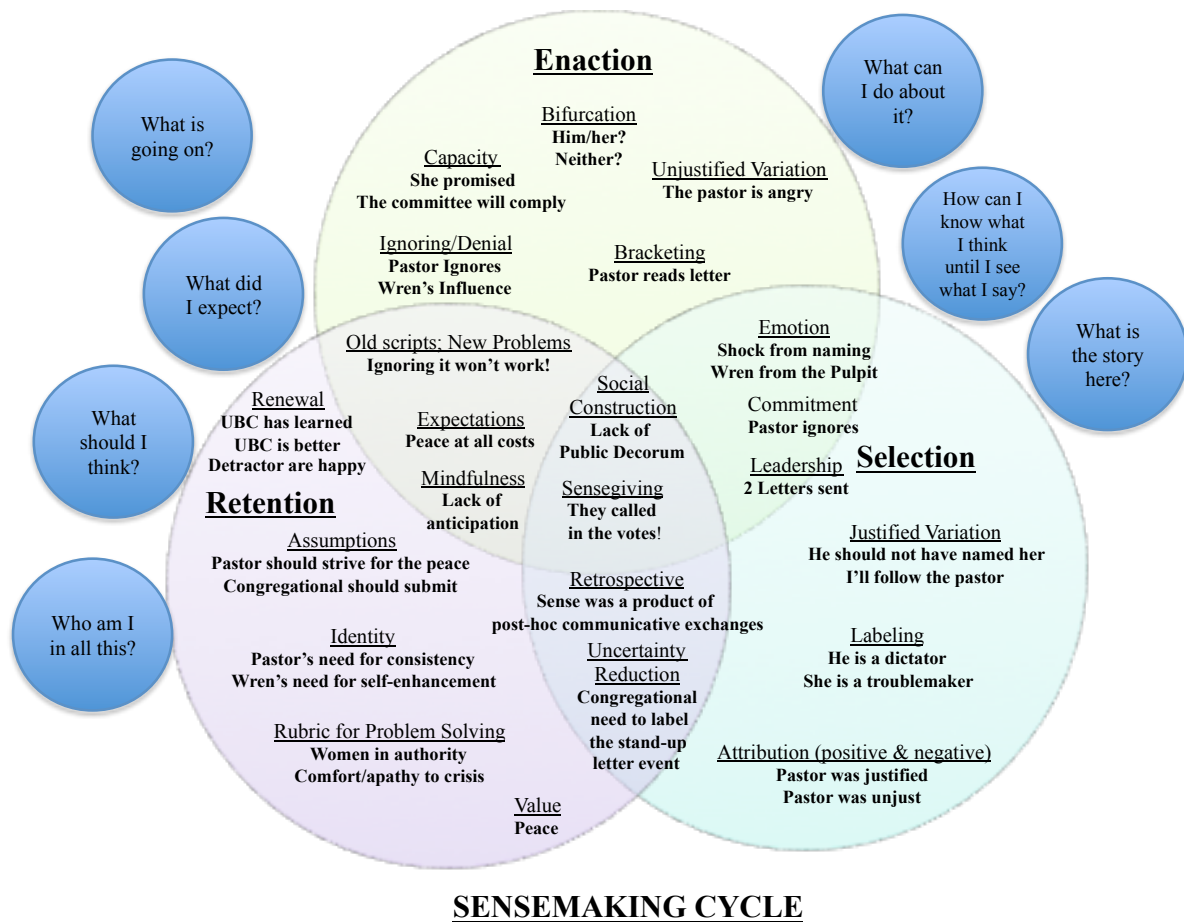


Figure 5.1 Sensemaking Cycle Applied

The previous section suggests that Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens through which to study small-scale crisis, as well as church crisis. However, the primary goal of theory application, in terms of Sensemaking Theory, is not only concerned with how participants moved through the crisis and sensemaking stages, but why. The following sections discuss how each concept within the components of enactment, selection, and retention and along the time continuum of pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis, explain why participants made sense in one manner or the other. As previously stated, the overarching finding as supported by an

explanation of the themes, is best categorized within the elements of belief and action/communication.

At each juncture of the crisis, participants sought to simplify their world via sensemaking. When beliefs required validation via action, UBC members acted accordingly. According to Weick (1995), “when people individually see what they think, this does not mean that others with other interests see the same thing or think the same way” (p. 136). However, based on the need for self-consistency (Erez & Early, 1993), they believe propaganda in order to validate an *a priori* belief in the face of facts that might contradict a certain belief. When action required a justification, they made retroactive sensemaking to that end. It is important to note that belief can be argued from the sensemaking perspective as a retained response that was also the product of retrospective sensemaking. In other words, retention is predicated on previous enactment and selection where the product of selection forms the basis for retained knowledge that then serves as the bright line for future enactment.

Perhaps some critics may argue that the sense in this case was in fact not sense when weighed against reality. This would be an incorrect evaluation of the nature of sense. A normative argument cannot be made concerning sense. Sense is neither positive nor negative; it is neither good nor bad. It is in reality best described in amoral terms. What is a more valid and pragmatic description of sense and sensemaking is that it is consequential. The consequences of sense may be interpreted normatively but should not be attributed to the act of sensemaking. This error is akin to the misnomer that communication can break down or that there was a lack of good communication.

## Research Questions

### Enaction

Sensemaking from a congregational perspective that began the enactment stage was the product of a commitment to an action (RQ1). My interpretation from a Sensemaking Theory perspective dictates that at the point where Pastor Tom read the stand-up vote letter he was inextricably bound to the action. According to Weick (1995), “binding occurs when the behavior is explicit (there is clear evidence that the act occurred), public (important people saw the act occur), and irrevocable (the act cannot be undone)” (p. 157). Further analysis indicates that at the point where Pastor Tom initiated the bifurcation through the reading of the stand-up letter, it was exacerbated because of his failure to justify his claim. In other words, Pastor Tom made an inferred claim, Wren is bad, but never justified his claim. He merely read the letter that created a false either/or dilemma and then left the sanctuary.

This response is antithetical to what competent leaders do when creating environments for organizational members. According to Weick (1995), “top managers advertise, lobby, and educate to make environments hospitable for their organization” (p. 164). Clearly, the ambiguity and inferred claim against Wren inherent in the reading of the stand-up vote letter required some type of justification. At the point where Pastor Tom had the floor and attention of the congregation, he had an opportunity to both lobby and educate. I believe his failure to do so caused members, who may have supported his inferred claim that Wren was bad, to make sense of the bifurcation on the basis of the manner in which the information was presented and less on the message itself.

We see according to the data that numerous congregates made their selection of the crisis, not based on the content of Pastor Tom's communication, but on their meta-communicative perception of the message. In terms of effective leadership communication, this was a complete failure and resulted in members making their selection of the event, and subsequently affecting the manner in which they voted, on grounds completely foreign to the main issues that initially comprised the crisis.

Pastor Tom's lack of explanation may have been the result of his belief that the church would disregard the manner in which he communicated the message of the stand-up vote and base their selection on their knowledge of Wren's alleged indiscretion. This would have been a failure to understand that leaders' actions have the propensity to alter events and, according to Weick (1988), create "an orderly, material, social construction that is subject to multiple interpretations...Enacted environments contain real objects such as receptors, pipes and valves. These objects are inconsequential until they are acted upon and then incorporated retroactively into events, situations, and explanations" (p. 307). What Pastor Tom thought was a given, the congregation's perception of Wren as bad, was lost to a meta-communicative issue. To understand the manner in which the congregation made sense of the bifurcation is to understand that Pastor Tom failed to understand his role in creating an environment worthy of multiple interpretations, of which some would be in his favor. Pastor Tom seemed to have incorrectly assumed that the manner in which he communicated and worded the stand-up vote letter was inconsequential. Whether his ambiguity was strategic or out of ignorance to the potential consequences, the result was a greater negative evaluation of the incident than had he attempted an explanation or what Weick would term as an action to manipulate a committed action (1995).

One cautionary recommendation that flows from the interpretation of the findings is that, though leaders do not define reality unilaterally, in that sense cannot be injected into others in a unidirectional fashion (Westley, 1990), leaders can offer frames. Though leaders do not define reality, they should offer possible perceptual frames from which members may view or select their evaluation of an action. Though leadership cannot dictate selection, they can qualify cues. In this case, actions in the form of words should be measured for their impact on stakeholders (Ulmer, et al., 2007). There will be individuals in any congregation who have a greater or lesser amount of information, are combative, and are supportive or apathetic. All members are stakeholders. Messages that do not focus on stakeholder uncertainty or ignore it completely are often doomed to negative interpretation because confusion is not a desirable state when the main source of information, Pastor Tom, refuses to enact thorough sensegiving behavior. However, though the results of the data give cause to recommend an attempt at qualification, pre-crisis behaviors in the way of boundary spanning, mindfulness and framing are a more appropriate recommendation had the circumstances allowed. Later, in a more exhaustive recommendation section, suggestions for both leadership and membership will be offered for dealing with both pre-crisis and crisis.

