

Conclusion: Episcopal Decision Making

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Episcopal governance is the product of a number of factors: the personality and style of the archbishop, the makeup and needs of his archdiocese, and the governing structures of the church. Who is appointed archbishop makes a tremendous difference. His talents, values, style, and preferences have an impact on his archdiocese. But he does not write on a clean slate with complete freedom. Canon law gives him power but also restricts him. The demographic and financial condition of his archdiocese as well as its history provides him with opportunities and restraints. And it is through the structures of governance that he must interact with other actors in the archdiocese and attempt to influence its direction.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 examined how archbishops govern their parishes, deal with finances, and personnel and oversee the operations of their education and social service programs. A number of themes were common to all of these situations, which give us a picture of the episcopal decision-making process.

Reactive and Crisis Management

A characteristic of episcopal governance is that it is primarily reactive and not proactive. Like other leaders of organizations, archbishops respond to problems by searching for solutions.¹ An archbishop's time and attention is predominantly controlled by what hits him in the mail and on his schedule. Thus the mail brings in information, requests, and complaints. People desiring to see him do the same. His confirmation schedule forces him out among the people. His regularly scheduled meetings with various boards and councils force him to go over agenda material and to listen to the advice and opinions of others. The annual budgetary cycle forces him to review expenditures and budgetary projections.

Crises, especially those that might reach the press, also focus the archbishop's attention. A potential scandal, demonstration, or protest will consume his energy. A labor dispute or the closing of a school will always be controversial and require the archbishop's attention. Archbishops do not like surprises, but, in fact, they must spend a good amount of time responding to crises.

Being in a reactive mode is not necessarily a negative pattern. By reacting to crises and stimuli, an archbishop responds to the needs and the desires of the people in his local church. In fact, this reactive management style helps him to be pastoral in orientation. On the other hand, these concrete events can easily consume his time so that he does not have time to update himself theologically or to deal with broader issues. He fails to scan the environment for opportunities.

But while responding to immediate concerns is necessary and good, many archdiocesan officials, including archbishops, complain of the lack of long-range planning. Programs and policies are made in response to requests and perceived needs, but when limited resources demand selectivity, there is no sense of priorities to guide choices. Where some long-range planning is taking place, it is usually in response to a perceived crisis such as the decline in the number of priests.

Incrementalism vs. Comprehensive Planning

Some archdioceses have developed mission statements and pastoral plans. Some even have an office of planning and research. These offices are concerned with goal setting and the planning process within the diocesan structure. They also act as consultants.² But often the planners complain that their advice is not taken or they are ignored by the real decision makers. Their critics reply that the planners have biases and that their opinions are no more weighty than those of other participants.

Despite attempts at planning, setting priorities, and mission statements, most episcopal decision making is incremental.³ Archdioceses have tried management by objectives, PPBS (program, planning, budgeting system), zero-based budgeting, and other management techniques. But when the final decisions are made, they are almost always only incrementally different from what was done in the past. This should not be surprising, since these management techniques have proven less than perfect when applied to government programs. In archdioceses, when money is tight, choices are rarely made among programs. Rather budgets are frozen or across-the-board cuts are made. When money is available, most budgets are expanded incrementally. Recognizing that programs are rarely closed down and that employees are rarely let go, archbishops place high thresholds in front of new programs or hirings.

Incremental change since the Vatican Council has meant mostly expansion--more programs, more offices, more lay personnel, more money. These many incremental changes have added up to substantial expansion on the part of archdioceses. This expansion together with a more rapidly changing environment has made the job of the archbishop more difficult. The creation of secretariat structures and budgetary systems have been attempts by archbishops to find means of governing these new programs and agencies.

One difficulty archbishops face in governing is that there are few empirical ways of measuring whether a program is successful or not. In a business, there are a number of indices: profit, market share, efficiency, growth. Like any nonprofit organization, the church lacks a bottom-line criteria of success. The Catholic church has for many years counted baptisms, Mass attendance, communions, collections, etc. All of these can be used as measurable criteria. But theologically,

the church is interested not only in quantity but quality. Measuring quality of a liturgy or a sacramental experience is much more difficult.

