

DISSERTATION

SPIRITUALITY IN LEADERSHIP:  
HOW MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION  
PERCEIVE THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THEIR DECISION MAKING

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## ABSTRACT

### SPIRITUALITY IN LEADERSHIP:

#### HOW MALE AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION PERCEIVE THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THEIR DECISION MAKING

The purpose of this study was to better understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their leadership decision making. This phenomenological study provided the opportunity for seven male African American leaders in higher education to explain in their own words how they perceive the influence of their spirituality in their own professional decision making, in their leadership roles.

The study used individual, in-depth interviews for data generation and collection. The participants in the study held leadership roles of Dean, Associate Dean, or Department Chair. They worked for major universities, private colleges, or for-profit colleges in a major metropolitan area in the South. The participants self-identified themselves as being spiritual.

Participants entered into a discussion format that began with several open-ended questions. Their interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Common themes emerged from each data set and then brought together in describing the phenomenon. One common, predominant theme emerged within this analysis. Each participant directly connected his spirituality to his personal belief in the Triune God. Further, these participants saw no difference between their spirituality and their Christianity and used the two terms interchangeably. Participants believed that because of their ongoing communication with God through prayer and meditation, they were able to draw on their

spirituality as needed to help them make decisions. They stated that it was their ongoing relationship with God that gave them the spiritual reinforcement they needed when making their leadership decisions.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Sepha Mae Burgess, who is 96 years old. She lost her vision to Glaucoma more than 10 years ago, but she never lost her faith and continues to live a full life. She always encouraged me to pray and ask God to help me achieve my goals. A former sharecropper, she is a very spiritual person and goes to church every Sunday. My sister Mary E. Fulton is her caretaker and was there to support me when I needed a little encouragement to keep moving forward.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study is an examination of how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their decision making. The area of spirituality is one of growing interest, especially its impact in the workplace. Fry (2003), Guillory (1997), Conger (1994), Benefiel (2003), and Fairholm (1997) are just a few who have contributed to the growing body of literature on spirituality in leadership. They believe that spirituality is an integral part of an individual's ability to effectively lead others.

While there has been some literature devoted to the subject of spirituality, a query of spirituality and leadership and male African American leaders in higher education returned only one result. The one study that was discovered was a dissertation by Ellison (2007) that focused primarily on various attributes that impact spirituality in leadership among African American leaders in higher education. Ellison's research however did not specifically focus on spirituality and decision making for the targeted group. Spirituality and decision making was just one of several other elements reviewed.

My study builds on Ellison's (2007) research and provides a dimension of leadership and decision making that does not directly address any of Ellison's recommendations for future research. However, it does provide a different perspective on the leadership and decision making for male African American leaders in higher education and the role that spirituality plays in the decisions they make in their role as leaders. This study explores the phenomenon of spirituality and how spirituality

influences decision making among the identified population. The connection between spirituality and leadership and how they influence the decisions male African American leaders make seems to be an area of research that remains unexplored. While studies on spirituality and leadership may be showing up more in the literature, not one of these studies address the issue of spirituality and how it influences the decision making among the population of male African American leaders in higher education. This study will provide a voice for these leaders to share their experiences.

### **Definition Of Male African American Leader**

For the purposes of this study, a male African American leader in higher education is defined as an African American male working for a college or university, who has attained the position of dean, associate dean, or department chair. African American refers to those individuals who may also be classified as Black or of African descent.

Jackson (2003) believes the number of male African American administrators in upper level positions (chair, dean, provost, vice president, president) in higher education decreased from 1993 to 1998. He cites a decrease of 34.47% at all institutions and all levels—lower and upper level positions—which includes two year and four year institutions. However, his study on hiring practices of African American males in academic leadership positions at American colleges and universities found that between 1993 and 1998 “African American males’ representation in upper level positions at four year institutions may have increased by as much as 5.65% (Jackson, 2003, p. 325).

Jackson (2003) believes that there is not yet enough empirical research available to paint an exact picture. However, the number of male African American leaders is the second

largest group of administrators with White men constituting the largest group. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it will provide greater insight into one aspect of spirituality that might influence the decision-making process that male African American leaders in higher education utilize in their leadership role.

### **Decision-Making and Leadership**

There can be a variety of influences that impact how an individual makes decisions that might include education, experience, culture, religion, gender, attitude, and the environment. Vroom and Yetton (1973) support this assertion by classifying decision making as being both interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal decision making takes into account social aspects and Vroom and Yetton believe this to be one of the most important components of the decision-making process.

The extent to which their spirituality influences the decisions they make will have to be explained by the participants themselves. That is why it was important to conduct the interviews with the participants, to hear in their words how they believe their decision making is influenced by their spirituality. Male African American leaders in higher education may find themselves in a unique position to affect significant influence and change in the decision-making process while at work. Knowing more about how they make their decisions could shed light on the decision-making process itself and also give us a better understanding of how male African American leaders believe their leadership is influenced by their spirituality. The goal of this study then was to hear from male African American leaders in higher education in their own words and let them explain how they believe their spirituality influences the decisions they make in their roles as leaders.

## **Background**

Spirituality as a phenomenon has gained attention because of the belief that it can positively impact the performance and productivity of employees and managers in the workplace (Fry, 2003). Some researchers believe spirituality is a quality that first has to be internalized and understood by the individual before it can be applied externally to others.

At the root of the term spirituality is the word “spirit,” which is more commonly used and more commonly accepted than the term spirituality. It is not unusual to hold a pep rally at school before the big game to increase “team spirit”; to get everyone focused on one common goal of defeating the opposing team. A team spirit at school helps to create a community in which everyone is focused on achieving the same goal. In this sense, spirit or a spiritual connection of the masses toward one cause seems appropriate. There are companies that hold similar rallies to generate a team spirit or create a sense of community in the workplace. When used in this manner, the use of the term spirit is an acceptable use that is generally understood to create an environment of teamwork and collegiality within a group or organization.

Managers often want to create a spirit of cooperation within an organization, which can in turn create a positive atmosphere where employees are creative, highly motivated, self-driven, and have the authority to make decisions to benefit the good of the organization. Such an environment may often be referred to as having an esprit de corps, or an organization whose employees have a high morale. Similarly, team spirit at work helps to create the same type of environment where everyone has a common focus.

Collaborative communities and team communities share some of the same characteristics that promote spirituality in the workplace. Collaborative communities are environments where there is a close sense of community or spirituality. Guillory (1997) believes collaboration within groups is possible only when there is a spiritual connection between the members of the group who share a similar mission or goal. He provides several additional characteristics, which include harmony, interconnectedness, and oneness (p. 21).

Organizations hold retreats at remote locations to foster a greater sense of team building and community. This creates a spiritual bond among those attending in order to more fully exploit the talents of the participants to fulfill the mission of the organization. These types of activities could be considered essential to the overall success of the organization. While not explicitly called spiritual, the end result is the same as that desired by the spiritual leader. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) describe spirituality as the individual's connection to others and that which creates purpose and meaning in the work they do, which ultimately brings satisfaction and even joy. Spirituality could also be that quality that exists within the individual. It could bring about internal satisfaction or fulfillment from work as opposed to the external rewards that may be associated with the job.

While the term spirituality may not be used to describe a specific type of activity, individual, or even management style, it is indeed a more "spiritual" environment that many attempt to achieve in the workplace, but without specifically using the term. Benefiel (2003) believes a company's performance can be positively impacted by spirituality. Benefiel (2003) further proposed that

...they do this by sustaining economic profit, by building a reputation for quality and integrity in their products and services, by reducing employee turnover, by building long term trusting relationships with customers and suppliers, and by giving back to the communities which they live. (p. 10)

Guillory (1997) shares this view and believes that companies that integrate spirituality are more “humanistic and employee-friendly work environments” (p. xv).

However, spirituality, as a concept, can be difficult to define. Terms such as compassion, love, truth, honesty, trust, vision, humility, integrity, and fun, are just a few of those used to describe spirituality (Fry, 2003; Guillory, 1997; Rosener, 1998). Some of these terms (trust, vision, integrity) are qualities that exist in the workplace and are easily integrated into the day-to-day operations of the organization. However, the qualities of terms such as compassion, love, truth, and humility might exist, but are not openly discussed and integrated into the daily work world. Perhaps a double standard exists between the secular world and the religious world where any crossover of religion into the workplace is seen as inappropriate. However upon closer examination, these are qualities that are often associated with religion and the church that have been able to make the transition from one field to the next

### **Spirituality vs. Religion**

There can be some confusion as to whether there is a direct connection between spirituality and religion. Spirituality and religion on the surface might seem to be synonymous. When the term spirituality is used in most instances it is usually connected to religion. The religious person might be spiritual, but a spiritual person might not be religious, and vice versa.

For the purpose of this study, it was decided that a definition of spirituality would not be provided to the participants. Rather, I wanted to let the participants themselves

describe their own spirituality. This was important because it appears that a definition of what spirituality is can vary from individual to individual. Moreover, connecting spirituality to the leadership practices of male African American leaders is virtually absent from the literature. The impact of spirituality on leadership is discussed in a variety of writings by Bolman and Deal(1995) and Conger(1994) as well as others. But its impact on decision making is not well represented in the literature.

Fairholm (1997) believes that “spirituality is the essence of who we are. It is our inner self, separate from our body” (p. 6). Fairholm further suggests “our sense of spiritual wholeness defines humankind, determines our guiding values, and directs our most intimate decisions and actions” (p. 7). Griffin (1988), too, believes spirituality refers to the “ultimate values and meanings in terms of which we live, whether they be otherworldly or very worldly ones, and whether or not we consciously try to increase our commitment of those values and meanings” (p. 1). It would appear then, that if spirituality does exist in the workplace it may not outwardly be manifested by those who use it, but it might be a quality that could influence the decision making process. If this is the case and spirituality influences decision making, to fully understand this phenomenon it is necessary to first look at some of the ways the literature shows how spirituality is integrated into the workplace.

While spirituality can be the byproduct of religion, the terms spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably. Rosener (1998) believes that you cannot talk about spirituality without talking about religion because the two have for so long been linked. However, Rosener suggests they are not the same. Spirituality is not a religious philosophy, but rather can incorporate religion as the foundation to create a meaningful,



compassionate environment. Guillory (1997) believes “religion is actually a form that spirituality takes in practice. Spirituality is the source behind the form” (p. 21).

Spirituality is something that can naturally become a part of the way leaders manage.

While religion may serve as the basis for a spiritual experience, the two are not mutually exclusive.

Lerner (2000) differentiates between spirituality and religion in this way:

“Spirituality is a lived experience, a set of practices and a consciousness that aligns us with a sense of sanctity of All being... Religions, on the other hand, are the various historical attempts to organize a set of doctrines, rituals and specific behaviors that are supposed to be “the right way to live” (p. 5).

Fernando et al. (2006) suggests that religion based workplace spirituality can be nonproductive, leading to the position that one particular faith is better than the other. The caution here is that forcing someone to adopt a religious stance, especially in the workplace, can be counterproductive to the overall goal of the organization. It is assumed spirituality at work might mean religion at work or an effort to inject a set of religious values into corporate culture. Fry (2003) believes that employees and leaders are confused and cannot distinguish between spirituality and religion and because of this, workplace spirituality is not included in leadership and management theories.

According to Klenke (2003), organized religion is dependent on rituals and dogma. It is more about rites and scriptures and tends to be “dogmatic, exclusive, and narrowly based on a formalized set of beliefs and practices” (p. 57). In the workplace, Rosener (1998) believes that in general, when people talk about spirituality at work, they are trying to instill or impose their religious values on the corporate climate. Fernando et

al. et al. (2006) sees the connection between spirituality and religion and believes that the literature on workplace spirituality has been a byproduct of studies in religion and psychology.

Bolman and Deal (1995) explore the complexities of integrating spirituality into leadership. They believe spirituality is the goal, religion is the path. The word religion describes a group of people bound by a vision of the divine expressed through shared beliefs, institutions, rituals, and artifacts. Every great religion offers special gifts, based on a unique spiritual tradition (Bolman & Deal, 1995). Spirituality, however, is not the same as religion. Chaleff (1998) suggests that

Spiritual acknowledges that there is something sacred about life itself. It acknowledges that, whatever its source, this sacred element is within oneself and within each living being. It understands intuitively that regardless of extreme differences, we share a commonality. From this sacred commonality springs core values of human decency. And if we honor these values, they inform our decisions and relationships. (p. 9)

Lerner (2000) believes spirituality and religion are not the same. He characterizes religion as:

Lived experience, a set of practices and a consciousness that aligns us with a sense of sanctity of All Being ... Religion, on the other hand, are the various historical attempts to organize a set of doctrines, rituals, and specific behaviors that are supposed to be “the right way to live. (pp. 5-6)

Fairholm (1997) explains that “spirituality does not apply to particular religions although the values of some religions may be part of a person’s spiritual focus” (p. 7).

Those who have written on the subject of spirituality generally agree that spirituality and religion are quite different. Spirituality is usually connected to the individual and his connectedness to the environment and to others whereas religion is more about organized belief systems (Benefiel, 2005; Conger, 1994; Fry, 2003; Guillory, 1997; Lerner, 2000 ;).

Further, Guillory (1997) believes that religion is “a form that spirituality takes in practice” (p. 21). Fry (2003) supports the connection between spirituality and religion and further suggests that in order to be religious, you have to be first a spiritual individual.

The assumption that there is a connection between religion and spirituality cannot be ignored. If this is true, then it appears that a person’s deeply held religious beliefs impact their spirituality. Fry (2003) believes that spirituality is necessary for religion but religion is not necessary for spirituality (p. 706). Thus, when the subject of spirituality is introduced, the assumption is that the discussion is not religion based, but rather, based on some other aspect of spirituality not connected to religion.

Religion has to do with a person’s faith in a higher power. Religious beliefs provide direction in people’s lives and gives their life meaning. Religion provides humans with moral guidance and the will to do good in life. To argue that you cannot separate religion from spirituality may be an argument in vain. A person’s religion cannot be ignored when discussing spirituality. To what extent then does spirituality influence the decisions that are made by leaders in their roles as decision makers?

It is through the voices of male African American leaders themselves, that this research attempted to shed some light on African American leaders’ perceptions of how spirituality impacts the decisions they make.

When you understand the truth about life and the source of your being, about who you are, where you come from, where you are going, and what God is, you are free! Free from all preconceived notions, free from the ways of the world. You experience wholeness. You achieve a breakthrough to a new spiritual awareness. (Kimbrow, 1997, p. 265)

Writers such as Eric Copage, Julia A. Boyd, Iyanla Vanzant, and Bishop T.D. Jakes all use spirituality as the backbone of their writings (Starling, 1998). But these writers provide inspirational messages with a definite religious spin as opposed to specific messages devoted to management and leadership. It is believed that this renewed interest in spirituality reflects a return to the roots of African Americans growing up in the church (Starling, 1998).

While writers to this point agree that there is a distinct line between spirituality and religion, in the African American community that line might be very much blurred if not non-existence. Coleman (1997) suggests that the connection of religion and spirituality can be traced back to slavery. The reality of the early African American slave was one in which the spiritual and physical realms converged. Coleman suggests that

unlike certain aspects of Western dualism (e.g. the separation of the sacred from the profane or the spiritual from the physical), the perspective of the African American slave did not separate reality into clearly defined realms. Instead, reality was viewed as one interwoven fabric connecting human beings with spiritual ones. (p. 533)

It is the aim of this research, therefore, to determine what influence spirituality has on the participants' decision making.

### **Rationale for the Research**

Mitroff and Denton (1999) believe the amount of information available regarding spirituality continues to increase. Not only is the amount of information about spirituality increasing, but so too are those who might be willing to discuss the phenomenon and its impact on employees in the workplace. Definitions of leadership and management vary widely and it is difficult to pin down one definition that succinctly defines traditional leadership and management theory. The more traditional models of management come to

mind (for instance, transactional leadership) when there is any discussion of what it takes to be a successful leader in business and education because transactional leadership is more about how it is done as opposed to who does it. Bolman and Deal (1995) believe that this style of management might not be the most effective and suggest that traditional management styles must be reevaluated.

Benefiel (2003) proposes that spirituality not only impacts organizations' profitability, but also helps to retain employees. Guillory (1997) believes that spirituality is the primary component of the living organization, which he describes as an organization that is able to adapt on a continuous basis to transform itself into a profit making business. Conger (1994) believes that spirituality may be the solution to many of the challenges that are facing organizations whose current processes may be mechanical and short lived.

While in itself spirituality is not a type of leadership style, it could be a quality that influences how a person leads. Leadership style, as mentioned earlier, can be learned. Spirituality, on the other hand may be more difficult to define because its definition could vary from individual to individual. Further, an individual's specific leadership style could be influenced in some way by their spirituality.

Spirituality may, to a great extent, reinforce those learned qualities of leadership that an individual exhibits. The challenge may be in helping leaders to recognize and understand their spirituality and then tap into it to become better leaders. However, because the characteristics of spirituality such as love, truth, honesty, trust, vision, humility, and integrity as presented by Fry (2003) and others are characteristics used to describe a spiritual leader, an individual cannot be forced to integrate these qualities into

their leadership style and expect them to be successful. They may have to already be open and accepting of these qualities and be aware of their own spirituality in order to put them into action in the workplace. But spirituality is more than just the words and meaningless actions. Actions without feelings—just going through the motions—is not spirituality. Fry (2003) suggests spirituality is a way of leading others, inspiring them, and helping them achieve their fullest potential. This in turn contributes to a healthy workplace and a healthy employee.

Spirituality does not necessarily throw out the rules by which management has lived for years, but uses a different sort of rule that may contribute to and enhance the employee and the leader's success. Through the use of spirituality in leadership, people are empowered, encouraged, supported, and respected; leaders value their roles in the organization and openly acknowledge their contributions to the success of the organization

Fairholm (1997) suggests that “the new spiritual leadership paradigm sees transformation of self, others, and the organization as important, even critical” (p. 26). This is because in order for spirituality to be incorporated into the daily routine of business and education, a change must occur that encompasses everything that is known about leadership, and then as the cliché states, you must “think outside of the box.” In order to incorporate spirituality into leadership, that is exactly what must occur.

Spirituality may therefore involve a completely different method of thinking, acting, working, and producing. It may require the buy-in of management from the very top, to the people on the frontline, to those at the very bottom, in order for it to be effective within the organization. Widespread adoption of spirituality within an

organization means that the organization must transform itself, not with just a few people involved, but with everyone in the entire organization being involved in the transformation process.

Guillory (1997) categorizes the widespread adoption of spirituality within the organization as the “living organization” and describes it as one that never sleeps—one that is always in flux. That may very well be the case as companies look at ways of attaining success, especially when traditional management and leadership principles fall short of bringing them the success they desire.

Bolman and Deal (1995) believe that leading with the heart and with the soul can be used to empower employees and managers. Organizations in which other methods of motivating and leading have been tried but have failed might find success in the adoption of a more spiritual approach to leadership. Patton (1998) suggests that spiritual leaders create a vision that promotes cooperation, mutual caring, and dedication to work. Leaders are the servants of followers in that they facilitate goal accomplishment through the provision of resources and demonstrating that the work can be done. And while spirituality, leadership, and decision making cannot guarantee the success of the individual or the organization, it is suggested by some researchers that spiritual organizations are successful organizations. Further, if the leadership within an organization is able to recognize the importance of spirituality on employee performance, the organization as a whole benefits.

Dreher (1996) believes “there is growing consensus that we need a new paradigm to move beyond the traps of conventional thinking” (p. 39). He suggests “great leaders inspire us with a vision of further possibilities. They share their vision and challenge us

to develop our own, joining with us to fulfill our highest human potential” (p. 39). It could very well be that spiritual leaders contribute to the organization’s success by transforming the organization into a spiritual organization in which employees thrive. As a concept, spirituality could be the glue that holds everything together when it comes to how people lead and how those who follow respond to that leadership.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their decision making. Therefore, my purpose is to:

- To examine how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality in their decision making.
- To add to the literature about the subject and the population under study.
- To hear from male African American leaders themselves about their perceptions of spirituality and how it is integrated into their decision making processes.
- To uncover the essences of the phenomenon of how spirituality influences decision making on a specific population.

The review of literature revealed one study that shares a similar research theme, but differs in its overall purpose and focus. Ellison (2007) investigated how spirituality impacts male African American administrators in higher education. His focus takes a different approach to the subject and concentrates on the overall impact of spirituality on male African American administrators in higher education from a critical race theory perspective. My study differs significantly in its focus, which is primarily on how decision making by male African American leaders is influenced by spirituality—



specifically, how they perceive spirituality to influence their decision making in their roles as leaders.

Ellison's (2007) basis for his dissertation was from a critical race theory approach and focused more on how African American men "who hold leadership positions in higher education define their pathways, struggles, and successes in reaching and maintaining their positions" (p. 6). While exploring these various topics, Ellison does briefly mention spirituality and decision making and his respondents discuss briefly its impact on their decision making. However, these discussions are just a small part of a larger study on the impact of spirituality in male African American administrators.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on the decisions they make?
2. What influences the spirituality of male African American leaders in higher education?
3. How do male African American leaders in higher education integrate spirituality into their job?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it provides insight into how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the impact of spirituality on the decisions they make. The key is these are the perceptions or experiences of male African American leaders, as expressed by them. As spirituality transitions from a phenomenon that was once rarely discussed in professional and educational circles, this study will help to bridge the gap and lead to new information and discussion about how male African

American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their decision making.

### **Researcher Perspective**

I became interested in spirituality when I took my first course in Education Leadership as part of the doctoral program at Colorado State University. My interest in spirituality and leadership was piqued by one of the required readings for the course, the book *Leading with Soul: An Uncommon Journey* (Bolman & Deal, 1995). The book describes the story of a leader who has lost his way and seeks the wisdom of a wise sage to help him understand his challenges as a leader and to help him chart a new course of leading—with soul (or spirit). I believe myself to be a spiritual and a religious person, but at the time, I had never considered the possibility of leadership being influenced by a person's spirituality. I was intrigued by the whole idea of spirituality and leadership at the time and decided that this was a topic that I might consider for my dissertation.

At the time, in early 1999, there were other articles and a few books that addressed the topic of spirituality, but there was not a wealth of information available that focused on what would later become a working topic for my proposal, *Spirituality and Leadership: Male African Americans in Higher Education*. I was new to leadership at the time of this first leadership course and had been recently appointed as the Dean of General Education. As a newbie, I thought I was a spiritual leader because I felt I utilized some of the same principles in my leadership style as those outlined in *Leading with Soul*. Those principles included:

- Authorship/Empowerment – The leader does not have to make all the decisions. Subordinates are empowered to solve problems

- Love – Show people you care about them. If you care about them, they care about you
- Power – Give it to others and you end up with more
- Significance – Working with others, doing something worth doing, making the world better.

These are principles that I felt I integrated into my leadership style—not intentionally, but as a natural extension of my desire to be the kind of leader that I always thought a leader should be—to do the best job possible and to treat everyone with respect. This is what I feel I continue to integrate into my leadership to this day. I always thought that there was a spiritual dimension to my leadership and I tried to exhibit what I considered to be spiritual qualities in my leadership style. In addition to those qualities mentioned above, I did what I thought were things that were further evidence of my spirituality as a leader. I always maintained an open door policy (Love); was a counselor when needed (Love, Empowerment); provided as much support as possible to ensure that everyone had what they needed to do the best possible job (Empowerment, Significance); fought for and protected the people who reported to me (Significance); and tried to do all the things that I felt were the right things to do to ensure that everyone was productive and effective in their role as faculty (Authorship/Empowerment). These were qualities that I felt I possessed as spiritual leader.