### Commitments and Capacity

As we move through the research questions, we fluctuate among the different crisis stages. RQ2 concerned commitments made by Pastor Tom in the pre-crisis stage where he labeled Wren as “not a problem” which created a blind spot to her behavior and reluctance to mediation. As previously discussed, the interpretation is that this action of commitment allowed the crisis to continue to escalate. However, an interesting connection is discovered between the action of commitment by Pastor Tom outlined in RQ2 and his subsequent belief that validated

this action in RQ3 in terms of his capacity to deal with the crisis. Here, we see the intersection and relationship between action and belief. According to Weick (1995), “once people choose how to justify action that they chose to perform, they fix the frame within which their beliefs, actions, and associations will then make sense” (p. 164). I contend this fixing of the frame or belief adjustment was the case with Pastor Tom and was one of the main reasons that the pre-crisis stage was allowed to escalate to the crisis stage. According to the data, Pastor Tom had indicated that Wren was “not a problem.” This was a conscious commitment to label a situation. This labeling seems to have been the equivalent of labeling something hot as cold, or something dangerous as docile, such as claiming that a great white shark is harmless in reference to a wounded sea lion floating in the sea. He simply made an atrocious error and then found it difficult to see the situation differently.

Concerning capacity and belief, another interpretation is offered concerning Pastor Tom’s labeling of Wren as “not a problem.” I contend that Pastor Tom adjusted his beliefs in order to justify his lack of capacity in dealing with Wren. Like the critique of former pastors outlined by Sue-FLM3, Sam-NLN2, Pam-NLN3 and Eli-NLN4, the same evaluation was made of Pastor Tom: nobody thought Wren was a problem. I believe, however that previous and current pastoral leadership were actually admitting that nobody could control the problem of Wren. The potential for crisis is made evident here when pastors who still have the responsibility to lead and deal with problem situations do not because they feel helpless to do so. They feel a lack of capacity. As a result, leaders only “see those events they feel that they have the capacity to do something about” (Weick 1988, p. 311). I also contend that in order to make sense of their lack of capacity, or in order to rationalize a competent view of self (RQ8), former pastors, as well as



Pastor Tom, altered their belief as a type of coping mechanism. A more complete discussion of the impact of RQ8 and identity will follow.

Therefore, at the point when Pastor Tom made the commitment to the label (RQ2), he altered his belief concerning Wren's likely compliance with her assertion that she would not seek a second term as finance chairperson. The power of commitment and its subsequent impact on capacity is obvious. It is very interesting to observe how one's initial action is justified by beliefs that continue to allow crisis to fester. The idea that our communication creates our reality (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) is especially evident in the observation of Pastor Tom's commitment (RQ2) and his capacity (RQ3). At the point where actions require justification, beliefs will be affixed retroactively in order to maintain consistency. Furthermore, in light of Weick's (1995) assertion that believing is seeing, we can begin to understand how action, justified by altered or self-manipulated belief, can lead to a lack of capacity that furthers the onset of crisis.

What is a bit of a mystery to me is whether Pastor Tom's commitment created his lack of capacity or his lack of capacity caused his need to commit in order to retain an acceptable level of self-consistency. In light of Weick's (1995) assertion of *Ready, Fire, Aim*, I contend that early on in their relationship, at each enacting situation, he labeled (selection) minor enactments as "not a problem." I am persuaded that earlier enacting encounters with Wren caused Pastor Tom to deduce, if even subconsciously, that he was unable to effectively deal with Wren in the pre-crisis stage. Therefore, I believe that faulty commitment in the pre-crisis stage caused Pastor Tom to develop a more consequential lack of capacity in the later crisis stages. I do believe that Sensemaking Theory allows for the mutual influence of both concepts, which explains decisions made throughout the case.

Recommendations concerning commitment and capacity are conceptualized as the need to be mindful of the problem of selection. Selection of enacting cues that are premature are detrimental because these selections are resistant to change. According to Maitlis and Sonenshien (2010), “recent studies of crisis suggest that public commitments in the form of optimistic evaluations of a situation are especially likely to generate sensemaking blind spots” (p. 555). Leaders should resist hasty selections and public labels because leaders are instantly “married” or connected to their labels. To “divorce” themselves from their labels is to enact face-taking behaviors that may be viewed as detrimental to their leadership. Whether or not this is the case, I believe that leaders can be so committed to saving-face that they justify premature selections that are not in the best interest of themselves or the organization. Rather, leadership should delay selection by cultivating humility, seeking variety, being flexible, building excess capacity and by questioning assumptions (Weick, et al., 2000).

## Expectations

Another major retained belief that facilitated a prolonged incubation period was the belief or the expectation that peace should be maintained at all costs (RQ4). This was the prevailing belief concerning the church leading up to the reading of the stand-up vote letter. Members who called for a meeting to discuss and pray about the circumstance involving Pastor Tom and Wren quickly labeled their action, praying for the situation, as noble and sufficient in mediating the crisis. An interpretation of the data suggests that this belief was in complete contradiction to what was the current level of crisis at that moment and more representative of their strong belief in keeping the peace at all cost. Here, the example of a call to prayer was an event that, according to all attendants other than Pastor Tom, represented an action and a call to peace that was sufficient. This yearning for even a false security is reflective of Weick (1995) when “events that

conform to the expectancy and confirm it make sense. Cues that do not fit stand out.

Explanations constructed to explain these discrepancies are what the situation means” (p.148). In this case, what the situation “means” is that the members present at the prayer meeting believed that any action toward peace was in fact all that needed to be done to bring about peace because they were operating from the belief of peace at all cost. Pastor Tom makes clear the distinction:

My prayer was that we as a group of men could come to an agreement and find a way to resolve these issues. Nobody apparently listened to my prayer because they were just waiting on me to say Amen. ‘Cause everybody said oh, this is so wonderful, this is so wonderful. I am sitting there saying, “What’s wonderful?” All that has happened is that nobody’s doing anything.

This quote suggests that any event that approximated this move to peace so urgently desired by the UBC members made sense to them and thus blinded them to other cues that did not fit their manufactured reality.

The group that was present at the prayer meeting was made up of all male members of the UBC who held leadership positions in the church such as staff, committee members and deacons. Their expectation of peace at all costs quickly morphed into an assumption that peace had been achieved following their prayer time and worked as a type of self-fulfilling prophecy toward inaction. This assumption was instead a selection of the crisis cue that was detrimental. According to Weick (1988), “assumptions that top managers make about components with the firm often influence enactment in a manner similar to the mechanism of self-fulfilling prophecy. Many of these assumptions can increase or decrease the likelihood that small errors will escalate into major crisis...thus assumptions are an important part of crisis prevention” (p. 313). Here,

expectations were affirmed in the face of contradictory information, but rather than mediate the obvious crisis, church leadership chose to ignore Pastor Tom and label the event as positive and therefore settled. This false labeling was precipitated by an expectation that peace should be held at all costs.

Recommendations concerning organizational leadership and expectations revolve around the concepts of mindfulness, specifically reluctance to simplify interpretations and a commitment to resilience. There is an idiom in Christianity and certainly within the SBC that prayer changes things. Though I believe whole-heartedly that prayer is impactful, circumstances that dictate action or other tangible forms of mediation are necessary. Consider the Biblical story of David from 1 Samuel 17: when faced with the crisis of Goliath, he was not instructed to pray but to act. For David to have simply prayed for intervention when the commandment was to take action and then to have subsequently embraced the army of Israel as if victory had been achieved would have been both foolish and immensely costly. It would have also been a gross oversimplification of the circumstances. However, this is often the case in many organizations among their members. According to Weick et al. (2000), “humans handle complex tasks by simplifying their interpretations of events. These simplified worldviews, frameworks, or mind-sets allow people to ignore information that may hamper efficient decision making” (p. 35). The current case outlines a situation where optimistic expectations lead to a gross oversimplification of the cues that led to crisis.

Leaders must resist oversimplification of their interpretations and rather become resolved to the fact that our initial and even most thoughtful interpretations can be insufficient because of our limited frame of reference. This is termed a commitment to resilience. Crisis is inherently unpredictable yet often preventable. However, a commitment to resilience is a commitment to

address current or unpreventable crisis cues in thoughtful and strategic ways. As has already been discussed, to make hasty or oversimplified decisions is to risk becoming psychologically and inextricably attached to those decisions. To be strategic and thoughtful is to enact organized action in the face of crisis. Later in the recommendation section, suggestions of effective crisis leadership will be offered.