In addition, the archbishops' lack of sophistication in social sciences makes it difficult for them to think in these terms. Those, like Andrew Greeley, who have been involved in empirical research on Catholic questions, complain that the bishops do not pay attention to their work. While no one argues that empirical research will answer every question, the church funds far less research than any other complex organization of comparable size. Nor do many Catholic foundations fund research.

Finances

One empirical measure most archbishops do understand is money. Some people are shocked and disappointed at the amount of time that bishops must devote to finances. Archbishops, however, recognize that they can do little without money. Their agencies and programs are bottomless pits that can always use more money. If an archbishop gives them all they want, the archdiocesan budget will be permanently in the red. Every archbishop knows of dioceses that overspent and were heavily in debt. They have heard from their friends how difficult and painful it was to turn those dioceses around and pay off the debts. None of them wants that problem. Nor do many enjoy raising money. As a result, most insist that the archdiocesan budget be balanced.

Finances are also important to some archbishops because they recognize the power of the purse. He who controls the funds, controls the organization. When my father presented the articles of incorporation for the Los Angeles Catholic Big Brothers to Cardinal James McIntyre, the cardinal said, "I only want to know one thing: How do I control the funds in this organization?" He was very angry when told he did not control the funds.

The power of the purse is seen at budget time. Funding determines what new programs are started. And the budgetary process is usually the only mechanism for reviewing existing archdiocesan programs. It is a time when questions are asked and programs must be defended. It is a time when an archbishop is guaranteed an agency's undivided attention.

On the other hand, extensive involvement in financial administration is also a temptation for bishops. Organizational theorists call this displacement of goals thorough overcommitment to means.⁴ But this danger is not simply present in financial administration but in all kinds of administrative procedures: planning, meetings, newsletters, rules, and procedures.

Catholicity

Archbishops are also concerned about the Catholicity of archdiocesan programs, especially the Catholic character of their schools and social programs. Having programs that are professional and efficient is not enough; archbishops want something distinctively Catholic about these programs. This can be controversial if there is disagreement over what is "Catholic." While a certain amount of legitimate pluralism is acknowledged by most bishops, they also recognize their responsibility for the Catholic character of their agencies and programs. It is within the role of bishops as institutional leaders (rather than simply managers or technocrats) to be concerned

about "meaning," legitimation, and higher level support, which makes the achievement of goals possible.⁵ The difficulty comes when "Catholic" is defined in a legalistic way as to eliminate creativity in responding to a changing environment.

Consultation

Because they are dealing with so many uncertainties, few archbishops are willing to make decisions without consulting others. Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco admits that his "mistakes have always happened in the case where I did not really consult, where I just made my own decision without discussing or consulting with anybody. I don't usually do that. I usually do consult with wise people. But when I haven't, then I see that it has very often been the wrong decision."

Archbishops consult many people, including other bishops. Many archbishops find out what other bishops are doing before making a decision. Smart diocesan administrators know that if they can show that a program or policy has been adopted in a number of other dioceses, especially by bishops whom their archbishop respects, they will have an easier time selling their proposal. At a cabinet meeting discussing when and how often to allow Tridentine Masses, one archbishop reported calling Archbishop Kelly in Louisville to find out what he was doing.

Consulting other dioceses often gains valuable information and advice by profiting from their experience. Such a strategy helps an archbishop avoid making mistakes or at least avoid being alone in the mistake. One of the reasons Renew was adopted by so many dioceses was the high marks it received from bishops who had tried it. Likewise, when Archbishop Roach of St. Paul wanted to reorganize his diocesan agencies, he sent his moderator of the curia to Chicago to learn about their reorganization.

Most archbishops are not afraid to make decisions, but they realize that they need the advice of others. Who they consult is important. Some consult widely; others tend to consult those they consider expert on the issue in question.

Cardinal Krol of Philadelphia explains:

In arriving at decisions, an archbishop must be well informed, must consult with people who know and have something to offer. It is a popular tendency today to have so-called grass-roots input, which is valid if the grass roots know what the issues are, what the problems are, what the goals are.

[Government officials in a democracy] do not go to grass roots every time they have to make a decision. They have to consult, they call the experts and the people who are in the know, and they do have hearings. But that town hall kind of a syndrome, which was valid with very small communities, is not applicable when you have a country such as ours or a diocese which exceeds 1.3 million Catholics.