I believed that as a spiritual leader I was responsible for ensuring the success of the faculty who reported to me. This meant that I needed to provide support and allow people the opportunity to do their job to the best of their ability by empowering them. I

believed that being an effective leader meant being focused on one common goal because faculty need leadership, wisdom, and guidance to do their job. They needed effective leadership but also needed to know that they had academic freedom to do their job and be effective in their roles.

I was not sure if other male African American leaders shared my interpretation of what constituted a spiritual leader. Further, I was not sure if any of the qualities that I considered important to my own leadership really meant anything to anyone other than myself. I wanted to know how other male African American leaders in higher education integrated spirituality into their leadership and I felt one way of doing this was to actually develop a dissertation that not only was a reflection of my interest in the topic, but would also allow me to hear from other African American leaders in higher education.

My topic initially was quite broad and focused on the “whole” of spirituality and leadership and male African American administrators in higher education. Then two years ago I discovered a dissertation that closely resembled the topic I had been interested in for almost 10 years. It was difficult to fathom that there was someone else whose topic could be so closely related to mine. I decided to narrow my focus from a broad topic about spirituality and leadership and male African American administrators in higher education to focus more specifically on the decision making process. I felt that the decisions that are made by this population can contribute to the success or the failure of the individual as a leader and that these decisions are reflective of the individual’s total leadership abilities. In other words, to be spiritual and a leader is one thing. But to be a spiritual leader whose spirituality influences the decisions he makes is another.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality in their decision making. In this chapter I establish the framework that will be used to explore the phenomenon of spirituality and decision making. Spirituality as a concept is still emerging; while there is a representative body of literature available, it remains misunderstood. This review of literature consists of four sections:

- Qualities of spirituality
- Spirituality in the workplace
- Spirituality and leadership
- Spirituality and decision making

### **Qualities of Spirituality**

Spirituality as a phenomenon in the workplace is difficult to define and quantify. Researchers have attempted to create a number of identifiable characteristics that describe spirituality but the list is far from comprehensive. Some of the qualities of spiritual leadership are described by Santora (1999) who identifies nine principles that he believes are the foundation of a spiritual environment: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (p. 5). Santora believes

each has its special place in the work environment. His descriptions of each of the principles and its impact in the workplace are explained below:

- *Love* has to be understood in terms of sacrifice and concern for others.
- *Joy* is not hilarity but a basic balance, an abiding contentment.
- *Peace* means not just burying the hatchet but a “tranquility of right order”—an alignment of one’s own will with the will of God.
- *Patience*, you have to understand patience even etymologically. The word means “to suffer.” The agent acts and the patient receives the action. If you are going to be a patient person, you have to be prepared to suffer. How a person receives an action—especially an unwelcome action—is the test of patience.
- *Kindness* genuine kindness is being attentive to other people. Patiently attentive.
- *Generosity*. When it is practiced, generosity demonstrates the truth of the old dictum that “virtue is its own reward.” It just happens. And it is contagious. It will trigger generosity on the part of other people.
- *Faithfulness*, translated to the workplace, means dependability and reliability. You can count on someone. If you can count on someone and someone can count on you, it just multiplies the strength and the effect of it.
- *Gentleness* means that a person is neither insecure nor arrogant but self-possessed, in quiet control of self and the surrounding situation.
- *Self-control*. *A test of personal integrity that involves the practice of saying no to yourself.* (Santora, 1999, p.5).

Santora’s (1999) descriptions of the qualities of spirituality might not align with those that we might expect to experience on a daily basis in the workplace, but if they

indeed exist, it may be that they are often overlooked or not discussed because of the perception that spirituality is not necessary to be successful in the workplace. The pressures of the day-to-day operations of an organization may sometimes overshadow the spiritual qualities that exist in the individual and in the workplace.

Fairholm (1997) and Bolman and Deal (1995) arrive at similar conclusions regarding the heart and soul of leadership and how acts such as love, caring, compassion, and authorship can be used to empower employees and managers. Fry (2003) defines the qualities of the spiritual leader in Table 1 (p. 695).

Table 1

*Qualities of Spiritual Leadership*

<b>Vision</b>	<b>Altruistic Love</b>	<b>Hope/faith</b>
Broad appeal to key stakeholders	Forgiveness	Endurance
Defines the destination and journey	Kindness	Perseverance
Reflects high ideals	Integrity	Do what it takes
Encourages hope/faith	Empathy/compassion	Stretch goals
Establishes a standard of excellence	Honesty	Expectation of reward/victory
	Patience	
	Courage	
	Trust/loyalty	
	Humility	

The qualities of leadership presented by Fry (2003) seem to be consistent with those of others such as Conger (1994), Lerner (2002), and Bolman and Deal (1995) who write about spiritual leadership. When put into practice, these qualities of spiritual leadership have to be more than just words, but must be translated into action. Spiritual

leaders have to model the behavior they expect from those with whom they work. Fry and Matherly (2007) provide additional qualities of spirituality. They believe that spirituality is concerned with qualities of the human spirit such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility and a sense of harmony with one's environment (p. 3). These qualities are necessary for the leader who considers himself or herself to be a spiritual leader. Leadership, according to Bogue (1994) can be displayed by leaders in several ways: honor, dignity, curiosity, candor, compassion, courage, expectation of excellence, and servant exemplar. Thus, spirituality involves moving beyond the traditional management paradigms and integrating a host of qualities that can enhance management and employees alike. The next section examines how spirituality is integrated into the workplace.

### **Spirituality in the Workplace**

Spirituality in the workplace may already exist for some employees and managers. For others, however, its existence might be overlooked or not even considered. Fry (2003) views spirituality as a necessary component of the intrinsic motivation of the individual and of others in the workplace. Lavelle (1999) suggests excellent companies often encourage their employees to talk about what they want out of life, to articulate their beliefs, and to state how what they do for a living contributes to their lives. This shows in the words "service," "values," and "fulfillment," which are frequently found in company mission statements. To me though, what these words are really talking about is the meaning in one's work—a spirituality of work, if you will. (p. 130)



Neck and Millimam (1994) suggest that spirituality can positively affect employee and organizational performance in several ways:

First, spirituality can lead individuals to experience consciousness at a deeper level, thereby enhancing their intuitive abilities. Second, spirituality-based intuition can also facilitate employees to develop a more purposeful and compelling organizational vision, which can also increase innovation. Third, organizations which offer spirituality-oriented work goals provide opportunities for employees to experience a higher sense of service and greater personal growth and development. Fourth, spiritual-based values can enhance teamwork and employee commitment to the organization, attributes which are highly sought after by corporate executives in the USA—a country which has a highly individualist culture. (p. 11)

The goal of most organizations is to be successful monetarily. In their aim for financial success, companies look to dedicated, loyal employees to help reach their goals. It is not uncommon, then, when describing spirituality in the workplace, to encounter words not normally associated with a typical work environment, which may contribute to the concept being easily accepted by the business world. As mentioned previously, terms such as love, joy, passion, sharing, and gentleness are some of the terms usually associated with spirituality in the workplace. “When you relate something to spirituality, you’re in a non-denominational, non-hierarchical, non-ecclesiastical setting (Santora, 1999, p. 5).” Rutte (1998) identifies four benefits of spirituality in the workplace, which include increased creativity, honest and genuine communication, increased ethical and moral behavior, and increased expression of talent in the workplace (p. 59). When associated with spirituality, Rutte’s benefits of spirituality seem to suggest that organizations that are spiritual stand to gain by promoting spirituality in the workplace.

Fry (2003) sees workplace spirituality as a means of integrating those qualities that an individual brings to the workplace as being motivated by the spiritual need to experience “a sense of transcendence and community in their work” (Fry, 2003, p. 1).

Lavelle (1999) and Rosener (1998) believe spirituality can provide more meaning to the workplace while Rutte (1998) and Patton (1998) support the premise that more and more corporations are integrating spirituality in their day to day operations. The next section will explore the relationship between spirituality and leadership.

### **Spirituality and Leadership**

Understanding the relationship between spirituality and leadership is important as we move into the discussion of spirituality and how it impacts decision making. The overview of spirituality will help provide some clarity about the topic of spirituality.

Spirituality is a difficult term to describe and an even more difficult concept to apply to leadership in the organization. Guillory (1997) describes spirituality as a type of consciousness that extends beyond the human mind while Lerner (2000) believes it is impossible to measure or observe spirituality in action. These descriptions are supported by Conger (1994) who believes that spirituality is personal and is internalized by each individual because it is about being aware of and in touch with ourselves at a an internal level.

Vaill (1998) defines spirituality as a “decision to search beyond what one can do to and/or on and/or within oneself” (p. 179). Bruce and Novinson (1999) define spirituality as the

search for meaning and values, which includes some of the transcendent, or the force or life energy beyond ourselves that is often identified with religions, but which may be simply a sense of interconnectedness with others and a desire to make meaning and live out one’s own values about good and wrong. (p. 165).

Lavelle’s (1999) approach is more practical in nature; he believes that spirituality in most organizations is exemplified in the mission statements with words such as “service,”

“values,” and “fulfillment.” These examples illustrate variations in definitions of spirituality that currently exist. Each definition is quite different but interrelated nonetheless in that they share a common thread that connects them. That connection is the individual. They all point to the individual, or the self, as the center of the existence of spirituality.

Tracey and Hinkin (1998) in their study of transformational leadership refer to the creation of a team spirit or team building while Kim (2002), in her study of participative management and job satisfaction, believes that leaders who involve employees in the decision-making process are more likely to have workers with higher levels of job satisfaction.

Spiritual leadership involves more than viewing oneself and employees as just a worker. Rather, the individual is valued with needs that can be used to improve their performance (Fairholm, 1997). Fairholm further believes that workers who share in a common bond and have similar philosophies raise performance levels. They make more informed choices, and they are typically more self-disciplined, honest in their evaluation of self and others, and are less competitive. When people become more aware of their spirituality and its meaning for all their life—including their work life—they are more focused and directed in their actions. In short, when we act against our spirit self, we act against ourselves. (Fairholm, 1997, p. 73)

Bolman and Deal (1995) describe spirituality that can be integrated into the workplace by leading with soul or compassion in leadership. Glanz (1996) believes there are a variety of qualities that individuals can practice at work to exhibit their spirituality. These are not complex acts, but rather smaller acts such as helping a colleague with a

project or sending a note of encourage to a co-worker in support of a project. Rosener (1998) reports that some companies even employ “spiritual experts” to improve productivity, employee relations, and customer service. The experts help the organization to identify and integrate spirituality into the workplace and show how it can be used to the benefit of the employees and the organization.

Hesselbein, Goldsmith, and Beckhard (1996) believe that spirituality will become more integrated into the workplace and older leadership practices will begin to wane. Institutions of the past may now be obsolete and new forms of governance and leadership will have to be learned. Perpetual learning and change will be the only constant. (Hesselbein, et al., 1996, p. 67). Further, Hesselbein et al. believe that spiritual leaders will be in a position to exert significant influence into the integration of spirituality in the workplace because of their ability to empower others. They believe it is through the empowerment of others that employees will grow and excel as a result of spiritual leadership. This is significant as more organizations begin to realize the importance of collaboration in achieving company goals and objectives. When the paradigm does shift, if not already, companies must be willing to let go of those preconceived notions of traditional management that may no longer be the primary method of organizational management and employee development that will benefit the organization. Companies that fail to adapt to new ways of doing business could be creating an environment of failure.

Guillory (1997) believes that transformation in organizations is inevitable. Personal and organization transformation will, according to Guillory, shift the organization mindset from one of entitlement to empowerment. Empowerment frees the

employees of the confines of having to seek approval for every decision that is made. Empowerment frees employees from fearing the loss of a job because the wrong decision has been made. Empowerment frees the employee of mental and physical constraints that prevent him or her from achieving the most out of each opportunity. When organizations show their employees that they care about them, companies are more profitable, employees are happier, and managers serve the needs of the employees. Fry (2003) calls companies that support this type of employee empowerment “learning organizations.” In learning organizations, employees “are characterized as being open and generous, capable of thinking in group teams, and risk takers with the ability to motivate others” (p. 694). Empowered employees are ones who are tapped into the success of the organization and view themselves as a collective, rather than an individual. They tend to do whatever it takes to get the job done, rather than ignoring a problem or shifting the responsibility to someone else (Fry, 2003).

Chappell (1993) believes that a company will thrive when its managers and their employees are working uniformly as a team. Chappell also believes common values and a shared sense of purpose can turn a company into a community where daily work takes on a deeper meaning and higher level of satisfaction. Bolman and Deal (1995), Conger (1994), Guillory (1997), Benefiel (2003), Vaill (1998), and Lerner (2000) view spiritual leadership as a quality that can transform organizations and people.

Fry (2003) has been influential in moving spirituality into the mainstream of the business world via his website and training programs, which provide education and training in integrating spirituality in leadership. References are often made to different types of transformational leadership styles that, upon closer inspection, reveal the essence

of spiritual leaders. Other discussions of spirituality focus on the manager as a servant leader. Frick and Spears (1996) and Hunter (1998) suggest that a servant leader first makes sure that other people's needs are being met so that they grow as persons. The role of the servant leader is an integral component of spiritual leadership. Servant leadership, in its truest sense, is putting others in front and empowering them to do their job. According to Fairholm (1997), the leader is first a servant, and then a leader who realizes that they cannot do all the work themselves. Spiritual leaders therefore, are more willing to give up what is considered power and authority in the organization so that a culture of shared ownership and successful performance can be created. This is why the integration of spirituality into leadership can be a challenge.

Santora (1999) in an interview with Father William J. Byron, professor of management and rector of the Georgetown Jesuit Community, revealed more on spirituality in the workplace and its value in relieving the stresses of the job world by concluding:

You hear a lot of talk these days about transforming the workplace, making it more humane and respectful of human dignity, but that won't happen until the people who go to work each day are transformed first. That simple, undeniable fact points to the revolutionary potential of spirituality suited to your workplace as well as life off the job. (Santora, 1999, p. 4)

Chappell (1993) discusses human and community spirit in his text to show how to retain those "personal values" that can positively impact an organization. Further, Chappell (1993) believes spirituality is using your soul as a guide to become an effective leader or follower. Bolman and Deal (1995) believes that modern managers concentrate mostly on the rational side of the management process and ignore the spiritual dimension. As a result, they overlook a powerful untapped source of energy and vitality (Bolman &

Deal, 1995, p. 141). And Vaill (1998) believes that people allow their work to give meaning to their life, rather than them, as individuals, giving meaning to their work. Patton (1998) shares a similar philosophy and believes that “spiritual leadership is that characteristic of leadership that touches some desire deep within potential followers that stirs them to action and followership (p. 89). Spiritual leaders develop visions that foster cooperation, mutual caring, and dedication to work.

Leaders are the servants of followers in that they facilitate goal accomplishment through the provision of resources and demonstrating that the work can be done” (Patton, 1998, p. 90). The challenge to spiritual leaders, then, is to be able to provide spiritual leadership without compromising the integrity of the work environment. Patton (1998) believes that spiritual leaders must believe in what they do and develop a strong sense of purpose. When this happens, leadership begins to occur naturally and others will follow willingly because they know that the leader will be able to serve their needs.

Patton (1998) suggests that spiritual leaders develop vision that foster cooperation, mutual caring, and dedication to work. Leaders are the servants of followers in that they create the energy and enthusiasm needed in the work environment. They provide the resources that employees need and they model the behavior that they expect of those they lead. Patton (1998) believes this process helps to create and strengthen a community in which all are empowered and are focused on one goal—the success of the organization. “The processes of spiritual leadership are building community and a sense of personal spiritual wholeness in both leaders and led, setting high moral standards and stewardship” (p. 88).

Bolman and Deal (1995) suggest that traditional management styles must be re-evaluated.

The signs point toward spirit and soul as the essence of leadership. There is growing consensus that we need a new paradigm to move beyond the traps of conventional thinking. (p. 39)

Dreher (1996) believes that great leaders have the ability to motivate and inspire others because of their ability to create a vision of what the future may hold. Their ability to create future possibilities is what sets them apart from other leaders who may not recognize or promote spirituality in the workplace. Dreher believes they share their vision and challenge us to develop our own, and as such, this contributes to each individual in the workplace moving toward achieving their goals at the highest levels possible. Bolman and Deal (1995) are able to connect the relationship between management and “soul” by describing the sojourn of a typical manager who has lost touch with his “management reality.” It was only through a sojourn with a wise sage that the manager was able to reassess his management style and his priorities and then move to re-create himself as an effective manager capable of empowering employees to perform at the highest potential.

Kouzes and Posner (1998) provide five fundamental practices of a leader that they believe are characteristics of the spiritual leader:

1. *Leaders model the way* by establishing values about how employees, colleagues, and customers ought to be treated. They create standards of excellence and then set an example for others to follow.
2. *Leaders inspire a shared vision* because they passionately believe that they can make a difference. They envision the future by creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become.



3. *Leaders encourage the heart* by keeping hope and determination alive and recognize contributions that individuals make to climb to the top. And every winning team needs to share in the rewards of their efforts, so leaders celebrate accomplishments. They make everyone feel like heroes.
4. *Leaders challenge the process* by searching for opportunities to change the status quo. They look for innovative ways to improve the organization. They experiment and take risks. And since risk taking involves mistakes and failure, leaders accept the inevitable disappointments as learning opportunities.
5. *Leaders enable others to act* by fostering collaboration and building spirited teams. They actively involve others. Mutual respect is what sustains extraordinary efforts, so leaders create an atmosphere of trust and human dignity. They strengthen others, making each person feel capable and powerful. (pp. 7-14).

Kouzes and Posner (1998) believe these qualities already exist in organizations. It is in these organizations that the employees and the leaders benefit from spirituality in the workplace. The next section will examine decision making and leadership

### **Decision Making and Leadership**

In order to better understand and appreciate the influence of spirituality on leadership, it is important to also review the decision-making process and its impact on leadership. While the focus of this dissertation was to analyze whether spirituality influences the decisions that male African American leaders make in their roles, it was first necessary to discuss the decision-making process. First will be an overview of the

decision-making process. After that, an analysis of decision making and leadership will be presented.

The decision-making process itself can be one that involves complex processes. Grunig and Kuhn (2005) define the decision-making process as one that has a “system of rules for obtaining and analyzing information which can be applied to the resolution of a certain type of decision problem” (p. 44). Driver, Brousseau, and Hunsaker (1990) assert that decision making involves the analysis of a situation and coming up with a solution. Driver et al. believe that the decision making process is a learned process and can be influenced by an individual’s background.

Buchanan and O’Connell (2006) credit Chester Barnard, a retired telephone executive, with bringing the term “decision making” from the “lexicon of public administration into the business world” (p. 33). Buchanan and O’Connell add that Barnard and other theorists are also credited with helping to establish the integration of decision making into the organization. According to Barnard, “Decision implies the end of deliberation and the beginning of action” (Buchanan & O’Connell, 2006, p. 33). Grunig and Kuhn (2005) believe the decision-making process is the movement from a current situation to a target situation. In both cases, the time for deliberation or thinking is over, and action must be taken.

Effective decision making contributes to the success of any organization. Decisions that impact an organization can result in the success or failure of the manager or leader who makes the decision. Fernando et al. (2006) believes that the decision making process is impacted by the decision maker’s personal characteristics “such as his

or her values, beliefs, needs and proficiency that may influence how he or she reacts to environmental, organizational and task demands” (p. 5).

Klein et al. (1993) believe that most decision making research is focused on what they terms the “decision event.” The decision event is

the crucial part of decision making that occurs when the decision maker (generally a single individual) surveys a known and fixed set of alternatives, weighs the likely consequences of choosing each, and makes a choice. The decision maker evaluates the options in terms of a set of goals, purposes, or values that are stable over time and that he or she knows quite clearly. (p. 5)

The decision maker, in this case, is armed with the knowledge needed to carry out the decision making process. In this case too, there is an attempt by the decision maker to come to an acceptable conclusion based on the prior information that he or she has at his or her disposal.

Fry (2003) believe that the decision-making process is critical to the success of the organization and summarize the “strategic management process” as consisting of a mission and vision, internal and external analysis, strategy and objectives, implementation, and evaluation (p.9). Clearly, this type of decision making is based on the accumulation of data over a period of time that the decision maker can use to determine the best possible course of action. Ideally, a decision maker’s ultimate course of action in this case is based on external factors (data) and prior experiences. This suggests that decisions are not made based purely on technical data that supports the decision, but rather on external and internal influences.

The decision-making process is critical to the success of anyone in a leadership position. It is not only important that the decision maker makes a decision, but how he or she makes decisions as well. Regardless of the method utilized, the decision maker has at

his or her disposal an arsenal of decision-making strategies and techniques. There are any number of variables that can impact the decision-making process. The decision maker's age, race, ethnicity, education, and religion are some of the variables that can influence decisions. Spirituality may be an additional dimension that can be attributed to the decision-making process.

Vroom and Yetton (1973) believe that decision making is an important part of leadership and that the leader not only makes decisions but also “designs, regulates and selects social systems that make decisions” (p. 5). This decision making for the entire organization is what can help chart the success of the organization in the future, or lead to its downfall. The direction of the organization, its success, and the success of individuals in the organization are directly related to the decisions made by leadership and the data he or she has to work with at the time of the decision being made. Decision makers may employ a variety of strategies to determine the most appropriate course for the organization such as those described by Grunig and Kohn (2005), which involve what they call “decision logic.” Decision logic is concerned with descriptive decision theory and prescriptive decision theory. Grunig and Kohn (2005) postulate that descriptive decisions are based on descriptions and explanations of entrepreneurial decisions that were arrived at using factors such as intuition, past events, recommendations, random choices, and “systematic rational thought supported by relevant information” (p. 8). As such, it is highly unlikely that decisions are ever made in a vacuum or in a “perfect” environment, free of outside influences. According to Grunig and Kohn (2005), prescriptive decision making, on the other hand, is based primarily on systematic rational decisions with little, if any emphasis on intuition and experience. Grunig and Kohn's

(2005) definition supports the theory of those who believe that the decision making process should be based primarily on the factual supporting data and not the individual's intuition.

While the modern day decision maker has at his or her disposal a wealth of data that can aid in the decision making process, Buchanan and O'Connell (2006) postulate that decisions can also be made from "gut" responses as well. These are decisions that are not made necessarily on past, present, and future information that the decision maker has, but rather, at a more deeper, personal or emotional level. A decision is made perhaps more on whether the decision maker views the potential outcome as the "right" thing to do. Decision making and spirituality may be connected in such a way so that the decision-making process is not based on a complex system, but rather a spiritual approach that involves the individual's upbringing, religion, culture, and other variables that can be associated with a person's spirit.

Good decision making results in good decisions for business and organizations. Good decisions for the organization results in increased profitability for the company and can contribute to the success of the individual who makes good decisions. In an effort to continue to remain competitive, organizations employ any number of training and development activities to increase employee performance, company morale, and ultimately company profitability. However, given the continued support that organizations may provide to help individuals make the right decisions, the decision-making process itself, cannot be viewed in isolation.

Fry (2003) contends that there are extrinsic and intrinsic motivations that impact human performance. Extrinsic rewards are those that come from an external source. Fry

(2003) describes an extrinsic reward as the “what am I going to get out of this if I do this,” while an intrinsic reward is something deeper, more spiritual. Intrinsic rewards come from doing a job and doing it well and the satisfaction that comes from a job well done. Extrinsic rewards involve recognition, extra pay, time off, or any other type of compensation to an employee for doing their job. Many employees expect extrinsic rewards as being part of their normal work day. On the other hand, intrinsic rewards are more lasting and meaningful and provide a greater degree of satisfaction to the individual. Intrinsic rewards provide a greater degree of overall satisfaction to the individual. This is closely related to what Burke and Miller (1999) describe as intuitive decision making, which they believe is a subconscious process of making decisions based on experience and accumulated judgment. They categorize intuitive decision making into five categories: subconscious and mental programming, values or ethics-based decisions, experience-based decision, affect-initiated decisions, and cognitive-based decisions.