## Emotion

When attempting to understand levels of emotionality and its impact on the crisis (RQ5), it is important to note that sensemaking is all about making due with whatever resources are at hand (Weick, 1995). At the point where discussion, debate, qualification of intent or meaning is limited or absent, individuals will still attempt to make a selection of any cue available, given that selection will in some help manage uncertainty. The reading of the stand-up vote letter is a valid example of such a context of low information and high emotionality resulting in a negative selection or evaluation of the cue. Pastor Tom, by the wording and the reading of the letter, was consistently yet generically labeled as rude, inconsiderate, face-taking and unloving. Along with this rudeness came other generic connotative labels like authoritarian, mean-spirited, and even manipulative. Even those who agreed with his summation and accusation of Wren's actions deemed his wording and delivery as less than desirable. At no point did one individual claim that Pastor Tom's message was qualified, measured, explained, respectful or loving. Though Pastor Tom perhaps had a valid case, his reluctance to make his case in a face-saving manner rendered his message as overly negative and even shocking. At the point when the only resources available to the congregate were low amounts of ambiguous information and their emotional response, crisis ensued.

We see the mutually influencing nature of Sensemaking Theory concepts when attempting to interpret the emotionality, or more directly the “why” of emotionality. In the current case, emotionality is correlated with expectations (RQ 4) in the form of a violation. The congregation had an expectation that the pastor would not call any member by name in a negative way (RQ6). At the point when Pastor Tom broke this expectation, it aroused an emotional response. In describing emotional arousal in terms of expectancy violation within a dyad Berscheid and Ammazalorso, (2003) assert, “when an important expectancy is violated, the partner becomes less familiar, less safe, and more of a stranger. In the face of an emotional outburst, people often ask in disbelief, ‘what did I do?!’ That is the wrong question. The better question is ‘what did you expect?’” (p. 318). At the point when Pastor Tom did not anticipate member expectations (keeping peace at all costs) and thus violated those expectations, which gave way to the consequences of a negative emotional response to his message, he thrust the church into a more serious and higher degree of uncertainty and crisis.

Regarding emotionality and crisis, it is recommended that organizational leaders must attend to various emotional responses. Leaders must internalize the idea that they are in fact managers of emotion and that when they address audiences, that concepts or messages that they may not consider emotional triggers are well within the threshold of arousal to other congregates. Writing about church splits from a sociological perspective, Edwards (1987) posits that within any group of 100 members you have a small percentage of people who are both hostile to authority and have the potential for both verbal and physical violence. Given the potential for arousal that may result in a negative outcome for leadership, it is incumbent upon leadership to frame messages in such a manner that mitigates emotional impact.

## Selection and Retention

Data suggest that Pastor Tom lost the congregation in terms of his rhetorical advantage as the leader when he mentioned Wren by name (RQ6). Where bracketing (enaction) makes the world simple (Weick, 1995) through compartmentalization, labeling makes the world more rational, plausible, explicable and functional. According to Weick, et al. (2005), “functional deployment means imposing labels on interdependent events in ways that suggest plausible acts of managing, coordinating, and distributing. Thus, the ways in which events are first envisioned immediately begin the work of organizing, because events are bracketed and labeled in ways that predispose people to find common ground” (p. 411). At the point when Pastor Tom read the stand-up vote letter and the church was thrust into chaos, coordination occurred via the solidification of the bracketed event by the reading of the letter. However, organization in the form of plausibility came only after members selected an interpretation of the bracketed cue. For most, this selection was that the pastor was in error. For others, it was justified through their commitment to Pastor Tom.

Though it could be argued that any mention of a church member from the pulpit would have resulted in a majority negative selection, I disagree. In my interpretation, it would have been possible to discuss the issue in such a way that would not have broken the expectation of proper public decorum and would have softened the impact of breaking the congregates’ expectation concerning naming a member from the pulpit. Again, by choosing to name any member from the pulpit some negative selection is inevitable, but had Pastor Tom offered a brief rationale such as that explained in the post stand-up letter (Appendix B), I believe the crisis level would have been markedly smaller. I believe this because even though naming Wren would have been an enacting event regardless, selection can be manipulated especially when information in

readily available that will inform selection. Qualifying information in this case would have guarded against such a severe bifurcation and with fewer individuals drawing from their more basic human resource of emotionality. In other words, had Pastor Tom qualified his statements by reducing congregational uncertainty through explanation which was afforded him via the office of pastor, he would have been able to assuage the detrimental consequences of his message. However, Pastor Tom did not attempt to frame his message in a qualified manner.

It is possible that Pastor Tom held the belief that as pastor he would garner the type of authority that would allow him to make those accusations with little recourse. As the common critique of Pastor Tom indicated, he did believe in organizational hierarchies and expected a certain amount of latitude and respect due the office. This, in my estimation, served as a type of retained rule. It is understandable that he would enact such a rule in that it had been sufficient to lead UBC to a certain amount of success and growth for over a decade. However, the enacting of tried and true solutions that did not fit or answer the current problem resulted in a magnification of the crisis.

The escalation of this crisis was due to an unqualified and controversial stance on women in authority and UBC's retained organizational response mechanism to ignore the consequences of this stance (RQ7). Data suggest that individuals who were active members of UBC when the crisis took place, as well as those who had left UBC in years prior, all agreed that Pastor Tom took an oppressive stance toward women. Personally, I do not believe that this was Pastor Tom's intention. However, his actions and previous unqualified decision-making gave rise to a negative selection from the congregation. One example included a very competent and non-controversial female member allegedly leaving UBC because she was asked to leave her chairpersonship. Later in the suggestions for leadership section, we will consider how controversial action must



be qualified early and often, in order to guard against crisis. However, in the current context, the opposite was the case. These unqualified actions created doubt in Pastor Tom's evaluation of women so that at the point when he named Wren from the pulpit, prior negative selection of the Pastor's view on women was confirmed.

The escalation of the crisis, however, was not only a product of unqualified actions, but it was also due to the retained organizational rule to ignore. The data indicate that both men and women were offended by the actions of Pastor Tom toward women. This negative selection was a common consensus by those interviewed that his actions were misogynistic. Even if Pastor Tom made strides to qualify his stance, which was never suggested in any interviews, the message was not effective. But the congregation is also culpable here. Just as data failed to indicate any qualifications in terms of women in leadership on the part of Pastor Tom, there also was no indication that anyone had ever brought a formal complaint concerning their selection (interpretation) of his actions in the past (pre-crisis). Rather than a series of disputes or grievances, the dominant narrative was that UBC was a place where cycles of minor conflict followed by volitional acts to ignore occurred. Here we see again the power of action and belief. Both the action on the part of the pastor to allegedly diminish women and the action of the congregation to ignore these actions leads to conflict avoidance and a lack of mediation .

A recommendation concerning the importance of questioning retained organizational rules is to again reject simplicities in order to avoid faulty selection of cues. In the place of simplicity, leaders should embrace complexity and label it in such a way that allows them to function effectively until such a time when they can seek out multiple perspectives and interpretations. Conversely, in the midst of chaos, human tendency is to seek the familiar. Whereas *déjà vu* has a quality of whimsical acceptance, its opposite, *vu jade*, is unsettlingly

unacceptable. As a result, we seek the familiar. According to Weick (2002), “what is really tough is that when things are really inexplicable, superficial simplicities feel like solid explanations, at least for a short while. But as these superficialities begin to unravel, and as complexities and nuances begin to surface, the specter of a return to the inexplicable resurfaces” (p. 30). Data indicated that rather than embracing nuances, both leadership and membership returned to the realm of the familiar. One problem in returning to the inexplicable after it has already been labeled is because it would require a minor admission of guilt. It would require either leaders or members to admit that they made a hasty or incorrect decision (selection). The very act of admitting guilt is face-taking and thus is antithetical to social norms. I think that both leadership and membership knew, at least to an acceptable extent, the primary individuals and factors involved but chose to adhere to outmoded retained rules rather than embracing and mediating uncomfortable realities. Leaders who seek to thrive rather than survive crisis would be wise to embrace uncertainty rather than inept rules.