Limiting consultation to experts is efficient, but it sometimes prevents the archbishop from getting advice from people who will be affected by the decision. In addition, if their support is necessary to carry out the policy, consultation is a method of fostering ownership over the decision. For example, while an archbishop might think RCIA or Renew would be good for the parishes, he should recognize that adopting them without consulting the priests would be a disaster. Bishops who follow a consultative style realize their dependence on others and the necessity of cooperative strategies to reduce uncertainty, gain commitments, and make goals more easily achievable./6

Sometimes the consultation process is in form only because those consulted know the archbishop has already made up his mind. For example, the priests' council in New York voted to have a archdiocesan synod because they knew Cardinal O'Connor wanted one, but there was little enthusiasm among the priests for the idea. On the other hand, in some situations the archbishop can be embarrassed when a consultative body flatly turns down his recommendation. The St. Paul council of priests in 1985 told Archbishop Roach that they did not support his plan to renovate the seminary. He postponed the project until he could win over their support.

When working with consultative bodies, archbishops look not only for advice, they are also attempting to form consensus. A majority vote in favor of a proposal is rarely sufficient. If 49 percent of the council opposes the proposal, the archbishop will rarely proceed. Rather he will call for more discussion and perhaps modifications to take into consideration the views of those opposed. This frequently means that the final decision is postponed.

The archbishop also wants consensus among his consultative groups. He would not want his priests' council and pastoral council in conflict like an upper and lower house./7 If the pastoral council has one view and the priests' council has another, he is in trouble./8 He or his staff will have to broker a compromise and work for consensus. The desire for consensus is one example of the high priority archbishops place on unity.

Some archbishops (for example, Cardinal Bernardin) go through wide consultations in an attempt to reach a consensus before making a decision. They are reluctant to do anything without wide support. Here, frequently the complaint is that decisions take too long to make. Similarly, while Archbishop Quinn wanted some kind of renewal program for his archdiocese, he wanted the priests' council to recommend which program should be adopted. They, on the other hand, wanted him to make a recommendation. The result was no program.

Other archbishops are accused of giving the appearance of consultation while really manipulating the group to agree with their preordained decision. Some priests believe their archbishop does not take their council seriously. One member of an executive committee described a meeting where liturgy and personnel were chosen as priority topics for the year.

The archbishop was invited to discuss these with the executive committee. This was his chance to influence the proceedings. He saw Liturgy and Personnel on the blackboard, and he said, "They just want a gripe session. They want more money for the liturgy committee. Personnel? Gripe session! Priests are never happy with personnel decisions."

Later when the archbishop addressed the entire council, he told them their choice of issues was wonderful. "Liturgy and personnel, these are my concerns, too." As soon as there was a coffee break, everyone learned what he had said to the executive committee.

Few archbishops are comfortable with group decision making in large consultative councils, such as a pastoral council or priests' council. These bodies tend to be uninformed and slow in coming to a consensus on a course of action. The archbishops find these councils most useful as feedback mechanisms where they can hear the reactions of people about what is happening in the archdiocese. Smaller specialized boards whose members are familiar with particular agencies are more successful.

Despite these problems, few archbishops will move on a major decision until after wide consultation leads to a consensus. While recognizing that they always have the last word, the archbishops also recognize that forcing a program on the archdiocese, and especially on the diocesan priests, can be counterproductive. Without enthusiastic support of the priests and archdiocesan lay leaders, most archdiocesan programs will not work anyway.

Primacy of Charity

In the decision-making process, archbishops place a priority on unity and charity, which take precedence over efficiency and effectiveness. This can be seen not only in the consultative process, but in other decision-making situations. For example, almost all archbishops pointed to personnel as their most difficult area. Most archbishops want to be loving fathers; they do not like to confront or fire people. As a result, people are not challenged, they are not dealt with honestly, and personnel problems are unresolved. For example, computerizing the business office will wait for the retirement of an elderly bookkeeper. Reductions in personnel can only be made through not replacing retiring personnel. The resulting inefficiencies can cause staff morale problems and ineffectiveness in archdiocesan programs.