The spiritual decision maker might utilize all five forms of decision making when needed, as there is no specific decision making mode that is employed at all times. The source of the spirituality of the male African American leader in higher education might derive from the intrinsic satisfaction with his job, or it might be more intuitive in nature. Whatever the source, this intrinsic satisfaction may contribute to the decisions that are made by male African American leaders in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

The literature reviewed provides little insight on how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on decision making in their role as leaders. The literature, though, does provide a sufficient amount of data that

suggests that spirituality is indeed being utilized by organizations as a means of infusing energy, empowerment, and values into its existence. It is also clear that there are distinct lines of demarcation between religion and spirituality. However, these lines are quite blurred when African Americans are added to the equation.

Because of the importance of the decision making process in any organization, it is paramount that the leaders consistently make the right decisions. The right decision results in the organization being more successful and in the decision maker's success as well. Does this spirituality impact the decision maker? If this is true, then the question that this researcher must answer is the extent to which spirituality affects African American administrators in higher education.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the research design, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness of this study. The research design selected for this study was a phenomenological approach because I wanted to discover how male African American leaders in higher education perceived the influence of spirituality in their decision making. I chose the phenomenological approach because it allowed me to conduct field interviews with participants so that participants could talk about their perceptions of the influence of their spirituality on the decisions they make in their roles as higher education leaders. It allowed them to tell their stories and for me to better understand this phenomenon.

The participants for this study were male African American leaders in higher education. I chose to limit the selection of participants to male African American leaders in higher education because this is an area of research that I was interested in, and I wanted to find out more about this subject and the population. Further, I am interested in this topic because I wanted to see how this group experienced the phenomenon of spirituality in their professional decision making. The selection of the participants will be explored in the section on participants.

The data collected for this research was information taken from interviews conducted with the participants. Two interviews were conducted with each participant.



The first one captured the essence of each participant's experience. The second interview shared my analysis and interpretation of their transcripts. They provided me feedback that either supported my interpretations or allowed them to provide clarification and better and more specific examples.

My data analysis describes how the data were analyzed. I chose a data analysis approach that complemented the dissertation's phenomenological design. The approach I used was the Modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120). I chose the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data because it is a highly structured approach to data analysis that allowed me to collect data at a level that revealed the structure and then the essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the research participants. The discovery and exploration of the essence of the phenomenology provided me with a deeper level of understanding and interpretation based on the perceptions of the research participants. An explanation of the modified Van Kaam method and the specifics of my data analysis are described in the research design section.

I achieved trustworthiness through specific steps taken to ensure the research was accurate and ethical. Trustworthiness was achieved through peer review/examination; rich, thick description; audit trail; and reflexivity (Merriam, 2002).

### **Research Design**

I chose a research design that allowed me to focus on the structure and the essences of my participants' stories. Qualitative inquiry allowed me to investigate spirituality and decision making among a specific population. According to Moustakas (1994),

the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived—in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (p. 13)

Phenomenological research is a way of obtaining comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). From the comprehensive descriptions, I developed the phenomenological structures. These structures revealed the essence of the phenomenon. The essence is at a much deeper level of interpretation and it can be quite abstract. In addition, the essence is not something that each participant will be able to easily or knowingly disclose. This is why it was necessary to use a data analysis design that stripped away the redundancies and unnecessary data in order to develop a structure that allowed the essence to emerge. It is the participants' descriptions of their experiences with the phenomenon that provided me the opportunity to gather data, analyze and interpret the data, and to describe it in order to develop meaningful conclusions and to understand the structure of this phenomenon. It is the structure and the essence their data revealed that allowed me to move toward understanding the individual and his shared experience of the phenomenon of spirituality in his professional decision making

Moustakas (1994) describes empirical phenomenological research as a “return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). These male African American leaders in higher education who participated in this research provided their perceptions of how their spirituality influences their professional decisions. Their perceptions allowed me to build a structure that turn revealed the essence of the phenomenon. It was the return to the experiences of the research

participants that revealed the essence of their spirituality and how it was unique or similar to the phenomenon experienced by other participants.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality on the decisions they make?
2. What influences the spirituality of male African American leaders in higher education?
3. How do male African American leaders in higher education integrate spirituality into their job?

### **Selection of Participants**

The participants in the study were male African American leaders in higher education. The identities of the participants remain confidential, and I am the only one who is able to connect their pseudonyms with their real names.

For the purpose of this study, a male African American leader in higher education is defined as an African American male working for a post secondary college or university, who attained the administrative position of dean, associate dean, chair, or department chair. African American refers to those individuals who may also be classified as Black and are of African descent. These positional leaders in higher education self-identified as being spiritual people in order to be considered for this research study.

Higher education is defined as post secondary degree granting institutions, which includes technical schools, junior colleges, and colleges or universities, and encompasses undergraduate through graduate school.

I used the snowball sampling technique as the primary means of selecting participants for the study. I chose this method of participant selection because I wanted to identify male African American leaders who themselves believed they used spirituality in their own professional decision making. I asked my colleagues to provide the names of individuals whom they knew, who were male African American leaders in higher education. From each recommendation, I contacted the referral and requested to set up an appointment.

Participants were selected primarily by identifying as male African American leaders in higher education in an urban, southern metropolitan area. Having determined that each individual met the criterion of self-identifying as a leader who used his spirituality when making decisions, I invited him to participate. The participants were selected based on matching the selection criteria listed below:

1. They lived and worked in an urban, southern metropolitan area or were within a 200-mile radius.
2. They served in a leadership role and had decision making or administrative responsibilities in their role as a leader.

The selection of candidates for this study did not pose a significant challenge. The seven participants lived in an urban, southern metropolitan area and held positions such as dean, associate dean, or department chair and all felt they were spiritual.

### **Site Descriptions**

The participants in the study work for a variety of universities in an urban, southern metropolitan area. One participant works for a private, historically black, all male liberal arts college. The school offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in

business, technology, liberal arts, and sciences, as well as medical degrees at its school of medicine. The school's enrollment is approximately 3,000 students.

One participant works at a two-year technical college in the Southeast. This college is part of the statewide technical college system and serves as a feeder for the state university system. Student enrollment is slightly over 11,000 students.

One participant works for a private college in the Southeast. The school offers undergraduate degrees in a variety of areas that include business and management, healthcare, and criminal justice. Student enrollment is approximately 1,100 students.

One participant works for a public, state supported research university. The school is one of the two largest universities in the state university system and student enrollment is approximately 30,000 students.

Three of the participants work for an international for-profit university system comprised of multiple locations in the United States and abroad. The school offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in business, management, technology, liberal arts and sciences, and healthcare as well a medical degree at its schools of medicine and veterinary sciences. Student enrollment is approximately 80,000 students.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted interviews of the seven participants at their office, their home, or an office conveniently located to them. Three participants were interviewed in an office or conference room where they worked. Three participants preferred to be interviewed at their home. One participant chose an office at a local college near his home. All interviews were recorded with two digital voice recorders. In case one of the recorders failed to operate, there was a backup of the interview. Recording of the interview allowed

me flexibility to focus on listening to the participants' responses so that I could probe for clarity and follow-up with questions if needed.

The interviews conducted for this research followed the informal interview method. I believed the informal interview method was most appropriate because it allowed me and my participant to engage in a natural, conversational style of dialogue that was neither pre-scripted nor prescribed. It allowed for full participation by each individual being interviewed. Merriam (1998) states that the informal interview method is appropriate for the phenomenon the researcher wants to know explore.

I used minimal prompting with only a few questions or benchmarks that helped guide the interview process. However, realizing that in a qualitative approach there are new discoveries being made throughout the interview, I did follow-up with additional questions as each interview progressed. Follow-up questions were asked as a result of the response to a question or when I felt I needed additional clarification. I also found that my questions changed as I began to more fully understand the structure of my phenomenon.

Once my interpretations and analysis of the responses for each participant was completed, I emailed a copy of the analysis to each participant. Each participant was asked to review my interpretation of their response and provide feedback or recommendations. Each of the seven participants informed me that my analysis of their interview was appropriate and none of them provided additional feedback or recommendations.

## **Data Analysis**

From the variety of data analysis methods available, I chose to utilize the modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenology data suggested by Moustakas (1994). I chose to use this method because it supported a research design that was highly structured and allowed me to interpret the field data collected at a level that revealed the structure and the essence of the phenomenon experienced by research participants.

The modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data allowed me to collect individual descriptions via the interview. From these individual descriptions, structures were created using the general or universal meanings that were derived. From the structures or universal meaning, the essences of the structure of these experiences were derived (Moustakas, 1994). The structural analysis revealed the phenomenon through the eyes of those who perceived their use of spirituality in the decisions they made.

It was the participants' descriptions of their experiences with the phenomenon that provided me the opportunity to gather data, analyze and interpret the data, and to be able to describe it in order to develop meaningful conclusions and to identify and classify the essences of their experiences.

I accomplished each of the seven steps of the modification to the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data using the following process. The participants were interviewed and the interviews recorded. Each interview was transcribed. Once the transcriptions were completed, I read the transcripts several times in order to be completely familiar with the information each of the participants provided.

Then to support the seven steps of modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data, I did the following:

1. I horizontalized the data by listing and performing preliminary grouping. Every relevant expression of participants was listed. Moustakas calls this listing and preliminary grouping-horizontalization.
2. Next, through the reduction and elimination process, these expressions were reduced and some of them eliminated. This was achieved after examining whether the experience was significant and if it could be labeled. According to Moustakas, there were two ways to do this:
  - a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficiently constituent for understanding it?
  - b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experiences? (Moustakas, p. 121). All other expressions were discarded. What was left were the invariant constituent of the meaning of the experience.
3. Next, the information was clustered and themes assigned to the clusters.
4. The fourth step involved validation of the final identification of the invariant constituents and themes. According to Moustakas (1994), validation can be achieved by checking the “invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant” (p. 121). Moustakas cites three things that contribute to validation:
  - a. Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription?
  - b. Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?



- c. If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the researcher's experience and should be deleted (p. 121). The relevance of these themes determined whether they remained or were discarded.
5. The construction of an individual textural description was then created using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes. Moustakas recommends that these be verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.
6. Next, individual structural descriptions of the experiences as described by each male African American leader were constructed.
7. Finally, the textural-structured description of the meanings and essences of the experience were constructed. Once each of these steps was completed, the final result was a complete description of how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality in their decision making (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121).

According to Moustakas (1994), "from the individual textural-structural descriptions, develop a composite description of the means and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (p. 121). In other words, I needed to extract the meanings from the structures that were derived and from the participants' descriptions as articulated in their interview to develop a deep level of analysis and interpretation of the responses of research participants. This deep level of analysis formed the essences of their experience with the phenomenon. An analogy would be like that of peeling away the layers of an onion to reveal yet another layer until finally reaching the core. The layers were the structures that led me to the core. It is the core that I was most interested in, not the layers. Each individual layer moved me closer to

my goal of discovering the individual essence, but the layer was just a component of the essence. Each essence was different for each respondent, but it was the essence and how it manifested itself for each participant that revealed how this phenomenon of spirituality influenced the decisions they made in their roles as leaders in higher education. As a result, I was able to develop a description of the phenomenon representative of the entire population studied.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in the qualitative research design is concerned with the practices and procedures used in data collection and whether these practices were being conducted fairly and ethically. Merriam (2002) provided several strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in research. I used following were the four strategies to ensure that my data were trustworthy: peer review/examination, researcher's position or reflexivity, audit trail, and rich, thick description (Merriam, 2002, p. 31).

The first method of trustworthiness for my research was peer review/examination. Merriam (2002) believes that every study has a built in peer review in the form of committee members who will each read the research and provide feedback. For my research, my primary peer review was conducted by my advisor/methodologist. Peer review/examination allowed my advisor/methodologist and me to work together, each of us serving as an instrument of my research. Because we were different instruments, he and I did not necessarily share the same views or have the same answers to questions regarding the data. By utilizing my advisor/methodologist, I was able to have him review my material to ensure that I did not have any flaws in my analysis of data. I utilized his

expertise and experience to my benefit because of the unique perspectives he provided to the analysis of the data.

Researcher position or reflexivity was the second method I used to ensure trustworthiness. According to Merriam (2002), reflexivity allows the researcher to explain their position on the topic being studied. This position is reflected in the researcher's "basis for selecting participants, the context of the study and what values or assumptions might affect data collection and analysis" (p. 26). Reflexivity was what I brought to the study and how I impacted the study in terms of analysis and interpretation. My interpretations were based on the interviews I conducted but more important, the themes and meanings that I derived that served as the basis for my analysis of the data and any pre-conceived notions I already had developed about the research topic and the data.

Audit trail was another method I used to ensure trustworthiness of my data. Merriam (2002) describes the audit trail as describing in detail "how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made through the inquiry" (p.27). The audit trail involved such things as journaling and the recording of how I interacted with and interpreted my data. The audit trail revealed the activities that occurred in the data collection, how it was conducted, how participants were chosen, how data were collected, and how the data were analyzed.

Rich, thick description is described by Merriam (2002) as building a significant database upon which to draw from in the study. For my study, the seven participants provided the rich, thick description needed for trustworthiness, through their voice, that is, what they said and how they felt about their perceptions of how spirituality influences

the decisions they make as leaders in higher education. It was from their descriptions that I was able to determine the essences of their experiences of how spirituality influences the decisions they make as male African American leaders in higher education. My participants provided a solid database of information that supported my research. These were the methods I used to provide trustworthiness for my study.

## CHAPTER 4: INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### **Introduction to the Results**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality in their decision making.

As you read in my researcher perspective, you saw that I am a Christian and that I am spiritual. You saw that some of my assumptions about spirituality came from the literature. For instance, Bruce and Novinson (1999) believe that spirituality transcends religion and involves the search for meaning and values that exist beyond the forces of which we are usually aware and has to do more with the values we possess and doing what is right and not what is wrong.

Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) point to the individual's connection with others and the purpose and meaning in the work that they do as outward forms of spirituality. Fry and Matherly (2007) believe that spirituality is concerned with qualities of the human spirit such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and a sense of harmony with one's environment (p. 3). Fry and Matherly, as well as other researchers cited in the review of literature, provided descriptions of the human spirit through examples that I believed illustrated the consistency of qualities that characterize spirituality. Most researchers' descriptions of

spirituality were not based wholly on religion but were based on other qualities and characteristic.

So when I began my interviews with these participants, I began with the expectation that spirituality would have a broad base and perhaps religion would be one part of their spiritual base as these men practiced it. Therefore, I was surprised when the participants discussed their spirituality, they did so by describing and developing their religious beliefs and experiences. In other words, these participants considered their religious beliefs and practices to be their spirituality, which influences their decision making practices.

While my participants talked about the qualities of love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, personal responsibility, and harmony, they did not do it in a way that was outside or beyond their religion. Rather all these concepts were within their religious beliefs and practices. Participants talked about these concepts as part of their religious beliefs, because these concepts are important for them to live by. Therefore, their data show their spirituality was their religious belief.

What I found in the interviews was that there was not a broad umbrella of spirituality. Rather, the participants' spirituality was identical to their religious beliefs and those religious beliefs for six of the seven participants centered squarely on Christianity. The seventh participant, Vincent, will be addressed later. More specifically their Christianity was based on their belief in the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In the next section, I will briefly describe the participants' concept of the Triune God. The description of the Triune God is important because it is the basis upon which

the six participants' belief system is built and serves as the foundation of their spirituality.

### **The Triune God**

In order to understand the participants' religious beliefs that constitute their spirituality, it is necessary to understand their belief system and the concept upon which it is based. In developing this section I first develop the major concepts of the Triune God: God, the Father; Jesus Christ, the Son; and the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost.

The concept of the Triune God, one God in three persons, is the tenet upon which Christianity rests. The concept of the Triune God is also called the Trinity. Unger (1957) describes the concept as having only one God, but that God is tri-personal—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The participants' description of their spirituality is their Triune God, which they sometimes called a Higher Power. In the interviews the participants intermittently used the phrase Higher Power, but as they talked about their own religious beliefs and their own spirituality, they made it very clear that by using the phrase Higher Power they meant Triune God or the Trinity. Higher Power in this sense was never an entity unto itself, but rather a shorthand reference participants used to refer to their Triune God.

Each participant except one, Vincent, believes in the concept of the Triune God. I was surprised that the participants almost immediately connected their spirituality to their Christianity and then to their belief in a Triune God. Also, their descriptions of their Christianity (except for Vincent) were consistent across all interviews.

The participants never identified any other influences that contributed to their spirituality except their Christianity. Therefore, when participants discuss their

spirituality, they also mean their Christianity, which is the same for them. While participants talked about compassion, caring for their fellow man, and empowering others, for example, as expressions of their spirituality, it was their relationship to the Triune God that directed their lives and determined their spirituality.

### **Belief in God, the Father**

A belief in God, the Father, is the first component of the Triune God. In Christianity God the Father is the creator of everything: the universe, the earth, all plant life, animal life, and human life. Unger (1957) describes God as being the “Supreme Personal Intelligence, the Creator and Preserver of all things...” (p. 410). Christians believe that if they pray to God, the creator, and serve through worship and through living a life that rejects sinful acts and deeds, that when they die they will live eternally with God. It is this belief in a spiritual life after their physical death to which Christians ascribe, and it is this belief in the reward of everlasting life that guides their faith and belief in God.

The belief in God the Father by participants was universal across all interviewed including Vincent. Participants believe that God is a power greater than each of them and that God is the reason for their existence and is therefore the source of their spirituality.

Each participant said he communicates with God on a regular basis. They communicate with God through prayer and meditation. For some, that was a simple statement of praying every evening. For others, it was a matter of praying multiple times a day. Others chose to pray during the day when they had something difficult come up. Regardless of what the schedule was for these individuals, each communicated with God on a regular basis. Further, participants believe that God communicates with them via



their prayers and meditations. They admit that there is no physical or external voice that speaks to them in their prayers. Nor do they believe that every time they pray to God they will receive answers or recommendations on decisions they make. Rather, it is because of their prayers and meditations that they feel they are connected to God and believe it is through this connection with God they are provided with direction and guidance.

### **Belief in Jesus Christ**

A belief in Jesus Christ is the second component of the Triune God. In the Christian faith Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Father, whose incarnate birth was made possible through the Holy Spirit and a virgin named Mary. Christians believe that God sent his Son to live and die in human form. They believe it is through Jesus' death and his resurrection that people not only come closer to God, but are offered the opportunity to receive their salvation and eternal life. The participants acknowledged their belief in Jesus and feel that their spirituality is also determined by their belief in Jesus. Further, they believe that their connection to Jesus influences the decisions they make in their roles as leaders.

When participants discuss the impact of their spirituality on the decisions they make, they connect their belief in Jesus as being an integral component of their decision making process. They believe they communicate with Jesus and Jesus provides them with direction and influences how they live their lives. Each participant believed that his Christianity is his spiritual foundation. Further, they believe that their relationship with God the Father and Jesus the Son is integrated into their lives and even when they do not

consciously think about their relationship with the Triune God, their spirituality, which is derived from God, is always working in the background.

### **Belief in the Holy Spirit**

A belief in the Holy Spirit is the third component of the concept of the Triune God. Christians believe The Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, is the spirit of God, or the manifestation of God, in a personal and spiritual way. While the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament beginning in Genesis, the most clear examples and illustrations of the Holy Spirit that these participants have comes from the New Testament, in the Gospels. In Acts, the fifth book of the Gospels in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is described as the power that will “come on you and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem...”. It is in the Gospel of Acts that the Holy Spirit is described in detail as being the presence of Jesus Christ in all people. The omnipresence of Jesus is a result of his crucifixion and his human death, which resulted in his ascension to the Father or God. This is also described in the first book of the New Testament, Matthew. Jesus Christ ascends to God the Father after his resurrection. Christians believe Jesus’ ascension to the father was necessary in order for the Spirit of Jesus Christ to reside in each person who believes in him. This is specified in the New Testament in the Gospel of John 16:7-8: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”

Jesus’ death was necessary because in his human form, he was only able to be in one place at one time. Because of his ascension, he becomes Jesus in spirit form, and is able to be in all places all the time. Further, because of Jesus’ existence in spirit form, he is able to reside in the hearts of those who believe in him and accept him.

When participants talk about their spirituality, they talk about the influence of the Holy Spirit on their Christian lives. One participant believed that the Holy Spirit provides him with guidance and direction, but more importantly, watches over him to protect him and keep him from harm or danger. It is because of the participants' belief in the God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—the Triune God—that their spirituality is manifested in their daily lives, and ultimately in their professional careers as male African American leaders in higher education.

From this point forward, references to the participants' spirituality and their Christianity will be used interchangeably because the participants have stated implicitly and explicitly that their spirituality is their Christianity, which is their belief in their Triune God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the next section, I will introduce you to the participants.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected by identifying male African American leaders in higher education in a major metropolitan city in the Southeast and inviting them to participate in the research project. The participants held leadership roles in which they were responsible for leading students, faculty, and staff on a daily basis. Each participant chose his pseudonym used in the study. I will now introduce my participants.

#### **Nick Phoenix**

Nick Phoenix is a 49-year-old associate program dean in the College of Technology at a university in the Southeast. Nick has been in a leadership role for two and a half years. Prior to his appointment as associate program dean, he served as an adjunct professor while working full time as an operations manager in the IT field. He

has been in the education field for 13 years and in his current position has 12 faculty members who report directly to him. He has one indirect report, an administrative assistant, whom he shares with three other colleagues. He has an MBA and a MS degree and is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program. For Nick, his decisions are in organizational areas such as enrollment, student success, course offerings, and majors. He works daily with faculty and students.

**Responsibilities.** In his capacity as associate program dean, he reports to the associate college dean. There are a number of professors who report to him and his responsibilities on a daily basis can range from working with students to resolve issues they face as college students, to reprimanding a faculty for poor performance. In his role as associate program dean, Nick is responsible for making decisions that impact the faculty who report directly to him. In addition, he works very closely with several administrative staff who are indirect reports. In this capacity, he is expected to provide guidance and direction to those who report to him.

**Spirituality.** Nick attends church on a regular basis and is a Christian. He believes in the Triune God and believes that his spirituality and his Christianity are the same. Nick's nurtures his Christianity by attending church regularly and by associating with other Christians who share the same beliefs as him.

### **Jason**

Jason is a 45-year-old associate college dean of technology at a university in the Southeast. He has held his current position for four years. Prior to his appointment as associate college dean, he held the position of professor for seven years. He has been in education for 12 years after holding several various positions in the telecommunications

industry as an engineer. Jason was enrolled in a Ph.D. program majoring in Research Measurements and Statistics. He holds a master's degree in computer science.

**Responsibilities.** In his role as associate college dean, Jason is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the College of Technology and Information Sciences. He has two direct reports (associate program deans) and 28 indirect reports who are the faculty who report to his two associate program deans. He must provide guidance and directions and supervision for the two associate program deans who report to him. He is also responsible for working with students on a daily basis.

**Spirituality.** Jason was not raised in an environment in which his parents attended church regularly, so he did not have the early exposure to the church that some of the other participants had. Rather, Jason's regular exposure to religion did not occur until he was a teenager at which time he said he made a conscious decision to attend church. He explained that at the age of 15, he gave his life to Christ and one of the requirements of him as a member of his church was to pass out tracts or religious literature to people walking on the streets of the city in which he lived. He believes his involvement in the church during his teen years greatly influenced his spirituality. His mother did not attend church regularly and Jason explained that because of his involvement with the church, his mother began to attend church regularly. Jason believes the influences he had when he attended church significantly shaped his belief in the Triune God. He believes his Christianity is his Spirituality. Jason does not attend church on a regular basis, but believes that his relationship with God is not based on religious doctrine or attending church every Sunday. Rather, he prefers to stay home and watch church on TV. One televangelist that he likes is Joel Olsteen. In addition, Jason listens

to various motivational speakers and ministers whom he believes provide him with the spiritual reinforcement he needs.

