

## **The Promise and Practice of Good Governance**

Presented at General Assembly 2013

June 20, 2013

“From Promise to Commitment”

Presented by

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*How can governance liberate the  
energy and creativity of our congregations to  
awaken compassion, transform lives, and bless the world?*

### **Agenda**

Theological Grounding

Promise-Making: The Experience of the Holy

Promise-Making: The Nested Bowls

Promise-Keeping: Accountability

Questions and Answers

Close

If we can come to some basic consensus about what the church is for it will inform the way we choose to organize congregational life and most especially how we define responsible involvement.

It's an interesting exercise to try to understand what we believe is most important observing how we attempt to integrate new members into our churches. In most of our congregations it would be easy to come to the conclusion that our primary concern is not spiritual growth or even social justice but instead the church itself as an institution. Not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. All too often responsible involvement includes: regular attendance, a fair-share pledge and serving on a committee. I would argue that our understanding of church life is self-limiting. How powerful it would be to define responsible church involvement in terms of consistent spiritual practice, the cultivation of skills in small-group intimacy, and community leadership for positive social change. Instead of placing the church itself at the heart of our concerns why not actually structure our church life to emphasize spiritual and social transformation.

The articulate Christian convert C.S. Lewis wrote about the primacy of God in a letter to a friend. As you listen to his words I invite you to replace the term "earthly dearest" with the word "congregation."

*When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. In so far as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving toward that state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, Second things are not suppressed but increased.*

If we want our churches to thrive we need to learn to put first things first. Policy-based governance can help us to bring our decision making into alignment with our covenantal theology. We understand good governance to be a collective spiritual practice that insists that we put first things first.

Rob Eller-Isaacs  
from "Churches That Count"

## Experience of the Holy Reflection

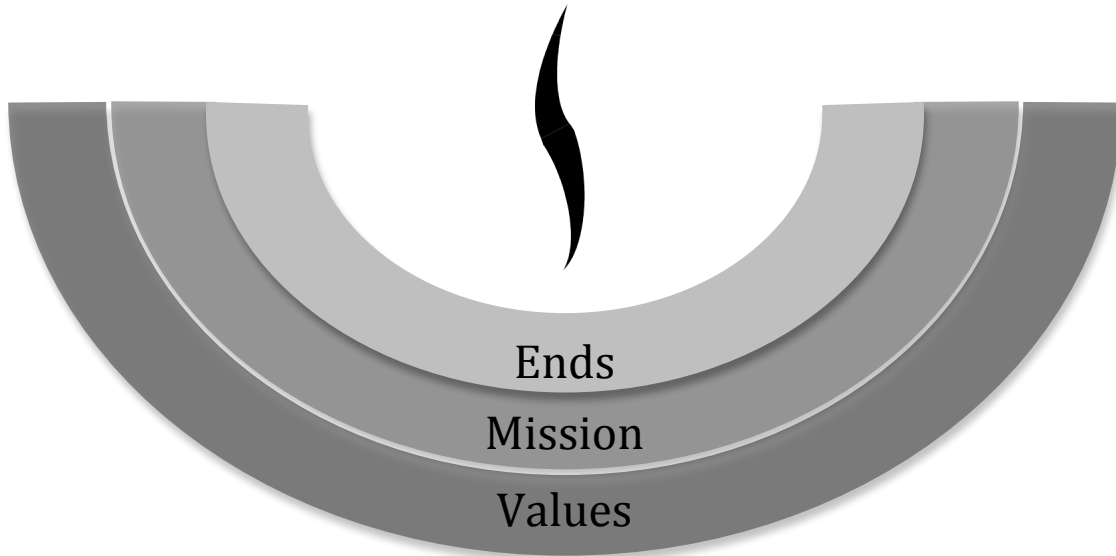
What's your experience of the holy, a time when you felt connected to something larger than yourself, a time when you felt your heart and mind expand?

What's your partner's experience of the holy?



What values are embedded in your stories? What qualities of your experience are key to the experience *being* holy? Does the story speak to an underlying value such as independence? Reverence? Empowerment? Authenticity? Wonder? Freedom? Generosity?

# The Nested Bowls



**Values:** What transcendent, timeless qualities of our religious community will we embody in all we do?

**Mission:** What's our transcendent purpose--what overarching difference are we here to make and for whom? Whose lives will we change and in what way?