## Identity

Data suggested that, in terms of the concept of identity (RQ8), participants viewed Pastor Tom as enacting behaviors that supported his need for self-consistency as an authoritarian, while they cited Wren’s need for self-enhancement as power-hungry. The way in which identity impacted sensemaking was depicted in the manner in which the two main protagonists functioned in order to protect or retain their identity needs. According to Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010), “the importance of identity in such contexts becomes especially evident when it is threatened” (p. 563). Though I agree with this quote, data from the current crisis contradict the following sentence within the former quote: “In a crisis, a threatened identity constrains action as individuals and teams lose important anchors about themselves” (p. 563). First, it is evident that

both Wren's (power-player) and Pastor Tom's (authority figure) identities were threatened. At the point when Pastor Tom acknowledged Wren's behavior as a problem, he realized that his identity as an authority figure was being threatened. This is evidenced by the first two sentences of the stand-up vote letter:

As Moderator of our church, I am calling a special called business meeting next Sunday morning for a vote on whom you choose to lead you. I will ask you to vote to continue following me as your Pastor under the leadership of the Holy Spirit or you may choose Wren and her followers.

His reaction threatened Wren's identity as a power-player in calling for her to be removed from the membership of UBC.

Second, in contrast to the Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) assertion that a threatened identity works to constrain action, I believe that in the current case it bolstered the main protagonist to action. In simple terms, at the onset of the crisis stage, neither Pastor Tom nor Wren was willing to relinquish their identities without a contest. It is at this juncture that the politics of sensemaking or sensegiving should be considered (RQ9 & RQ10).

Though the interpretation concerning Pastor Tom and Wren's identity is clear, an important aspect to consider is how did their jostling efforts to retain their identities impact sensemaking on the greater congregation? One possible interpretation is that it forced sensegiving behaviors that created contradicting narratives that in turn created a greater organizational fracturing. Data suggest that the two competing narratives depicted Pastor Tom as an inflexible and overbearing authoritarian and Wren as a trouble-maker (RQ9 & RQ10). The overt and covert sensegiving actions on the part of Pastor Tom and Wren outline the manner in

which various selective frames were offered to the congregation and thus how a percentage of the population ultimately made their selection of the crisis.

Specific recommendations concerning competing narratives or political maneuvers are scant. Organizational leaders who find themselves in a crisis of competing narratives would be wise to cease attempts at winning the narrative war and to reach out to the other side in an effort to reconcile and to create a new, joint narrative. Though not Sensemaking Theory specific, negotiation concepts dictate that when asserting an integral negotiation context, the disputing factions should resolve to focus on interest and not positions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). Members of church organizations, seemingly more than any other organization, should hold to the same interest: unity. Christians are commanded via scripture to contend or give a concerted effort to preserve unity (Ephesians 4:3). At the expense of guarded identities and strongly held selection of cues, organizational members should agree to come together in the interest of their shared interests. In a church setting, the shared interest is unity and the furtherance of the mission of the church. In a business setting, the shared interest is sustained economic development. Thus, the recommendation to organizational leaders and members when it is evident that competing narratives are being offered is to stop offering differing narratives and come together to build a unified narrative that represents the interests of all parties involved.

### Communication and Sensegiving

Sensegiving among leadership (RQ9) and membership (RQ10) followed the predicted path of separate narratives competing for influence. As stated previously, at the point when sensemaking is an act of volition, pursuant of specific goal(s), then sensemaking has become sensegiving. Sensemaking and sensegiving follow a constructivist approach where sensegiving is

a coordinated phenomenon (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). The example offered by the current study views two separate power dynamics of sensegiving. Pastor Tom, when compared to Wren, was higher in terms of power. He had the power of the pulpit and the power of the pen. Wren had less power organizationally, but she did have great influence. Whereas Pastor Tom spoke to the masses when sensegiving, Wren was much more individualistic and thorough in her approach. In terms of competition, Wren tapped into her vast organizational connections. The data indicate that she went to great lengths to stay in contact with both influential and non-influential members of UBC. The common narrative for Pastor Tom was that he had a non-submissive and trouble making member who was causing discord among the congregate. The common narrative for Wren was that Pastor Tom was power hungry and misogynistic.

One interesting interpretation of the data in terms of the politics of sensemaking is that it would seem that one does not have to admit that their attempts at sensegiving are volitional, intentional and with the conscious intent to persuade. Though Pastor Tom may assert that he did not enact any sensegiving behaviors, when he named Wren from the pulpit and with the context of the church newsletter, he had in fact made a political maneuver. Wren, who was afforded much less mass access to information dissemination, was able to enact political sensemaking behaviors through telephone and face-to-face interactions. However, like Pastor Tom, the data indicated that Wren did not consciously admit or perhaps consider herself as taking political measures.

The same critique of the church that was made in terms of their propensity to ignore the pastor's alleged view of women is appropriate in the context of Wren as well. Data indicated that numerous pastors and church leadership had attempted to benefit from her connections only to regret the effort over time. The overall impression was that everyone knew that she was a

problem, yet they were and/or they felt like the church was unwilling to act on their concerns. The clear recommendation for organizations and leadership is to resist the notion to ignore by actually being preoccupied with potential failure or crisis cues (Weick, et al., 2000).

## Renewal

Following the removal of 15 members of UBC that had been labeled negatively by Pastor Tom, the church entered into a renewal phase. In effect, and whether one would agree with the process or the outcome, the purging of UBC was effective. Two questions guide the interpretation of the current concept: why did UBC enter into the renewal phase? Are they experiencing an organizational new normal or are they merely experiencing the intermittent period between the previous and future crisis? In terms of crisis, it is understood that organizations that are not in crisis are in fact in the pre-crisis stage (Turner, 1976), but the current interpretation that guides the question of whether the church has reached a new normal or is again primed for another crisis is set in the concept of organizational learning. Did the members and leadership of UBC, following the crisis, make sense of the crisis in such a way that fostered both learning and preparedness?

Is UBC experiencing a new normal as the result of organizational learning? The forms in which organizations learn, post-crisis are via knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory (Huber, 1996). According to Seeger, et al. (2003), “crisis creates time of intense self-reflection and debriefing as members actively seek to understand what went wrong and why” (p. 18). According to Chad-FHM1, UBC has entered into a time of learning:

The church as a whole I think understands and saw what little things can turn into.

However, one interpretation could be that the church does in fact now understand that small pre-crisis cues can lead to crisis but still may not take any steps to prevent a future crisis of like kind. Though knowledge and memory are aspects of organizational learning, proactive preparation would seem to be a higher-level type. In this regard, UBC has taken steps in addition to their experience. Soon after the crisis had subsided, leadership of UBC contacted a church crisis organization called “Peacemakers” and requisitioned them to come train both the leadership and the congregation of UBC in church conflict. Here, UBC offers advice for any organization following a crisis or that may be in the midst of crisis: seek out training and mediation.

#### Further Recommendations

What follows are further recommendations based on the findings, analysis and conclusions of this study. Leaders are constantly juggling the potential and current impact of both beliefs and actions within their organization. Implications drawn from the current case suggest a heightened level of uncertainty brought about by the entity that should have been the vehicle for uncertainty reduction rather than crisis enactment. However, because not all crises are preventable, suggestions for leadership include recommendations for both the pre-crisis and crisis stages. Suggestions pertaining to the pre-crisis stage are understood through the concept of framing that is, in effect, a type of sensegiving behavior (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). The basic premise is that proactive, positive and focused framing from leadership during the pre-crisis stage will build up a retained organizational rubric for crisis enactment and selection. The second set of recommendations included concern leadership and sensemaking once a crisis has taken place. Here, best practices will be offered for mediating the unavoidable (Ulmer, et al., 2007). In both the pre-crisis and crisis recommendations, effort was made to frame the suggestions within Sensemaking Theory concepts of belief and action (Weick, 1995).

## Effective Pre-crisis Strategy

Beliefs are in effect the fodder of retained responses (Weick, 1995). However, it is the role of the leader to shape how members may view potential pre-crisis cues in an advantageous manner. According to Weick, et al (2005), “to make sense of disruptions, people look first for reasons that will enable them to resume the interrupted activity and stay in action. These ‘reasons’ are pulled from frameworks such as institutional constraints, organizational premises, plans, expectations, acceptable justification, and traditions inherited from predecessors” (p. 409). I contend that leadership is a primary arbiter of those frameworks. Leadership has a tremendous impact on what and how membership enacts, because they are the principal or inherent communication source that sets organizational directives.

Therefore, the question for the leader is not if they set the course, but rather how? The concept of framing offers clear suggestions as to how leaders can create the frames within which organizational members retain and utilize in times of crisis. Again, the paramount suggestion inherent within the concept of framing is that it is best utilized before the onset of crisis. The data from the current study highlighted how individuals utilized the frames other than leadership’s, and one possible interpretation of the cause of their non-leader frame utilization is because leadership did not frame their positions effectively.

