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## Spirituality in Higher Education: A Narrative Analysis of Its Use for Decision-Making

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**Spirituality: A Narrative Analysis of Its Use by Academic Leaders  
In the Minnesota Colleges and Universities System**

**By**

**Jeffrey F. Judge**

**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for  
The Education Doctorate Degree  
in Educational Leadership**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota**

**May, 2016**

**Date: March 22, 2016**

**This dissertation has been examined and approved.**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative research study examines the role of spirituality as a tool for academic leaders in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU). The role of the academic leader (dean, vice president, president, etc.) encompasses a wide array of responsibilities and continually calls upon a large skill set in order to be effective in the position. Often times a leader's decisions will be pivotal to the success of programs, departmental stability, and general divisional morale. Recognizing and embracing spirituality as a tool for working with faculty lessens stress, clarifies decisions, and invites dialogue and harmony where adversity and discourse might enter. This study focuses on the aspects of meaning making, servant leadership and authentic interaction. College and university leaders from various institutions in MnSCU were interviewed about the role spirituality plays in their daily interactions with faculty. Thematic categories were interpreted using research questions addressing the interpretation of separation of Church and State as it relates to spirituality, individual definitions of spirituality, and perceived attitudes on the part of faculty of administrators when spirituality has played a role in running an academic division of a state institution.

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### **Acknowledgements**

It is with gratitude and profound respect that I dedicate this endeavor to my mother, Marguerite Jeanne Swenson Judge. She is, and always has been, my mentor, spiritual teacher, greatest cheerleader, and closest confidant. She is the epitome of unconditional love, and I could never have achieved this without her. A perfect world, for me, would be a mom like mine for every child on the planet. Thanks, mom.

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**Word Frequency Query Results: NVivo**  
**25 most common words, 5 letters or longer**

think	75	3.32
spirituality	43	2.29
people	34	1.88
person	20	1.07
things	20	1.02
decisions	18	0.99
making	25	0.99
values	21	0.94
faith	23	0.92
position	26	0.9
actions	18	0.83
support	21	0.79
always	14	0.77
church	14	0.77
going	22	0.75
might	15	0.75
different	14	0.72
comes	19	0.64
trying	12	0.59
something	10	0.55
first	13	0.55
intentional	14	0.53
practice	13	0.53
bring	13	0.49
moments	10	0.47



## Chapter I

### Introduction

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops, in the recently revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal, approved the following blessing as part of the Mass to be celebrated in the English: “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord with your life” (p. 567). These are the words a Catholic priest says as he dismisses worshipers at the end of mass. The words serve as a charge to continue the work of service, applying this command to every aspect of their lives. Carrying this charge beyond the doors of the church into a secular place of employment is the challenge, the goal and the struggle.

Chang and Boyd (2010) write that the concept of spirituality playing a part in the workplace is gaining more and more acceptance, especially in the realm of higher education. Often veiled in terms of servant leadership, authentic interaction, meaning making, and even mentorship, spirituality is appearing as a topic for conference presentations and in education-related publications all over the United States (p.225).

### Background of the Problem

Spirituality has many definitions, all of which invite the individual to a deeper sense of self. Massenburg (2010) defines spirituality as “the set of beliefs and standards and/or the way of thinking within oneself that serves as a motivation to do what is right as an inspiration to reach one’s fullest human potential and as a guide in one’s interaction with humankind” (p. 5). This definition may seem lofty, as reaching one’s fullest human potential is no small task. However, motivation to do what is right is easily grasped by people of every walk of life.

By engaging in the study of spirituality, it is difficult to ignore its effects on decision-making, leadership style, and the everyday resolution of conflict so often

encountered by educational leaders. Academic leaders within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU) are confronted by a multitude of problems and situations on a daily basis, many of which require quick and sometimes pivotal responses. With increasing calls for accountability and improved performance in higher education that represent the status quo of the new millennium, higher education leaders are seeking strategies to help their institutions not only survive, but to thrive (Walker, 2008). It is conceivable that spirituality can be an important component of leadership.

Why is spirituality an important component of leadership? Personal reflection shows that there is no way to escape it. Spirituality is innate to every individual (Fullan, 2002). This innate connection to what gives meaning to our lives makes it impossible to block spirituality from influencing one's response to situations. For those who embrace the idea of spirituality as an overarching guide, the worry of what to say and how to say it takes a back seat to the honesty required for authentic discourse, clearing the path for honesty and removing the obstacles that cause divisiveness.

It is important to clarify that spirituality is not synonymous with religiosity. Tisdell (2003) concedes that, although interrelated for many people, religion and spirituality are not the same. Spirituality as a tool for leadership is more about what gives meaning to our lives. It is more about what drives us, not what defines us as a member of a particular worshiping community of believers. Estanek (2006) argues that this discussion separates the understanding of spirituality from religion, and thereby changes its meaning, for no common definition exists. The research shows that academic leaders can use the tools of spirituality to make their daily interactions more authentic. "Self-consciousness is replaced by focused awareness, cynicism is replaced by awe, and

judgment is replaced by appreciation” (Reardon, Boone, & Fite, 2011, p. 55). Deep thinking happens and creates an openness to the idea of the movement of the Spirit. Much of the literature points to how weaving spirituality into the various facets of a personality brings about a greater sense of satisfaction in both personal and professional lives. Wuest (2009) delves deeply into this phenomenon as it relates to the work of social workers around the country. Her study shows that, regardless of level of education, adherence to religious practice, ethnic background, or age, spirituality factors positively into job performance and satisfaction.

But it is not just about satisfaction; it is about fulfilling a vocation for which there is no adequate job description. For purposes of this dissertation, the *academic leaders* within MnSCU will be defined as college and university presidents, vice presidents, and deans. Members of this group are consistently asked to act as a liaison between faculty and administration, between students and faculty, between faculty and faculty, and even between administrator and administrator. It is in these daily interactions where, albeit unconsciously, too many people put on the mask of whomever the particular constituent wants them to be.

It is easy for academic leaders to fall into the trap of tempering their message to fit the needs and situations of their constituents. Take, for example, an administrator speaking to a faculty member who is not administering student evaluations. Too often the conversation is presented under the guise of a mandate from the top instead of zeroing in on the real issue. This real issue might be that the instructor has received negative feedback in the past and no longer wishes to provide students with evaluations which open them up to criticism. It might be that the instructor is philosophically opposed to the

idea of allowing students to grade him or her. Finally, it could be the simple fear of allowing a disgruntled student the chance to put something in writing. The authentic communicator, motivated by spiritual grounding, approaches the conversation differently. He or she might reference the institution's mission and values, reminding the instructor that evaluations provided by students serve as a tool for continuous improvement on everyone's part. Allowing students to give a written response to the course is a required, necessary component in any class and is not meant to be evaluative. The presence of the tool of spirituality can serve as the catalyst for authentic discourse between the administrator and the instructor, eliminating ambiguity and ultimately providing a better experience for students and instructors alike.

In my own journey, organized religion did serve as a catalyst for building a foundation for a spiritual view of the world and consequently my life. Certainly having a mother who served eight years as a Franciscan nun played a part in my upbringing. She entered the convent after she finished nurses' training and had planned to live her life working in pediatrics at the Mayo Clinic. It was spiritual fortitude that gave her the strength to question authority, her vocation and rules that did not make sense. On the day she was to make her final vows, she left the order for a new life.

My father's strict Irish-Catholic upbringing served as the glue that formed my family's spiritual development. His religious conviction mirrored my mother's ideals and therefore we followed Holy Days and seasons of the Church. My family of origin attended mass without questioning authority, without contemplating rebellion and without complete understanding of the practices. I can remember our parish priest standing at the pulpit saying that we don't go to church to feel good. We go to church to

become good. When questioning the logic behind these words, my father gave what became his standard answer: “Not attending mass is the easiest habit in the world to fall into.” This was no answer, rather an attempt by a loving father to ensure his children would not stray from the fold. Our mother had a less conservative perspective which allowed for a good balance. It was these types of dialogues that underscored the lesson to stop questioning and just do it. This lesson might make sense someday.

After many years of going through the motions, this process of building my faith began to make sense. In a post-graduate course I took on Generation '98 writers of Spain, I read an excerpt from Miguel de Unamuno's 1933 novel, *Saint Manuel, the Good, Martyr*. In this book, the main character, a Catholic priest, reveals to a parishioner that he believes in God just in case God is real. In some ways that was the underlying message I took away from my father's wisdom.

It is important to mention that my experience of organized religion did not provide for other forms of spirituality. Quite the contrary, ours was the one true Church and there was no disputing that with church leaders. Luckily, Franciscans approach the world with a more scholarly and accepting understanding of truth. My family taught me to honor all belief systems and to find good in all creation, but at the end of the day we were Catholic. One of the worst things my older relatives could say was, “You know, she left the church.” I no longer look at anyone's decision to leave the church as a stigma. Many times it is a conscious decision driven by disappointment, and other times it simply becomes a habit not to attend.

My grandmother used to tell us not to judge the priesthood by the priest. It took me a long time to figure out what she was saying, but I grew to understand that not all

priests make good role models. Young people need mentors, idols and heroes. I consider myself fortunate that my mentors all fell into the category of “good people” who had a solid understanding of spirituality, prayer, morality and service. They were my role models because of the pride they showed in being humble, in and of itself an interesting dichotomy. Some were teachers, some were clergy, and some were friends. All were smart. They drew people in not because of charisma, but because of the grounded, steady nature of their personality. Each one led and I followed, deepening my understanding of what mattered in life, what type of person I wanted to become, and how I wanted others to perceive me. Ultimately, I chose to follow these individuals, and my decision to do so was all the thanks they ever needed.

Perhaps just as important to recognize are the people whom no one should ever emulate. Like many people, I have had some difficult bosses and dealt with many people in authority who were uncaring, narcissistic, reactionary and rude. I have friends who had jobs where the only motivating factor was fear. I’ve experienced leaders who have said one thing to my face and then changed their story when talking to a different group. This behavior not only brings about distrust in any organization, it also affects how employees begin to see themselves in the overall structure of the institution. Employees need leadership that can help them be satisfied in their own lives. As Mitroff and Denton (1999) wrote, “No organization can survive for long without spirituality and soul” (p. 80).