### **Nombre**

Nombre is a 58-year old senior director of the Diversity Education Planning office of the Provost, and Senior Academic Vice President for Academic Affairs. He has been in his current position for 12 years. He previously held the position of Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Diversity programs. He has worked in the field of education for 36 years. He has three direct reports and five indirect reports. He is ABD for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration.

**Responsibilities.** As the senior director of Diversity Education Planning Office of the Provost and Senior Academic Vice President for Academic Affairs, Nombre is responsible for university leadership in diversity initiatives, which includes implementation of a Diversity Strategic Plan and monitoring the Diversity Council. He is also responsible for design and implementation of diversity awareness training/consultation and development of global competencies for an inclusive workforce.

**Spirituality.** Nombre's spirituality is the result of being raised in a Christian environment in which his mother attended church every Sunday. Nombre's mother did not miss the opportunity for them to attend church, and if there was ever an occasion in which they could not physically be in church, she would have church at home. Because of his upbringing in the church, Nombre attended church regularly as a child and into adulthood. However, as he matured he became disillusioned with religion and stopped attending church regularly. He believes his spirituality was significant enough though that he does not need to attend church. He prays and meditates daily.

## **CB**

CB is a 65-year old associate program dean at a university in the Southeast. He has held his current position for two years after having served as dean of his college for several years. He has been in education for 28 years and currently has eight full time professors who directly report to him. He has a total of 33 indirect reports. He has a master's degree and is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program.

**Responsibilities.** In his role CB is required to work daily with students, faculty, and staff. All of the professors in his college report directly to him and he is expected to evaluate their performance in the classroom, provide developmental activities for them, and work to ensure that academic quality is not compromised inside or outside of the classroom. CB is also responsible for supporting enrollment initiatives, supporting retention activities, and helping to sustain current programs as well as develop and initiate new programs in his college. He spends most of his days working with data on his computer, but also has to find the time to meet with faculty, conduct classroom visits, conduct online course observations, as well as a host of other associated duties.

**Spirituality.** As a child CB was raised in the church. His parents attended church regularly and he was expected to attend church as well. He attends church regularly, is a member of the church choir, attends Bible Study regularly, and attends Sunday School as well. CB believes it was his upbringing in the church that determined his Christianity as an adult. He believes the solid grounding he experienced as a child was the major influence in Christianity. CB believes his Christianity is a way of life for him.

## **Bernard**

Bernard is a 57-year-old IT administrator at a college in the Southeast. He has been in his current position for two years. Prior to his current appointment, he held the position of dean and associate dean at a university in the Southeast. He has been in the field of education for more than 30 years and holds a master's degree.

**Responsibilities.** In his role as associate program dean, Bernard was responsible for managing 27 professors who reported to him. He was responsible for evaluating faculty performance in the classroom. He made recommendations for faculty development as well as assisted in helping faculty to chart a course for successful performance. Bernard reported to the college dean. He was also responsible for advising students.

**Spirituality.** Bernard was raised in the church and his Christianity was influenced by his early exposure to the Triune God as a child. Bernard was raised in a small community and his parents helped to establish the small church in which he and his family worshiped while he was growing up. His father was a deacon in the church and his mother taught Sunday School. Attending church was not an option while Bernard was growing up. Bernard's father was well respected in his community and Bernard believes that because of this his father served as a role model in his life of what a Christian male should be. Bernard believes his Christianity is a result of his relationship with God and that the decisions he made in his role as leader were influenced and shaped by his spirituality.



## **House Prof**

House Prof is 51 years old and is the chair of the department of sociology at a major college in the Southeast. He has held the position for two years and previously held the position of professor. He has worked in the field of education for 18 years. In his current role, there are 12 faculty who report directly to him and 18 others who indirectly report to him. He holds a Ph.D.

**Responsibilities.** In his role as leader, House Prof is responsible for providing leadership and guidance to the professors who report to him. He is expected to maintain academic quality and provide professional development to faculty. Most of the faculty who report to House Prof are tenured faculty and he views this as a challenge because most all faculty have various agendas that he has to address. He believes his spirituality helps him to be able to work with the varying agendas he faces daily. He works closely with students and advises them on matters ranging from personal matters to academic matters. House Prof believes that the students he works with benefit from his advice and recommendations.

**Spirituality.** House Prof was raised in the church and attended church regularly. He believes his early experiences in the church helped to shape his present day relationship with God. He currently attends church regularly and attends Bible Study, Sunday School, and serves on several church ministries. He believes that through his prayers and meditations he has an ongoing connection to God, which does not require him to go into prayer every time he needs to make a decision.

## **Vincent**

Vincent is a 42-year-old chair of general education at a college in the Southeast. He has held his current position for two years and prior to that served as the chair of Arts and Sciences at another school in the Southeast. He has been in the education field for 16 years. He has 15 people (faculty and staff) who report directly to him. He holds a master of arts degree in African and African American Studies (Black Studies).

**Responsibilities.** In his role as a leader Vincent is responsible for managing faculty and staff. He works very closely with students on a daily basis and the decisions he makes in his role as leader can impact individuals and the university as a whole. He is responsible for enforcing the various policies of the university, but he also has to balance the decisions he makes against university policies and the best interests of the students. Vincent is responsible for the hiring and mentoring of new employees and works with existing professors to ensure that they are providing a quality academic curriculum for students.

**Spirituality.** As a child, Vincent was raised in the Church as a Christian. His mother attended church regularly and he was expected to attend as well. It was during his college years that Vincent began to explore other religions. He felt that Christianity had become too ritualized and began to search for a religion that would provide him a religious experience that Christianity did not provide him. He was intrigued by the Nation of Islam and a friend invited him to attend one of their meetings. After attending the meeting, he became a Black Muslim. He was deeply involved in the teachings and preachings of Elijah Mohammed and was completely devoted to the religious teachings of the Islamic Faith. After a few years he became disillusioned with the religion, citing

the enormous amount of time the religion required of him as a major factor in his decision to leave the Nation of Islam. Still searching for a religion other than Christianity, he began to practice the African religion of Yoruba. He was fascinated with the religion and its connection to the universe as a whole. However, not finding any satisfaction with Yoruba, or the religion of Islam, he returned to Christianity and has practiced Christianity ever since.

### **How Spirituality Influences Decision Making**

In this section, I will explore how the participants believe their decision making is influenced by their spirituality. I would like to remind the reader that participants do not distinguish between their Spirituality and their Christianity and view them being the same.

Because decision making is such a large piece of the participants' role and responsibility, we now focus exclusively on decision making. For each participant, I will examine how he makes decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff. There will not be decision-making examples for all three groups listed. If one of these is absent, it is because it was not in the data.

#### **Nick Phoenix**

In his role as leader Nick believes the decisions he makes on a daily basis are influenced by his spirituality. Nick makes decisions that affect students, faculty, and staff and provides examples of how he uses his spirituality when making decisions for each of these groups.

**Decisions that impact students.** Nick believes his spirituality is evident in the decisions he makes that impact students.

In many cases... I make decisions based on what I feel inside... my heart and I think that is governed [by my] spiritually. I could easily be very closely governed in my decision making by policies and procedures. But I make many of my decisions on a... moral basis.

Nick's admission of making decisions based on what he feels in his heart illustrates the influence of Nick's Christianity on the decisions he makes as leader. Making decisions based on what he feels in his heart or what he believes to be morally right are values that are connected to his Christianity. While Nick admits that he could very easily follow policy and procedure to the letter, he believes that his spirituality provides him the spiritual reinforcement he needs to make decisions within the realm of the policies and procedures.

Nick admits that he makes decisions that are based on what's in his heart, but at the basis of these decisions is his spirituality. Nick says that sometimes these decisions might go counter to the organizations goals and policies.

I think I had to make a decision that was in the best interest of the student not necessarily the organization, and that was driven by my belief.

However, Nick believes that as a leader, it his responsibility to evaluate each student's issue individually and not apply a blanket policy to each decision. The results of his decisions can vary in impact on the student. But Nick believes it is through his spirituality that he is better able to work with students regardless of the outcome of the decisions he makes. Some decisions may be viewed favorably the student while other decisions may be viewed by the student as unfavorable.

Nick's belief in God is the force behind his spirituality and serves as the support he uses when making decisions that impact students. When Nick works with students, he

believes he is able to utilize his spirituality realizing that the decisions he makes can have a significant impact on the student's life.

I am having to make decisions, day after day after day that ultimately impact those students' lives and one of the things that I am really cognizant of is what will be the long-term ramifications of my decision. It could be an issue that is impacting their academic pursuit. It might be a personal matter.

It is important to Nick that he does not ignore the significance of the decisions that he makes and the impact they have on students. Nick explained that issues involving students can sometimes be a challenge from a leadership perspective because he has to weigh what is ultimately best for the student within the policies of the organization.

As an example, Nick tells the story of a student who was dismissed from school because of excessive absences. Nick explained that the student was having transportation problems that prevented her from attending class regularly. She had good grades prior to the transportation issue when she stopped attending class. The school's policy was to dismiss students who miss more than two days of class; thus the student had been dismissed. She was required to submit an appeal to return to school. The appeal was forwarded to Nick and when he reviewed the appeal, he set up an appointment to meet the student.

There is a young lady at my campus and just in talking with her and... interfacing with her... I could tell that she's had kind of a hard life... and... she's obviously without transportation. And I can see the hardships that that poses. And she has failed courses repeatedly and ...she was at the point where academic success or completing her degree here just didn't look like it was going to be in the cards. But something inside told me to reach out because... there was something there that I felt compelled that I had to do something about.

Nick could have easily rejected the student's attempt to return to school and move on to the next appeal. But Nick believed that it was the Holy Spirit that told him to reach out to the student. However, he believes that because of his spirituality and the Holy

Spirit within him, he was able to discern that the student needed help to be able to continue her education. Nick realized that the student had already failed classes because she did not have transportation to school, but he felt that the student deserved another chance and he was willing to give her the opportunity to succeed or fail.

And so basically I did reach out to her. I brought her in and had a very in-depth conversation with her about what could we do, what could I do over and above what my concrete duties were. And... in working with her, I was able to get her into a position [to] help her make some decisions and I'll tell you, here's where my spirituality comes into play.

Nick was not sure what the outcome of his decision would be because he could only provide the student with the opportunity to return to school. The decision on whether to return and whether she would succeed would be up to the student. Nick believes as a leader it is important to follow rules and policies when working with students. However, Nick also recognizes the importance of looking at students individually and taking into consideration the specific circumstances surrounding their particular issue. Recognizing that this particular student needed additional support he was able to provide her with the assistance she needed to make a decision to continue with her school.

Nick pointed out that he did not make any decisions for the student. He fully understood the ramifications of allowing a student who had failed to continue. Rather, he provided her with a few options to allow her to make her own decision.

The reader may recall back in the discussion of Nick's concept of spirituality he said his spirituality was reinforced by his ongoing prayer and meditation. In this instance, Nick believes that because he is in constant communication with God through prayer, he was able to make a decision that benefited this student. Nick believes that in

this specific instance, he was able help by providing the student with an opportunity to achieve her goal while at the same time taking into consideration the policies of the organization.

Sometimes, you have to make decisions that go counter to the desires and goals of the organization. And whether she makes good on this on her end or not – that's on her. But... I can't stand by and let a student continue in a downward spiral – even if it is the organizationally correct thing to do.

Nick believes it was his spirituality that told him to reach out to the student and provide an avenue to succeed. Nick believes sometimes a leader has to take a stand and do what he believes the most appropriate based on the circumstances and what he feels spiritually. In this instance, he believes the decision he made was appropriate given the circumstances and because he felt spiritually motivated to help the student. It was not necessary for him to go counter to the organization's goals in order to help the student. He believes that it turned out to be a winning situation for the organization and the student. It was a win for him because he was able to make a decision using his spirituality to help him chart the best course of action while adhering to at least the spirit of the company policy. It was a win for the student because Nick was able to provide her with an option. While he was not sure if his decision was specifically what was needed, all the student wanted was enough support to get back on track and be successful.

I think it was. I think it was and I don't know if it will turn out to be a winning proposition for her, but it gets her in that direction.

Getting the student headed in the right direction was important to Nick because he wanted to make a difference in his role as leader, and he knows that the decisions he makes can have a significant impact on every student with whom he interacts. That is where he believes his spirituality is most effective.

Nick's awareness of the long term ramifications of decisions he makes is obviously something that he views as important in his decision making process. It is especially significant for those decisions that directly impact students. He is careful to weigh all the circumstances before making a final decision, even when that might not result in what the student wants or believes to be the best decision for them. Nick believes that the decisions he makes represents his best effort to ensure the best possible outcome for the student. Nick understands that the decisions he makes that impact students are not to be taken lightly and these decisions can impact a student's life after the decision is made. That is why Nick believes it is important to work with students on an individual basis rather than applying one decision-making template to all students.

I have students that come in and by right I should make a certain decision that could have an adverse impact. But then I look at what impact am I having on that student's life. Am I doing the right thing, not the procedurally right thing?

Nick understands his decisions can have an adverse impact on students and he believes it is his core Christian values that are evident. Nick's core Christian values allow him enough latitude in his decision making to take into consideration the ramifications of his decisions. Nick believes his spirituality helps him to make the decisions that favor the student, when possible, and that is not always the decision that follows policy and procedure. Nick does not profess to consciously violating processes and procedures in favor of a positive outcome for a student. Rather, Nick believes that it is because of his spirituality he is able to make decisions that support or are within the boundaries of procedure, while also positively impacting the student. Nick cautions though that not all decisions end favorably because spirituality is not always about making the right decision, but rather, it is about making a decision one way or the other.



## **Jason**

Jason believes that his spirituality impacts the decisions he makes in the workplace. Jason's work as an academic leader means that he has to be prepared to make decisions all the time and his decisions impact students, faculty, and staff. The decisions he makes range from approving a grade change for a student to terminating a professor for poor performance. Jason also works with two associate deans in his role as a leader and each of these groups can be impacted by the decisions he makes.

**Decisions that impact students.** In his professional role, Jason is confronted daily with decisions that impact students. While Jason did not have a specific example of a decision he made that directly impacted a student, he did speak generally about how his spirituality influences the decisions he makes.

Deciding whether a student should remain in school or be dismissed is one of the most common decisions with which Jason is confronted. In many instances Jason must adhere to policy and procedure when determining whether to allow a student to remain in school. Jason believes he uses his spirituality in his professional role as leader. He believes that because of his ongoing prayers and meditations with God, he is able to draw on his spirituality when needed because it is always a part of him.

It is not a conscious decision that when I have to make a decision, that I'm thinking about God or spirituality. I believe it's already part of me. I believe who I am and when I am making decisions, [it's] because that's part of me. That decision has been made indirectly, with this spirituality or this higher being. It's not Like I go pray and say, o.k., how do I make this decision. ... When I have to make a decision I'm thinking about God or spirituality. I believe it's already part of me... when making decisions...

Jason's reference to a higher being as explained earlier is his reference to God, as many of the participants describe God not only as the Triune God, but as a higher power.

When Jason communicates with God, he does it on an ongoing basis through prayer and meditation. Because of his ongoing relationship with God, when Jason is confronted with a decision he is already in his spiritual zone and there is no need for him get on his knees and ask God for guidance. Jason says it is a part of who he is; God is already integrated into his personal and professional lives so that he does not have to make a conscious effort to communicate with God or to connect with God in order to make a decision. There are other decisions that require him to communicate with God directly and seek guidance and direction before moving forward.

I really believe that if I have a tough decision to make in life, that I don't make that decision by myself. There's someone higher than all of us, that can aid me in making that decision...

How he reacts and the actions he takes are not set in stone and there is no roadmap that he follows that tells him which is the best way to utilize his spirituality. Jason believes it is because of his core Christian values and his belief in the Triune God that he is able to make decisions and carry them out.

**Decisions that impact staff.** Jason believes as a leader, he is responsible for recognizing the value of each employee who contributes to the success of the department and the organization. This can sometimes result in him having to make a decision that might go counter to the prevailing organizational attitude at the time. Jason believes by allowing his spirituality to guide him, he was able to make the decision to defend one of his staff who was viewed as being a poor performer. Jason disagreed with this assessment of his staff member.

I can think of a situation where, my manager doesn't think that one of my subordinate is the right person in that role. ...Because this subordinate works for me on a daily basis I know what he does on a daily basis, how he goes over and beyond. I can call this individual at 9 o'clock at night... He may not do

everything the right way, but he works hard. And I just don't think you throw individuals under the bus... without giving them an opportunity.

Jason's decision to challenge his boss on the assessment of the employee could have resulted in Jason's demise as well as the employee he was trying to protect. But Jason believes it was because of his spirituality and his belief in the Triune God that he was protected and that he could protect his staff.

I just don't think everybody looks at the human capital the way I do and I think mine has a lot to do with my... caring nature and definitely my spirituality... For the most part, at the end of the day, I can get overturned, because I don't have a lot of power. ... But at the end of the day, as long as I've done my part in communicating what I think needs to happen, then I feel good with that...

Jason believes that by standing up for his staff member, his action was spiritually appropriate. Jason does not believe it was his boss' responsibility to evaluate his staff member's performance when he had no direct knowledge of the person's performance on a regular basis. Jason does not believe his boss understands the value of this individual to the organization. Jason felt that he was being pressured by his boss to give a subordinate an unfavorable review. Because Jason believes he is a spiritual leader, he believes his spirituality helped him to successfully defend the employee and resulted in him showing how valuable the individual was to the organization.

Jason understands that in the end his decision could have been overturned and that he himself could have suffered because of his stance. However, he believes that because of his spirituality he was able to withstand the pressure to conduct a poor evaluation of his staff member.

I do my job and I do the best that I can do based on who I am and at the end of the day, if that's not good enough, God is going to take care of me. I've never allowed a company to make me lose who I am, and to make me walk around with fear like I [have] seen how some folks do.

Jason believes his spirituality helps him to see both sides—the employee’s side and the organization’s side. He believes that in his role as leader he is not aligned to either side of the fence—the business or the employee. Rather, as a leader he has to be able to analyze all the information he has at the time to be effective. Jason understands that while he can always put up a valiant fight to protect an employee, he realizes that sometimes that might not be enough.

For Jason, being an effective leader means supporting the people who report to him. It also means helping those individuals to be able to demonstrate their value to the organization so that they do not need Jason’s protection to survive.

I just... know spirituality is always at the forefront because I focus more on the human capital, and I think you have to have some spirituality and some appreciation for God if you do that.

Jason believes it is his spirituality that helps him to see each employee as an individual and not just a number. Jason believes that his evaluation of the individual’s performance and his daily relationship outweigh any negative impressions his manager may have had about his subordinate.

Jason believes that sometimes being a leader means having to make hard decisions that can impact those who report to him in a negative way. Having to reprimand someone or even fire them can be a blessing in disguise to the individual involved.

Maybe that person isn’t the right person in that role, and I’ve exhausted my means... and I’ve done everything that I can, and I’ve communicated to this individual, and I’ve given them the expectations I think... are reasonable, and something still doesn’t happen, and at the end of the day a decision has to be made that’s gonna be in the best interest of the organization...

Making the decision that is in the best interest of the organization and the individual is a role that can prove to be a challenge. This is when Jason believes he has to rely on his Christian core values. Jason said he does not just make the decision out of the blue, but he has done “everything that I can” to ensure the employee’s success before making the decision to terminate.

Jason does not believe that it is fair to just keep giving individuals second chances while they continue to perform poorly in the workplace. He believes that a spiritual leader has to recognize when to cut his losses and make the hard decision as it pertains to a poor performer. And while the initial impact on the employee might be one that results in the loss of a job in the end, Jason believes the person might be in a better place as a result of losing their job than by continuing on in a position that is not the right fit.

The decision to terminate an employee who is a poor performer highlights one major point of discussion among the participants as it pertains to spirituality and whether being a spiritual leader means always making the right decision. Most agree that while their spirituality is a major influence in helping them to make decisions in their role as leaders, it by no means results in them always making what might be considered the “right” decision for the circumstance. What their spirituality does, though, is to help provide them with a choice of paths that can be taken, and each decision has to be evaluated based on each individual circumstances at the time.

Jason is clear about his connection to God and its impact on his professional decisions. Jason believes that his spirituality is not one that he just turns on and off when needed. Rather, his spirituality is based on something more, something that is always there and is always guiding and helping him to shape the decisions that he makes. In

fact, according to Jason, it is not even running in the background, but is a constant part of his spirituality and at the forefront of the decisions he makes.

**Decisions that impact faculty.** Jason also makes decisions that can impact the faculty who report to him. Those decisions can range from how to counsel a faculty member who is performing poorly to terminating a faculty member whose performance is unacceptable. Jason believes that because of his spirituality, he is able to make decisions and execute them in his professional life.

Jason believes that sometimes organizations forget that employees are people, not machines. He believes a focus on an organization's human capital is just as important as focusing on equipment and machines. He said he does not view people as just numbers and figures. It is because of his spirituality that he is able to recognize each individual and his spirituality allows him to be more aware of the human capital and interact with individuals from a Christian perspective.

Jason points out though that while a focus on human capital is at the forefront of the decisions he makes, that does not mean that every decision he makes is positive or has positive results—at least not immediately. Jason believes his spirituality helps him to understand and appreciate that the decisions he makes are not always going to be viewed as positive ones, especially for the person who is impacted by the decision. For instance, while terminating a faculty member is one part of his job in his role as leader, if necessary, he does not hesitate to explain that a termination does not always have to be a negative decision in the long run. The termination can have immediate negative implications for the employee and even perhaps for the organization, but Jason believes that it is because of his relationship with the Triune God he is able to make these kinds of

decisions. The termination of a faculty member might not necessarily be viewed as a positive outcome of his decision making. However, Jason believes that sometimes the decisions he makes might not seem to be positive at the time, but the decision is the right one regardless of a positive or negative impact on the employee.

At the end of the day... if a person is not stepping up to the plate, and... that it is causing the organization problems, then... that's [a]roadblock that God is putting up into that person's life and let me not keep preventing the roadblock from going up.

In this sense, Jason views the roadblock that a person might be experiencing as a matter that he can exacerbate by not taking action when it comes to managing an employee. Jason believes keeping a person employed who is incapable of doing the job is not helping that person and might be denying that person a chance to grow. He believes his spirituality helps him to understand the implications of his decision, and at the end of the day, he has to live by his decision, whether positive or negative for the employee

### **Nombre**

In his role as leader Nombre has served in a variety of leadership positions. He has worked as an academic administrator, taught in the classroom, and recently returned to an administrative position after teaching for several years. The decisions he makes in his leadership role can range from organizing a major conference to resolving a student grade appeal. Nombre believes that his spirituality is central to the decisions he makes in his role as leader and believes his spirituality is a result of his belief in the Triune God.

**Decisions that impact students.** It was in role of teacher that Nombre had to draw on his spirituality and decision making skills to confront a challenge that presented itself in a course he taught.

Nombre presents the story of a young man in his class who challenged him and other students on various issues regarding race and used derogatory language to describe African Americans. For this assignment, the students were required to read an article by a Black author and respond via an essay. All of the students completed the essay without challenge, except this one. On one of the assignments submitted, Nombre was taken aback by the severe language and tone that was communicated in the student's writing. The comments the student provided were so upsetting that Nombre felt compelled to share them with his direct supervisor. His supervisor was equally concerned but took no direct action to intervene. Another colleague, however, suggested getting law enforcement involved because of the tone of the comments in the student's paper.