What is framing? According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), “when we share our frames with others (the process of framing), we manage meaning because we assert that our interpretations should be taken over other possible interpretations...in framing, when we create a bias towards one interpretation of our subject, we exclude other aspects, including those that may produce opposite or alternative interpretations” (pp. 3-4). To strategically assert one set of



possible interpretations while excluding others is the process of sensegiving. What follows is the first step in offering organizational-wide sense through vision-based framing.

Vision-based framing enables organizational members to view the world from the perspective of the leader (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996) and thus is the recommended first step in effective leadership sensegiving behavior. The aim of a clear vision is the promotion of interpretations that are pliable enough that allow for a range of different organizational functions that can apply the goals of the vision to their situation (Eisenberg, 1984). From a Sensemaking Theory perspective, vision shapes the beliefs from which members evaluate current functions and by default, future unexpected cues. Even so, the mere existence of a vision or a vision statement does not ensure that people will interpret current and future cues by the beliefs espoused in the vision. This is because vision, like sensemaking, is a negotiated phenomenon (Keyton, 2005; Schein, 2010). Therefore, according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), an effective [sensegiving] vision must be well formulated and consistently communicated. The vision has a formative quality in determining the culture of the organization because they espouse things such as beliefs, values and appropriate action responses. Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) maintain that management is what “conveys a clear preference for mindfulness in its beliefs, values and actions...those top management actions and words are communicated credibly and consistently and remain salient for everyone” (p. 117). Numerous articles and books have been written concerning the formulation of a vision that includes how to develop clear beliefs, values and appropriate member action; therefore, the current recommendation will address the importance of the vision being consistently communicated and how it is communicated.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) assert that the majority of people assume that opportunities where their communication will be most consequential are planned. The authors reject this

notion and rather assert that our most valued and impactful interaction occurs in a spontaneous setting. Therefore, leaders have a greater impact on those they lead when they interact on an informal basis. This does not negate the importance of formal vision casting or mass organizational vision casting [sensegiving]. What it does imply is that explicitly formal organizational visioning is insufficient. The problem is that most leaders spend great amounts of time carefully crafting and preparing their statements only to assume that a one time framing [sensegiving] is adequate to daily impact the future sensemaking of organizational members. Unfortunately, it is much more the norm to prepare for a formal declaration, and much less a social norm to prepare for spontaneous conversations. I echo Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) in advocating that leaders must prepare to frame spontaneously in order to be effective.

How does leadership prepare for spontaneous framing? They do so by enacting reflecting, priming and communicative behaviors. Through reflection, the leader is encouraged to daily consider the beliefs, values and actions espoused in the vision-statement. By enacting priming behaviors, leaders mentally seek out and rehearse possible interactions with organizational members where they apply an aspect of the vision to a certain organizational function. And finally, once leaders have reflected on the vision and imagined themselves interacting and apply the vision, they should then seek out tangible communicative contexts where they can actively apply their frames.

#### Effective Crisis Strategy

Suggestions previously discussed are focused primarily on leadership behaviors that are appropriate during the pre-crisis stage. However, as stated, some crises are unavoidable. When crisis occurs, leaders should enact a different rubric in order to effectively craft messages that

reduce uncertainty by advocating frames that are ethical (Seeger, 1997) and effective (R. Ulmer, et al., 2007). Ulmer et al. (2007) focus on speculative stakeholder reaction in order to determine or craft an appropriate message.

Applied to Sensemaking, we see how important initial actions are at the onset of crisis. The authors offer 30 crisis lessons that deal with uncertainty, communication and leadership. From this group of 30 lessons I have selected the 10 that I deem were most important at the onset of crisis:

Table 5.2 Recommendations for Effective Crisis Communication

10 Recommendations for Effective Crisis Communication	
Category	Lesson
Uncertainty	Do not respond to crisis with routine solutions.
Uncertainty	Threat is perceptual and thus must be managed from a multi-perspective vantage point.
Uncertainty	Organizations should not purposely heighten the ambiguity of a crisis to deceive or distract the public.
Communication	Determine your goals for crisis communication.
Communication	Acknowledge your stakeholders as partners when managing crisis
Communication	Effective crisis communication involves listening to your stakeholders
Communication	Do not over reassure stakeholders about the impact the crisis will have on them
Leadership	Leaders should be visible during a crisis.
Leadership	Leaders should be open and honest following a crisis.
Leadership	Leaders should cooperate with stakeholders during a crisis and should work to build consensus.

The recommendations provided were for both organizational leadership and organizational membership. Given that there are multiple causes for church splits, the recommendations put forth were meant to be generic suggestions for avoiding crisis. Thus, much of the recommendations are most applicable during the pre-crisis phases. The final section was comprised of suggestions that would benefit leaders during a crisis. The primary lesson for leaders and members concerns strategic planning and framing before, during and after crisis. The recommendations offered here are not primarily rubric based organizational functions but are also communicative in nature because they are both situated and highlighted during the act of exchange. Furthermore, it could be argued that organizational planning devoid of effective framing will most often end in futility. The suggestions reflect such a perspective.

#### Limitations

All academic pursuits consist of some level of limitation, and this study was no different. One limitation consisted of the self-report design of the research schedule. As with any self-report design, whether it is via survey, focus group or interview, there is a possibility that respondents will not respond accurately. These inaccuracies are the result of both acts of volition and omission. From the perspective of volition some respondents may have given answers that were not completely accurate due to their need to view themselves as competent and consistent (Erez & Early, 1993). In terms of inaccuracies that are the result of omission, respondents are susceptible to a lack of clarity when they are so far removed from the context.

Finally, concerning a complete depiction of the counter narrative, it was unfortunate that Wren would not agree to be interviewed. I called on three separate occasions and had a tentative date set, but when pressed to set a date she would not agree to an interview. Though I

interviewed several people who considered themselves both current friends of Wren, as well as being intimately involved in the crisis, it would have been beneficial to the study had she agreed to an interview.

#### Direction for Future Research

The current investigation, in part, sought to better understand church crisis through the prism of Sensemaking Theory. After completing this initial study, Sensemaking proved to be an excellent framework for the study of crisis within churches. Future research will further this qualitative approach to understanding church splits of numerous types. Starke and Dyck (1996) reduced all causes of church splits into two separate categories: authority-related issues and doctrine-related issues. Concerning the current case, both are issues of authority (Pastor Tom's use of power and Wren's political nature) and doctrine (women in authority). However, I believe that further studies in church crisis via Sensemaking Theory will allow for a broader typology of crisis.

Future studies that broaden church split types are beneficial for both academia and church leadership practitioners. Studies in Sensemaking Theory within church crisis will be beneficial to researchers in general and Sensemaking Theory researchers specifically, because they will highlight an understudied area of Sensemaking Theory, the politics of sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Future possible typologies within church crisis may include interpersonal communication-related issues, organizational communication-related issues, ethical-related issues, and so on. In broadening the typology, the number of potentially identifiable influencers or power groups will be classified, which will allow for a more comprehensive study of the politics of sensemaking. This expansion is also beneficial for researchers in Sensemaking Theory, because it will offer insight into how sense is made within and from what types of

groups, as well as how this sense impacts crisis. Church practitioners will benefit from studies that expand typologies, because it will offer specific areas or contexts of which leadership should be both mindful and proactive in mediating. Note that this expansion is merely a function of division. Where Starke and Dyck (1996) distilled all causes of crisis to two major categories, an expansion will work to subcategorize these crisis influences so that practitioners may better pinpoint the onset of past crisis or detect a possible conflict.

Concerning the politics of sensemaking, I contend that church crisis or church splits are an excellent context for study because church crises generally have one major component in common: competing narratives. Future research into the politics of sensemaking and church splits will be specifically focused on group, intergroup and individual sensemaking within the context of competing and/or contested narratives. In future studies, the giving of sense from a political perspective will be a major unit of study. What follows are potential research questions that will highlight the link between sensemaking and the politics of sensemaking within the context of competing narratives:

RQ1: Why do some people or groups adopt one narrative over the other?

RQ2: Are there common rhetorical strategies to competitive or contested sensemaking?

RQ3: How do enaction and selection behaviors impact retention in terms of evaluating competing narratives?

RQ4: How does organizational structure/culture impact the way in which people make sense of competing narratives?

RQ5: How do people make sense of or rationalize changing their adherence from one narrative to another?

RQ6: How do communication channels impact how political sensegiving behaviors are facilitated?

RQ7: Are their common identity needs among the main protagonists as well as rank and file organizational members in the midst of a crisis of competing narrative?