Yet, leading a purpose-filled life is not just about survival or even satisfaction. The tool of spirituality offers us our own *raison d’être*. Pollard (1996) gave his own description in the following quote:



Will the leader please stand up? Not the president or the person with the most distinguished title, but the role model. Not the highest-paid person in the group, but the risk taker. Not the person with the largest car or the biggest home, but the servant. Not the person who promotes himself or herself, but the promoter of others. Not the administrator, but the initiator. Not the taker, but the giver. Not the talker, but the listener. (p. 127)

In a perfect world, all administrators, all bosses, all educators, all clergy, all people in authority, all world leaders and all parents would ascribe to the above-listed criteria. This list of qualifications, however, would preclude anyone from ever answering the ad if they were all obligatory characteristics for higher-education leadership.

Why is it that academic leaders feel the need to deliver the same message to two different constituent groups using two distinct filters? Take for example an administrator who needs to make a statement about the necessity for student evaluations. He or she might say to the faculty that student evaluations will have to be given because of a state mandate on the school, and because every state employee needs to be evaluated every year. The message may address this mandate as an insult to their professionalism. In a meeting the same day with other administrators, the message morphs into a statement about faculty being lazy and needing to be evaluated more frequently regardless of the state mandate.

The authentic communicator who pays attention to the message, not the constituent, says the same thing to both groups: The mission of the institution values what students have to say about their educational experience. All instructors will administer student evaluations as a way to ensure students' voices are heard and so that

instructors have a means by which to monitor their own quality improvement. Fullan (2001) offers the following advice regarding authentic interaction: “It is time, in other words, to bury the cynic who said “leadership is about sincerity, and once you learn to fake that, you’ve got it made” (p. 53).

Although the concept of spiritual leadership is commonplace, it is not clear the extent to which administrators use or rely on spirituality as a tool for their leadership. The omnipresence of the tool of spirituality may serve as the catalyst for bringing various facets together, enabling college and university administrators to blend their unnecessarily fragmented and insincere personas.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative analysis will be to understand the role of spirituality for academic leaders in the MnSCU system as it relates to their position. The research aims to clarify the ways in which spirituality influences how academic leaders portray themselves to various constituencies and if the portrayals are, in fact, authentic or contrived according to the audience. Participants in the study will be asked to consider what role spirituality plays in their philosophy of leadership. The guiding question leading the research will be: What role does spirituality play in MnSCU leaders?

Research Question 1.           How is spirituality defined?

Research Question 2.           What role does spirituality play in college or university leaders and how is it embedded into daily interaction with faculty, staff and students in a wide variety of situations?

Research Question 3.           How might colleagues respond to the idea that spirituality plays a part in decision-making and leadership?

### **Significance of the Research**

State institutions tend to shy away from the idea that spirituality could play a significant role in how colleges and universities are run. As Astin and Astin (1999) stated:

The important point is that academia has for far too long encouraged us to lead fragmented and inauthentic lives, where we act either as if we are not spiritual beings, or as if our spiritual side is irrelevant to our vocation or work. (p. 2)

Astin and Astin (1999) went on to say that academics are increasingly searching for ways to make their lives and their institutions more holistic. This theme emerges in the literature surrounding spirituality. Palmer (2002) stated:

The community of truth is an image that can carry the educational mission because it embraces an essential fact: the reality we belong to, the reality we long to know, extends far beyond human beings interacting with one another. (p. 106)

It is this human interaction which this dissertation will explore.

This study aims to validate and give credence to the idea that spirituality, if recognized and embraced by the academic leader, can provide a framework of understanding as to why some interactions are more difficult than others, why some decisions are more troubling than others, and how the position of administrator can be considered a vocation. There is an understood apprehension on the part of state institutions to uphold the separation of church and state, discouraging anything that might point toward an overt act of spirituality or religiosity. This study will explore spirituality not as an overt act, rather as an internal, personal framework which guides, validates and clarifies decisions made by academic leaders. The goal of this dissertation is to add to

the existing literature on the subject of spirituality, serving as a model for other academic leaders in similar positions in similar institutions.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study will be limited to leaders in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. This is due to my position as an administrator and also geographic accessibility. An invitation to participate in this research study will be sent to all administrators in the MnSCU system. A sampling will be selected, making every attempt to include a balance of male and female participants, experienced and novice administrators, two-year and four-year institutions, and, to the extent possible, representation from non-Christian-based beliefs and those who identify as non-believers.

As state institutions, there is an inherent understanding that a clear separation of church and state is upheld. Participants will take part in individual interviews through which general themes will be coded. No individual will be identified directly. It is limited to the state of Minnesota, which is known for its slogan “Minnesota Nice” and may not be generalizable to other states.

This is a qualitative study and will be limited to a relatively small number of interviews with academic leaders in the MnSCU system.

### Definition of Key Terms

*Authentic interaction.* Removing biases and filters when interacting with other people so as to express solely what the speaker recognizes and appreciates as truth.

*Decision-making.* The way in which a person determines the actions he or she must make for the benefit of others/himself/herself and/or an organization (Massenburg, 2010 p. 3).

*Meaning-making.* How individuals categorize, rationalize and define that which gives purpose and understanding to their lives.

*Servant leadership.* Placing oneself in a subservient role for the purposes of leading by example, and embracing the role of humility in leadership.

*Spirituality.* Refers to the raising of one's mind and heart to a higher power in acknowledgement that one is not self-sufficient. It is the opposite of self-legitimation and shows the need for a higher entity as the source for life decisions. The term spirituality comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, which is derived from the verb *spiro spirare*, meaning *to breathe*. Spirituality does not aim to convert, rather it is a lifestyle based on traditions.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature on spirituality as it relates to leadership in higher education. The chapter will incorporate various working definitions of spirituality as well as examples of servant leadership, authenticity, and the use of spirituality to find meaning and understanding in life. Early theologians as well as current practitioners will be referenced, providing a framework of the role that spirituality plays as an element of leadership.

#### **Spirituality and its Definitions**

In the 1995 book *Leading with Soul*, Bolman and Deal provided dialogue which dealt with the elusive definition of spirit and spirituality. Maria, the therapist, stated, “Spirit. The internal force that sustains meaning and hope” (p.22). The same character went on to say the following about finding your spiritual center: “It’s an inward journey. There’s no map. You find your soul by looking deep within. There you discover your spiritual center” (p.30). The definitions which follow ask the reader to move inside his or her experiences to help understand these terms. Some of the definitions are straight forward and others are a bit more nebulous. Bolman and Deal’s description, for example, seems reminiscent of the Spanish poet Machado. In Machado’s 1912 poem “Caminante, no hay Camino”, the third and fourth lines translate as follows: Traveler, there is no path. We make the path by walking it (p. 24). By all accounts, this acceptance of the journey as part of the ultimate understanding of spirituality is an underlying theme.

Chang and Boyd (2011) have commented on the frequency of spirituality as a topic for national presentations and conferences. Since the events of September 11, 2001,

the topic of spirituality has become the focus of many such presentations throughout the country (p. 225). In light of such an unspeakable tragedy spirituality became a landing point of solace and understanding for people affected by those events. Americans and the rest of the world were forced to take a personal inventory, find meaning in the chaos, and weed out the unimportant so as to gain some clarity into what really matters in life. Is what I am doing important? Is it making a difference in the world? Is my focus on myself or on others? These questions can be sobering and even depressing because they invite us to fall into the mindset of depression.

If an outside constituent does not explicitly tell us that our work is valued, what would ever drive us to continue to do it? The study of spirituality as a tool for leadership allows for a different framework. It can allow the individual to step back in situations like the events of 9/11, prompting him or her to refocus, reframe, and reevaluate so an appropriate response can occur. That response becomes an outward sign to the world of what that particular leader is made of and can guide others to act in a similar manner.

The derivation of the word spirituality, *spiritus*, is Latin for wind or breath. Webster's Concordance defines it as such: "spir'-it-u-al (pneumatikos, "spiritual," from pneuma,"spirit"): Endowed with the attributes of spirit. Any being made in the image of God who is a Spirit (John 4:24), and thus having the nature of spirit, is a spiritual being" (Merriam-Webster, 2014, p. 1268). The word stems from the Old French word *espirit* and the Modern French word *esprit*. These words are interchangeable as the French word for "soul". From this, we derive English words such as "inspiration" and "respiratory".

Similarly, Hebrew uses the word *ruach* to signify both "spirit" and "life" (Dictionary of the Bible, 1965, p. 840). In a living creature *nephesh chayah*, the *ruach* is

the breath, whether of animals or mankind. God is the creator of ruach: "The ruach of God is in my nostrils" (Gen 7:15; Psalm 104:25, 29) (Isa 42:5; Ezekiel 37:5) (Job 27:3). Nothing human can live without breath. A spirited child, in the English language, is one who has an abundance of life and energy. A spirited debate is lively, involving two or more parties. A group of cheering high school students is commended for showing school spirit. Spirituality, by definition, is giving life. It is concerned with humanness and therefore begs the question of how we should live.

Studies conducted over the last fifteen years have given credence to the idea that spirituality is a resonating topic in higher education. A special interest group report by Beech (2012) stated that in today's society, "interest is undoubtedly growing in the relevance of the spiritual dimension to higher education" (p.15). The report was from the International Conference for the Study of Spirituality. In a related study of 40,670 faculty at 421 colleges and universities, 81% of faculty identified themselves as "spiritual". In this same study, spirituality was defined across a variety of dimensions, including spiritual quest, equanimity, compassionate self-concept, and religious engagement (HERI, 2004b, p. 9). This defining across dimensions is significant because working definitions of spirituality go in a plethora of directions. Some definitions are internal and self-absorbed, dwelling more on feelings an individual has toward given situations. In these cases, the definitions tend to be darker and more mysterious. Others are concerned with how spirituality invites the individual to interact with something or someone else. This type of spiritual understanding is best evidenced in the more traditional expression of group worship within the context of organized prayer experiences.



Other definitions provide more of a supernatural understanding where an outside force or entity offers guidance and clarity. This could be requested (prayed for) or imposed. These definitions tend to be less concerned with mainstream understandings of the spirit and more concerned with karma, luck, or reward/punishment.

In a chapter titled “Spirituality and Professional Collegiality: Esprit de“Core”, Haug (2011) offered a consonant working definition of spirituality:

One’s spirituality provides a framework for giving meaning to life events and for opening to what is life-enhancing. Spirituality transcends our self-focus and fosters compassionate connectedness with self, others, and the environment, hopefulness, and gratitude and appreciation of beauty; it supports purposeful, courageous living. Spirituality encompasses a person’s cognitive, affective, behavioral, developmental, and valuing dimensions; it is not a static set of beliefs but an evolving, dynamic process as individuals integrate learning and life experiences. (p. 91)

Haug’s definition is intensely positive and does not entertain the idea of uncertainty.