The primacy of charity over efficiency can also be seen in the desire of archbishops to keep open inner-city parishes with declining congregations. While retailers and services flee to the suburbs, Catholic churches remain open and staffed. Inner-city schools for blacks are another example of charity outweighing efficiency. Although black children are helped tremendously by these schools, few are Catholic and few become Catholics.

The primacy of unity and charity encourages archbishops to avoid conflict whenever possible. Few archbishops are combative by nature or enjoy a fight. Planning has been ineffective in most archdioceses because planning means making choices, and choices bring conflict with those who prefer the status quo. Plans are invariably postponed until a consensus supports them or until lack of resources (either money or personnel) forces a decision.

Archbishops also avoid conflict by delegating decisions. Department budgets might be cut and then the department heads told to make the necessary cuts among their offices.

The biggest problems for archbishops come when the interests of one group conflict with another. For example, most archbishops would like to raise teachers' salaries, but this would require raising tuitions. Or on an individual basis, there can be a conflict when two priests want the same pastorate. Or conflict can occur between the needs of a pastor and the needs of a parish.

In secular society, such conflicts would be resolved in favor of the strongest; in the church, they are just as apt to be resolved in favor of the weaker party. Priests in Chicago joke that priests who do well in a difficult assignment are rewarded with an even more difficult job, whereas those who fail are given a soft job. Charity takes priority over merit.

Keeping the Pastors Happy

When making decisions, the most important constituency for the archbishop is his priests, especially the pastors. Keeping his priests happy is a high priority. Because of their permanent commitment to the archdiocese, they are like members of a family in a family business. This "clerical club" is based on extended relationships that have grown over time, beginning in the seminary. The large exodus of priests also made bishops sensitive to priestly needs. With the decline in the number of priests, each diocesan priest becomes an irreplaceable employee.

All of this means that keeping the priests happy is good for the archdiocese and the archbishop. Practically every archbishop, for example, tells his secretary that he is available for any priest who wants to see him at any time. Even cardinals and archbishops involved in national or international work will come under criticism if they become unavailable to their priests.

Keeping the priests happy has important ramifications on archdiocesan governance. For example, one favorite pastime of the clerical club is complaining about the chancery, especially that it is wasting money. Whether or not this is true, their attitude puts pressure on the archdiocesan budget because of an unwillingness of archbishops to raise parish assessments or diocesan appeal goals. The archbishops would usually rather cut or freeze budgets than face the wrath of pastors by proposing a tax increase.

Priests also complain that the chancery and archdiocesan agencies are not doing anything to serve the parishes. Archbishops have responded by asking agencies at budget time what they are doing for the parishes. Agencies, like Catholic Charities, that for many years operated independently from the parishes, are now developing programs aimed at fulfilling parish needs. Agencies that the pastors think are wasteful tend to be the ones that get cut at budget time because they have lost the support of this important constituency.

Another example of this attitude toward pastors is the reluctance of archbishops to mandate any policies or programs. Most archbishops want to respect the autonomy of the local pastor as much as possible. In addition, they do not want to place additional burdens on pastors who are already overworked. As long as there are not too many complaints from the parishioners, pastors can pretty much get away with almost anything.

The priests' personnel board and priests' personnel directors can be understood in this light also. By using a board and following its recommendations, the archbishop can distance himself from

possible conflict with his priests. Rather than telling a priest that he is not fit to be a pastor, he can say, "The personnel board does not think you are ready to be a pastor. This is the way they see you...." He can even have the personnel director convey the bad news. In one archdiocese, the archbishop notifies the priest who gets a parish, while the clergy personnel director notifies those who were passed over.

Coping with Uncertainty

One of the most important functions of an organization's leadership is to deal with the constraints and contingencies imposed by its environment and its technology. For a pencil factory, this means organizing the capital, raw materials, workers, and equipment as well as marketing the output. The simpler the technology, the more benign and stable the environment, the easier the job. The more complex the technology, the more unstable the environment, the more difficult the leader's task. Complexity and instability introduces uncertainty into the decision-making process.