I was livid when I read the paper. I was livid because there were many things going on. ...like calling this author a liar, this was a complete waste of my time, which was disrespectful, the whole lambasting of Black people. I mean he just went all out. And I'm, like, I assigned the book to read and I'm black, so, you know, are you threatening me. There was threatening language there, so much so, that I let the Affirmative Action director read it, and she said I think you need to take this to the police. I would not go back to that classroom without somebody with me because if he is this angry.

Not only was Nombre offended by the language and tone presented in the paper, but he also felt physically threatened. He questioned whether he should return to the class alone and followed the appropriate steps to notify campus law enforcement. However, with all the potential to have this turn out in a bad way, Nombre believed it was his spirituality and his ability to lead others that helped him to manage this situation. Thus, he made the decision to continue to teach the class in light of the student's obvious disdain for him as an instructor and an African American.

I wanted to use this as a teachable moment. I took two of the papers. One came close to his and another one was written the way it should have been written. I



took three anonymous students and asked them to come to the front of the room and I asked them to read the papers. And I asked the class to take notes and I want you to respond to each paper... Look at your syllabus [about] what you were supposed to accomplish. So I had to go back into that classroom... and when that particular paper was read, the class erupted. I mean, went berserk. ...How dare, somebody sitting in this class... write something like that. That is threatening.

Nombre said he had to rely on his spirituality to help him chart his course through this episode. Making the decision to continue with the class and not remove the offending and potentially dangerous student from the class was a decision he made after meditation and prayer. Nombre's connection to God and his spirituality were put to the test with this student. But Nombre admits that it was not an easy task to undertake. Nombre explained that his spirituality keeps him constantly connected to the Triune God and it is not uncommon for him to go into his office and close the door to meditate and pray during especially challenging times during his workday. Nombre admits that while his spiritual connection is ongoing, it is not uncommon for him to take the time during his workday to communicate with God when faced with a particularly challenging decision. This event was no different and Nombre believes he had to draw on his spirituality to help the student and himself.

Nombre explained that the student who wrote the paper was upset with his action of having the paper read to the class, even though there was no identification of the student who wrote the paper. The student subsequently filed a complaint.

The student went and filed a complaint... I said this is vitriolic hate. I will pray for you. I have taught you all semester. You sat in this class all semester. And... you got nothing out of this class. He felt threatened that he wouldn't pass the class which was the ultimate. I worked with several counselors... the provost... I know that I had to really... had to step back spiritually and meditate on that and even to go back into that classroom...

After filing a complaint with the administration, the student called and complained to his parents that he was being singled out in class and being treated unfairly. The parents subsequently called the school. Nombre realized that this issue would escalate and he was prepared.

...The parents had called the provost about it and... we met, and he said well, I just want to talk with you to find out exactly where you stand. And I told him... and this is exactly what I said in class, this ward is my jurisdiction. No one can force me [out]... and I stand willingly... and I won't give you a grade. You did not do this assignment... Bottom line of all of that was I meditated about it... I let it go where it would. That was my spirituality.

Nombre believes that because of his spirituality, he was able to continue to provide instruction to the class despite the student's report and the subsequent meeting with the provost. Through his prayer and meditation, Nombre believes he was able to objectively evaluate this matter and to come up with a solution, given the apparent volatility of this situation. Nombre knew that he would have to explain his actions and show how the student was being disruptive and threatening to him and the class. He also believed that the student's actions and behavior would ultimately be called into question.

And I knew the truth was going to come out and true enough in his journal when he submitted it the next week, he talked about working at some fast food... and all these niggers were working there and the supervisor was a white woman. And there were these two black guys that one, he really didn't like. And the guy hadn't done anything to him. He says this in his journal. "And I picked at him and I instigated a fight with him and we actually got in physical violence because I knew he was goanna get fired. I knew my side would be taken." This is design and intent. And is brazen enough to write this knowing that I was going to read this in his journal. This is racist. I explained to the provost this, as an academician, I'm sure you know, has moved beyond classroom to clinical. There's no room, no place, for someone like this in a classroom. At this point, with this kind of vitriolic hate, this is clinical. ...with two weeks left in the semester, if it were longer, I would demand that his student be removed from this class, or I would not... continue teaching it because it was a threat.

Given the potential threat and the lack of action from his administration or law enforcement, Nombre believes that this situation could have escalated into something far more serious. It is unclear as to why no action against the student was initiated based on the information Nombre provided to school and law enforcement officials. What is clear, however, is that Nombre felt threatened. But even with the potential for something far more serious to develop, Nombre made the decision to handle the matter himself and was able to draw on his relationship with God to give him the strength and the vision needed to come up with a strategy to return to the class and not let the student intimidate him.

I kept saying to myself this was so crazy, and such a spoof. In all the years that I was teaching this course, I had had folk to walk up to that line, but they would never cross it. And that was ok. He actually crossed the line. ...This made no sense to me. But my spirituality said, it happened for a reason. You simply happened to be the catalyst. This isn't really about you. This is about him. Because... there's something that is going to... deal with him on that. ...I would say that I saw the spirituality piece work there, on the job.

Nombre believes it was his spirituality that helped him to survive this ordeal. In spite of all the negative actions that occurred, he still believed in using this incident as a teachable moment for the student and for his class. He also believes it was his spirituality that helped him understand there was more going on with this student that needed to be addressed and as a leader, it was his responsibility to confront the student and make an attempt to bring resolution to this issue. As a result, Nombre was able to use the subsequent writings by the student to show that there was a problem with the student that he could not easily address. Nombre explained that the student's problem was really bigger than he or the class and was a result of his culture and upbringing because the student's parents shared the same views as their son, which was evident in their ultimate comment to the provost.

And so when they talked to the parents the parents said we don't know why he took a class from a nigger anyway. ...My spirituality said to me... you did what you needed to do.

Even though this incident was very upsetting to Nombre, he did not let it deter him from his goal of teaching and educating students. Nombre views his role as one in which he has to provide guidance and direction in addition to teaching. He believes this is his job. On the other hand, he believes it is important for students to be able to live in a diverse society.

That's part of the ethos of teaching and training students at the college level, so the spirituality is woven into all of this...

For Nombre, it would have been easy for him to have the student expelled from class. It is still uncertain as to why school officials did not view this incident as a potential threat to the students and the school's safety. In light of this, though, Nombre made the decision to use this as an opportunity to draw on his spirituality and effective leadership skills to manage a potentially dangerous situation.

Nombre was able to draw on his relationship with the Triune God to gain the comfort and peace he needed to be able to return to a class in which he believed there was a student who could be potentially dangerous. Further, he was able to garner the courage to not only return to the class, but to take on the challenge of showing to the class how racist attitudes exist in their midst. This he believed was his responsibility as a leader and a teacher. But more importantly, Nombre used his spirituality to provide him with the courage he needed to confront the student regardless of outcome posed by the involvement of campus administration and the student's parents. In addition, rather than using this as an opportunity to only focus on the negative consequences of the student's

comments, he used this as a teachable moment and an opportunity to help the student and his classmates learn from this incident.

The effectiveness of his actions may be questionable, but because Nombre felt a sense of obligation to educate and provide direction and guidance, something he readily admits is result of his spirituality. Nombre believes that within his practice of Christianity he has been taught to continue to forgive and to work with others and is able to carry this over into his work with students. In this leadership capacity, Nombre believes he is most effective because of his relationship with his Triune God and his spirituality, which he is able to draw on constantly to help him make decisions in his leadership role.

## **CB**

In his role as leader, CB is responsible for making daily decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff. He interacts with these constituencies on a daily basis and in his role he must make decisions at a moment's notice as well as those decisions that over time might require considerable thought and contemplation. Regardless of the urgency of the decision to be made, CB believes his spirituality influences the decisions he makes in his role as leader. While CB had no specific examples of decisions that he has made that directly impact students, faculty, and staff; he spoke generally about his spirituality and how he integrates it into his daily walk as a leader.

**Decisions that impact students.** When assisting students with their educational pursuits, CB is rendering decisions of all types than can impact the personal and professional lives of the students whom he advises. CB believes the decisions he makes are based on his spirituality and as such, he is able to draw on his connection to the Triune God when needed. CB believes his spirituality and his Christianity are the same

and that his connection to a Triune God is a constant source of inspiration and empowerment. CB said he believes his spirituality is grounded in his faith and admits that his Christianity and his spirituality are the same.

We talk about God, we talk about Jesus, we talk about the Holy Spirit. ...I believe in it, yes. Do I believe that there's communication with the Holy Spirit? Yes!

CB believes that it is through his communication with God, that his spirituality is manifested in the decisions he makes in his role as leader.

I think it's good to use spirituality to make a decision... if you are open to spirituality...to receiving it.

Being open to receiving what is given spiritually is important to his spirituality according to CB. For CB, this means that his relationship with God is one in which he is able to draw on his communication with God to help him integrate his spirituality in his daily walk in the professional world.

CB believes that because he allows himself to be receptive to the relationship he has established with God, he is spiritual and is able to realize the solutions to decisions even when he may not be consciously trying to use his spirituality to make a decision. He believes that he is able to understand and connect with his own spirituality because he is open to receiving it. CB believes that because of his openness, he is able to receive revelations and direction from the Holy Spirit and that his spirituality is the result of his belief and connection to the Triune God.

Can I truly say that there have been times when I just suddenly got this revelation? I think so...!So in my case that would be... a Christian.

CB believes the revelations he receives are God's way of communicating with him at times when he (CB) might not be consciously asking God for help. The revelations are a result of his Christianity and his ongoing relationship with God.

While CB did not have a specific example of a decision that he has made that impacted a student, he was able to talk about some of the qualities of his spirituality that he uses to make student-based decisions. One quality of his spirituality that he believes is beneficial to helping him make decisions is being a good listener.

...A lot of students come to my office and are really irate and upset... I notice that when I just listen to people and just talk to them, and I don't necessarily have to agree with them... I like to talk to students in such a way it's to first listen to what they say...

CB believes that when he takes the time to listen, it helps to get issues resolved because he is able to hear both sides of the story and to make a decision based on the information he is able to gather and synthesize after talking to the parties involved. He finds this to be particularly beneficial when dealing with issues in which there is strong disagreement.

Now usually when that occurs, all I do is let everybody know where I stand, and I tell them right up front... I say look, realistically, you both could be exactly right about the same thing... Both can be right about a particular situation. ...If you have something that violates whatever the rules are, let me have it and based on that I will make a decision. ...Every now and then, the student will come up with something, and when he or she does, I will use it. ...Is that spirituality? Yeah to some degree, because I'm determined to be fair, and I'm determined to make sure [of] that if at all possible...

CB believes his ability to listen, process the information, and then come up with a solution that does not violate policy is important to effective decision making. Further, he believes in fairness and doing what is right. But most importantly, he believes in communicating and listening. By getting both parties talking and then listening, he can use his spirituality to come up with a resolution. He believes it is because of his spirituality and his belief in the Triune God he is able to continue to make a difference in the lives of students, and the faculty who report to him.

CB also believes that because his spirituality influences the decisions he makes in his role as leader and that because of his spirituality, he is sometimes able to look beyond the rules and regulations to try to resolve issues, especially those that impact students.

...I'm a business person... I don't look for loopholes... ...I try to play by the rules... I don't try to scurry around corners... If it tends to lean in the student's favor, even though it may not be exact, I think it belongs to the student.

CB believes that if there's a choice to be made and all variables being equal, he rules in favor of the student first. CB's philosophy of working with the constraints of policy and procedure to make decisions that are based on spirituality is a common theme across participants. Nick, House Prof, Nombre, and Jason all acknowledge that there are policies and procedures that must be considered when making decisions that impact students. However, they further acknowledge that they understand that decisions have to be made based on variables that transcend policy and procedure and it is their spirituality that helps them to make the decisions they make.

When I speak in terms of spirituality, I look at it from a fair, just way of doing things, and I won't deviate even if it don't necessarily favor what I would like to see... But even we were wrong, we were wrong.

CB believes that when decisions are made involving students that the results can sometimes be contrary to what is best for the student. In such cases he is more inclined to do what he feels is in the student's best interests while at the same time not violating policies or procedures. The reason he does this he feels is because of his spirituality and his desire to do what is right.

Do I always make the right decision? I don't think so. I think I make mistakes too, even with spirituality. I try hard not to... It... doesn't mean you're going to always make the right decisions, but it means you'll always try to. You're going to work towards trying to make the right decisions. That's the goal. That's my goal anyway.



CB knows that his spirituality does not guarantee that every decision he makes will be the mutually agreed upon by all parties involved. However, he does understand that the decisions he makes are influenced by his spirituality.

When working with faculty and staff, CB believes his spirituality is always a constant with him and that regardless of whether or not he is in direct communication with God, he is able to make decisions in his professional role. CB believes his relationship with the Triune God provides him with direction and focus when he needs to make a decision that impacts faculty while helping him to recognize the spirituality that faculty may possess as well. CB not only believes in his own spirituality, but also believes that there is a spirituality to everyone.

I believe that there's a spiritual part to everybody, and I believe that a lot of what we do, a lot of what we... understand and learn is given to us spiritually,...My spirituality also has some rules from which I play by. And those rules come from Christianity. I always want to be right. I always want to be fair, but where did I get this... fair play, from? ...Mainly from Christianity and of course from my upbringing, the way I was raised... that was still based on Christianity.

CB believes that it is important that he play by the rules because when the rules are violated it becomes confusing to make decisions that impact others. Organizational policies and procedures provide him with one set of rules from which to play, but he also views his Christianity as providing another set of rules by which he has to play. Being fair and impartial in his decision making is one of the major rules by which he plays. Making decisions that are appropriate for each circumstance might require him to be the mediator for issues involving students and faculty. In these types of situations, CB believes it is important for him to see both sides of the picture and then come up with a resolution. Because these types of issues can result in a no-win situation for one or both parties involved, CB views his role as creating the possibility for all concerned to walk

away from the table feeling positive about what has occurred. CB does not view resolutions to issues as no-win situations.

I can make it a win-win for everybody... And usually all parties understand and... everybody comes out shaking hands, laughing and talking. Now, no one got 100% of what they wanted... but it got to a point where at least everybody was communicating and it was on a friendly level.

For CB, it is important that he be able to resolve the issue without negatively impacting any of the parties involved. He understands that he cannot come up with a resolution that is favorable for everyone all the time, but it is definitely something he strives for.

I put... the rules up front... My goal is to let the student and the professor come up with an agreement. I'm more or less a mediator. ...The only time I make a decision is if you have something definite... I won't take his side against yours and I won't take your side against his.

Being a mediator and creating win-win solutions is important for CB. Because of his spirituality, CB has an optimistic view on work and life. He believes that everyone deserves a chance to win and that is why it is important for him to create win-win situations. CB explained that sometimes when a professor and student have a conflict, they want him as the dean to make a decision that benefits one party, but not both. As a mediator, CB wants to be sure that the decision he makes is mutually agreed upon by both parties involved. CB understands that it can be challenging working with students and faculty, especially when it involves an issue where neither of the parties are willing to compromise. He believes, however, that because of his spirituality he is able to help others make decisions that for the most part satisfy all those involved.

[It] works out well as a matter of fact, surprising[ly] enough. I let them figure it out. I look at it from a fair, just way of doing things... I try to play by the rules... I don't scurry around corners... If it tends to lean in the student's favor, even though it may not be exact, I think it belongs to the student.

CB explains that when a win-win situation does not exist and when only one person can come out on top, he tries to make sure that it is the student who is triumphant. When a conflict between a student and faculty exists and the two parties cannot work it out themselves, CB believes that is when it is time for him to step in and make a decision.

### **Bernard**

Bernard has served as an associate dean and interim dean in his career as a higher education leader. In his leadership capacities he was tasked with making decisions on a daily basis that impacted students, faculty, and staff. In his prior position as dean, Bernard made decisions that impacted faculty who reported to him.

Bernard believes in the Triune God and believes that his spirituality and his relationship with God influence the decisions he makes. Bernard believes God has been a guiding force in his life and because of the relationship he has with God, he is able to draw on his connection to God to help him make decisions in his professional role.

...I think that spirituality is that connection you have between the Lord and yourself. There is power above... aiding into getting to where you are and you need to acknowledge that... and give thanks... You can have a religion... Baptist, Methodist, but, you know, that's just a term that we have given.

Acknowledging the relationship he has with God is important for Bernard and because he appreciates his connection to God, he is grateful. He believes that there is a "power at work" that impacts his life and that this power is always "watching over me and guiding me indirectly" and through other individuals. The power to which he refers is the Triune God and Bernard feels that his communication with God is ongoing and constant. Bernard acknowledges that if you believe in and have a relationship with the Triune God, you should acknowledge it and let people know.

Bernard's expectation of an individual acknowledging a personal relationship with Christ is a common tenet in Christianity and is reflected in the Bible when describing the relationship that believers should have with Christ. Bernard believes it is not only important to acknowledge this relationship, but to also give thanks. He believes because of his relationship with the Triune God, he is able to get help or draw on the Triune God when he makes decisions in his role as leader. Further, Bernard believes that this relationship transcends religion and is based on each person's individual relationship with God.

Bernard did not have a specific example of a crucial decision that he made that impacted students or faculty, but he spoke generally about how he integrates his spirituality into the decisions he makes in his role as leader. Bernard said some decisions are made on the spot while others are made over period of time of reflection and praying. And like other participants, Bernard believes that some decisions have to be made within the confines of policy and procedure, but that he needs to do what he believes to be most appropriate and beneficial at the time.

Sometimes... you have to make a decision based on the policy. But that doesn't mean that you... have to be cold hearted... ..You can try to... ease the circumstance or the situation... and maybe understand that... it's a decision that's based on performance... and not that I'm an evil person that's making the decisions. If you can present it like that and you show compassion on the individual and while you might be giving them bad news, they'll realize that you know that this... is a person that has.... a heart and they will appreciate that.

Bernard believes that his spirituality helps him to make tough decisions and deliver difficult information with compassion. Compassion is a common recurring theme of spiritual decision making and Bernard believes it is important to possess this quality as part of the decision making process. Bernard's spirituality will not allow him to be

vicious or malicious in the decisions he makes. Nor will it allow him to deliver information in an unpleasant way. Rather, his spirituality helps him to provide leadership in a positive way and still conduct business as a professional.

...Someone with a deep heart, a spiritual background... comes up with a way, of breaking bad news to you... You will be able to see it in them or feel it... This person... is just doing their job.

Even when he has to deliver unpleasant news to an employee, Bernard believes that it should be done with an understanding of the implications it will have in the recipient. He believes that unpleasant performance reviews can be delivered positively and with compassion and that if he exemplifies his own spirituality, the recipient will be able to tell that what he is doing is not based on him being vindictive. Rather, he wants the employee to understand that his actions, as unpleasant as they might be, are based on something else and that he is able to communicate this in a positive way.

Bernard believes that his spirituality helps to provide him with compassion and understanding and even when there is bad news to deliver, he is able to maintain his humanity and deliver it in a way that takes into consideration the other person's feelings and how that individual will react. This is how he believes his spirituality is manifested in decision making.

Bernard would like to have time to contemplate the decisions that he makes, but understands that it is not always the case when he is in a leadership role. He believes it is his spirituality and his connection with the Triune God that his spirituality is there to help him when he needs it to make a decision.

Sometimes you make decisions at the spur of the moment... I try to think about what I'm doing and even try to relate to how is this going to affect the individual and is there a better way to do it.

Bernard shares this attitude with other participants who also show a desire to make the most appropriate decision and treat others fairly, even when the situation is not a positive one. Bernard believes also that his spirituality is so integrated into his life that he doesn't have to think about it or how and when he will use it. It is always working in the background to help him make decisions, even difficult decisions.

You have to... weigh what is going to be the consequence for this individual. What is his family going to do? What is he going to do? Is he going to be able to get a job

Bernard's compassion for others appears to extend beyond the work environment; thus, his concern for how others will be impacted by his decisions. However, Bernard does understand that as a leader he is sometimes tasked with difficult and challenging decisions, and regardless of the impact it will have on those affected, the decisions have to be made. He believes that through prayer and contemplation, he gains guidance and insight and that this, he believes, is how his spirituality is manifested.

Bernard, like Jason, believes that sometimes making a hard decision such as terminating an employee is not always bad for the employee. He believes that sometimes employees themselves share some of the blame for him having to make a decision to terminate for poor performance. He believes that he is not helping the employee by keeping them on the payroll and pretending that they are performing up to par when in actuality, they are not. But his spirituality also has him questioning himself and his role as a leader by suggesting that he himself could have done more to help this employee from being terminated.

...He or she is just doing their job, but there's something that I should have been doing also that shouldn't have put this person in this position that he should be doing this to me.

By “doing this to me,” Bernard suggests that if he himself had been doing a better job as a leader he might have been able to prevent an employee from being fired.

...If you're a leader, you're supposed to be documenting or calling this individual in to make sure that they're aware of their performance and if you're not doing that, then you're not a leader. ...If you're bringing in somebody and just say... that you haven't done your job, and I'm gonna let you go, and you haven't given that person any type of development or time to make correction, then you're not spiritual...

Bernard believes his spirituality means he has to also do his job and not rely on the employee to take the lead in improving his or her performance. But being aware of the individual's performance on an ongoing basis and providing feedback and professional development, he shares the responsibility for helping a faculty member be successful. Bernard views his leadership as being a cooperative relationship between the employee and him and that his spirituality allows him to view faculty as more than just a number.

Bernard says that he tries to think about the decisions he has to make as a leader and do everything he can to make sure that the decision is appropriate for the circumstances. He acknowledges like other participants that his decisions are not always good ones or bad ones, but believes that his spirituality is what keeps him focused on making the decision one way or the other. He also believes that because of his spirituality and through his prayers and communication with God, he can make decisions on a moment's notice.

...Sometime a decision can be made... at a moment whereas you hadn't thought about it... a passing decision that if you haven't had a chance to think about what happened and that you could just come off the cuff and say you tried, and just walked away... and they might say something and you might say something and you might have to go back... after you think about it. ...Your spirituality hit in, sets in, the conversation that we had together, wasn't really a good conversation.

Let's talk about what we should have said. So you know, decisions can be made at the moment that you come back and say, did I really do this? No.

Even after Bernard makes a decision, he still reflects on the decision to determine if it was the best one. He acknowledges that sometimes when making decisions on the spot, he might not always say or do what is in the best interests of the faculty member.

You have to weigh that outcome and think about that and actually pray over it, and that's where you... let the Lord lead you and just give you the insight as to what you need to do.

Bernard believes that some situations such as the one he describes is an opportunity to try to rectify a situation, or at least set the record straight after the fact. He believes that his spirituality helps him to reflect on decisions after they have been made. If there was a better solution to resolving the issue, he is not opposed to modifying or even reversing a previous decision. In such cases, he believes that he bears responsibility for ensuring that he creates an environment that is conducive to the success of the person involved and his as well.

Bernard views his connection with God as one that has sustained him throughout his life. He believes that the foundation that was laid by his upbringing in the church, and because of his father and mother's involvement in the founding of the church in his community, he was endowed with the spirituality he needed to keep him grounded throughout his life.

### **House Prof**

In his professional role, House Prof is the chair of his department and has major responsibilities for hiring, firing, evaluating, and advising faculty. In this role, he also interacts with students on a daily basis and provides advising and counseling to them as



well. The decisions he makes can impact each of these groups in various ways and because of this, House Prof believes his spirituality is impacting the decisions he makes.

House Prof believes his spirituality is his connection to and his communication with God.

My spirituality is my connectedness with God of the universe and how I manage the day-to-day business for humanity. The day-to-day decisions that sometimes I have to make are always rooted in the fact that I am in constant prayer, constant communication... In the day-to-day operations, I begin my day with prayer and contemplation. And I try to stay in that frame so that when things come at me and I need to respond to in the immediate, I am already in the spiritual flow so that when I make a decision on the fly – I feel good about the decisions that I make.