Other scholars on the topic have dissected it differently. Otto, a German theologian, addressed the topic of spirituality by separating it into two fields: the non-rational or numinous, and the moral and rational side. The former focuses on religious piety, tradition, mysticism and dependency on something external. The latter is more concerned with our life’s focus and how we respond to the life we experience. In Otto’s (1923) book *The Idea of the Holy*, the reader is asked to look beyond what many call blind faith in an attempt to make concrete that which is intrinsically intangible.

Something numinous cannot be seen; rather it must be experienced. Understanding spirituality as a holy dimension of one's being, then, will be unlikely for the concrete thinker.

Bender (2007) worked to pull spirituality apart from religion by calling the dichotomization of religiosity and spirituality "a contemporary trend in the United States" (p.19) calling spirituality an internal process, and not an action. In her definition, spirituality becomes an individual part of religion and connotes something superior to religion which is not controlled by human authorities. She further defined spirituality as including "the intellectual, emotional, and relational depth of human character, as well as the continuing capability and yearning for personal development and evolution" (p.9). Houston and Sokolow (2006) referred to spirituality as the substance rather than the form.

Chickering (2006) attempted to provide a working definition of spirituality by involving a wide variety of individuals whose backgrounds were different. He found that atheists, agnostics, and persons with strong humanistic orientation expressed their values using words like authenticity, purpose, and wisdom. This group of people who did not identify with any religious practice, found that, after a day-long seminar, the language challenge of defining spirituality gave way to their shared desire for social understanding.

The group settled on the following definition:

Being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition. Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Religion, of course, is one way many people are spiritual. Often, when authentic faith embodies an individual's spirituality the religious and the spiritual will coincide. Still, not every religious person is spiritual (although

they ought to be) and not every spiritual person is religious. Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential ongoing life goal. To be spiritual requires us to stand on our own two feet while being nurtured and supported by our tradition, if we are fortunate enough to have one. (pp. 17-18)

It is important to recognize that this language included the voice of atheists.

Though not religious in the traditional sense, the atheist contribution to the preceding definition shows a contemplative attitude, a shared search for meaning and a commitment to growth. Barratt, (2012) a professor of education at Indiana State University, offers the concept of spirituality being who we are and religion being what we do. The two entities exist independently from one another.

From a humanist chaplain, we are asked to consider some questions in this quote:

“I personally think it particularly critical to consider why human beings do the most important things in their lives. What motivates our greatest acts of love and justice? What brings forth and cultivates our creativity, good humor, and compassion? What empowers us to struggle for freedom or to explore the farthest reaches of what is or may yet come to be (McGhee, 2012).

Other existing definitions in the literature range from personal expression or behavior to an objective reality based on fundamental truth (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Houston & Sokolow, 2006). Spirituality is the centering of values and morals in respect or faith in a higher-order-being, an individual's lived experience of the

transcendent (Leigh-Taylor, 2000). Spirituality is, as Tisdell (2003) stated, “an elusive topic” (p. 28). She identified seven points about spirituality.

a) Spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated; (b) Spirituality is about an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many I interviewed referred to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit; (c) Spirituality is fundamentally about meaning-making; (d) Spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment; (e) Spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self; (f) Spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, art, image, and ritual which are manifested culturally; (g) Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise. (pp.28-29)

These seven points came out of a study that Tisdell conducted in 2003 with 31 people working in higher education. The following year, Astin (2004) provided the following definition of spirituality:

To begin with, spirituality points to our interiors, by which I mean our subjective life, as contrasted to the objective domain of observable behavior and material objects that you can point and measure directly. In other words, the spiritual domain has to do with human consciousness – what we experience privately in our subjective awareness. Second, spirituality involves our qualitative or affective experiences at least as much as it does our reasoning or logic. More

specifically, spirituality has to do with the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here – the meaning and purpose that we see in our work and in our life – and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. Spirituality can also have to do with aspects of our experience that not easy to define or to talk about, such things as intuition, inspiration, the mysterious, and the mystical. Within this very broad umbrella, virtually everyone qualifies as a spiritual being, and it's my hope that everyone – regardless of their belief systems – can find some personal value and educational relevance in the concept. (pp. 77-78)

Similarly, Chang and Boyd (2011) used autoethnographies of spirituality in their work on college campuses. In distilling their experiences, the researchers found that they “were changed, finding that as teachers, scholars, colleagues, and friends, they moved forward with new reverence for the most essential aspect of spirituality: collegial connection” (p. 104).

From a nontheistic approach, some may find it frustrating to wrestle with the idea of being spiritual, yet not religious in any context. As practicing believers leave mainstream religious practices, many are in search of community, a sense of purpose, and a genuine feeling of welcome where their non-belief is not judged or dismissed. McGhee, and American humanist, offered the following explanation: “There is a duality within secularism that echoes one to be found in Christianity. On the one hand, we have a philosophy that defines itself negatively against religious and metaphysical belief in favour of a kind of scientism that has no purchase on the realities of the human drama.

Against this stands a type of secular humanism that seeks to articulate a positive conception of human wellbeing independently of religious belief” (McGhee, 2013).

Menkel-Meadow, in a similar article, adds, “For many of us, spiritual values, morality, and religion are "given," not chosen, in the sense that we accept what our forebears, our culture, our family, and our racial, ethnic, or religious birthright, or "birth responsibility," gives us. For others of us, our sense of spiritual place and values has been "chosen" by conversion, commitment, reattachment, or detachment from birthed endowments. For some of us, spiritual values and religion are separate from our professional lives; for others of us, we have sought to inform ourselves.” (Menkel-Meadow, 2001).

### **Servant Leadership**

Sergiovanni (1996) presented arguments by interchanging the idea of spirituality with servant leadership. The term “servant leadership” comes from an ancient philosophical understanding, but was coined as a phrase in 1970 by Greenleaf in his essay “The Servant as Leader” (as quoted in Sergiovanni). The basic premise is that leadership begins with a natural desire to serve others first. Then a conscious decision is made to move into the leadership role.

Sergiovanni’s ideas of moral connection and duties of the educator were based on his own spiritual journey toward educational leadership. In *Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, Sergiovanni (1996) used a variety of texts to explore the vocation of teaching. Quoting the Old Testament, Matthew 20:26, Sergiovanni wrote, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (p. 47). This passage speaks to the heart of servant leadership and spirituality. When put into this context, leadership no

longer presents as hierarchical; it moves to a collegial approach where status is not the focus.

All theories of leadership emphasize connecting people to each other, and all emphasize connecting people to their work. A theory of leadership based on moral connection to spirituality is Sergiovanni's goal and moral connections come from the duties teachers, parents and students accept (p.33).

### **Spirituality and Authenticity**

Palmer (1998) wrote about spirituality as being our ultimate understanding about what is real in our lives. Sometimes referred to as authenticity, it is also described as a personal search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness and purpose by which we live. Psychologically, searching for meaning after a traumatic event is an important event moving toward recovery (Lindberg, 2010). The events of 9/11 were traumatic, and Palmer's definition of spirituality urges us to use this tool to work through the tragedy by reaching for a personal understanding of what matters. Similarly, Tolle (1997) observed that unhappiness and negativity is a disease on our planet. Negativity itself is to our inner being what pollution is to the environment. He contended that spiritually literate individuals use spirituality as antidotes to these maladies.

Chickering (2006) emphasized spirituality and authenticity in his book *Encouraging Authenticity and Spirituality in Higher Education*. In it, there is an assumption that authenticity carries a positive value. Chickering cites internationally recognized orators who demonstrated authentic communication: Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, etc. Their approach to spirituality

and authenticity stemmed from their own integrity, autonomy meaning, and purpose.

Chickering (2006) stated,

Our interdependencies depend on our capacity to identify with something larger than our own self-interest. Ultimately, it is our character, our purposes, and the values inherent in the way we live these out in our daily lives that express our spirituality as a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. (p.95)

Martin Buber, in his classic book *I and Thou*, used the relationship between the I-God view of life as opposed to the I-It view. Buber's belief was that man as an individual had two distinct ways of engaging with the world: viewing society merely as an observer or existing in it as a participant. Participating in modern society, however, left the person unfulfilled. This somewhat pessimistic view is later reconciled by the author's lessons on how to build a meaningful society by engaging in relationship with God.

Living through the 1930's in Germany, a tumultuous time in Jewish history, Buber called upon his study of philosophy to write about our existential angst. The three segments of the book are not meant to be read in any particular order. All three parts interrelate and function as a three-legged stool. In the I-It world, (*I* being the individual and *It* being society) we find life to be meaningless, out of control, and uncaring. If this I-It view is the lens we choose, our institutions, governments, systems, and all relationships are in peril of failing. It is through the experience of the spiritual connection (I-Thou) that life has its purpose and meaning (Buber, 1957).



Massenburg (2010), in her dissertation on the role of spirituality in decision-making, found that the subjects of her study believed spirituality “evolved from their upbringing, specifically their religious background and influences from their parents or grandparents (p. 3). Massenburg herself defined spirituality as “the set of beliefs and standards and the way of thinking within oneself that serves as a motivation to do what is right as an inspiration to reach one’s fullest human potential and as a guide in one’s interaction with humankind” (p. 4).

Chang and Boyd’s (2011) research points to spirituality as encompassing a person’s cognitive, affective, behavioral, developmental, and valuing dimensions. In an excerpt from chapter three of their ethnographic study of college students, one student shares about the risks involved in presenting yourself in this vein.

Now there is great risk in sharing personal spiritual phenomenon such as this but greater risk comes from ignoring it. Our resistance to engaging the spiritual leaves higher education bound in a secular imperative that limits our minds, separates our hearts and souls from our work, diminishes our lives, stultifies our search for truth and progress, and reduces our philosophies, theories, and research to the lowest common denominator. (p.51)

Similarly, Lindholm and Astin (2006), use the terms “seeking personal authenticity” and “developing a greater sense of connectedness to self and other through relationships and community, and “deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in life” (p.65). In a sense, their understanding of authenticity and connectedness drive home Buber’s points of requiring three separate entities to achieve balance: self, purpose, and a connection to

those around us. One could argue that *purpose* in this formula is derived directly from a reliance on spirituality.

Henderson and Hoy (1983) defined authentic interaction as “maximizing the acceptance of organizational and personal responsibility for actions, outcomes, and mistakes, the non-manipulation of followers, and salience of self over role” (p. 68).