Especially since Vatican II, bishops have had to face a more complex and constantly changing environment. Old ministries (technologies) have not produced the desired effects (e.g., Mass attendance and vocations have gone down). New ministries have been developed, but the effectiveness of these ministries has been uncertain. In addition, lack of agreement has existed over the desirable outcomes of various ministries. Lacking consensus on goals and lacking certainty on effectiveness, bishops have found themselves in the worst possible position to make what has been traditionally considered a "rational" decision: choosing the most efficient and effective means to obtain a goal.

Bishops have followed strategies that would be expected in such a situation.

1. They have created new units (liturgy office, social ministries, Renew, ecumenical commission, personnel office, family life office) within the organization that employ people trained in the new ministries (technologies). Sometimes the units (like minority offices, personnel offices) will be buffers or communication channels between the environment and the rest of the organization. The danger here is creating a multitude of uncoordinated units.
2. Rationality has been imposed on those parts of the system where it is possible both technically and politically. Thus, computers and modern business methods are making headway in financial administration but only where inertia is overcome by political means. Personnel procedures have been professionalized. The danger here is attempting to impose rules and standardization where it is not appropriate.
3. Where there is lack of consensus on goals or where the effectiveness of new technologies (ministries) is uncertain, social or political or ideological (theological) criteria are used in decision making. And decision making is incremental.

Church leaders in the face of uncertainty use social and political criteria in decision making: peer group evaluation, wide consultation, consensus decision making, appeals to higher authority,

appeals to experts, and limiting the number of variables examined because of ideological reasons. Thus, while a bishop may not understand what his Catholic Charities is doing, he will be satisfied if (1) it is accredited through peer evaluation, (2) government and private agencies have enough confidence in it to give it money, (3) those it serves are pleased, (4) the board of directors approves the programs, and (5) little negative feedback comes from important constituencies, like the pastors.

Ideological (theological) premises that ignore or deny the validity of environmental signals also ease decision making. Altars are turned around despite complaints of some parishioners. The requirement of priestly celibacy is retained despite the decline in vocations. Or uncertainty can also be resolved by appeals to higher authority or by eliminating any experimentation until it is mandated from above. Fear of exercising discretion is especially high when the consequences of error are considered great. What is started as an experiment is sometimes difficult to stop. And no one wants to be accused by the Vatican of being unorthodox.

The primacy given to unity and charity reflect the use of social and political criteria in decision making. Concern for unity and charity give a special orientation to ecclesial decision making. Keeping important constituencies happy, especially priests and chancery employees, encourages delegation, consultation, and consensus decision making. Extensive consultation has become an accepted part of contemporary American ecclesial life. It is a time-consuming process, but few archbishops would try to govern their archdioceses without it. Consultation is not simply a means of gaining information; it is also a method of developing support and consensus for a program or policy.

But an archbishop cannot simply respond to local constituencies. While their desires and opinions are important, he also is constrained by finances, church law, and the views of Roman officials, as was seen in the last chapter. He must see to it that programs are solvent and truly Catholic.

There is no such thing as an ideal archdiocesan organization. The organizational structure must be tailored to meet the personality and desires of the archbishop and the needs of the archdiocese within the constraints imposed by the environment. In large archdioceses, secretariat-level administrators have become necessary because of the proliferation and growth of archdiocesan agencies. The archbishop needs help if agencies and offices are going to be supervised and coordinated. Regional vicars also make the archbishop's presence felt in the parishes, especially if the archdiocese is large and he is busy with administration.

The danger of these new structures is that they will become bureaucratic and unresponsive either to the archbishop or to his people. Thomas F. O'Dea explained this well in looking at the pre-Vatican II church, but the dilemmas of institutionalization also exist for the post-Vatican church:

It is characteristic of bureaucratic structure to elaborate new offices and new networks of communications and command in the face of new problems. Precedents are established which lead to the precipitation of new rules and procedures. One result may indeed be that the structure tends to complicate itself. This state of affairs evolves in order to cope with new situations and new problems effectively. Yet such self-complication can

overextend itself and produce an unwieldy organization with blocks and breakdowns in communication, overlapping of spheres of competence, and ambiguous definitions of authority and related functions. In short, developments to meet functional needs can become dysfunctional in later situations.... The tendency of organization to complicate itself to meet new situations often transforms it into an awkward and confusing mechanism within whose context it is difficult to accomplish anything./9

Although structures are important, the key to successful governance is not so much an ideal structure as the ability of the archbishop to find people who can do the things he cannot do and give them the resources they need. Thus, an archbishop who has difficulties relating to his priests would be wise to seek out a vicar for priests who is well liked and trusted by the priests. An archbishop who dislikes administration needs to look for a competent vicar general to take care of as much administration as possible. Archbishops who spend much time on administration need their auxiliaries to be an episcopal, pastoral presence in the parishes. Rather than trying to turn themselves into something they are not, wise archbishops lead with their strengths and find others to cover their weaknesses. But he must be willing to give them real authority and not just a title.