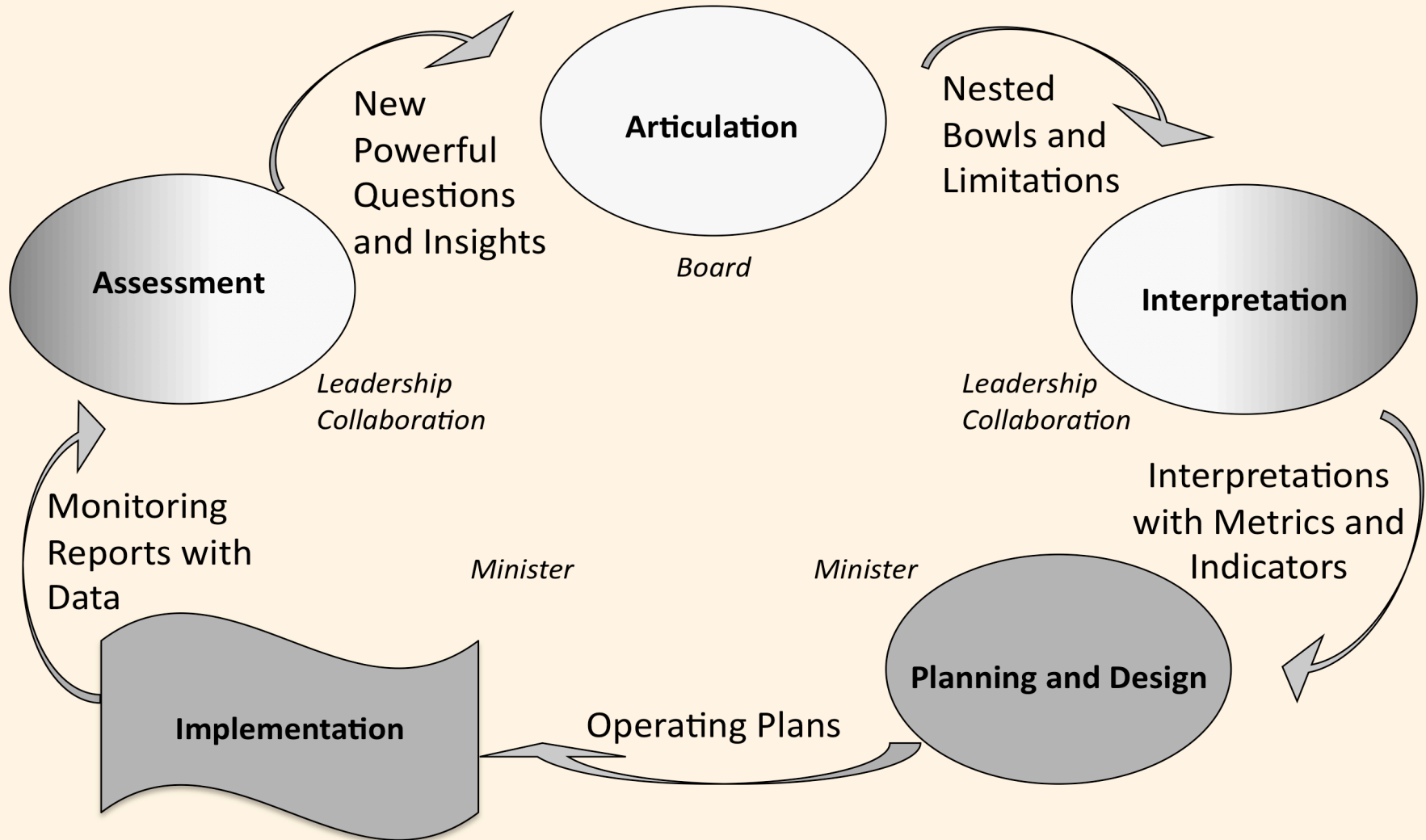
**Ends:** What specific, measurable differences will we make and for whom?

**Moral ownership, the flame that lights the bowls:** Close connection to your sources of authority and accountability, including, but not limited to, your members.

## **Effective Monitoring in Congregations**

- Evaluates the ministry we share and its impact in our lives and in our world
- Enables collaborative, mission-focused conversation between board and minister/operational leadership within their roles
- Focuses on results, not people or activities, and addressing the question “how do we know?”
- Takes the time it needs; intentionally evolves
- Adds value with success measured in new insights, new or deeper questions

# Leadership Cycle in the Mission-Focused Congregation



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