Jones (2005) wrote about spirituality and authenticity, specifically in education, as being interconnected; unable to be separated. She reiterates that understanding spirituality is not about religion, rather about transcendence and connection. Avolio and Gardner (2005) wrote that leaders who practice authentic interaction are true to themselves, have strong value systems and courage to uphold principles (p.328).

Nash and Swaby (2011) each talk personally about their own pursuit of spiritual meaning calling it “a lifelong journey to create meaning. Nash called upon a 4<sup>th</sup>-century theologian to put words to his own understanding of wanting to use spirituality as a guide to understanding life. He quotes Gregory of Nyssa by using the Greek word *epektasis*. This translates as a “straining forward” toward a mystery, toward a “luminous darkness and an unsatiated desire to find the elusive peace that surpasses worldly understanding (p. 40). Nyssa’s understanding of this luminous darkness is also echoed by Otto (1923). Nash, a self-declared secular humanist, teaches a course on spirituality in education. He acknowledges the troubling theological issue of theodicy, which is an attempt to justify the existence of a good God in the face of terrible evil (p. 113). A student of Nash’s responded by writing that despite having written books about spirituality and nature, that Nash himself “still didn’t know beans about God” (anon. 2011, p.169). This was Nash’s impetus to create his course on spirituality in education. In an autoethnography, Nash

states, “My spiritual search for meaning is so closely linked to my students’ that without them I would be even more metaphysically unsettled than I am” (p. 113).

Swaby (2011) was a student in the class that Nash taught. In her autoethnography she speaks of her spiritual upbringing in Jamaica. Her family sent her to Smith College in Connecticut where she began to explore different religions. After the death of her cousin at fourteen, a dormant spirituality came back to the surface and afforded her the tools she needed to get through the tragedy being so far away from home (p.115). Of Nash’s class, Swaby stated, “Robert’s class, among other meaning-making lessons and conversations, has allowed me to navigate my life with less fear of misunderstanding, hurt, shame, and ignorance from strangers, friends, and loved ones. I know now that these things may come, but it is all worth the journey (p.115).

Applying these principles of authenticity, Terry (1993) offered the following words on leadership:

Leadership lives at the intersection of the authentic and the inauthentic, tilting the world toward the authentic. Leadership is always mindful of that, as we call forth authenticity, we can never forget that the conflicts and ambiguities of action reside not just in the world but also within ourselves. No one arrives with pure motives or unambiguous interests. The struggles for authenticity are within and without – the ultimate congruence of our actions is unknown. (p. 274)

### **Summary**

The literature surrounding spirituality in higher education addresses themes relating to a connection to a higher power and how that connection can be achieved. It provides for ambiguity in the source(s) of this connection, allowing the researcher to

follow a path of belief or one of doubt. Striving for meaning in day-to-day work, the placing of oneself in the role of servant so as to better relate to colleagues and be able to provide authentic interaction which leads to personal and professional fulfillment, are clearly all achievable through different means. Examples stemming from early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century show the progression of the inclusion of spirituality as a vital piece to being and becoming an effective leader. Even when the reader separates the religious aspect/overtone of the word “spirituality”, many common understandings exist between the two camps.

It is clear that there is growing importance put on spirituality, especially in the area of leadership in higher education. Current practitioners offer permission, by means of their own actions, to include spirituality in the large toolbox necessary for effective leadership. In fact, there seems to be less of an apologetic approach to admitting spirituality might have a place in decision-making and in leading an institution of higher learning.

The aforementioned authors and practitioners will help to inform the research process. The members of a specific group within higher education (MnSCU) will be interviewed about their own personal practices.

### Chapter III

#### Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative narrative analysis is to investigate the use of spirituality as a tool for leaders within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). The goal of this research will be to add to the limited literature and resources available to future scholars of spirituality as a tool for decision-making.

#### Research Methods and Design

This will be a qualitative research study. It will not rely on numbers to make sense of the participants' shared experience with spirituality. Rather, the focus will be to examine the role spirituality plays as part of the human experience of leaders in academic institutions. The research will explore what is at the heart of the human experience in leaders' interactions and experiences with colleagues. *The Merriam Dictionary* (1998) explains the term *qualitative* as an umbrella concept used to gain understanding of a particular experience (p. 995).

The qualitative methods used in this research will serve to identify the perceptions and to recount the experiences of MnSCU leaders who personally identify with spirituality as a leadership tool. The key elements of the qualitative process include the use of natural setting, viewing the researcher as a key instrument, using multiple sources of data, building interpretations with an inductive approach to data analysis, and focusing on participant meanings (Creswell, 2007). Information will be gleaned through one-on-one interviews of all participants. Their responses will be recorded and transcribed by the interviewer.

Understanding that multiple views of spirituality will present themselves, the interviewer will employ semi-structured interviews, which will prompt personal

reflections on the topic. Themes and/or patterns will be recorded and analyzed by the interviewer, maintaining complete confidentiality.

The role of the interviewer will be to develop appropriate, consistent questions to be used in the interviews, while allowing participants to expand their answers in a narrative fashion. Every attempt will be made to create a relaxed, judgment-free environment, ensuring all participants a safe conversation, which will respect everyone's personal boundaries.

### **Participants**

The participants will include leaders identified within the MnSCU system. For purposes of the study, the term *leader* will include academic and student affairs assistant deans, deans, associate vice presidents, vice presidents, provosts and presidents.

Participants may be serving in permanent or interim positions, and may have been in their current position for a wide range of time.

All participants are part of an organizational chart, which includes direct reporting to a position higher than their current position. All serve as supervisors for multiple direct reports. College and university presidents with the MnSCU system report directly to the chancellor of the system who, in turn, reports to a board of trustees. All participants have completed master's degrees or doctoral degrees. They will represent a wide range of ages and a variety of religious backgrounds and experiences. All have worked in one or more MnSCU institutions during their respective careers.

The selection process of the participants will begin with an open invitation sent by email to the respective list serves for each of the above-mentioned groups to all MnSCU schools. These list serves are opt-in in nature and are managed by the system office of

MnSCU. All administrators within the system have access to the same list serves and they are updated periodically throughout the year. The invitation will include an attachment of the dissertation prospectus as well as an outline of the potential participant's commitment needed in order to take part in the project.

The initial sample will be small, stemming from the first set of respondents. If additional participants are needed to ensure an adequate sample, direct petitions will be made to individuals. The majority of the interviews will be face-to-face. The thirty-seven campuses in the MnSCU system are spread throughout the state of Minnesota. If a face-to-face meeting is not possible, some interviews will be conducted by phone and/or Skype.

#### **Data Collection, Processing and Analysis**

**Informed consent.** The respondents in the study will be asked to sign a consent form before beginning the interview. This will allow for the use of their personal stories in the study, as well as their ideas, pertinent career issues specific to their positions, and non-identifying descriptions of their own campus culture. All respondents will be assured that complete confidentiality will be maintained. Interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of transcription, and all participants will be made aware of the audio recording prior to beginning the interview.

All interview questions, as well as an outline of the interview process, methods, and reporting measures, will be provided to participants prior to the agreed-upon interview date. A respondent's inability or unwillingness to offer informed consent will preclude him or her from participating in the study.

**Confidentiality.** Kaiser (2009) offers this advice to qualitative researchers concerning confidentiality: "For qualitative researchers, maintaining respondent

confidentiality while presenting rich, detailed accounts of social life, presents unique challenges” (p.1). Anticipating these challenges, special attention will be paid to responses that might identify the MnSCU institution the participant works for and will not be included in the data. According to Tolich, (2004) the literature surrounding research design and ethics says little about how to handle the risk of deductive disclosure when presenting detailed qualitative data.

Although MnSCU is a large organization with thousands of employees, persons in leadership roles are strongly encouraged to network and attend professional development opportunities. This group of employees is considerably smaller and may interact with each other on a regular basis. While this accounts for camaraderie and intricate social ties, the challenge and the necessity of confidentiality will be critical. This group most likely will be the ones to read the results of this research, thus increasing the importance of anonymity.

The participants’ names will be kept confidential as well as the names of their respective campuses. All participants will be referred to by a pseudonym and all campuses will be given a random letter name. All information obtained during interviews will be stored in a locked office with security codes protecting all computerized records. All recorded interview audio files will be destroyed once approval of the dissertation is obtained.

### **Data collection method**

The study will involve gathering information from participants in the form of interviews. The interview questions will be used to explore the views, experiences and motivations of all participants. The interviews will maintain an emphasis on



understanding the respondents' point of view surrounding their understanding of spirituality. Questions will be used to structure the interviews, however the approach will be flexible and informal. The intent will be to illicit in-depth, verbal responses that reveal each individual's story about how spirituality plays into their respective positions. The transcriptions of the interviews will be entered into NVivo, a software product used for qualitative research. This product will code the responses and identify word frequency and patterns. Major themes will be extrapolated from the results.

There will be only one interviewer, adding to the uniformity of the data collection method. Participants will be given the option of viewing the transcript of their interview and will be able to make modifications to their comments and answers.

**Data analysis.** Data analysis will begin with a transcription of each interview. These interviews will be recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Next, a preliminary exploratory analysis will be done of each transcript. Each will be read several times in an attempt to identify major themes. At this point, connections will be made to the research questions as a lens for analysis. A scheme of coding the data will be created to best identify and label the themes which emerge and the transcripts will be re-read. Clarifications will be made at this stage, moving toward an interpretation of the findings. Guba and Lincoln (1985) wrote the following about this type of analysis:

In qualitative studies, there is an ongoing process of categorizing during the data analysis process. The researcher should document how initial codes lead to more elaborate codes and linkages and finally to formal data analysis. The analysis should continue until theoretical saturation is achieved, when no new themes or

issues arise regarding a category of data and when the categories are well established and validated. (p. 105)

### **Validity and Reliability**

Simon (2011) asserts that there are various approaches a researcher can use to address validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Some of these include triangulation of data, feedback from informants, and expert review. These data and themes will be reviewed by an outside expert for validation.

### **Interview Questions**

1. How do you define spirituality in your life?
2. Focusing on your position in MnSCU, how do you see spirituality playing a role in how you interact and make decisions? Do you have some examples to share?
3. Relying on your personal definition of spirituality and the role it plays for you, do you believe it is possible to effectively ignore its influences on your decision-making? Do you have some examples to share?
4. When you think about all the people with whom you interact and oversee, how do you think they would respond knowing that spirituality played or did not play a part in your decision-making process?
5. How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for leadership interferes with the separation of church and state?