Being in constant prayer and contemplation is the basis of House Prof's connection to God and the connection he has established with God is one that is ongoing. Because his relationship with God is one that is ongoing, he believes his spirituality is ongoing and when he makes decisions in his role as leader, it does not require that he goes into prayer or meditation. House Prof believes his spirituality is always working in the background and that he does not have to make a conscious effort to draw on it because it is always there.

House Prof believes that in his role as a leader he has to be prepared to make decisions at a moment's notice as well as be able to make those decisions that require considerable thought and contemplation. His reference to "stay in that frame" is descriptive of his belief that his spirituality is a constant with him working in the background. He compares it to a computer program that is always running and is there to be accessed when needed. His spirituality as it is always there for him when needed.

Further, House Prof has a set of precepts to which he subscribes that he feels provides him with additional spiritual support. The precepts are his core Christian values that he uses as a guiding force for his own behavior.

...Treat others like you want to be treated. Having a faith that... there are things beyond your control but that ultimately things are under control and... that if you walk in the principles of God... treat everybody right to try to do what is good. ...worship God and... lead a life where others can see that there is some ordered goodness in your life. Those are some of the overarching principles that I think will... manifest itself and ultimately to my benefit and others as well.

House Prof explains that even though he might think that he is in control of his actions and his behavior during his daily walk, there are times in which he feels he has little or no control. That is why he feels it is important to have a spiritual connection to God.

House Prof subscribes to a set of personal precepts that he feels are the basis of his spirituality. Treating others fairly, doing what is right, and doing good are the foundation of his precepts. These are qualities that he believes are important to his spirituality. House Prof is comfortable articulating his precepts and is constantly aware of them in his role as leader. At a more basic level, the basis of House Prof's precepts is what is commonly referred to as the Golden Rule. But what distinguishes his precepts from the Golden Rule is that his precepts are reinforced and strengthened by his spiritual connection to the Triune God. Further, House Prof believes that his precepts comprise an overarching philosophy to which he subscribes. He believes it is important to model the behavior he expects others to exhibit. It is through his integration of his precepts that he is able to manifest his spirituality when making decisions in his role as leader.

House Prof recognizes that the decisions he makes are not always going to be mutually agreed upon by all parties involved. Also, he is fully aware that sometimes

when he has been led by the spirit to move in one direction, he can choose to move in another.

... We have free will and sometimes we make choices even when the spirit has told you not to do that or to do something and you choose not to do it. And the consequences have been negative... I have plenty of examples where I haven't listened or haven't responded in ways that were positive and the outcome... has been negative... I think that because of the walk in the precepts that the fall was softer than it could have been had I not been walking in the, in the, in the precepts of God. So, the fall and the recovery has probably always has, has definitely always been swifter and softer than it probably otherwise would have been.

House Prof believes it is important for him to listen to God and to follow God's will. He further believes that when the actions he takes are those in which he strays from the communication he receives from God, he feels the decisions he makes are not in line with God's will. House Prof relies on his communication with God to provide him direction in his decision making. He admits that sometimes he does not always do what he believes God has communicated to him through his prayers and that can sometimes lead to outcomes that are not favorable.

House Prof understands that he is ultimately responsible for his actions, which is the free will he talks about. He also believes that it is important for him to live by his precepts, which help him to glorify God in his actions. It is House Prof's connection to a higher power that he believes provides him with the solid grounding he needs to be successful in his role as leader. However, he is quick to point out that when challenged to make a hard decision he has to draw on his spirituality to lead and guide him. He believes that his spirituality results in him being a servant leader in that he should serve as an example for those he leads by not asking them to do something he himself would not do.

I believe that because of my spirituality and my connectedness, my communication with God that I am able to foresee consequences of my behavior and if I am going to be a leader then I have walked the path that I am asking others to now tread because I have done that, either physically or through my spiritual walk with God.

House Prof believes it is important for him to lead by example. His decision making is based on his experiences as a leader and his communication with God spiritually. He believes that his behavior is guided by this relationship with God, and it is through his actions that God is manifested in him.

[Through] my readings, my understandings, my contemplations, my prayer, God has revealed to me that taking the people this way benefits them, me, and him in ways that will then be seen by others and bring others to the same understanding that this is good to do this this way. So, how does it impact my real day-to-day leadership? It is because I am prayerful about it, before I make a decision about something. I'm contemplative about it. I just don't simply rely on some religious notion.

House Prof's communication with God through prayer and contemplation are at the root of his spiritual connectedness with God and those with whom he works. Because he is able to outwardly show others his spiritual side through his daily actions, he believes that his actions will bring others in their own spiritual dynamic. It is his hope that he can serve as a role model and demonstrate the behavior that he expects others to exhibit in their personal and professional lives

House Prof also makes decisions that impact the faculty who report to him. While he was not able to provide a specific example of a crucial decision he has made that impact faculty, he spoke generally about how he integrates his spirituality into his decision making.

House Prof believes that the decisions he makes are decisions that are based on his spiritual grounding. He admits that because he has been in communication with God

and that this communication is ongoing, his ability to make decisions is inherently influenced by the revelations he receives from God. These revelations do not just appear, but are the result of him asking God for guidance and direction. Spiritually, he views these revelations as being communicated from God because he is in contact with God on an ongoing basis. While his decisions can result in negative outcomes as well as positive ones, House Prof understands that what spirituality does is to provide a check and balance system, that he can draw upon to help make decisions that he feels are the best ones for each particular issue that must be evaluated.

We are here to service others. And if you are gonna be a leader, you have to be as servant leader. ... You're first here to serve those who God who has also placed here so that they can then serve and to grow and progress... ... The only way to do that is to care for others like us... and that's deeper than simply writing a check to some charity... That is truly believing, in caring, in the ultimate goodness and necessity of every human being to be free and interact with other human beings in ways that forward a sustainable, livable, verdant world---justice, liberties, freedoms, those kinds of things.

For House Prof, it is not enough just to be a leader. Being a servant leader is important to House Prof because he believes it is through his ability to lead by example and not ask his faculty to do something that he would not do that he is able to help others grow and move to the next level. House Prof believes that caring for others is more than just saying you care, but demonstrating through actions that you care. Having lived the experience is an important quality of effective decision making and effective leadership for him. In addition, House Prof believes that in order for those who report to him to be successful, he has to provide be able to make the decisions that result in the growth and development of the faculty who report to him.

While the growth and development of faculty is important to him, he also realizes that sometimes he has to make decisions that may have a negative impact on faculty. It is

such times that he has to draw on his spirituality to lead him in the right direction.

...Whenever you need to administer discipline... that's often a very difficult thing to accomplish in that everybody is somebody and they feel that they are "the" somebody. So you have to be very careful...

As an administrator at a major university, House Prof has to weigh the sensibilities of the faculty against his ultimate goal of providing an environment that is conducive for student learning. He has to weigh the status of tenured faculty against any type of disciplinary actions taken against them for whatever reason. As such, when student complaints arise against a professor, the professor's stance is to dismiss the complaint and move on while House Prof has to take a leadership role and work with the student to get the matter resolved. House Prof believes that he has to have a constant connection to God because the environment in which House Prof operates requires him to be constantly connected to his spirituality. He understands that managing his faculty, most of whom are tenured, can be precarious.

And oftentimes they use their tenure to protect them from discipline. ...Not only... tenure but a real longevity at this institution. If you have to discipline, then this becomes how do you do this without causing this to be an outright challenge and ultimate loss of your authority and your leadership ability.

Having to reprimand someone who has violated policy or even performs poorly could backfire on him. House Prof understands this and believes that it is through his spirituality he is better able to maintain his professionalism while at the same time make the kinds of decisions that are expected as his level.

I am very prayerful about how I approach senior faculty when it is clear that they have done something wrong or outside of the policy or sometimes even destructive to the learning process for the students.

House Prof believes that because of his ongoing prayers and communication with God, he has advanced preparation for making effective decisions in his role as leader.

House Prof believes it is important for him to not only pray when faced with a challenge, but he prays and meditates even when he is not faced with a challenge. It is through this ongoing communication with God that he is better able to serve the needs of his faculty and of the students. House Prof understands that he has to work to provide the best possible solutions to the problems he is confronted daily. Issues involving students as well as those involving faculty can provide their share of challenges. House Prof believes that it is because of his ongoing communication with the Triune God that he is able to decide on the most effective method of making decisions about the challenges with which he is confronted daily.

...There is a way in which to approach them. So my spirituality, my readings, my contemplation... Those kinds of prayerful thoughts allow me to make decisions and pull these recalcitrant faculty into lock step with the rest of the troops to take that hill. Alright, when they would otherwise balk at doing and then we can move on without me really having to fire you, or to suspend you, or something that could get blown up very large and out of proportion and cause a lot of discord in a unit.

For House Prof it is important that all the troops are working toward the same goal and that they are supporting the same cause. He believes that making a bad decision can cause discord among the faculty and that it is his job to keep everyone marching to the same beat for him to be successful and effective in his role. It is through his spirituality that he is able to achieve his goals in his role as leader.

Just the prayerful knowledge and contemplation that God brings to my mind before I may come to a person and talk to them allows me to be able to listen to them, to understand their position, and he gives me sort of this piece to say okay – I have heard you and hear is what we are going to do and this is why we are going to do it. And, they usually go along with it.

House Prof believes his spirituality provides him the discipline he needs to be able to listen to his faculty, synthesize the information, and then make a decision. House

Prof believes and understands that his meditations and prayers help sustain him in his role as leader. He is able to draw on his relationship with the Triune God and use his spirituality to his benefit and the benefit of others.

I put the spirit of God first out there first and they can't battle that. I don't have to even battle it. I don't have to do anything with it. I've got this sort of righteous indignation that I could put forward to this situation that is really all GOD not me. And so I'm the mouthpiece that they feel something different, and they move. And for me that's the spirituality that informs the leadership. It's my leadership, my thoughts that... what you have done is not quite right... The question now becomes the spirituality part because how am I going to deal with you now? That's where God comes in and informs me how to do that to maintain this humane relationship of people... in business operations.

House Prof believes his spirituality helps him to determine how he will manage specific challenges as they develop. He understands that there is not a cookie cutter approach to how he resolves each issue because he is working with a diverse group of individuals and each personal challenge has to be evaluated on its own merits. Further, he uses his spirituality to help his faculty understand when they violated a policy or procedure and uses his spirituality to help him communicate and resolve issues.

I think that my spirituality gives me the ability to talk to that person and sort of mellow them out in a way that they are ready to service the child or the student.

Getting a faculty member and a student to resolve issues can be quite a challenge for House Prof. However, he believes his spirituality helps him to create a positive work environment that supports helping employees be successful in their job. And when his employees are successful, they provide a positive support network and learning environment for students.

I have built relationships... I'm building relationships... If I can make suggestions to them to facilitate what they want. Then, they remember that and that is building bridges. My spirituality won't allow me just to sit there and see things go on and let it blow over because that's not in the service of humanity, that's not in the service of our client, which is the student.



House Prof believes it is through the relationships that he is creating that he is better able to provide effective leadership to his faculty and to students. That effective leadership involves making decisions that impact all concerned. However, for House Prof, building bridges is important to him because it creates unity and an environment of cooperation. He believes this is crucial to his success and the success of faculty, and students and it is through his spirituality that he is able to achieve his goals.

As a spiritual leader, House Prof believes it is important to be in constant communication with people. As an illustration, he tells the story of how he not only communicates with the president of the college when needed, but with the students who wear the baggy pants who might be ignored or dismissed by faculty or other leaders on campus.

The president has some foundation [and]is having an international conference down at one of the big old hotels... He calls me to send students down there because I am going to send students down there who know how to pull up their pants and put on a shirt and tie and interface with dignitaries from around the world.

House Prof believes that it is through the relationships he has built with students that he is able to identify students who can themselves take on leadership roles.

That's what I tell students. You may not be in a leadership role right now, but you really are. People are looking at you and they will remember; they will remember.

He believes that in either case, being able to communicate at either level is important to the building of bridges.

### **Vincent**

For six of the seven participants, spirituality is directly linked to Christianity, which is their belief in the Triune God. This was not true however for the seventh

participant, Vincent. Vincent believes his spirituality is connected to his religious beliefs, but does not claim Christianity as being his spirituality as the other participants do.

In an effort to better understand Vincent's spiritual base, it was necessary to conduct a second interview to allow him the opportunity to provide a clearer explanation of his spirituality. Interestingly, Vincent's responses in the second interview were consistent with those he provided in the first interview. However, unlike in the first interview where he did not say upfront that he was a Christian, in the second interview he classified himself as a Christian who also practiced two other religions. Because Vincent was raised in a Christian household and attended church regularly as a child, he is aware of his Christianity, but does not necessarily subscribe to it.

Vincent characterizes his spirituality as a unique blend of various religions. This will be explained further in the section below. Vincent believes himself to be spiritual leader and further believes his spirituality influences the decisions he makes in his role as a leader.

Because Vincent's views about his Christianity are very different from the other participants, I wanted to analyze his responses in isolation from the other participants in order to more clearly understand the basis of his spirituality and how he believes his spirituality impacts his decision making in his role as leader. First, I will discuss the foundation of Vincent's spirituality. Then, I will explore Vincent's blending of religions and then conclude with Vincent's integration of his spirituality in his decision making in his role as leader.

**Vincent's spirituality.** In contrast to the other participants, there are several differences that exist between Vincent's definition and articulation of his spirituality and

the other participants. First, Vincent admits that his spirituality is not directly connected to a specific religious doctrine but rather it is a combination of several religions. The other participants were able to identify their spirituality as being their Christianity and did not differentiate between the two.

Second, Vincent describes his spirituality as being derived from a blend of religions, which include Christianity, the religion of Islam, and the religion of Yoruba. The other participants believe in the Triune God—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Third, in his first interview, Vincent did not express a belief in the Triune God like the other participants did. In the second follow-up interview, Vincent did admit that he considered himself to be a Christian, but was unable to express just what being a Christian meant to him. The other participants had very little problem explaining what their Christianity meant and saw no difference between their spirituality and the Christianity.

Fourth, Vincent believes that his experiences with other religions has provided him with a greater spiritual dimension than the other participants. None of the other participants associated any other religious practices with their religious beliefs other than Christianity. Vincent provided that perhaps the other participants' monotheist views might be the result of their lack of exposure to other cultures and religions.

...The other six of those individuals you interviewed... in terms of, where are they from, where did they go to school, what did they major[ed] in... I don't know if that has a lot to do with it... if they were business versus, I'm in liberal arts... I was all over the place right... where I was kind of exposed to a lot of different literature that questioned mainstream...

Vincent believes that perhaps his exposure to a variety of religions and supporting literature has provided him with a unique perspective and understanding of other

religions that the other participants do not possess. Further, Vincent suggests that perhaps his openness to exploring other cultures and religions has provided him a broader perspective and openness to accepting other religious practices. He even suggests that because the participants have not had the experiences with other religions that he has had, they might not be as open-minded to accepting them or even considering another religion other than Christianity. He further suggests that perhaps the other participants' exposure to other religions, where they live, and even how they were raised, contributes to their inability to accept other religions.

I want to look at the demographics of the people that you surveyed. ... You [are] only dealing with African American males... Are they in higher-Ed? Why I'm asking you to look at the demographics is because demographics play a part in people's belief system. Now for an example, did the other six gentlemen that you interviewed... were all from the deep South, the Bible belt? Bible belt Christianity... You can go anywhere in the Southeast... there are people that pretty much believe the same damned thing... if they grew up there, they went to school there. They could be just limited in terms of what they think, by not even [being] willing to question what they believe. Is that healthy, or is that good?

Vincent believes the other participants in the study are limited in their acceptance of other religious experiences and as a result, they cannot speak of any other religious experience other than Christianity.

Vincent believes that because the other participants' experiences have only been as Christians that their exposure to other religions as well as their unwillingness to accept other religious beliefs are limiting factors. Further, he generalizes that if the other participants were from the South or the Bible Belt, their exposure to Christianity is the only religious perspective they have been exposed to. Vincent surmises that if the other participants in this study were from the deep South, then their views about religion would be different than those of people who live in other parts of the country. Further, Vincent

suggests that if these individuals have not been exposed to other cultures or religions, then their views about religion will be quite limited. Vincent believes that in such cases the participants' responses would certainly differ from his as would their beliefs. He suggests that most Southerners tend to be Christians and believe in the Triune God, hence the references to the Bible Belt Christians. He believes that most Christians who are in the Bible Belt have this monotheist philosophy that might not exist in other parts of the country.

Vincent had no data to support this claim and explained this was just his view about the other participants. Further, he believes that his exposure to other cultures makes him different because he has been exposed to other religions and cultures and that knowledge and experience has given him a broader perspective and appreciation of other religions practices and beliefs.

Vincent explained that he has not fully embraced Christianity because of the many questions he has about religion in general which are not exclusive to Christianity.

...Whether it's Christianity. Whether it's Islam, whatever. ...So I keep that in the back of my mind. How much of this in terms of Christianity, how much of this [is] from Islam? Is really true? How much of it is... really not good for me...?

What is true and what is not true about religion is important to Vincent. Vincent believes that empirical proof is required in order for him to be accepting of any religion. Vincent believes that not being able to answer the questions he has about the various religions has impacted his view of religion in general. Vincent's questions have gone pretty much unanswered as he has continued to search for the religion that has the answers to his questions. Vincent said the unanswered questions he has about certain teachings about Christianity cannot be scientifically proved.

Because it's not science and you can't prove it to me. I can only believe that... Jesus is the Son of God. But I could just believe it. It's not science...It's not a fact. It's not a fact.

Vincent's desire to have scientific proof of the existence of God is therefore a major stumbling block for him. The other participants accept the fact that there are aspects of their religion that cannot be proved or explained. Further, it is their faith and belief in the existence of the Triune God that is the foundation of their belief system, as explained in the introduction to this chapter. Vincent's desire to have physical evidence or proof is the cornerstone of his inability to believe in the Triune God, even though he says he believes in God; for him, these are just words and not a philosophy he truly embraces.

I believe that Jesus died for our sins. I believe that he died and rose on the third day, for our sins, and... That's it. I have, to be honest with you, I have no proof...

Vincent said that he has always been someone who asks questions, even as a child growing up. To this day, he still has difficulty accepting something as being true without physical evidence to support.

And I think that's just part of just who I am in terms of always questioning. I've always questioned. I questioned my parents when they enforced rules. I questioned instructors. I always, always wanted to try to dig deeper... I realize what religion is—that it is just a belief. And I believe that we all have to believe in something...

Vincent admits that without physical evidence to support the existence of God, he has trouble believing in him. However, in the same vein, Vincent later admits in his second interview that he does consider himself to be a Christian and believes in the existence of the Triune God.

I believe Jesus is the Son of God, Yes, but how do I measure to what degree do I believe that?

Analyzing Vincent's data is complicated even further because he does not take a definitive stance on his beliefs. Because of his admission to utilizing a blended religion, his responses to questions can sometimes be confusing because his beliefs are an amalgamation of various different religions and religious doctrines. Vincent himself admits that he is "confused." This is what makes interpreting Vincent's belief so challenging. Vincent is an individual who appears to lack direction in terms of his own spirituality. He can point to the various benefits he derives from the three religions he has practiced, which he believes are the basis of his spirituality. For instance he said that the religion of Islam impacted his spirituality, not because of the religion itself, but for the other aspects of being a member of the Nation of Islam.

Because if you think about it, in the Nation of Islam, they worship the Master Farrad Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakan... and to the point where you would think they were the god, the god on earth. I think they took what benefitted them and shaped it into a black nationalist... It was more political based. It was more political driven. The Nation of Islam, to me was more political social. That how it served me.

Vincent believes that at the time that he practiced the religion of Islam, it served a specific need in his life. The political aspect of the religion and the associated community service that were hallmarks of the Nation of Islam that helped to reinforce a spiritual deficiency in him. Vincent believes that even while the religious influences of the religion were not permanently embedded in his psyche, he nonetheless was able to derive some benefit from being a follower of the Nation of Islam.

To be honest with you, now that I am older, I don't think that I got the real teaching of Islam because I was part of the Nation of Islam, which stemmed from a Black Nationalist perspective... So do I think or believe that I got the true teaching of Islam? No!

As a result, Vincent's exposure and practices as they related to the Islamic faith were more physical acts than the teachings and preachings associated with the religion.

Nevertheless, Vincent believes that for the short time that he spent in the Nation of Islam, he was able to derive some benefit from his experience.

That's how the Nation served me... in terms of who I am, in terms of how I carry myself, morals and values...as opposed to it being religion.

On the one hand, he says he is a Christian and believes in God, but on the other hand, he explains how he benefits from other religions such as Yoruba.

In Yoruba, the deity is the god. My deity was Ogun which was just one of several deities in the Yoruba faith. The Arisha or Shaman, who does the reading, or the Yoruba priest... has the gift to determine what god rules your head. Ogun is the god of iron. So, I started reading about Ogun, and I realized I have those traits of Ogun, and I apply Ogun in certain situations. I apply those three religions that I practice in different situations.

By his own description, the religion of Yoruba is one that consists of various gods, and not just one God as in Christianity and even Islamic religion. Because of Vincent's varied exposure to other religions and beliefs, he has created what he terms his own blended religion that he feels provides him a solid foundation for his spirituality.

In the next section, I will take a closer look at how Vincent describes his blended religion and how he believes it has impacted his decision making.

**A blended religion.** While the other participants almost immediately connected their spirituality to Christianity, Vincent failed to do that. Vincent professes that he has what he calls a blended religion, which is based on his participation in several religious doctrines and that attending church alone might not be enough to satisfy his spiritual needs. He cites being a member of the Nation of Islam (also called the Black Muslims), practicing Christianity, and also Yoruba. Vincent believes his blend of religions provides



him with a broader based from which to draw on when making decisions. Vincent admits that at times he is able to utilize the teachings of all three religions he has practiced, hence his description of a “blended religion.”

I mix up my religion. You might see a Yoruba mask with the Holy Bible next to the Holy Cross in my house. And if I light a candle or light incense, I mix it all. My spirituality is blended, it’s blended. I take a little this, a little that, and I apply it. I’m blended. I’m not just all Christian. I’m not all Islam. I’m not all Yoruba, I take the good out of all of them and I apply it to my life. So, there’s really no [one] religion. I say I’m a Christian. I’m just a spiritual person, I’m a spiritual person that believes in God, and however I get there as long as I don’t bring any harm to myself or nobody else, period. So I’m blended spiritual individual.

He believes that because he is able to utilize what he terms the “best” of all the religions, he is able to make decisions effectively in his role as leader. Vincent believes his participation in these religions has made him a stronger Christian because after experimenting with two other religions, he eventually returned to and began practicing Christianity again.

Vincent explained that he became disillusioned with Christianity while he was a student in college and began to seek more from his religion.

...I found myself during that time period really searching for something other than what I was told, or given by my parents or society. I wanted to go against the grain... Christianity was America’s religion, and I... was anti-American, anti white and all... The Nation of Islam, really played a major part... along with Yoruba... I was in the Nation of Islam, probably about three years... I eventually graduated to...Yoruba...

Vincent believes the graduation from the religion of Islam to Yoruba was a natural progression in his quest to find a suitable religion. Unlike the other Christians in this study, Vincent’s dissatisfaction with Christianity led him on a quest to find what he calls the “right” religion.

I grew up in a small church. Everybody knew everybody. Every holiday the preacher preached the same sermon. we knew exactly what he was gonna preach

on certain holidays. I go back today, and I've been away from home for over 20 years, the church service is identical. The order of the services is identical and still the same songs...