In order to approximate any implications or conclusions concerning these broad based research questions, numerous qualitative studies of multiple church crises are required. I look forward to my continued research in this area in the hopes of both understanding the anatomy of church crisis, as well as to offer church leadership tools from which to avoid or mediate crises. However, in addition to the prospects of further research, this study began with a set of twelve research questions that were appropriated and applied during the course of this study. The next section reviews these objectives and their results.

### Review of Research Objective

As stated previously, the purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens through which to understand church crisis by highlighting the role of communication as a central aspect of the sensemaking process in order to assist congregations as they try to avoid the negative consequences of church splits. Specifically, the intent was to understand how Sensemaking Theory explains pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis communication and how these sensemaking episodes led to the crisis of a church split.

The primary research objective was accomplished by demonstrating how communication within the UBC congregation spoke the crisis into existence (Weick, 1995). Rich description of previous conversations in which UBC members made sense of the crisis exemplifies how that communication is the essence of sense in that sensemaking is an “issue of language, talk and communication” (Weick, et al., 2005 p. 409). The research questions specifically underlined the communicative properties of sensemaking, because concepts such as enactment, commitments, capacity, expectation, emotion, selection, retention, identity and sensegiving were all formulated, mediated and confirmed through communication. Throughout the crisis-cycle, communication within the UBC membership exhibited a clear procession through the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis stages.

Finally, the secondary objective was approximated because the study of any crisis lends itself to a discussion of prevention. Both leadership and UBC members were offered recommendations concerning how they may potentially avoid or mediate crisis. These recommendations were Sensemaking Theory focused via concepts outlined in the study. Suggestions for practitioners were also communication focused through vision-based and spontaneous framing, as well as through lessons.

## Conclusion

As this study comes to a close, it is important to link back to the warrant or rationale for this research undertaking. On average, an estimated 23 pastors and their families are affected by forced termination every week (Willis, 1999). These statistics indicate an increase in forced terminations when compared to studies completed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1984 and 1988 (Norris, 1988; Tharp, 1984). The SBC has a problem. The problem is conflict. This



conflict often leads to small fractures where only a percentage of the church population leaves, or crises result in a complete split where a substantial percentage of the church population leaves the church to form another church, join a separate church or cease attending any church. The crisis of church splits, as previously stated, may also be termed a crisis of sensemaking. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine if Sensemaking Theory is an appropriate lens through which to understand church crises, but also how church crises may be avoided or mediated.

In using Karl Weick's Sensemaking Theory, the study highlighted how interactions among leadership and church laity were understood and how their interactions precipitated crisis. In light of the interaction data documented in the current study, the crisis was the result of a clear and identifiable event where someone noticed something that was so out of the ordinary that it caused individuals and groups of individuals (factions) to bracket the experience and feel a need to make sense of the event (Weick, 1995). The event outlined in the data as the enacting event was the reading of the stand-up vote letter by Pastor Tom. Following the enactment of the event, individuals retrospectively made sense of the event and labeled it as negative or noble, which caused organizing action (Sutcliffe, 2001), and that organizing eventually led to the crisis that resulted in a church split. Some individuals made their selection of the event as warranted due to their devotion to the pastor while others made their selection of the event based on the manner in which the stand-up vote letter was read, in that it named Wren specifically. Following the enacting event, members and leadership enacted sensegiving behaviors in order to influence other members. Participants of this study were current and former members of Unity Baptist Church, located in central Louisiana.

In formulating the purpose for the current research, there was a temptation to assert that Sensemaking Theory is the **most** appropriate lens for understanding church crisis. Though such

wording would have necessitated an undue and expansive burden, I do feel as if it was/is the most appropriate theory for understanding crisis in a holistic manner. When considering other approaches to study church crisis, I compared other models such as Turner's crisis model (Turner, 1976) or theories such as Stakeholder Theory (Ulmer, et al., 2007). Though both approaches have merit, it seemed that when compared to Sensemaking Theory, neither of them answered or raised as many questions. Though Turner's approach dealt effectively with pre-crisis stages and Stakeholder Theory with appropriate decision making processes during a crisis, neither of them as effectively as Sensemaking Theory outlined the vast number of variables occurring over time. Because Sensemaking Theory is expansive in sub-concepts, it allows for a more thorough understanding of the context. For these reasons I contend that Sensemaking is the **most** appropriate lens through which to understand and study church crisis and crisis of large or small scale.

The case study highlighted in this research outlines the sensemaking properties of crisis. Future studies are necessary to expand an understanding of the intersection of sensemaking and politics of sensemaking. My sincere prayer is that organizational members and leaders may one day come to grasp the basic concepts of Sensemaking Theory so that they can operate in a manner that allows them to fulfill their mission.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A

#### Motion for Stand-Up Vote

July 20, 2011

Dear Members of Unity Baptist Church,

The following highlighted statement is to be voted on this Sunday, July 24, 2011:

As Moderator of our church, I am calling a special called business meeting next Sunday morning for a vote on whom you choose to lead you. I will ask you to vote to continue following me as your Pastor under the leadership of the Holy Spirit or you may choose Wren and her followers. Should you choose Wren and her group; I will clear out my office after the vote and will ask for no compensation. Should you choose for me to remain as pastor I will expect Wren and her followers to be removed from all places of service and leadership and will encourage them to find a pastor they can follow, allowing us to carry on the ministry of this church in peace and harmony.

This letter is to notify all members who attend Unity Baptist Church, concerning this Special Called Business Meeting that will be held this Sunday, July 24, 2011 in the Morning Service.

For many years Unity has been divided over who should lead this church, this is nothing new. The problem existed long before Pastor Tom was called to lead as pastor. In recent years this has intensified with many accusations spread by those who have opposed me, but I have not responded publicly concerning their rumors, lies, innuendos and misrepresentations. I chose not to do so then and I choose not do to so now.

The deacons called a meeting last Sunday without notifying me as is required in our policy manual, "*The Pastor will attend all deacon meetings unless hindered*" Page 20 #4. They also had non ordained church members, including women present, in which they made plans to challenge me before I even take the vote. Jerry Wright has spoken to me at their request telling me they plan to make a motion for him to replace me as Moderator of this meeting, in essence removing me from leadership before you even have the opportunity to vote. I have asked Jerry not to let his name be used for such a motion. They also plan to make a motion for a "secret ballot". This would be a cowardly act which I will strongly oppose. Some also plan to speak against me, encouraging you to vote "No" to my leadership.

It is impossible for a church to be divided between two leaders and still stand. Jesus said "*A house divided against a house falls*" (Luke: 11:17-18). We are also instructed in scripture to get

rid of the evil influence before the entire congregation is infected, "*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump*" 1 Cor. 5:6-7. Either I am the infection or Wren is the infection... that is for you to decide. If the majority of members vote for Wren and her followers to be the leader of Unity Baptist Church, I will immediately resign, pack my library and personal items from the Pastor's Office and leave without asking you for any compensation.

**I ask those of you who desire to keep me as the leader of Unity; PLEASE DO NOT SPEAK FOR ME IN THIS MEETING.**

I will not defend myself against their accusations. All my life I have sought to be like Jesus, therefore, allow me to be silent before my accusers. It will dishonor me, for you to give the devil anymore ammunition than he already has.

The local paper has a story about church members suing Rock Baptist Church over just such a vote; what a tragic shame and disgrace to the name of Christ. Let us not add shame to His name by arguing and making accusations against each other... this vote is shameful enough.

Some have asked if they could cast absentee ballots. I wish that would be possible, but it is not. We have no policy in place for proper notification of the membership, nor is anyone elected to receive the ballot, verify membership and notarize the ballot. You must be present to vote.

I am at peace with the decision that will be made Sunday. My plans are ready for whatever the Lord brings. Please pray about your decision and then vote.

Pastor Tom

Pastor

## Appendix B

### Post Stand-Up Vote Letter

July 27, 2011

Dear Church Member,

Many of you did not know what to do with my insistence on a stand-up vote without explanation of why it was needed; for that you have my apology. There were many reasons for its necessity. This vote was about trust and belief that I am still the man God called to lead Unity. For me to go through all the reasons for the necessity of the vote would have called for you to choose whom to believe. I am thankful that more of you showed courage to stand by faith for me than those who stood against me. I understand that some did not vote and that was their choice. The outcome of the vote had no impact on them as to their positions at Unity.