### **Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

This study will be constructed with voluntary participation from current MnSCU leaders. It is assumed that participants are in good standing with the MnSCU system office and that in no way are their beliefs on the subject of spirituality brought into any supervisory review of their performance.

In recognition of the limitations to the research, the intimate and personal nature of speaking about one's own spiritual beliefs has the potential to be uncomfortable.

Participants might look upon the interview questions as too personal, giving way to answers that are brief or incomplete. The topic of spirituality may also raise issues of participants' past experiences in their families of origin. There is no intention to delve into negative experiences surrounding familial religious practices, and some of those memories are inevitable. If people's backgrounds held bad memories, the reluctance to respond fully may increase.

The system in which all of the participants work in is public and certainly not affiliated with any religious-based entities. Most likely, there are individuals within this system who identify as non-spiritual, atheist, anti-religious, or simply adamant about separating all aspects of church and state. This can change an atmosphere of free speech to one of holding one's beliefs as something not to be shared, let alone to become part of a research component of a dissertation.

The MnSCU system, like many large organizations, utilizes a tiered system of administration. As a delimitation to this research, the term *leader* only refers to those people in leadership positions who have achieved graduate degrees. On the premise of inclusion, countless individuals within the organization are equally in tune with their own spiritual connections but lack the sufficient education to be considered part of this research group. These people are also leaders, serving the MnSCU student body in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this study, however, they will not be included.

### **Ethical Assurances**

Stake (2000) states, "Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p.447). Upholding this code of ethics will be paramount to the success of gathering the participants' stories

and life experiences. Informed consent will be required before audio taping, and all recorded material will be locked in the researcher's office before, during, and after the transcription of interviews and transferal to NVivo for coding purposes. All identifying comments will be removed so as to maintain anonymity. In keeping with the ethical practices set forth by the university, a certain additional level of care will be employed, recognizing that some of the practices discussed may not be directly in line with a particular institution's stated values.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 discusses the steps to be followed so an accurate portrayal of the use of spirituality in decision-making can be gleaned from the participants. The questions are intended to spark real-world examples of how leaders within MnSCU might consciously or unconsciously rely on their own spiritual connectedness to carry out normal activities related to their jobs. By employing the aforementioned methodology, principles and standards, a quality study will be realized that adds to similar research studies in academia.

## Chapter IV

### Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis was to understand the role spirituality played in the professional roles of leaders within Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Interview questions addressed issues of decision-making, personal interpretations, and perceived understanding on the part of the leader of how others regarded their use of spirituality as a guide to perform their respective jobs.

Ten participants provided responses to five questions. The participants were deans and vice presidents from both academic and student affairs who have served in their roles from six weeks to twenty-two years, respectively. Their ages range from thirty-six to sixty-three and all have a masters' degrees, PhD's or EdD's.

Participant one, RH, is a practicing Christian with a contemporary view of spirituality that is not aligned with any organized religion or faith denomination. He considers himself inclusive and uses spirituality as a way to center himself. Spirituality, for him, is a focus on personal growth within a secular context. Similarly, spirituality is an action; it is considered part of a process. It is to be considered intentional and comes as a result of searching.

When asked to give examples of how spirituality played into decision-making, he spoke about the capability he sees in each person and how it is his hope that all his direct reports should and can aspire to something greater. Their actions need to be purposeful. He sees directing these people as a way to become better at his job. His duty is to help them find their own truth. For him, it is possible, but not preferable, to separate spirituality from the decision-making process. RH feels separating spirituality from the

decision-making process leads to reacting rather than responding to situations. This mindset has taken him a long time to acquire.

RH feels that overtly presenting spirituality as a tool would make some people suspicious and nervous, giving them reason to believe he was filtering everything through some religious lens rather than understanding that decision-making is more about reflecting in hopes of gaining clarity. The idea of using spirituality can be appreciated only if framed correctly. He gave an example of mentioning his two children during a meeting. A coworker, who had made life choices that involved remaining single with no children, emailed him after the meeting and chided him for mentioning his children at work. Rather than reacting, he reflected on how his comments may have made this coworker uncomfortable.

This reflection allowed him to look at the situation in a different light. He changed the way he conducted meetings and ceased including personal anecdotes with his children as a way of shedding new light on a discussion. By reflecting, RH was more easily able to empathize with his colleague. It would have been easy for him to brush off her comment, attributing it to being bitter and over-sensitive. Instead, he has grown in understanding of personal boundaries and workplace appropriateness.

The separation of church and state with regard to using spirituality as a tool for decision-making does not present itself as an issue for RH. This stems from a clear distinction between spirituality and church. He stated that he had done some of his schooling in the southern part of the U.S. and compared the school experience to that of working in rural Minnesota. Some might have considered these communities as ultra conservative. Whatever the opinion, in his estimation demographics play a part in the

distinction. His current position requires overseeing the Philosophy department. This has opened his eyes to interacting with a variety of religions and cultures, as well as interacting with rural Minnesota students and a diverse faculty and staff. His understanding of spirituality continues to affect his interactions with all these facets of the community.

The second participant, EI, was a child of a pastor and grew up in a different country. Even with a strong religious background and framework for believing, she is very resistant to this idea of giving a working definition to the term spirituality. She believes there are a lot of things being done in the name of spirituality that frighten her, and this makes her skeptical and almost distrustful of the question. She regularly attends church and admits that her background defines how she leads. She calls it an inner faith and truth which serve as a calling to serve people.

As a leader, she seeks the same in other people, wanting to connect with their inner core to see what grounds them. She is a believer in forgiveness and second chances. Allowing someone to save face, in her opinion, stems from her own sense of spirituality.

EI sees herself as being constantly mindful of how her actions impact others. In order to be an authentic leader, she feels it imperative to practice self-evaluation, regularly checking the direction of her moral compass. Her title does not make her a leader; she is dean because of who she is. This is an awesome responsibility and can't be taken for granted. She considers this a journey, along which she is called to help people.

An example she offered came from her first week on the job. Her assistant came to her with a problem he had encountered dealing with the business office. He was very

nervous and flustered. She asked him what the problem was and he explained that the previous dean had regularly belittled him and made him feel he was not competent. EI took it as an opportunity to help him save face. She initialed the document and said she hoped the business office would rectify the misunderstanding. No disappointment was shown. This was reality. This was forgiveness. This was a time to empower the individual and lift him up rather than put him down. Her sense of spirituality framed the situation and provided a positive outcome.

EI believes that separating spirituality from your conscience actions is possible if you believe that spirituality is a behavior. For her, however, that is not reality. It is part of her core. In fact, she recognized retrospectively occasions when she did not allow her spiritual understanding to enter into some decisions. She is not proud of most of those outcomes.

Some of her direct reports, if they were made aware, might find her spiritual framework off-putting. Others would view it as an alien thought. Most, in her opinion, would not be surprised.

The third participant, MH, was also the child of a preacher. Faith is an integral part of his life and always has been. During college he attended a Jesuit institution that encouraged him to challenge his faith. Spirituality guided his decision then as it does today. He is unable to remember a time when spirituality was not part of his decision-making. When he comes in contact with people who found it later in life, he is almost jealous because it is so new and interesting to them. He feels he has always had a moral guide in spirituality.



Spirituality directs how MH treats people. This direction is based in Christianity and MH believes fairness and compassion go along with that understanding. It is, however, a balance. There is never any imposition of ideals or beliefs. Rather, it is to be considered his moral compass, leading to consequences rather than punishments.

MH believes that it is absolutely possible to separate spirituality from your decision-making process. In his words, he is a rule-follower. This means that he can follow an imposed rule even if he does not agree with it. The example he gave was the baker who was against the idea of gay marriage and refused to make a cake for a same-sex couple. MH would have just made the cake because that was his job.

Although he does not advertise that he is a preacher's kid, he hopes that he portrays a strong moral upbringing. Most people, when they find out, are not surprised. MH believes this is due to how he puts his spirituality into practice. He stated that it should not be about treating someone as though they are Christian, rather treating them like a good person.

A difficult part of his understanding came from working in a Catholic institution as a non-Catholic. While he held many of the same beliefs, it was made clear to him that he could not advance at that institution without espousing all the doctrine particular to that religion. Leaving that position eventually led him to MnSCU.

Participant number four, KL, considers herself a practicing Christian who is driven, in her words, by the Holy Spirit which "is part of the trinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit." She goes on to say that to live a life that is filled with motives and intentions and the actions to serve that trinity is guided and communicated by the Bible. Her understanding of faith is maintaining a conscious mind and body, being certain of

what you hope for and certain of what you can't see. A soul, for her, is a mind, free will, and a heart. Her task is interjecting all of that into her daily life.

Spirituality comes forth in her approach to people and situations. It is a foundation for her decision-making. It is a framework with which to tackle problems head on, make ethical decisions, and play out a role that is called leader. This leadership manifests itself in kindness, empathy, and a consistent approach to being mindful of her actions.

KL's faith is embedded in the curiosity of learning and working in higher education. She uses an example of dealing with the faculty union on her campus. If she enters a meeting with her mind made up and being unwilling to dialog about the issue, the meeting usually turns sour and nothing is accomplished. But when approached with a lens of mutual respect, she is better able to bring about a positive outcome. She said that she has been called names, had false accusations made, and been blindsided many times. While she cannot tolerate that kind of insubordination, she can control her tone and her manner of dealing with the situation.

This comes from a spiritual grounding. It is the same with her interaction with students. If someone is coming in to discuss an issue and she is planning to be overly firm with her rejection of the student's idea, why engage in the meeting at all? She recognizes that empathy, kindness, and understanding are all part of the learning curve and that she has gotten better over time.

KL's clarity of values helped her choose where she wanted to work, and those values lead her to the two-year institution. She's had many job offers, but she constantly goes back to the values held by her college and knows she is fulfilling a calling.

When asked if her colleagues would be surprised if they knew of her reliance on spirituality to make decisions, KL stated that they would not be surprised at all. Most already know that she is spiritual, principled, ethical and optimistic. She also refers to her leadership as following a particular mindset. If you are calm and unbiased you will find ways to seek real feedback. Authentic leadership and the principles of spirituality are all the same thing in her understanding.

The fifth participant, LM, does not self-identify as religious and actually uses the term “misguided” when referring to his college experience where monks were the primary educators. His label of choice would be Buddhist because Buddhism best provides a framework that is all-inclusive.

