



Ethnographic Research Proposal: The Role of the Church in Leadership Education¹

Ted Ward

Descriptive documentation is needed to provide a basis for reliably identifying the conditions, the motivations, the relationships, and the community characteristics in which a church best fulfills its educational purpose. The intention of the research is to establish documentation and an observation scheme which will provide orderly and minimally biased evidence about the ongoing development of the educational mission of group of churches.

Evaluative research will allow decisions to be made about the intervention options and to guide the schedules and strategies which are being used. The evaluative uses of the ethnographic data will be formed and implemented as a quest for effectiveness in this particular project.

Plans. Ideally, a sample of local churches will be observed and documented. Churches will be clustered by sets according to the goals and questions of the research. A taxonomy of relevant church variables will be identified. The taxonomy will be open-ended, and will develop as work in the field indicates more of the matters worthy of documentation.

The taxonomy will attempt to represent the range and differential characteristics of the churches in all sets identified. Costs and availability of the researchers will likely necessitate a frugal sample, anticipated to be a minimum of three and a maximum of six churches in each set.

An **initial observation** would be conducted before _____ (date). The schedule for further observations (including interviews and other forms of data-gathering) anticipates on-site visits by members of the research team.

In addition to the on-site observations would be a **quarterly report** from each church, using a documentation instrument which will provide indications of the steps being taken, their results, and the evidences of change in the life of each church.

Procedures. The instruments to be developed by the research team are indicated following:

1. *Taxonomy of church characteristics.* A terminology and preliminary classification system to account for the range and variety of descriptors of churches in the research project.
2. *Observation guide for on-site data-gathering in local churches.* Inquiry objectives and suggested procedures for non-intrusive observations. A manual of practical advice based upon the contemporary standards in ethnographic research.
3. *Interview guide for data-gathering through conversations with leaders and others.* A protocol(s) for sequences of questions dealing with particular matters of concern in the development of the churches' contributions to the development of present and future leaders. The major concern of the interview(s) is to elicit or specifically encourage certain responses or patterns of response.

¹ Unpublished document, 2000