#### **My reasons for the vote:**

1. Many did not know of the internal difficulties going on behind the scenes. I spoke only to my closest advisors and the deacons, concerning these difficulties.
2. There was a concerted effort by troublemakers to call people to stir up problems and keep them stirred. This effectively caused the problems to accelerate.
3. My sudden call for the Special Called Business Meeting on Sunday, July 17th was due to two events that took place on Friday and Saturday of that weekend.
  - a. A very upset deacon told me he was planning to speak out names of “ungodly” people who in his opinion were trying to kick Wren out of Unity. His plan was to speak during the Sunday morning service. I felt this would have the potential of becoming so explosive I would not be able to keep order. Therefore, he was not given the opportunity by the reading of my announced Special Called Business Meeting and abrupt ending of the service.
  - b. The special called Deacons meeting that was held without the required notice to me, meant the meeting this time would be about me, which proved to be true. I was not willing for this body of men to judge me... that was God’s decision through your vote.

#### **Reasons I named Wren and her followers:**

1. Wren told me in front of Arnold Parker, she would not ask for a second term as chairman of the Finance Committee if I agreed not to speak against her nomination at a time when no man on the committee was willing to serve. That word was broken the next year when she allowed her name to be given and accepted the second term.

2. During her second term as chairman of the Finance Committee she had the committee make a motion to reimburse her for travel for her volunteer work at the same rate the church staff was reimbursed. I spoke against that motion due to the fact that it is not provided for in our policy manual and would be unfair to all other volunteers. She was granted permission as the only volunteer to be reimbursed and has received \$404.93 thus far. During the discussion at this business meeting she stated she had served as temporary Nursery Coordinator in a volunteer capacity in 2006 to help the church when in fact, she was paid \$3,438.61 over the eight month period of her temporary position. She also was reimbursed mileage during that time for \$224.60; another falsehood.
3. During the December 2010 business meeting she told the church that I had attempted to have the Manual Review Committee recommend new rules to prohibit husbands and wives from serving together as money counters and they voted against it, which was another falsehood. I did give the committee several pages of recommendations for consideration for NEXT year but there was no action or vote at the time.
4. Each time there was a vote needed in a coming business meeting, the phone calls would begin; trying to get a majority of voters on "their side".
5. Many people were called or visited to encourage them to by-pass the church budget and designate their offerings to special funds.

### **Why a stand up vote?**

1. I called for a stand up vote in order to mark those causing dissension.
2. This vote would affirm that I am the God-called leader of Unity. The statement, "I don't follow Pastor Tom and I don't follow Wren, I follow Jesus," sounded good to some ears, but Jesus does not stand up in our church and make decisions; He tells His chosen leader to do those things. This church had to decide who that leader was to be.

### **False Statements Cited During Special Called Meeting**

#### **Jill Jones: Wren had reprimanded me for "financial indiscretion" of church funds**

1. Wren never spoke to me concerning financial indiscretion of church funds. I challenge her or Jill to prove such a horrendous lie. Show proof and find a committee who will verify such a

meeting. Ask either Billy Prince (who voted against me) if such a confrontation ever took place when he was Treasurer, or ask our present Treasurer, Brock Raybon (who voted for me) if such a confrontation took place. Never have I misused church funds!

2. Jill stated that I could be arrested for not paying taxes in this misuse of funds because I did not pay taxes on the alleged purchases. First, I don't use the church's credit card for personal use and Unity DOES NOT have a tax free status. Unity DOES pay taxes on every purchase. We do not have to pay taxes on profits because we are a non-profit organization.

**Jill Jones: I proceeded to get credit cards after that confrontation**

1. On June 18, 2008 Unity voted to have commercial credit cards in the church's name for all purchases. Since that time the only person who has absolutely defied that church decision is Wren who has continued using her personal Discover credit card for church purchases and has been reimbursed for \$10,108.69 since that time. This fact is easily proven through reimbursement checks to Wren.
2. Only recently did someone complain that a staff member charged a personal item on the church card and then reimbursed the church. After a meeting of our Treasurer, Finance Committee Chairman and myself, a new policy was given that no personal use and reimbursement would be allowed in the future. This was also conveyed to the Finance Committee.

**Jack Johns: I did not let the deacon's Mediation Committee do its job**

1. I did bring my concerns to the deacons in their first meeting after the December business meeting hoping they would intervene and help end this conflict. The first response was to falsely accuse me of trying to "remove people from our church". I never spoke of removing anyone – at any time. From the very beginning of these current difficulties my desire was to have those proven to be troublemakers removed from leadership or at least be brought to some type of accountability.
2. These men had seven months to do their work and they never brought one person to meet with me or the deacon body to even try to work through the conflict. They reported that Wren refused to meet with them as a committee and that there was no need to contact the others since Wren was the key to the problem.

3. Part of the difficulties that exploded in the December 2010 Business Meeting surrounded the manner in which I dealt with Tessa Henderson when I asked for her to retire or have a list of complaints given to the Personnel Committee with the intent to have her removed. There were two witnesses in my office when I spoke to Beverly – Bro. Chad and Bro. David. The committee NEVER spoke to either of them to question what had actually happened.

4. On May 8, 2011 the chairman of the deacons, who is also chair of the Mediation Committee, asked Chad and David (the only witnesses to my meeting with Beverly) to attend a deacons meeting where they were challenged by this Mediation Committee before the entire deacon body, rather than in a private exploratory meeting with their committee. Neither of these young ministers nor their pastor/supervisor were told of the nature of the meeting. The Mediation Committee's duty was to listen to both sides of the conflict and impartially lead to finding a peaceful resolution to conflicts. Instead, three of the members became the accusers. How can an accuser be a mediator?

Finally, there is a rumor that I will retire in three years. That was only a consideration prior to last Sunday, but no longer. Along with the peace I had from God during this terrible ordeal, He revealed that we will rebuild, grow and strengthen Unity until He makes that decision. So, no retirement in the coming future; instead let us grow in peace and harmony and bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bro. Tom

## Appendix C

### UBC Member Removal Letter

I move that the following people be disfellowshipped from Unity Baptist Church.

Cole Bruce	Bruce Trimble	Tessa Henderson	Charlie Bailey
Jacque Bernard	Jack Johns	Wren	Peter Pounds
Joseph Mercer	Trey Morgan	Marc Beavers	Ron Williams
Billy Prince	Rusty Jones	Dan Olden	

**These men need to be removed as deacons of Unity Baptist Church for violation of the Church Policy Manual:**

Page 23: Role of Deacons of Unity Baptist Church

2. The deacon should seek to undergird the work and ministry of the Pastor by being personally involved in ministering to the needs, both spiritual and otherwise, of the Church members and others.
- 6d. Keep the Pastor informed of special situations
9. Provide support to the Pastor.
10. Support the Pastor with continuing prayer.
11. Maintain a loyal Christ-like attitude toward the Pastor; hold in confidence matters of personal concern emanating from church members; as much as possible, resolve conflicts without involving the Pastor.

Page 25: Church Qualifications

8. He must be willing to accept and support majority decisions on any matter brought before the deacon body or the Church.

Page 25: Election of Deacons

9. In the event an active deacon or Deacon in Reserve ceases to fill his role and/or begins to live or behave in a manner contradictory to the scriptural or church qualifications and does not voluntarily resign, he may be removed from the deacon body by the Church on recommendation of the active deacon body.

**The active deacon body met Sunday, Sept. 11 and voted unanimously to recommend their removal.**

## Appendix D

### Post Member Removal Letter

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for believing in God's call on my life to be the pastor of Unity Baptist Church. These past weeks have been a roller coaster ride of emotions. We have experienced awesome worship, people being saved, and increased attendance each week amid apprehension brought about by the threat of yet another possible church-wide vote on me as pastor.

That threat is now over, but it did cost us dearly. We were forced to take a drastic step by the announced plans to make motions each month for the purpose of terminating me as pastor. The scriptures are plain concerning allowing those who disrupt the unity of the church to continue their tactics until they either infect the majority of members of UBC or until we give up and quit. Paul wrote in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

The only way to purge the leaven from Unity was to remove those who were determined to cause dissention among the brethren by removing them from our church membership. These 15 members

now have no right to vote, make motions, or hold positions within the church thereby ending their continued efforts to force their way upon us. They are; Sidney Austin , Cole Bruce, Wren, Jacque Bernard, Audis Dawson, Tessa Henderson, Mark Beavers, Jim Wayne, Charlie Bailey, Dan Olden, Billy Prince, Art Rainwater, Jack Johns, Trey Morgan and Rusty Jones. These who sought to remove me as pastor are themselves removed from our fellowship.