Like many deans, LM’s position requires that he manage which courses will run and which ones will be cut due to low enrollment. He considers compassion to be the leading attribute needed to effectively balance offering necessary classes with taking away classes from adjuncts, often meaning that health insurance won’t be an option. He describes his institution as legalistic, where egos get hurt and compliance with the law takes precedence.

Yet even in this type of atmosphere, LM equates his spirituality with core values embraced by the institution. He believes a leader can remove religion from the process of leading, but not spirituality. When asked if his colleagues would be surprised to know that he used his own understanding of spirituality as a tool in his position, he responded that some individuals would be put off at first. Much of this depends upon the type of conversation he’d be having with the individual, but his approach would still include spirituality at a subconscious level.

Like some other participants, LM feels intentionally applying doctrine of any sort would be considered a slippery slope. Luckily, in his opinion, there a lot of checks and balances within higher education that keep us from sliding down this slope. His true modus operandi in this situation is, in his words, “not to talk about that stuff and move through the school undercover.”

Participant number six, PE, holds her definition of spirituality as something very personal, admitting that it is not something she talks about and has struggled with her whole life. While considering spirituality an important aspect of her life, she does not believe a lot of people know that about her and she prefers it as such. This is an intensely emotional topic for her largely due to the fact that her father, who passed away some time ago, rooted her upbringing in the church. Eventually there was a personal schism that did not allow for regular connection to a faith-based community.

This changed shortly after her father’s death. By reconnecting with the church, it brought back a lot of sad memories of the loss of her father. Her daughter had been the instigator of returning to the faith for her family. This experience led her to the understanding that leaders need to assume people are coming from a place where they want to be a part of something bigger. Growth in this understanding sheds new light on every individual whom we deal with. What group do they hope to belong to? How are my decisions affecting how this person belongs?

PE finds it inappropriate to knowingly allow spirituality to enter into the decision-making process, yet she admits that it guides her assumptions. People should have the right to act the way they choose and, according to PE’s understanding of spirituality, people want to be good.

In her position, she spends a lot of time talking about values and helping individuals assimilate their day-to-day tasks into the bigger mission of the college. Her direct reports have specifically asked for more conversation about purpose. Because she supports this type of dialogue, she knows they are aware that she struggles with tough decisions and treats other people's struggles as private matters.

She gave the example of a student who has gone through the discipline process and has made some threats. PE's had to make some very difficult calls regarding the student's future. She believes her thoughtful, deliberate discerning of the problem, combined with the understanding that this student had a background most people would not ever know about, would have left her staff feeling heartened by how she ultimately responded to the situation.

Admitting that she doesn't truly understand how to use spirituality as a tool for decision-making, she doesn't believe that owning your own spirituality interferes with any separation of church and state. PE does not see how it could interfere unless you were trying to make people think like you.

The seventh participant is MP. Her upbringing was Roman Catholic, but currently she does not attend church. Spirituality, for her, is directly tied to her interactions with people and serves as a guide for how she expects to be treated in return. In her explanation of the working definition, she mentions karma, stating that what you send out to the universe is returned to you.

Her position as vice president gives her the privilege, in her words, to make people feel good. She sees her role as leading by example, seeking opportunities wherever possible where she can influence other people's mindset to do no harm.

MP is a woman of color and comes to MnSCU from another state. It was important to her to bring up the concept of Minnesota nice inasmuch as she views her leadership role as needing to bring up the topics that make people uncomfortable. This is not to intentionally be contrary. Rather, her authentic self requires it of her. Honest conversations require presenting yourself without veils of propriety. Her spirituality helps her with this framework.

She feels she needs to be at peace with the actions her position requires her to take. These actions can have financial or emotional impacts on her direct reports, but she never wants to operate with the corporate mentality that the dollar is at the end of every decision. Spirituality, an integral part of her authentic self, helps to keep that in check.

Knowing that MP utilized spirituality in her decision-making process would not, according to her, surprise her staff. Some would understand it because they operate from the same spiritual understanding. Others, possibly from the outside, might not agree with her approach, but there is no way she can deny who she is in her daily interactions.

The separation of church and state is a non-issue in MP's mind. The example she gives is the money we use in the United States. It says, "In God We Trust." The dollar is a government bill, so she sees no need to vehemently separate God from the government. Perhaps the most telling part of her interview is her belief that agnostic, atheist, and spiritual individuals all have to interact from an authentic base. Without that understanding of what motivates you and gives meaning to your work, you won't be an effective leader because you can't be completely honest with other people if you have not been honest with yourself.

The eighth participant is KM, who was raised Catholic and eventually converted to Lutheran. In her early life, spirituality was church. Admittedly, as she has gotten older, that idea has changed. She is still a strong believer in God but many things she's witnessed in the church have upset her. At her core she knows that her God put us here to love, not to judge. KM is able to have productive dialogues when this belief remains at the forefront of her interactions.

The leadership model that KM employs is a reverse triangle. This puts her at the bottom, supporting her faculty from the bottom up. For her, the knowledge that she has supported her faculty is enough to sustain her through the difficult periods of being an administrator. She uses the idea of treating others as you wish to be treated as an aid. In her opinion, using religion to make a decision would be wrong.

Participant number nine is WM, the only participant who self-identifies as atheist. She was brought up in a Universalist church which she describes as eclectic and inclusive. The theology of this church put the burden on the individual. She is not currently active in the church and now works to examine the commonalities between what she considers to be truth and what is meaningful. The inherent worth of the individual guides her interactions and she is passionately connected to the natural world as a way to feed her soul. For WM, everyone has potential and everyone can change and grow. It is up to leaders to foster this understanding and pull the best out of every employee we supervise.

WM values all kinds of diversity, from race to work styles. There are different strengths, and sometimes those differences cause collisions. The different strengths, though, ultimately make teams stronger. This is reflected in her group of direct reports

and she offers the example of the hiring of her administrative assistant. This person's hire was not the safe choice; that is to say that the new hire did not fit the stereotype of what type of person who you might think would be in this position. WM prides herself on seeing people's potential. That is why she decided to go off the grid and hire someone who would bring diversity of experience and culture to the college. These sorts of decisions can cause others to push back and question someone's motives. WM is confident that taking the risk is usually worth it when it comes to creating a diverse team. So far, that decision has proven fruitful.

When asked about separating spirituality from decision-making, she offered an example of how a seemingly inconsequential decision could be viewed through the lens of a value-based thought process. If she, as an administrator, needed to buy garbage cans, it would be incumbent upon her to investigate green alternatives to waste disposal before choosing the best garbage cans for the campus. This brings the importance she places on nature into her decision and allows her to make a final decision that is in line with her authentic self.

As a leader, WM is confident that her direct reports would acknowledge that she operates from a value system that was spiritually influenced. A church is different from WM's spirituality, but not attending a church does not remove the values associated with a religion. In her leadership, WM tries to make people feel honored, and she believes you can make good things happen for people if, and only if, they feel honored.

The tenth and last participant is AU. He identifies as a Christian and as a person of color who is connected to a higher power. This higher power helps him govern his life



and the lives of those for whom he is responsible. His mission and drive is to lead his family in the hopes that they may be saved and one day rejoice in the resurrection.

AU is a believer that everyone already possesses a moral compass, recognizing that there are rules and regulations to be followed. His example is that we, as citizens of this state, can't just drive at any speed. There is a limit. Green means go and red means stop. Although he considers himself a responsible driver, he admits that sometimes he speeds. The speed limit and the officer on the side of the road are reminders. Our lives are set up that way. AU views all people as his brothers and sisters. This belief is based on following the teaching and examples of Jesus.

Sometimes students ask AU about his spirituality and sometimes he initiates conversations around the topic. He believes it allows him to form trusting relationships and has seen that self-identifying as a believer often supersedes being a person of color in gaining compliance from someone else.

In the decisions AU makes, removing spirituality is possible. This is easier when the decision is based on college protocol or MnSCU policy. But in relationships and how he treats people, it is impossible for him to remove spirituality from the process. He believes the vast majority of people who know him would not be surprised to learn he utilized spirituality as a guiding principle and as a tool for decision-making. He offered an example of people who are staunch atheists telling him that what they appreciate most about him is the fact that he is proud to be a believer.

All ten of these participants had received the questions ahead of time and had obviously put time into their responses. Because several of these individuals have been through the process of writing a dissertation, they were very willing to participate. All

responded to the invitation within a few days of the email being sent and several were intrigued as to who the other participants were. This information was kept confidential. As an option from the beginning of the process, each participant was allowed to go back and add to their comments. None of the participants elected to change their answers.

Upon analysis of the qualitative data collected in this study, it is difficult to ignore the effects spirituality has on decision-making, leadership style, and the everyday resolution of conflict so often encountered by educational leaders. It is conceivable that spirituality can be an important component of leadership. In analyzing these interviews, the predominant themes which emerged were the use of spirituality as a moral compass to find one's own truth, the intersection of secularism with spirituality still providing a way of guiding interactions, and what it means to present yourself as an authentic leader while recognizing that spirituality is playing a part in your decision-making.

## Chapter V

### Results and Findings

This final chapter will explore the outcomes of my research as well as some recommendations for future research in the area of narrative analysis. The purpose of this narrative analysis was to understand the role of spirituality for academic leaders in the MnSCU system as it relates to their position. The research aimed to clarify the ways in which spirituality influenced how academic leaders portrayed themselves to various constituencies and if the portrayals were, in fact, authentic or contrived according to the audience. Participants in the study were asked to consider what role spirituality played in their philosophy of leadership.

#### Interview Process

As noted earlier, the methodology utilized was that of personal interviews. This allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee to function in a more intimate fashion, allowing both to obtain and explore the influence and importance of spirituality for academic leaders. The interviews were conducted in a private setting, away from their work space.

All the responses were recorded for purposes of transcribing their words. All were given the option of going back to make revisions, but none chose to do so. Once transcribed, word documents were imported into NVivo, a software program developed for qualitative research. Major themes became evident by reading through the transcriptions. These were identified as using spirituality as a moral compass, the intersection of secularism and spirituality, and the participants' attempt to speak authentically as leaders. Careful attention was paid to ask each question with exactly the

same wording and intonation so as not to inadvertently emphasize the importance of any particular question from the list. In other words, an attempt was made to avoid as much as possible allowing my own assumptive world to influence the participants.

Although it was not asked of each participant if he or she had spent a significant amount of time preparing the answers, it seemed clear that each one had wrestled with the questions prior to the interview. Some came with prepared notes and some admitted to running the questions by colleagues and friends ahead of time. Many commented on how grateful they were to have received the questions prior to the interview. Their responses proved to be well-thought-out and I had only a few follow-up, clarifying questions given the completeness of their responses. Several of the participants hold terminal degrees and recognized the importance of doctoral-level transcription of interviews. This, no doubt, aided in their compliance and helped to yield clear results.