But there are some things that the archbishop simply cannot delegate to others: dealing with the Vatican, with the NCCB, with other bishops (including his auxiliaries), with priest personnel problems, with budget deficits, with the closing (or opening) of parishes and schools, with problems that will make the front page of the local newspaper, and with the appointment of pastors and cabinet-level administrators. He can get help from others on these matters, but they are too important for him to ignore. In addition, he must be sensitive to the long-range good of the archdiocese and the church as a whole since others in the diocese will be focused only on parts.

Finally, the archbishop must take care of himself. He is responsible for ministering to his priests, but there is no one to minister to him. There are few with whom he can share his problems. If he has close friends among the diocesan clergy, he will be accused of preferring them over others. Even these priest friends are under him in authority, which is why many bishops seek out religious priests as spiritual directors. One archbishop reported that he had a hard time finding any priest who was willing to be his spiritual director.

Bishops can become isolated with no one supporting them, as Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee explains:

I'm finding that more and more bishops are isolated. We religious had our own support groups, and we had superiors who were interested in us. I find that more and more bishops somehow don't get any support groups and they get isolated. They come to the bishops' meetings, they smile and greet people, and they go home, and no one seems to worry about who ministers to the bishops.

As a church leader, the archbishop must also nourish his spiritual life. Archbishop Kelly of Louisville speaks of the need of a bishop to be "sustained and nurtured by prayer." He says,

All of this stuff, the programmatic stuff, the financial, the management, none of it can hold a candle to my responsibility to preach and therefore to pray.

I am to be the best preacher in the diocese. I am to be the best celebrant, and that means a deep spirituality. I haven't got it there yet, but I want to be there. That is very, very important to me.

This book has been about the archbishop's role in the governance of his archdiocese. As a result, I have not been able to devote much space to his role as liturgist, teacher, or spiritual leader. Nor have I been able to examine the theological views or spiritual lives of archbishops. All these aspects of episcopal life are very important, but they are less susceptible to analysis by social scientists.

What this book has shown is the way archbishops respond to their environment, organize their archdioceses, and make decisions dealing with such important matters as personnel, finances, parish life, social services, and education. These are all vital to the life of the local church that is his archdiocese. The archbishops have a tremendous impact on the lives of their local churches. The decisions they make today will determine the shape of the church in the United States in the next century.

Footnotes

1. James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 151.
2. Ruth N. Doyle, Eugene F. Hemrick, and Patrick Hughes, *National Pastoral Planning in the 1980s* (Newark, NJ: National Pastoral Planners Conference, 1983). See also Eugene F. Hemrick, "The Evolving Church and Church Governance," in *The Ministry of Governance*, ed. James K. Mallet (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1986), 140-59.
3. On incrementalism, see Charles E. Lindblom, *The Policy-Making Process* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986); Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," *Public Administration Review* 19 (Spring 1958): 79-88; Thomas J. Reese, S.J., and Paul J. Roy, S.J., "Discernment as Muddling Through," *Jurist* 38 (1978): 82-117.
4. Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, 79.
5. *Ibid.*, 11.
6. For a discussion of cooperative strategies, see Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, 34-36.

7. Rembert G. Weakland, "Local Implementation--Ecclesial Life Under the 1983 Code," CLSA Proceedings 46 (1985): 19.

8. James H. Provost, "The Working Together of Consultative Bodies--Great Expectations?" Jurist 40 (1980): 257-81; Robert Kennedy, "Shared Responsibility in Ecclesial Decision Making," Studia Canonica 14 (1980): 5-23.

9. Thomas F. O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas in the Institutionalization of Religion," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 1 (1961): 35-36.

See also:

Woodstock Church Studies