I know this was hard and left a bad taste in our mouths, but as the under-shepherd of Unity it is my responsibility to protect the flock. This was not my desire, but it was my responsibility. Some of you, who came and stood with me on the votes, ended up being unable to stand with me on my motion to remove them. I understand and accept that you could not violate your own conscience and I respect your decision. But, now, we need to move on and press on toward the goal that is set before us... We are faced with a great opportunity to erase the stain of division of the body and produce a glowing representation of the body of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



## Appendix E

### Interview Data Codebook

#### **Interview Data Codebook**

**Categories of Meaning:** Enactment; Selection; Retention, Mindfulness

**Legend:** Term, Definition, Data Link

#### **ENACTMENT**

Bracketing	
Definition	Includes references to a bifurcation point in which the participant experienced something so out of the ordinary that they could not explain the apparent uncertainty of the discrepant event.
Data Link	
Capacity	
Definition	Includes references that both expand and limit possible interpretations and subsequent reaction.
Data Link	
Commitment	
Definition	Includes references that indicate a commitment to action or interpretation.
Data Link	
Ignoring/Denial	
Definition	Includes instances where participants indicated that organizational members and/or leaders ignored episodes that they labeled discrepant or out of the ordinary.
Data Link	
Emotion	
Definition	Includes references by the participants that indicated an emotion arousal response by citing such terms as the basic emotion response of surprise, fear, disgust, joy, sadness and anger
Data Link	

## SELECTION

Labeling & Attribution	
Definition	Includes references that indicate justified variation in which the episode is given a positive or negative evaluation/interpretation.
Data Link	
Sensegiving	
Definition	Includes references where participants developed and negotiated competing interpretations (think competing sense) of the event.
Data Link	

## RETENTION

Assumptions	
Definition	Includes references to previously held beliefs.
Data Link	
Identity	
Definition	Includes references by the participants that indicate how they viewed their identity throughout the crisis.
Data Link	
Expectations	
Definition	Include references where the participant gave explanation to previously held expectation concerning the broad
Data Link	
Renewal	
Definition	Includes references to a new normal for either the organizational and/or the individual.
Data Link	

## MINDFULNESS

Preoccupation with Failure	
Definition	Includes references to how/if participants anticipated possible failure points within the organization.
Data Link	
Reluctance to Simplify Interpretations	
Definition	Includes references to how participants developed their interpretations and to what extent they remained constant throughout the conflict.
Data Link	
Ability to Adapt	
Definition	Includes references to how/if participants and the organization were able to adapt to the crisis.
Data Link	
Sensitivity to Operations	
Definition	Includes references to what extent both participants and especially leadership were sensitive to operations.
Data Link	
Commitment to Resiliency	
Definition	Includes references to how/if the organization was able to continue towards reconciliation or renewal post crisis.
Data Link	

## Appendix F

### Schedule of Questions

#### **SCHEDULE OF QUESTIONS**

Name & age

Years attended

Positions held

How did you view yourself and your role at the church before, during & after the crisis?

How would you describe the church before the crisis?

What was your experience like before the crisis?

How did/does the church make decisions and solve problems?

What do you feel is the role of and what do you expect out of :

A church

Pastor

Worship Leader

Youth Minister

Office Staff

Deacons

Church members

When did you first notice something was out of the ordinary?

How did you find out?

What was the major incident that you believe started everything?

Why did you think it was out of the ordinary?

How did you respond emotionally?

When did you have a good enough understanding to make sense of the incident?

What was your conclusion?

How did your conclusion affect how you worshipped and ministered within the context and leadership of the church?

If and when you discussed the issues surround the crisis, was it ever with someone that you would have considered on the other side?

How did that affect your conclusions?

How prepared do you feel the church was to deal with these issues?

Was there anything in particular that you feel made the church vulnerable to this type of crisis?

How and to what extent did leadership within the church deal with the crisis?

How and to what extent do you feel as if politics played a role in the crisis?

Do you feel as if the church is better suited to deal with conflict?

Using today's date as a reference point, describe what has been the result of the crisis for you personally and for the church corporately.

## Appendix G

### Consent Form

#### **Consent Form**

Brandon Bannon  
318-947-0400  
[bbanno2@lsu.edu](mailto:bbanno2@lsu.edu)  
Available upon email request.

**Study Title:** “Volatile Congregations: Crisis Sensemaking in a Southern Baptist Church”

**Performance Site** (varies):

**Purpose of Study:** The final goal of this research is aid congregations in avoiding crisis. You have been asked to participate in this study because you have experienced a conflict within the church. The research goal is to determine how people made sense of the church crisis.

**Subject Inclusion:** Individuals 18 years of age and above who were directly or indirectly involved with the church conflict.

**Study Procedure:** Semi-structured interviews concerning your experience during the church conflict.

**Benefits:** By participating in this study you contribute to helping the researcher understand and hopefully aid future congregations in avoiding crisis.

**Risk:** There is no known risk for harm.

**Right to refuse:** Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

**Privacy:** This study is confidential in that your identity will be masked via pseudonyms of participants as well as the church affiliation and address.

**Financial Information:** This is a volunteer interview that does not included participant compensation.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692, [irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu), [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb).

I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researchers' obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

Subject Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The study subject has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent form to the subject and explained that by completing the signature line above, the subject has agreed to participate.'

Signature of Reader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H

### ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
131 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
[irb@lsu.edu](mailto:irb@lsu.edu) | [lsu.edu/irb](http://lsu.edu/irb)

**TO:** Brandon Bannon  
CMST

**FROM:** Robert C. Mathews  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** July 23, 2012  
**RE:** IRB# 3293

**TITLE:** Volatile Congregations: Crisis Sensemaking in a Southern Baptist Church

**New Protocol/Modification/Continuation:** New Protocol

**Review type:** Full ☐ Expedited ☒ **Review date:** 7/24/2012

**Risk Factor:** Minimal ☒ Uncertain ☐ Greater Than Minimal ☐

**Approved** ☒ **Disapproved** ☐

**Approval Date:** 7/24/2012 **Approval Expiration Date:** 7/23/2013

**Re-review frequency:** (annual unless otherwise stated)

**Number of subjects approved:** 20

**Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal:** (if applicable) ☐

**By:** Robert C. Mathews, Chairman

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –**  
**Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects\*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:

*\*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

# Application for Approval of Projects which Use Human Subjects

This application is used for projects/studies that cannot be reviewed through the exemption process.



Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
131 David Boyd Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
P: 225.578.8692  
F: 225.578.6792  
irb@lsu.edu  
lsu.edu/irb

— Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include two copies of the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below. Once the application is completed, please submit to the IRB Office for review and please allow ample time for the application to be reviewed Expedited reviews usually takes 2 weeks. Carefully completed applications should be submitted 3 weeks before a meeting to ensure a prompt decision.

-- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

- (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.
- (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
- (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

\*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

- (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
- (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>)
- (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (<http://research.lsu.edu/files/item26774.pdf>)

1) Principal Investigator\*:  Rank

\*PI **must be** an LSU Faculty Member

Dept:  Ph:  E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each

3) Project Title:

4) Proposal Start Date:  5) Proposed Duration Months:

6) Number of Subjects Requested:  7) LSU Proposal #:

8) Funding Sought From:

IRB#	<u>3293</u>	LSU Proposal #
<input type="radio"/> Full <input checked="" type="radio"/> Expedited <input checked="" type="radio"/> Human Subjects Training <input checked="" type="radio"/> Complete Application		

## ASSURANCE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR named above

I accept personal responsibility for the conduct of this study (including ensuring compliance of co-investigators/co-workers) in accordance with the documents submitted herewith and the following guidelines for human subject protection: The Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance (FWA00003892) with OHRP and 45 CFR 46 (available from <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>). I also understand that copies of all consent forms **must be maintained at LSU for three years after the completion of the project**. If I leave LSU before that time, the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Signature of PI  Date 6/14/12

**ASSURANCE OF STUDENT/PROJECT COORDINATOR** named above. If multiple Co-Investigators, please create a "signature page" for all Co-Investigators to sign. Attach the "signature page" to the application.

I agree to adhere to the terms of this document and am familiar with the documents referenced above.

Signature of Co-PI (s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Study Approved By:  
Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
Institutional Review Board  
Louisiana State University  
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
Approval Expires: 7/23/2013



## VITA

Brandon Bannon is a native of Georgetown, Louisiana. After graduating from Georgetown High School, he earned a bachelors degree in General Studies with a concentration in Business and a minor in Speech from Northwestern State University. He continued his education at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock where he earned his Master of Arts in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication in 2006. Following that, Mr. Bannon worked in training and leadership for a financial company and a local church. Mr. Bannon was also invited to teach at his alma mater, Northwestern State University, where he taught speech at the instructors level for four years. In 2007, he enrolled in the doctoral program at Louisiana State University in Communication Studies. His research examines the role of communication in crisis situations. Mr. Bannon has presented papers at the Louisiana Communication Association and has served as a Forensics coach. He has accepted a position as an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at Louisiana College in Pineville, LA.