As far as problems that occurred, one of my participant's interviews was accidentally erased, prohibiting its use in the study. This was particularly disturbing because the participant was an enthusiastic respondent to the initial invitation sent to administrators within MnSCU. Hers was a thoughtful and eloquent interview that left me, as the interviewer, confident the topic was of value to people. She was the only scientist in the mix of participants, yet would have provided the clearest qualitative answers. Because there were already ten participants, this individual was not re-interviewed.

As major themes emerged, certain words repeated themselves across all the transcriptions. In serious studies, word repetitions often reveal themes or currents which provide an invaluable aid to the interviewer or researcher. Participants spoke of unrest on

their respective campuses, conflicts with their own supervisors, clashes with the faculty unions, and the frustrations that can occur moving from faculty to a position in administration. These conversations brought to light a myriad of stressful aspects to their positions, but none were as compelling as the three themes I will address.

### **Major Themes**

#### *Moral Compass*

A compass is an instrument that gives direction and helps one not to get lost. The term “helps” is used because getting lost is inevitable. We are, after all, human. We assume and hope our moral compass is pointing us in a direction that will yield a fruitful outcome. All of the people interviewed, by way of their enthusiasm and candor, showed that they want to do the right thing in their respective roles and choose to follow in the direction this compass points out.

Each participant alluded to the idea that morality – doing the right thing in a given situation – is a key component to what gives their job validity and credence. It is noteworthy that each participant equates spirituality, albeit in varying degrees, to doing the right thing. In some of their examples, doing the right thing includes allowing people to make mistakes without judgment. EI, for example, called her leadership role “an awesome responsibility that I cannot take for granted”. In understanding that role, she refers to it as “my journey to walk with others and to do what I can do to help others along that journey.” Doing the right thing is listening to both sides before making a decision. Doing the right thing is erring on the side of turning the other cheek rather than making every insubordinate interaction a punishable offense.

My own supervisor at my institution has used comparable terms to those of my participants in her interactions with me. She was not part of this study, but her words are

relevant to this portion. She has repeatedly stated that it helps to be a Christian in this job. To be clear, my supervisor is accepting of all religions, but her point is that the ability to turn the other cheek is a necessary component to leadership. Many are the meetings in which she has been accused, slandered, and raked over the coals. Often, she is taking it on the chin for us, her subordinates. She knows that these attacks are not meant to be personal, but they are still painful and make one realize the depths to which people will go to make their point and get their way.

In his 2007 book, *True North*, Bill George speaks to the value of holding firm to a moral compass all leaders must possess in order to overcome difficult situations. He states,

If you are guided by an internal compass that represents your character and values, you're going to be fine. Let your values guide your actions and don't ever lose our internal compass. Everything isn't black or white. There are a lot of gray areas in business (p. 35).

In this passage, George is clear in stating that a leader must first have the inner scaffolding to support the use of a moral compass. Leaders cannot simply say that their conscience led them to a certain decision. The moral compass needed to be set and maintained as a result of deep reflection on what mattered to the leader. It is this reflection on what a meaningful life entails that sets the groundwork for becoming a morally-grounded leader, capable of supporting and utilizing a variety of tools for the job.

Clearly, all ten of the participants know that their deeds and actions need to be guided by a conscience. Some referred to this guidance as "following their heart", and

some actually named it as a moral compass. RH used the phrases “centering yourself”, “personal growth” and “pursuing truth – whatever it might be.” All these references show a reliance on something more than just their own intuitions.

The examples indicate something which has been nurtured in them; taught, if you will. And their actions and words show that they relied upon a tool to calibrate their respective moral compasses. There is an assumption that this calibration is taught because we already know, by way of our conscience, that treating people badly is wrong. It is not, however, inherent to rely on external sources for moral guidance.

Morality carries with it a sense of responsibility to the larger society. The leaders interviewed in this study are all working with faculty and staff who directly impact the lives of students within MnSCU. It is incumbent upon all leaders to recognize that daily decisions have a trickle-down effect and even the smallest resolution to a problem can have ramifications for scores of students. These might include access to an institution, financial aid, satisfactory academic progress, or even personal safety issues.

All leaders within MnSCU are put through mandatory training on the art of leadership and the science of leadership. This five-day training brought together newly hired administrators and supervisors from all over the system with the purpose of providing tools for leadership. Participants took part in role plays, mock interviews, and watched several videos depicting different leadership scenarios. Legal issues surrounding our day-to-day decisions were presented and many scenarios proved to be helpful. At no time, however, was the idea of leadership morality brought up. The fact that so many of the participants in this narrative analysis included the moral compass as a

vital tool for their roles leads one to believe that it should have been included in some capacity.

MH's examples speak to morality being the component that best unites the country, not separating the public education system from any understanding of church. His moral guide, as he refers to it, is a key factor in how he chooses to motivate and direct his own set of direct reports. He views spirituality as a way to connect, not divide. AU added, "Left to my own devices, who knows what I might do? I believe everyone has a moral compass. There are rules and regulations for other things. It's just natural to have this lead me in this particular position."

EI began the interview very skeptical of the process and the topic. Her reluctance to buy into the idea of spirituality as a tool for decision-making gave way to an explanation. Her approach to other people as honored, worthy brothers and sisters eventually came around to her admitting to having a personal bend toward spirituality as a basis for her moral compass.

The seemingly 180 degree change in her demeanor and message led me to believe she had thought about my questions thoroughly, had wrestled with them, and had gained some personal clarity surrounding their implications. Other participants left the interviews thanking me for posing questions which had long been on their minds, while others showed a blank affect during the interviews.

Hopefully, the mere fact they were asked about spirituality in their daily work lives has caused them to be cognizant of its place in their leadership style. The training I spoke about earlier for all MnSCU administrators and supervisors should be updated to include an exercise inviting participants to write their own personal statement elaborating



on what guides their decisions and actions. Ideally, these statements would be completely confidential, yet could be revisited at varying intervals after the training.

Some participants may need to begin at a more basic level, one that began with a personal transformation. My suggestion for a writing prompt would be as follows:

*Write about a personal transformation. This could involve how you grew as a result of a particular decision or experience, a difficult situation you overcame, or an encounter with the numinous. The transformation might have been subtle or one which changed the way you view the world. It could have been sudden or have evolved over time.*

Morality, on its own, has a set of stigmas attached. The United States has outspoken people who espouse the term moral majority. There is violence in the name of moral judgment. There are university-level courses on morality that give way to extremist views. Yet the basic premise of the term must be taken for what it is: an attempt to do the right thing. The participants in this study are all trying to do the right thing, and spirituality is one small light they are using to see the way.

#### *Intersection of Secularism and Spirituality*

This process was entered assuming participants would be reluctant to share their personal beliefs, or lack of spiritual understanding. Without exception, the participants were willing to share their personal journeys to understanding their connection to spirituality. In the letter inviting them to participate, there is statement alerting them to the possibility that speaking about their experiences surrounding spirituality might cause them to be uncomfortable, bringing up past situations which may have proven delicate or even painful for them. This was an attempt to invite the participants to go deeper than they may otherwise have believed necessary.

The hope was for participants to feel their responses didn't need to be limited in any way, and in no way would any judgement be placed on those people for whom faith-based living was neither a topic to be discussed nor germane to their situation. What was encountered was an openness on their part to discussing their situations honestly, some viewed and explained through the lens of spirituality and some very purposely remaining on the secular side.

For two participants, recent memories seemed more difficult. PE became emotional as memories of her father, coupled with a reluctance to return to church, brought to light how her daughter's spiritual development needed to take precedence over her own misgivings and discomfort. This discomfort stemmed from church having served as a prime reminder of her father. Why would she continue with something so closely associated with her dad if it made her sad? The following quote from her interview brings that discomfort to light.

I think that comes from my connection to spirituality and to the church because it's hard to separate those. It's all interwoven. It was my dad's expectation that we were all raised in the church. He passed away six years ago and for a long time I couldn't go back because it was so hard for me. So emotionally draining that it was easy not to go. My daughter told me she wanted to go back to church. She was confirmed this past May. Because of that it is who I am and you have to look at the reasons why someone is doing what they are doing. We have to assume that people are coming from a place where they want to be part of something.

EI's initial reaction to the first interview question brought about a less-than-receptive answer. An immediate disclosure that she was skeptical and was not in the habit of talking about spiritual matters quickly clarified the situation. Hers was not a particularly negative reaction to spirituality. Rather, she didn't see how it should play into a clear definition of her role within MnSCU. As her story unfolded, she softened her skepticism. In the following quote, that initial skepticism is evident, but gives way to a stated understanding and explanation on her part.

I think I know that the term spirituality can have so many definitions of who you are. And part of me resists or I'm a little hesitant, but there are some elements of how this is being used that are not very appealing to me at all. I think there are a lot of things being done in the name of spirituality that frighten me. So I'm a little bit skeptical. I do know that spirituality plays a role in my life not only because I was a pastor's kid. As an adult now, I do go regularly to church. I know it guides my interactions. I think it defines how I lead. It's sort of seeking of some kind of inner faith and truth, justice, to serve people.

Assuming that each participant had a clear understanding of the differences between secular and religious ideology, no question was included about their individual views or definitions of them. All of their responses showed an understanding of the differences. What was remarkable was how the dichotomies intersected in their descriptions and comments, as is evidenced in these quotes by RH, KH, PE and AU respectively.

Blankly throwing out spirituality I could see some people getting a little suspicious and nervous about that as if I'm filtering it through some religious lens

verses them understanding that it's more about reflecting and meditation upon a situation in hopes of better understanding it and gaining clarity. I think then they might appreciate it.

It's all about your mindset. You are calm. You don't jump to conclusions. You are not biased. You find ways to seek and build real feedback. In authentic leadership, servant leadership, those all have the same principles of spirituality. They are all the same.

We are trying to take time to talk about our values. People have a hard time separating their day-to-day tasks from the bigger mission of the college. They have asked for more conversation about purpose. They would not be surprised and they would support it, truthfully. If someone brings it up. I treat it like it's private for other people too. Some might actually be encouraged. I wrestle with tough decisions. We have a student who went through the discipline process who made some threats. I don't know what's going on with him, but I had to make tough decisions. In some way I think my staff would be heartened.