Vincent said this monotony of religious dogma is what forced him to look at religions other than Christianity. The sameness of Christianity is one aspect that Vincent found to be a turnoff. Vincent thought that perhaps the size of the church might make a difference and decided to attend one of the mega churches located in his metro area. He believes that in the larger church that he now attends there is more variety in the type of service conducted. He believes that because it is non-denominational, the experience he receives is more rewarding and fulfilling.

Vincent admits that he is confused about his religion and ultimately his spirituality, and nowhere is it more evident than in his aforementioned comments. Vincent's blending of religions may do no more than provide him with a constant source of confusion because he does not really know what he believes. Further, his belief that he is able to find solace in either of the three individually or collectively illustrates how difficult it is for him to truly commit to one religion. Vincent's constant quest to find the perfect religion only serves to further complicate and confuse what he really believes.

Vincent believes his blended religion makes him a more spiritual person because he is able to draw from more than one source for his spirituality. He believes that his spirituality is personal and admits that while others might be very clear about their spirituality or their Christianity, his spirituality is what he believes it to be and he believes that his blended religious beliefs work for him and those he manages in his role as a leader.

This is what I really believe. And you know what, you can't question what I really believe. You can only try to interpret it, and that's what I really believe.

And, you know what, it has really worked for me. I feel like a lot of good things have happened to me even, valley experiences, as they say. Hard times, you know. [The] thing is, it was my spirituality and my belief in God that got me through that.

When pressed to be more specific about his belief in the Triune God and practicing just one religion, Vincent admitted that this is what he believes and pointed out that his comments in his second interview are consistent with what he said in his first interview, which occurred over a year later. Vincent believes there is a higher power connected with all three religions he has practiced and the higher power is the foundation for all the religions. He refers to God as being the higher power in Christianity and in the Islamic faith, he refers to the higher power as the “Supreme Being” Allah. Vincent believes that his spirituality is directly connected to various belief systems, which he has practiced. Unlike the other participants, however, he does not directly connect his Christianity to his Spirituality nor does he use them interchangeably as the other participants do.

Vincent is the only participant who did not refer directly to Jesus in his initial interview. However, he mentions his relationship with God throughout the first interview and believes that his successes and his failures are all due to his connection with God. In his second interview, Vincent admitted that he believes in the Triune God and said he believes he is a Christian. But, he also admits that because he is not really sure what he believes, his commitment to just one religious philosophy is not possible. He refers to being able to find strength through prayer, meditation, and through the principles he learned while practicing the Islamic faith and Yoruba. Vincent admits to believing in a higher power, which he calls God and believes that God exists in everything.

...Out of the three... in terms of spirituality, I really discovered the difference between spirituality and religion. God is in everything... the trees, the water, the wind, everything.

Vincent admits that after experimenting with other religions, he ultimately returned to Christianity, in part because of his upbringing. He believes that Christianity, in the end, provided him a spiritual reference that he was all too familiar with, but more importantly, it provided him with a spiritual base on which he can live his life.

**Spirituality and decision making.** In his role as a leader Vincent is responsible for managing faculty and working with students and staff. In prior leadership roles, his responsibilities are similar to his current duties, but now he has the added responsibility of recommending faculty for hire and also for evaluating faculty and advising students.

Vincent believes his spirituality influences the decisions he makes in his role as a leader.

I think it plays a part in my decision making. It plays a part in terms of how I interact with people. It plays a part in how I create, develop, implement certain things...

In this capacity, Vincent believes he is able to use his spirituality to help him make decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff with whom he interacts daily.

However, Vincent believes that while his spirituality is a source of reinforcement for him when making decisions, he struggles with making major decisions, such as the decision to fire an employee.

It's very hard for me to fire people... because... it's a domino effect. I go beyond just them being without a job. The compassion part of me takes into consideration who else will this affect. Will it affect their household, their children, whether or not they eat... where they live? I think my spirituality helps me be very considerate of others when I make decisions...

Vincent's desire to make everything right or to have a happy ending for all outcomes may very well be one of the major challenges of his spirituality.

While other participants see their spirituality as an asset and believe their spirituality is a result of their direct communication with God, Vincent's multitude of religious practices may be clouding his judgment and confounding his ability to be an effective leader. His reluctance to fire an individual because of the long term ramifications it will have on the employee illustrates how his emotional involvement in his leadership may be compromised because of his inability to separate his personal feelings from professional responsibility; other participants use their spirituality and the Christianity to help them make decisions.

While Vincent admits that he struggles with difficult decisions such as firing an employee, he acknowledges that when the decision has to be made, he has to follow through, regardless of the consequences.

But I...had to make decisions and just wish them to their highest good because they were not a good fit for the particular position. It's my spirituality that helps me in terms of my interaction with my colleagues.

In this illustration, Vincent will make a decision when he is pushed and there is no other alternative. When he is pushed into a corner, he will make the decision. But, he admits that his spirituality is used to help him communicate with his colleagues in a compassionate manner.

Like other participants in this study, Vincent believes that he bears some of the responsibility for an employee who might not be performing up to expectations. He suggests that sometimes employees might not be a good fit in a particular position and that it is his responsibility to work with employees to help them realize their potential.

However, he understands that he cannot save everyone from a bad situation, and that is where he has to rely on his spirituality to provide him with the direction he needs.

**Spirituality and leadership.** Vincent believes that he is a compassionate leader as a result of his spirituality.

...As a leader I try to tap into people's strengths, and their talents. Because, they might have been good in this particular area, but that's not to say they're incompetent, etc. But if we were to put them into another area they might just blossom. I had the flexibility to do it. I would do it. For some people it's just not a good fit overall, and it's better for them to move on... for their growth and development.

Vincent believes that because of his spirituality, he is able to recognize that not all people are right for the jobs they have. He believes that if he allows them to continue to perform poorly, it is not doing them any favors. As much as he hates to terminate an employee, Vincent believes his spirituality does provide him with the strength he needs to carry out a decision to terminate an employee. It is not a job he enjoys doing, but it is one that he feels is a part of his job as a leader. Vincent believes that because of his spirituality and his blending of religions, he is a better leader and is able to handle the challenges that are a part of his job.

I think to me, the spirituality is to be calm, to diffuse. Faculty members could be angry, destructive, especially when there's a faculty and student confrontation. And I think my blend of all three of them plays a part in how I coach and advise a faculty member too. I don't fight fire with fire.

Vincent said once everyone calms down and both parties are able to think clearly, his role as advisor and mediator is much easier. He believes that spirituality provides him with compassion in leadership and helps him to make decisions big and small. Vincent feels that his compassion in leading others is paramount to his success as a leader. It is his desire to always make decisions that are fair to the individuals involved.

Vincent also believes that this compassion helps him better serve the needs of the students he advises as well. He admits to going well beyond expectations to ensure that students he advises are successful. Making phone calls, providing them with information, and counseling them are activities he feels demonstrate his compassion and his spirituality. Vincent points out one example in which he feels he used his spirituality in leadership.

...Use mentoring for an example. If I see a need at work... I try to implement a program, process, or system that could better assist them. ...Where I work [you] have a high population of Black males who are first generation college students... who don't have mentoring, who come from an environment where there is no positive role model. I try to implement and create programs that would mentor, foster behavior in, and build relationships by [creating] an avenue for them to become better... I think my spirituality plays a part in that because of my compassion for people and my compassion to see others do well and be successful and succeed.

Vincent's desire to mentor others led him to provide mentoring for a young black male student who attends the college at which Vincent works. Vincent believes his spirituality showed him there was something special, but missing, in this young man's life and perhaps he could help to provide guidance to the young man.

And I helped this individual get out of the college...I currently work at because he didn't belong there. He belonged at a more traditional college, I saw that in him.

Vincent believed that in this instance he took an appropriate course of action by advising the student to attend another, more traditional, school because the one he was attending was not right for him. Vincent believes his spirituality helped him to advise the student in a positive way and the student did indeed attend another school and has been quite successful as a student.

Vincent concedes that it is important that young Black males have positive role models in their lives and that because he is in a position to help provide opportunities for

mentoring, he views this as one of the impacts of his spirituality. He is very passionate about his commitment to young black males and believes that the decisions he makes in his role as leader, extend well beyond the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality in their decision making. The analysis of data provides insight into how the participants believe their decision making is influenced by their spirituality by providing examples of how they integrate their spirituality into their professional lives. While participants acknowledge they do not make every decision by dropping to their knees and praying and asking God for guidance, they also acknowledge that because of their ongoing relationship with God, their spirituality is always working either consciously or unconsciously when there are decisions to be made.

Terms such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, and personal responsibility are not unique to these individuals and how they integrate these values into their leadership. The participants believe it is important to focus on the individual as well as the organization, but it is the individual who they believe benefits from their spirituality. And as mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 4, these concepts are within the participants' religious beliefs and practices. The participants believe these concepts are important to them and they live by these concepts in their personal and professional lives.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Introduction**

Chapter Five presents the results of the study as they interface with the existing literature. This section begins with a review of the assumptions that led to the study. Followed by a review of the research questions and discussion of the findings as they compare to the literature. Finally, recommendations for future studies for higher education leaders will be presented.

### **Presumptions About Spirituality and Decision Making**

I wanted to understand how male African American leaders in higher education defined the phenomenon of spirituality and how they perceived their spirituality influenced the decisions they made in their roles as leaders. In order to understand the phenomenon, I talked to male African American leaders and had them define what spirituality meant to them. I asked these leaders to tell me how they believed their spirituality influenced the decisions they made in their roles as leaders.

I felt it was important to have these participants define the phenomenon and describe in their own words what spirituality meant to them and how they believed it influenced their decision making. The analysis of my data revealed information that contradicted my original assumptions about spirituality. My analysis also revealed that the participants' spirituality and their decision making were strongly connected. Further, the participants' spirituality and their Christianity were viewed as being synonymous. I

did not anticipate the relationship between the participants' spirituality and their Christianity. This was surprising because the review of literature showed spirituality mostly from a non-religious perspective; therefore, I expected the data gathered through the interviews to be similar with the data I presented in the review of literature.

The purpose of this study was to better understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality in their decision making. Through in depth interviews and analysis of data, the results revealed how these male African American leaders in higher education perceive they use their spirituality to make decisions in their role as leader.

When participants described how they use their spirituality in decision making, there was not one clear cut, easily applied explanation to answer the question of "how?" Therefore, the structure of the phenomenon provides a number of elements that make up each participant's spirituality and the different ways in which his spirituality influences his decision making.

All participants were Christian and believed in the Triune God: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because of their belief in the Triune God, all the participants except one, were able to identify their spirituality and their Christianity as being the same. They did not distinguish between spirituality and Christianity.

The participants also agreed that they communicated with God through prayer and meditation. They reported that they pray on a regular basis, they pray when confronted with a particularly challenging decision, but they also pray when less complicated decisions have to be made. They all generally agree that because of their ongoing communication with God, they do not have to pray every time they make a decision.

Rather, their spirituality is always working in the background so that when it is needed, it is always available to reinforce, guide, or direct their decision making.

As a reinforcement to their decision making, the participants believe their spirituality provides clarity in their decision making. They also believe their spirituality provides them with direction and guidance during their day-to-day activities as a higher education leader. They believe their spirituality reinforces their ability to make a decision regardless of whether the outcome is positive or negative. They understand that not every decision is the most appropriate for every situation but believe it is through their spirituality that they are better able to make decisions regardless of the outcome.

In the next section I will discuss my initial expectations about what I thought I would find about spirituality and decision making from the participants' responses.

### **Response to Research Questions**

In this section, I will examine how the participants' data answer the research questions that guided this study. These are the research questions that guided the study:

1. How do Male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of their spirituality on the decisions they make?
2. What influences the spirituality of male African American leaders in higher education?
3. How do Male African American leaders in higher education integrate their spirituality into their job?

To address the research questions, interviews were conducted with seven male African American leaders in higher education who self-identified themselves as being spiritual. Each interview was transcribed and analyzed to determine essence of the responses.

Question 1: How do male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on the decisions they make?

All participants believe their spirituality influences the decisions they make in their role as leader. They point to the decisions that they make that impact students, faculty, and staff. For each of the constituencies they serve, they believe their spirituality influences the decisions they make. They pointed out that because of their Christianity, they were able to make decisions that required considerable thought and contemplation as well as making decisions on the spot without a considerable amount of thought or meditation. The participants said they did not believe there was a difference between their Christianity and their spirituality. As a result, when they spoke of their Christianity and their spirituality, they used the two terms interchangeably.

Nick Phoenix believes that his spirituality influences his decisions in his professional role. Nick believes he makes decisions based on what is in his heart. He admits that he also has to balance his spirituality against the policies and procedures of the organization, but in the end, he feels his spirituality helps him to be able to make the most appropriate decision.

Jason believes that his decisions are impacted by his spirituality. He believes that he is spiritual because of his relationship with God and through his spirituality he is better able to make decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff. Jason believes companies are quick to lay off employees during difficult financial times, but believes it is through his spirituality, he is able to recognize the importance of the individual to the organization and fight to keep those employees who he feels will help the organization to

grow when company conditions improve. Jason places a high value on what he calls the “human capital,” which is the contributions of individuals to the organization.

Nombre believes his spirituality has helped him to confront challenges in the classroom, such as the student whom he believed to be racist because of the views expressed in an essay. Nombre believes his spirituality helped him to focus on helping the student and the rest of the class by using the incident as a “teachable moment.” Through prayer and meditation, Nombre believes he was able to use his spirituality to come up with a solution that averted what could have been a very volatile situation for the student, the class, and for himself.

CB believes he is able to utilize his spirituality at work in the decisions he makes because his spirituality helps him to be an effective mediator when resolving problems between student and faculty. CB believes it is important to listen to both sides of a story and make a decision that is a win for both parties involved. CB believes his spirituality helps him to come up with resolutions to the issues with which he is often confronted in his role as leader. CB believes that through his communication with God through prayer and reading the Bible, he is able to utilize his spirituality in leadership.

Bernard believes his spirituality has helped him to make decisions that impact the faculty who report to him. Bernard believes that effective leadership starts with him and when an employee fails to perform at an acceptable level, it is partially because he has not provided the support and feedback to help the employee be successful. Bernard believes his spirituality provides him with the reinforcement he needs to be able to communicate the good and the bad to employees when he needs to and believes it is through his spirituality that he is able better able to support faculty to be successful.

House Prof believes his spirituality is grounded in his constant communication with God through his prayers and meditation. He believes his spirituality is always working to help him make decisions and it is not necessary for him to drop to his knees and pray every time he has to make a decision. House Prof believes his spirituality provides him the strength he needs to function as a higher education leader and give him the guidance and direction needed when particularly difficult decisions arise. House Prof believes his spirituality is always a part of him and therefore it is a part of his decision making because of his ongoing relationship with God.

Vincent believes that his spirituality, which is an amalgam of three religions, helps him to be an effective leader. He believes that through his spirituality, he is able to provide support to students by being a positive role model and mentor. He uses his spirituality to help those students be successful. He believes that many of the students who attend his college are not prepared to be successful and need support beyond the classroom. Vincent believes his spirituality helps him to identify these students and provide them with tools to be successful.

### **Summary of Research Question 1**

The participants believe that through their ongoing relationship with the Triune God, their spirituality was ever-present in their life and because of this, they were able to integrate their spirituality into their decision making at both the conscious level and the sub-conscious level. At the conscious level they integrated their spirituality into their decision making through prayer and meditation with God. When faced with a difficult decision, their communication with God influenced the decisions they made because they prayed and mediated about them and asked God for guidance and direction. At the sub-

conscious level, they believe that through their on-going prayers and meditations, their spirituality was always working in the background, and it was not always necessary to meditate and pray when making decisions that needed to be made immediately or in real time. Because they had already established a spiritual foundation with God, they were able to make decisions that had to be made at a moment's notice.

Question 2: What influenced the spirituality of male African American leaders in higher education

I learned that for most participants, the participants' spirituality is based on their belief in the Triune God. That is the one and only factor that influenced their spirituality. Most participants were raised in a Christian household where one or both of the parents attended church on a regular basis.

Nick did not describe his early exposure to Christianity, but did admit that as an adult he attends church regularly because it is important for him as a Christian to interact and connect with other Christians who share the same beliefs as him. "...I look for people who have some kind of spiritual basis that they live by."

Jason admitted that his parents did not attend church regularly. However as a youngster he attended church and was actively involved in church activities. He described how he was expected to pass out church literature on the street to passersby. Jason did not explain the circumstances that led to his connection to the church but shared that when he was 16 years old he was able to help his mother become a Christian because of his involvement in the church. Jason admits that his spirituality was deeply influenced by his early experiences in the church and as an adult, the foundation that was established at an early age is still a significant influence in his life.

Nombre's parents attended church regularly and his mother was a devout Christian who insisted that her children attend church even when she could not. Nombre's remembers his grandparents as being churchgoing people as well. Nombre said that even when the weather was too bad to attend church, his mother held Sunday School at home. He also remembers the time as a child when he believes he felt the "presence of God," which he believes was the beginning of his spirituality.

I think was outside one... in Philadelphia... and it was pitch dark and it was starting to rain... even though at night... it became very sudden[ly] blue black dark... and it starts sprinkling... and still with the water beading... it all of a sudden felt like there was this presence of God, that I just had this conversation. I was having this conversation and I felt his presence with me. [He said] I am real. And I am with you. And from that point, and I didn't hear any words... I felt that was my beginning of my spiritual life with God. And, now I could have either increased it or decreased it, depending on whether I chose to accept it and to nurture it, and be obedient and learn to listen, and to commune with [Him], but my spirituality is at the heart of my existence.

Nombre admits that as an adult he does not attend church regularly because of what he calls a disenchantment with religion. His disenchantment is the result of his belief that the church has become political and because of preachers who espouse negative information that contradicts what he felt to be spiritually reinforcing for him.

CB was raised in the church and attends church regularly as an adult. While CB did not provide details of his spiritual roots, he explained that as an adult, his spirituality is reinforced by attending church, attending Sunday School, and attending Bible Study. He has taken a course on how to be a better Christian and is always seeking to learn more about Christianity and the life of Christ and how he can apply it in his personal and professional life.

Bernard was raised in the church and both of his parents attended church regularly. His mother was one of the founders of the church in his community and his



father was a deacon. His maternal and paternal grandparents were Christians and his family was the largest contingent of parishioners in his church.

...So it's just a history in our family... I attended Sunday school every Sunday because the church was just a few blocks, actually next door to my home where I grew up. Coming from a rural country... we all had church every fourth Sunday. So my family was the largest family in the church. We participated in... Sunday School, all the Christmas plays. We were the Christmas play. So you it was just continuously being... instilled in me... As I matured... I realized more what it meant to be a Christian... That's how it's been instilled in me...

Bernard believes that it is not only through his own prayers, but the prayers of his parents and his grandparents, that he has been able to live a Christian life and his belief in God has sustained him in his personal and professional life.

House Prof was raised as a Christian. He did not provide the details of his upbringing in the church, but through his interview, I discovered that he was raised in the Baptist church and performed in the church choir as a youth. He was also a musician who played the piano for various churches. House Prof's spirituality was reinforced by what he calls "supernatural" occurrences he experienced in his youth. His examples include a woman whom he said was singing in church and fell.

I'm standing right next to this woman, and we're singing and the song is really good, and when I look over at this woman, she is falling backwards, stiff as a board, but she's floating down. I mean she just simply, gently lands on the risers, stiff as a board. Still, she didn't sit, she didn't fall, she floated backwards gently, stiff as a board, on the risers. Freaked me out. Now I'm thinking... what's going on because... my scientific mind's not going to let me go there...

House Prof provides another example that he said could not be explained.

I've seen pianos play and nobody on it... When I was going to graduate school, I used to play for some holiness churches, and [this] brother was playing the piano. He fell off the bench. I still heard piano music.

House Prof provided these examples of occurrences he experienced as a youth to illustrate he believes God "intercedes on people's behalf" and how these occurrences

have solidified his belief in God and his spirituality is manifested in his interactions with people in his personal and professional lives.

Vincent was raised in the church and attended church regularly as a youngster.

You know, I grew up in a small church. Everybody knew everybody. Every holiday the preacher preached the same sermon. We knew exactly what he was gonna preach, on certain holidays.

Vincent explained that his experiences in the church involved being “preached to” rather than being taught what it meant to be a Christian.

How I was raised in terms of Christianity, it was, it was preached to me. I don’t think I was really taught it... It was like, here’s a scripture, here’s a chapter and I was told what it was... instead of me trying to really discover for myself... and I just took it for what it was. I just believed that that’s what the preacher said and my mom and dad said, it was the gospel and that was it. [I] didn’t question it until I grew up, went to college, [and] start doing my own reading.

Vincent explained that as he grew older and went to college, it was his rebellious nature that led him to experiment with the Nation of Islam as a college student. After three years of various activities associated with being a Black Muslim, he felt that he still had not established a spirituality based on the religion of Islam. It was through his readings about the religion of Yoruba and the encouragement of a couple of his professors that he began to practice the religion regularly.

Vincent calls himself a Christian but believes his spirituality is not based primarily on his Christianity, but rather his blending of Christianity, the religion of Islam, and Yoruba. This blending of religions he believes is the basis of his spirituality.

### **Summary of Research Question 2**

For most of the participants, their spirituality was influenced by their early exposure to Christianity either through their parents who attended church regularly, or through their exposure to church at an early age independent of their parents. Nombre,

CB, Bernard, and House Prof all provide specific examples of how their early exposure to religion influenced their Christianity. Even Vincent, who initially said he practiced a blended religion, was raised in an environment where he was expected to attend church regularly. Jason, on the other hand, attended church regularly, but not because of his parents. Jason did not go into detail to explain how this came about. However, he believes his exposure to Christianity and his work in the church at an early age helped him to become a spiritual person. Nick did not provide details of his upbringing and his Christianity but admits that today he is a Christian and that he continues to nourish his Christianity by associating with like-minded individuals.

Regardless of how the participants' spirituality was formed, they understand the importance of how it influences their decision making and are able to articulate what their spirituality is and how they integrate it into their decision making.

*Question 3: How do male African American leaders in higher education integrate spirituality into their job?*

Participants described several ways in which they integrated their spirituality into their role as male African American leaders in higher education. In their professional lives, they use their spirituality to help make decisions as leaders. They advise, motivate, and inspire students, faculty, and staff and their actions are based on their spirituality. For each of them, their use of spirituality in their role as leader is manifested in a variety of ways.

Nick believes his spirituality is integrated into his job through his ability to make decisions based on what he "feels inside." Nick believes his spirituality is governed by what is in his heart. He explained that he used his spirituality at work to help him make

decisions that impacted students and provided an example of one student with whom he worked to help resolve the challenge of remaining in school.

Because of his spirituality, Jason places a high value on the importance of human capital. He believes that companies do not place enough importance on the value of the individual contribution of employees; he uses his spirituality to help motivate, encourage, and lead others.

Nombre utilized his spirituality to resolve the issue of a combative student in class who challenged him about an issue that clearly was racially motivated. Nombre believed that because of his prayers and mediation with God, he was able to use the challenge as a teachable moment for the student and the class while maintaining strong leadership in the classroom.

CB's spirituality is rooted in the church and he uses his spirituality at work to serve as mediator between students and faculty when issues arise between the two groups. CB believes he is a good listener who is able to see both sides of the picture and attempt to create win-win situations for all parties involved.

Bernard uses his spirituality to create what he calls a positive work environment for his faculty. Bernard believes the success of his faculty is a shared responsibility between him and the faculty member. He believes that professors' success is a combination of their own personal efforts and Bernard's ability to provide guidance and support to help them be successful. Bernard believes that if he is providing strong leadership, then he is constantly working with faculty to provide them ongoing feedback on their performance. Bernard believes that a faculty member who is performing poorly

is partially his (Bernard's) fault for not providing the faculty member with enough support to be successful.

House Prof believes that his spirituality helps him to work more effectively with the faculty who report to him. He believes his spirituality helps him to resolve student versus faculty conflict as well as any conflict that could develop between himself and a faculty member for any number of reasons.

Vincent believes that his leadership is influenced by the variety of religions he has practiced. Vincent feels that in combination, all the religions he has practiced work in concert to make him a spiritual person. Vincent works closely with students and it is important for him to help them be successful in school by providing them with the leadership and support they need. He believes in strong mentoring of students and believes this is where his spirituality is most evident.

### **Summary of Research Question 3**

All of the participants believe their spirituality is integrated into their leadership. All of the participants except one, Vincent, believed in the Triune God and believed their spirituality and their Christianity are the same. Vincent's spirituality, however, did not align with the others in the study. Vincent's blended religion puts him into a category of his own that consists of a believe system and a spirituality that is based on the blending of three religions: Christianity, Islam, and Yoruba. Vincent's believes all these religions serve as a foundation for his spirituality.

### **Findings and the Literature**

This section will explore the results of my study and compare them to the literature. The results of the data collected and the review of the literature are discussed

as follows. First will be an analysis of how spirituality and religion do not have the same meaning. Within that discussion will be analysis of the qualities of spirituality, a comparison of Secular Humanism versus religious principles, the controversy of religion versus spirituality, and a discussion of the how the participants explain their spirituality. The next section will review how spirituality and Christianity are loosely connected. The last section will be an analysis of how spirituality and Christianity are the same.

### **Spirituality and Religion do not have the Same Meaning**

The review of literature provides a wide range of opinions about the relationship between spirituality and religion. In some articles the authors do not make any connection between spirituality and religion. In fact they create a new category of Secular Humanism to clearly separate spirituality and religion.

Secular Humanism is a rejection of traditional religion... a belief that there is no such thing as "spirit"... that people are undersigned, unintended, and responsible for themselves. Secular humanism is nonreligious, espousing no belief in a realm or beings imagined to transcend ordinary experience.  
(<http://www.secularhumanism.org/>).

From a Secular Humanistic perspective, the qualities that comprise spirituality are not related to religion or to God, but are qualities that are naturally occurring in the universe. Santora (1999) provides qualities to describe what he calls principles that are the foundation of spirituality.

### **Qualities of Spirituality**

Santora's qualities of spirituality include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Fry (2003), Guillory (1997), and Rosener (1998) use these terms to describe spirituality: compassion, love, truth, honesty, trust, vision, humility, integrity, and fun. There is some overlapping of the terms; they

share similarities. These qualities therefore can be viewed as reinforcement to the skills and abilities the individual already possesses. When these terms are used in a generic or secular sense, there is no religious connection. However, when my participants talk about how they use their spirituality, connections can be made to show how these terms can also be religious as they pertain to the participants' spirituality.

### **Comparison of Secular Humanism Terms vs. Religious Principles**

Nick Phoenix uses his compassion for others to help a student who might not have a chance of succeeding in school by granting her just one more appeal to remain in class.

Nick also believes in integrity.

By virtue of being an educator and administrator... integrity is a big thing. I wouldn't stoop to certain levels of, of dishonesty or deceit... One thing that I can say that my spirituality does for me is that it allows me to accept the good and the bad. And I think that that is the true influence of my true spirituality in the workplace.

Jason uses his faithfulness to protect an employee who reports to him from receiving a negative performance evaluation. Jason believes that because he is the one who really knows and understands the value of his employee, and because of the value he places on the individual's contributions to the organization, he should protect him from being unfairly evaluated.

CB uses patience to act as a mediator when he attempts to resolve disputes between students and faculty by allowing each side to tell their story and carefully evaluate the information before making a decision.

Nombre uses his patience, humility, love, and self-control to resolve a highly volatile situation involving a student with racist's views. He also believes a leader must be compassionate.

I would want someone to be compassionate, and I think sometimes we force people to lie... I always try to put myself in the situation... I'm in a position to make decisions, [based on] how would I want to be treated... and that is the spirituality that comes through.

Bernard's integrity causes him to believe that as a leader he bears some of the responsibility for an employee's success or failure.

House Prof's faithfulness, gentleness and humility help guide him through the daily challenge of dealing with student issues and tenured faculty whom he admits are quite demanding.

Vincent's truth, honesty, and generosity are hallmarks of his leadership because he is always looking for ways to help students and faculty be successful. He also believes he is a compassionate leader:

You have to have some compassion for the human being as well. We're not just table or chairs that you can just throw away. I think my spirituality helps me be very considerate of others when I make decisions...

The preceding examples illustrate how the qualities of spirituality as identified by researchers from a non-Christian perspective are some of the same values the participants utilize in their leadership roles.

From a Secular Humanist perspective, in all these examples, these non-religious terms have nothing to do with the participants' spirituality. For the participants, however, these terms and the subsequent actions they result in are directly connected to their spirituality. For the participants, these qualities of spirituality and the subsequent actions that result are a result of their Christianity. They are grounded in Christian values and philosophies. Furthermore, they appear to be no different than the qualities and descriptions provided by Chaleff (1998), Fry (2003), Rosener (1998), and Guillory (1997). Their list of spiritual qualities could easily be used to describe Christian values



that the participants in this study utilize in the role as leader. And even though these terms are used by Secular Humanists, they are also grounded in Christian views and philosophies. As such, it is difficult to completely separate these philosophies into two separate camps. So while the Secular Humanist claims no connection to spirituality, these Christian participants hold them as their Christian values.

Lerner (2000) believes that spirituality and religion are separate and distinct, calling spirituality lived experiences and practices that contribute to the individual's well being. Lerner's description supposes the individual's spirituality is comprised of life experiences. He further describes religion as organized doctrines and rituals. Klenke (2003) concurs and believes spirituality and religion to be different. Chaleff (1998) believes that spirituality and religion are different and describes spirituality as being qualities that are associated with the discovery of the individual and his or her values and relationships. These qualities are no different than those that are used by the participants to describe their own discovery of their Christianity. Nombre's description of his Christianity is one example that supports this assertion:

If you are true to who you are. If you are true to the voice that you listen to inside of you. If you meditate and ask God to guide you, to guide you in how you live your life, the choices that you make... he will show you and he will tell you I command you to not live a lie, but to be who I have created you to be. This is spirituality.

For Nombre, his description of his spirituality shows his strong belief in the Triune God. His explanation demonstrates how he believes God provides guidance in the choices that he makes. While his strong belief in God does not mirror the descriptions of those provided by Klenke (2003) and Chaleff (1998), who have been categorized as Secular

Humanists, the qualities of spirituality that he utilizes in his role as leader are very similar, if not identical, to those expressed by Secular Humanists.

Other proponents of Secular Humanism include Fry (2003), Rosener (1998), and Guillory (1997). They too provide a list of qualities they believe describe spirituality from a non-religious perspective which include terms such as compassion, love, truth, and humility. These researchers believe spirituality, as a non-religious phenomenon, can exist in the workplace and does exist when applied in a non-religious way.

### **Religion vs. Spirituality**

Those researchers classified as Secular Humanists view religion and spirituality as being very different. However, because of the obvious similarities between the two, it is not difficult for the two terms to be lumped into one category. Fernando et al. (2006) cautions that religion and spirituality can be confused in the workplace and when this occurs, it can compromise workplace productivity and morale. He bases this view on the supposition that people are unable to control their religious philosophies and attempt to convince others to accept their religious affiliation. This may explain why spirituality may not be openly embraced in the workplace because of the various religions, denominations, and philosophies that can exist from individual to individual.

The participants all say their spirituality is their Christianity, or their belief in the Triune God. They do not believe religion is the reason for their spirituality. Rather, they believe God is the basis of their spirituality and as such, their spirituality transcends a religious connection. The participants almost universally agree religion refers to rituals, dogma, and various protocols and orders of service and worship. Their Christianity

therefore, is their belief in the Triune God, and not their religion. According to House Prof

Religion is a nuisance. Because it divides. It is absolutely a man-made contrivance to maintain power and control over those whom they can exploit. That's religion. Spirituality is much deeper and much broader than, than simply believing in a particular canon. It is actuality operating in the principles of the universe that God has set in place for you to service humanity – not to divide it and maintain hierarchical arrangements of power and greed. This is what religion does. That is what religion has done historically. Because, if you look at their scriptures, the principles of spirituality that are embodied in each one of those texts are the same. The Torah, the Koran, and the Bible...the spiritual precepts are the same. Worship God – the father, serve the least among you. Those are the basic precepts [of the] universal God...

House Prof's description of religion is consistent with that of the other participants who believe spirituality and religion to be different. He believes his spirituality is not limited or confined to religious doctrines but is greater because he believes in the Triune God.

### **Participants and their Spirituality**

The participants in this study, however, seem to be able to balance their spirituality against the realities of the roles as leaders. The participants describe their spirituality as being a personal experience and one in which they are in communication and contact with God on an ongoing basis and therefore when a decision needs to be made, their spirituality is already working in the background. In the interviews they spoke openly and freely about their belief in the Triune God and admitted that they are Christian. House Prof does not believe it is necessary to openly display this type of religious behavior in order to be a spiritual leader.

So, it may not be drop down on my knees and pray and raise my hands... but in the back of my mind... [I am] cognizant of God's relationship in leading me and directing me.

House Prof believes that he should be an example to those he leads and believes his spirituality helps him to be able to do that without offending others or making them feel like they are being preached to. Fairholm (1997) and Griffin (1988) suggest that spirituality is about the individual and his relationship to humanity. They also believe spirituality is more about the individual's relationship to the world with a focus on the qualities that exist in the individual. Other researchers believe there are qualities or characteristics of spirituality that can exist in the workplace and they use a variety of terms to describe spirituality. From a Secular Humanistic perspective, these are expressions that have no religious basis and are not connected to religion in any way. However, when viewed from a religious perspective, these are all terms that are associated and identified with Christianity.

Even though the Secular Humanistic approach does not support connections to religion, many of the characteristics of Secular Humanism can be applied to the participants' spirituality. While the connection from a Secular Humanistic view might not be apparent, the crossover between is more common than what the literature might suggest.

This does not seem to be an issue for the participants in this study. The participants integrate their spirituality into their daily walk as leaders. When they work with students, faculty, and staff their desire is to put their spirituality into action in their relationships with people whom they interact in their role as leader. House Prof's workplace philosophy is a simple one based on the Golden Rule.

Treat others like you want to be treated. Treat everybody right to try to do what is good. Lead a life where others can see that there is some ordered goodness in your life. Those are some of the overarching principles that I think will, that will manifest itself and ultimately to my benefit and other's as well.

House Prof believes treating people the way he would like to be treated is an approach that works for him.

Proponents of spirituality in the workplace believe spirituality emphasizes the contributions of the employee to the success of the organization. They believe that companies that are successful empower employees and provide them the latitude to contribute to the company's mission. Guillory (1997) believes an organization in which spirituality exists supports its employees with "unlimited opportunity for professional development, advancement, and quality of work life." (p. 13). Researchers believe that organizations should focus more on spirituality and emphasize the importance of human capital, the people who work for the organization. Jason believes the human capital is often overlooked and this hurts companies in the end.

I think most people, especially in our corporate environment, and corporate America, don't appreciate and understand the importance of the human capital... It just doesn't exist. I personally believe businesses that are successful really look at the human capital first. Even if it results in them losing money initially, they understand that if you invest in the human capital first, [in the] long term you're going to be very successful...

Jason believes that companies have lost sight of the importance of the employee to the success of the organization. He feels that companies that focus on the bottom line first and not the employee first will not be successful in the long run. His sentiments are in line with those of Guillory who believes that "the spirit of an organization resides in its people." (p. 25).

This then is another paradox that complicates the separation of spirituality from religion because even though researchers try to distance themselves from describing spirituality as religious in nature, the results for this study suggest there is no clear line

of demarcations as suggested in Chapter 4 and the overlapping of spirituality, Christianity, religion, and Secular Humanism is unavoidable.

### **Spirituality and Religion are Loosely Connected**

As mentioned previously, some researchers suggest there is a loose connection between spirituality and religion. Rosener (1998) believes that it is impossible to talk about spirituality and not talk about religion. Guillory (1997) believes religion takes the form of spirituality, in practice. Both researchers agree that spirituality cannot exist without religion. Lerner (2000) believes that spirituality and religion share some connections, but neither is dependent on the other to exist.

Fry (2003), Guillory (1997), and Rosener (1998) believe there are certain qualities that are associated with spirituality and religion. They suggest that spirituality is exhibited in expressions such as compassion, love, truth, honesty, trust, vision, humility, integrity, and fun. Notice how these qualities match up almost directly to those of Santora (1999) mentioned in the previous section. These qualities appear to be common terms used to describe spirituality from a non-religious perspective. In this case, however, the researchers admit that there is some overlapping of spirituality and religion and therefore do not fall into the category of Secular Humanist. They believe these qualities in the workplace enhance and support spirituality of employees and managers and as Conger (1994) suggests, may be (spirituality) a solution to the challenges that face organizations today. This attitude parallels that of the participants in this study. They believe that organizations should focus more on spirituality and emphasize the importance of human capital or the people who work for the organization. Jason believes the human capital is often overlooked and this hurts companies in the end.

I think most people, especially in our corporate environment, and corporate America, don't appreciate and understand the importance of the human capital... It just doesn't exist. I personally believe businesses that are successful really look at the human capital first. Even if it results in them losing money initially, they understand that if you invest in the human capital first, [in the] long term you're going to be very successful...

Jason's comments are in line with those of researchers included in this study. Fry (2003) believes that spirituality is a means of leading others and helping them to reach their fullest potential which in turn contributes to a productive workplace. This is echoed by Bernard who believes that the manager or supervisor of a faculty member bears responsibility for the success or failure of that employee.

If you're a leader... you're supposed... to make sure that they're aware of their performance and if you're not doing that, then you're not a leader. If... you haven't given that person any type of development or time to make correction, then you're... not... spiritual... you are not a good leader...

Fairholm (1997) believes management must understand and encourage spirituality in the workplace. He suggests that if companies are to be competitive they must employ leadership principles that are completely different from traditional management practices. The participants in this study have taken this one step further and are utilizing their spirituality to reinforce, support and guide the decisions they make in their leadership roles. However, these researchers do not deny there is a religious aspect to spirituality and suggest that the connection between religion and spirituality is one that naturally exists. Fernando et al. (2006) believes there is a connection between spirituality and religion and class spirituality is the by-product of religion. This philosophy is in line with the participants of this study who view their spirituality as directly connected to their Christianity. Bolman and Deal (1996) believe religion is the goal and spirituality is the path.

In the introduction in Chapter 1, I stated that definitions of spirituality varied from individual to individual and researchers found it difficult to come up with a concrete definition of what spirituality is. They provide qualities that are associated with spirituality, but a common definition of spirituality was not found in the literature. This was not the case for the participants in the study, as we will see in the next section.

### **Christianity and Spirituality are the Same**

The participants in the study believe their spirituality and their Christianity to be the same. As reported in Chapter 4, the participants all call themselves Christian because of their belief in the Triune God: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Initially one participant, Vincent, did not describe himself as Christian because of what he called his blended religion. However, when I conducted a second interview with Vincent almost a year later, he identified himself as Christian.

Yes, I consider myself to be a Christian. I believe that Jesus died for our sins. I was raised to believe that. It was the first religion that was introduced to. And that's what I believe in. And I still do.

This was in contrast to Vincent's original interview in which he describes his Christianity as being based on a blended religion, something which he still maintains a year later. In contrast to the six other participants, their belief in the Triune God is resolute and unquestionable. As mentioned in the response to the research questions, for some, their spirituality was established when they were children as a result of their parent or parents' Christianity. For others, their Christianity is the result of their reinforcement of their belief in God by attending church regularly, reading the Bible, attending Bible Study, and associating with other Christians who share the same beliefs as they do. This is in



contrast to the literature, which provide no direct connection between religion, Christianity and spirituality.

As mentioned earlier, there are researchers who suggest spirituality shares a loose connection to religion, but none of the research in this study made such a direct connection. However, the parallels between Christianity and Secular Humanism are hard to overlook and when researchers such as Santora (1999) suggest that spiritual leaders have to model the behavior they expect from others (servant leadership), these are the Christian values that were expressed by the participants in this study. According to House Prof

I think that lest you get your hands dirty, people don't understand that you are also willing to go where you are asking them to go. I have to demonstrate... through the things that I have done... that I am willing to do what I am asking you to do now. So, that is what I mean by servant leadership.

House Prof believes that it is important that people know and understand that he is not asking them to do anything at work that he is not willing to do himself. He believes that is how his spirituality helps him to model the behavior he expects from others.

The participants all believe their spirituality influences the decisions they make in their role as leader. They believe they are able use their spirituality when they make decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff. They acknowledge their spirituality operates at a subconscious level and a conscious level. At the subconscious level, their spirituality is working in the background and is available to them when needed. Because they have already established a relationship with God through prayers and meditation, they know their spirituality is working in the background. On the other hand, they recognize that some decisions require additional prayer and meditation and so there are decisions they make that require considerable thought and contemplation.

The participants believe their spirituality is an important part of their decision making. The participants believe their spirituality to be one in the same as their Christianity and when they spoke of their spirituality they used the term interchangeably with Christianity. There was no literature to support this type of connection between spirituality and Christianity. Most of the literature suggested there might be some connection between the two, but the results from my research goes against current literature. The participants openly expressed their belief in the Triune God and indicated that their belief was based on their Christianity.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their decision making. The analysis of the data supports the assumption that spirituality does indeed influence the decisions male African American leaders make in their leadership roles. My original assumption was that there was a clear line of demarcation between spirituality and religion. However, the participants proved this to be false. Because of their belief in the Triune God, their spirituality and their Christianity are intertwined and for them there is no difference between the two.

These participants seem to be able to balance their spirituality against the realities of their roles as leaders. The participants described their spirituality as being a personal experience and one in which they are in communication and contact with God on an ongoing basis; therefore, when a decision needed to be made, their spirituality was already working. In the interviews they spoke openly and freely about their belief in the

Triune God as the basis for their Christian beliefs. Further they admitted that their spirituality influenced the decisions they made in their leadership roles.

As stated in the review of literature, Fry (2003) believes that the decision making process is critical to the success of the organization. Effective decision making, therefore, is a requirement for successful leadership. Vroom and Yetton (1973) concur with this assessment and further suggest that the decision making process is at the core of effective leadership. Buchanan and O'Connell (2006) even suggest that "gut" responses play into the decision making process.

Nick admits that sometimes the decisions he makes are guided spiritually by what could be called "gut" responses.

I make many of my decisions... on what I feel inside, what's inside my heart... and I think that is governed by my spirituality.

Grunig and Kohn (2005) caution against making decisions that are based on intuition and not factual supporting data. They believe the decision making process is much more complicated than a "gut" feeling. This, however, may not be the case with decision making based on spirituality. The participants understand that they may not always make the "right" or most appropriate decision, but believe their spirituality helps them to make decisions.

The participants all believe their spirituality influences the decisions they make in the role as leader. They believe they are able to use their spirituality when they make decisions that impact students, faculty, and staff. They acknowledge their spirituality operates at a subconscious level and a conscious level. At the subconscious level, their spirituality is working in the background and is available to them when needed. Because they have already established a relationship with God through prayers and meditation

they know their spirituality is working in the background ready to help them when they make decisions. On the other hand, they recognize that some decisions require additional prayer and meditation and so there are decisions they make that require considerable thought and contemplation.

The participants believe their spirituality is an important part of their decision making.

### **Unexpected Discoveries**

I was very surprised that all the participants believed their spirituality and their Christianity to be the same. Throughout the literature review, there was a clear distinction between spirituality and religion. However, the participants for this study immediately connected their spirituality and their Christianity and saw no difference between the two. In my proposal brief, I believed spirituality would be approached from a non-religious perspective and that the participants in my study would be able to articulate their spirituality from a non-religious perspective. And the participants did indeed define, but certainly not in the way that I had expected. There was no distinction between their Christianity and the Spirituality.

One significant challenge in this study was whether to define spirituality or let the participants themselves define what spirituality is. It was determined that rather than influence the definition of spirituality, it would be the participants themselves who would give definition and meaning to the term spirituality. Participants were never asked specifically to define their spirituality. Rather, they were asked to discuss their spirituality in general in terms of how they related to the people who are impacted by decisions they make in their role as leader. Further, the review of literature failed to

provide a commonly accepted definition of spirituality. Rather, researchers chose to describe spirituality by using a variety of qualities they believe characterize spirituality.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The participants for this study were male African American leaders in higher education in the Southeast. Further research on White male leaders in higher education and the influence on spirituality on the decisions they make would be a logical next step in this research. Another potential population is female African American leaders in higher education. Because the topic of spirituality is so broad, any group of people could be a potential population for additional research. It would be interesting to see if their perceptions of spirituality and the source of their spirituality is the same as that for the group that participated in this study.

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## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

#### COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Spirituality in leadership: How male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on the decision they make as leaders.

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** TIMOTHY GRAY DAVIES

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** DALE S. BURGESS, 3771 MOUNTAIN WAY COVE,  
SNELLVILLE, GA 30039. 770-855-4251

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** You have been identified by someone as a person who is spiritual and by consenting to this research, you agree with that.

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** This study is being conducted by principal investigator Timothy Gray Davies and co-principal investigator Dale S. Burgess, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand how male African American leaders in higher education perceive the influence of spirituality on their decision making. I want to understand how the phenomenon of spirituality is perceived by you and how your spirituality influences the decisions you make. Because the decision making process is so significant in the role of a leader, I want to hear from you how you believe your decisions are influenced by the phenomenon of your own spirituality.

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** The study is being conducted primarily in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area and will consist of at least two interview sessions that will last no longer than 2 hours each. Interviews will be conducted at a convenient place agreed upon by the two of us.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** You will be interviewed two times and both interviews will be audiotaped. In the first interview, I will be asking you a series of questions about your spirituality and decision making. Sample questions include:

1. Does your spirituality play a role in the decision making process you use as a leader?
2. Can you give me some examples of a really crucial decision that you were responsible for making and how spirituality played out.
3. Do you recognize your spirituality to be at a conscious level or a subconscious level or both and how do you recognize that?

In the second interview, I will ask you to review my interpretations and analysis of the transcript of the interview and to engage in discussion around points that are of interest to both of us.

Page 1 of 3 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? The only reason is if you do not believe you are a spiritual person or the use of spirituality is not a part of your decision making.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no possible risks and discomforts associated with this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, it is my hope that I will learn more about how male African American Leaders in higher education use spirituality in their decision making process and what benefit they derive from that.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? There is no cost to you to participate in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used in recordings and transcripts and any place a quote from you might be used. If you decide not to select a pseudonym, I will select one for you.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? As we begin the interview, if you feel your spirituality is too personal to be shared, you may end the interview.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No compensation will be provided to you to participate in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

Page 2 of 3 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Dale S. Burgess at 770-855-4251. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on December 17, 2009.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? I will audio tape both interview one and interview two.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing \_\_\_ pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Staff

Page 3 of 3 Participant's initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. You have been identified by someone as a spiritual person and you concurred with that. What does that mean to you?
2. Does your spirituality play a role in the decision making process you use as a leader?
3. Can you give me some examples of a really crucial decision that you were responsible for making and how spirituality played out in the decision making process? What does that process look like?
4. Can you walk me through, in your mind, what that looks like when you have a major decision to make?
5. Do you recognize your spirituality to be at a conscious level or subconscious level, or both and how do you recognize that?
6. How has your spirituality contributed to your success as a leader?
7. Are you a religious person?
8. Do you see similarities and differences between spirituality and religion?
9. You seem to have a reservoir of spirituality that you use in your personal and professional lives. How do you refill that reservoir? Where do you go to replace the spirituality that you use?