So, our lives are set up that way. Even with my inner moral compass, being a person who is Christian, I think of people as my brothers and sisters. Jesus did the same with the disciples. I try and I fail, but I try as much as possible. An example, I listen often a little bit harder who talk about spirituality. I can bring this up or initiate conversations about that, but often students ask me about my spirituality. It allows me to form a trusting relationships. The moment they find out that I'm a believer, anything I say after that is gold.

Results from the interviews showed clear evidence that spirituality is functioning as an integral part of the decision-making process for leaders within MnSCU. Although different interpretations and definitions came into play, all ten participants admitted to allowing spirituality play a part in how their regular interactions played out with faculty, staff, and students. Examples of conversations pertaining to job performance, budget, student discipline, and personal non-work-related interactions underscored the role spirituality played for these professionals. Their examples ranged from providing mundane opinions to making pivotal decisions with wide-spread repercussions.

As a way of concretizing the apparent differences between secularism and spirituality, it is only fair to rely on definitions from two opposing personal views. Carnicelli, a humanist, writes,

Freedom of conscience and thought are essential elements in the Secular and Spiritual worldview. Without either of these conditions, authentic spirituality inevitably yields to dogmatism and religious or intellectual tyranny - and the quest for truth ends. Thus, in the eyes of this diverse and eclectic group, defense of these two bedrock guarantees is seen as a sacred duty, not a burden (2005).

On the other side of the issue, a pastor, Jenkins, writes,

That's the day I changed my mind about spiritual vs. secular. Jesus taught me that the most practical chores, duties, responsibilities, and disciplines – when done unto The Lord and with a right attitude – are profoundly spiritual and have eternal implications (2014).

*Speaking Authentically*

My friend's grandmother, an immigrant from Italy, used to say frequently, "The tongue has not a single bone, but many a bone the tongue has broken." What we say matters. Authenticity in speech is central to both good leadership and healthy spiritual growth. The purpose statement for this dissertation hopes to identify the ways in which spirituality influences how academic leaders portray themselves to various constituencies and if the portrayals are, in fact, authentic or contrived according to the audience. In revisiting RH's answers, his statement "I've since realized I need to take the things back, think it through, and gain a more purposeful approach to the conversation as it's usually a much healthier, much more positive result" provides a scenario many of the participants mentioned. Our words carry weight, and that is not to be taken for granted.

Stepping back from the situation, even for a moment, to put on the lens and filter of a spirit-filled, authentic response is not only wise, it should be how leaders are judged in their job performance. EI's comment "People will follow me not because I'm the dean, but because of who I am. And I think that's the heart of it" shows an understanding on her part that authenticity in our speech and action goes beyond anyone's reliance on a label of religious affiliation. The trust colleagues share in their leader's ability to lead, influence, make decisions, and solve problems comes from a place of recognition of authenticity. George wrote,

Today authenticity is seen as the gold standard for leadership. No longer is leadership about developing charisma or emulating other leaders. Leadership begins and ends with authenticity. It's being yourself; being the person you were created to be (2007, p. 37).

There is a hint of religiosity in that quote, summoning the idea of a higher power who created us. Whether or not a person believes in creationism is irrelevant. What matters in George's quote is that this idea of being authentic must act as the bookends to success, or happiness, or credibility. Without authenticity, a person's ability to lead is compromised.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

The idea of spirituality for leaders in the MnSCU system needs to be implicit rather than explicit. It is something not readily talked about and uncomfortable for many to talk about. Therefore, it is difficult to draw action steps to enhance spirituality-based leadership within MnSCU. There is a strong argument that spirituality belongs in the area of "implicit" because it is intensely personal, in the same way that sexuality is intensely personal.

Some argue, as one respondent did, that it is good to have a certain boundary between what is explicitly brought up in the workplace, where survival can require maintaining a professional public persona, and one's private life. What remains part of one's private self and life makes one vulnerable. Not bringing it up is certainly the path of least resistance, and will not get anyone into trouble or cause backlash. The downside of this "don't ask/don't tell" approach is that, if there are not specific governing values, such as doing the right thing, authentic communication, encouragement of deep awareness and appreciation, then full humanness is not valued in this workplace. There is no reason not to manage simply by fear, or by rules, or even by raw grabs for power. Failure to treat this topic causes people not to bring their full selves into their work.

Those interviewed for purposes of this dissertation are part of one of the largest higher-education systems in the country. It is conceivable that recommendations made

for leaders within MnSCU would also benefit leaders in similar institutions and systems outside of Minnesota. These include both private and public institutions, religiously oriented and those who have no connection to religion in any way.

Ideas, suggestions, and themes taken from the ten individuals interviewed for this dissertation hold commonalities for leaders in many other types of organizations, not just education. Employees who have a leader grounded in ethical, purposeful approaches can improve productivity and add to an overarching atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony. In recognizing a leader has a strong moral compass, chooses to allow spirituality to guide his or her decisions, and communicates in an authentic manner, those followers are presented with a role model, not just someone who tells them what to do.

In order to ensure the success of allowing spirituality to enter the psyche of leaders, the term needs to be demystified and credence must be given to the plethora of literature urging us to open our minds. The idea of spirituality needs to have a place next to academic knowledge and be recognized for its power and benefit; spirituality as a tool can no longer be relegated to something we don't admit to using out of fear of inciting political incorrectness. Rather, spirituality needs a new light shed on it, a light that stems from inherent goodness and not from doctrinal edicts that shame and divide.

As it stands, the body of literature is more heavily concerned with students' use and understanding of spirituality in the higher education system rather than those people running the institutions. Many journal articles and studies focus on how professors incorporate exercises that promote spiritual understanding and its role in the life of academia, but again, the professors are not the ones responsible for the day-to-day operation of the college or university. There needs to be a concerted effort to address



how those who have to make the critical decisions which move the institution forward are utilizing spirituality to aid their efforts.

When first investigating this topic, the derivation of the word “spirit” was explored. Its origins come from the word for “breath”. That core meaning echoed while going through the process of writing and compiling information in the first four chapters. As we breathe in, we become aware of life around us. We might notice smells, use the breath to focus, or even calm ourselves. That is how spirituality serves us. Allowing spirituality to play a part in our daily lives helps us notice things. It helps us focus. It can help us calm down and, at the same time, remind us that we are alive.

So much of what we focus on in academia revolves around past events and experiences. People dissect the causes of wars so as not to fall into similar traps. They rely on the writings of deceased scholars to inform their views on current issues. Individuals knowingly study the past so as not to repeat it. The study of spirituality is something that, in contrast, moves people forward because of its continual renewing qualities. The breath of spirituality, as evidenced by the preceding conversations, can cause us to take inventory of our present and create a future that is intentional.

MP, in her comments, stated,

It is a way I interact with other people based upon how I want them to interact with me. It is not tied to a religion. It's tied to my basic belief of doing good to others as you'd like them to do unto you. I know that's tied to a religious thing we learned as children. It's tied to karma, that what you give is what you get.

MP lays the groundwork for karma to come back to her in the future. This presents as a healthy way to conduct ourselves; we should be intentional about how we treat others and

react to situations. It speaks to our concern for the future and does not involve regretting the past.

What is missing from the literature is a study specifically encouraging the melding of secularism and spirituality for the purposes of making good decisions. A study of this sort could promote understanding and tolerance between groups who currently do not choose to dialogue. These choices may be due to too many perceived differences or a lack of societal support making these dialogues the norm. Dialogue is often the doorway to discovery. Leaders from various cultures and social backgrounds as well as religious traditions could be both enriched by and learn from such dialogue. Dialogue also combats isolationism and feeds both the individual and the community with new ideas.

Another area to consider is the effect spirituality plays in the overall well-being of an institution. Leaders are judged and remembered by the decisions they make, and an important addition to the literature would be a longitudinal study showcasing reliance on spirituality for making pivotal decisions in higher education. How those decisions ultimately affected morale, institution-wide success, and even enrollment when compared to other similar institutions would be good information for any leader to have.

Leaders of institution must ask themselves if their institution itself applies spirituality to decision-making, or if those who run it do. Individuals make up the whole, so common sense dictates the answer. Why would we want to hire individuals to run our institutions who did not adhere to the values the participants spoke to?

Many two-year colleges within MnSCU include the word *community* in their title. The idea of spirituality working in people's lives breeds the notion of building

community through its implied acceptance from the numinous to the concrete. In an attempt to broaden the notion of acceptance, leaders should call for an implementation of training for administrators, staff and faculty on world religions, their prayer forms and ethical codes. This would enable each college or university to best meet its students where they are, with sensitivity.

In keeping with the idea of community, institutions need to embrace the concept of ritual. Rituals of many types are important in churches, families, communities, and institutions of higher education. Our system needs to invite reflection about the rituals that impact the college/university community: first day, finals, graduations, times of day recognized as sacred to certain populations, etc. A better understanding, or even an acknowledgement of another's rituals would demystify our perceived differences and help create an atmosphere where learning can be central and our personal understanding of the spirit doesn't need to be judged or defended.

Leadership ethics needs to play a fundamental role in the hiring and on-boarding of new leaders. A useful tool for these, and all leaders, would be a compilation of best ethical practices on how some frustrating situations have been handled. These might include faculty unions, dealing with difficult people, how to effectively maintain privacy, and engaging in difficult conversations.

A leadership segment on the role of reflection and appreciation in governance needs to be added to the cadre of workshops available to leaders. It is conceivable that a closed blog or chatroom for leaders could be made available to discuss ideas related to the incorporation of spirituality, how to reflect on decisions, strategies for communication, and doing the right thing. Not a day goes by without the chance to make

a good decision. The professional banter a blog of this sort would generate would help leaders celebrate the good decisions they have made, making our system a better place to work.

Finally, future research is needed on spirituality to address more of the non-Christian population within the MnSCU system. While the group of participants included some leaders of color, one Buddhist, and one atheist, it was not, regrettably, representative of the wide range of ethnicities and belief backgrounds comprising this larger group. As the student population continues to become more diverse, MnSCU must employ leaders who mirror the student population's ethnicities and varied understandings of what brings meaning to their lives.

Spirituality must not be ignored when addressing the aforementioned issues. It must be recognized for the powerful impact it can hold for people of all backgrounds and positions. It must attain a place at the table where decisions are pondered and issues are solved. No person should be expected to take on the role of leader without an arsenal of tools to be successful, and spirituality provides the breath necessary to complete the task.

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Appendix A

### INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

September 24, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Jeff Judge. I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership program at Minnesota State University, Mankato under the direction of Dr. Scott Wurdinger. He is the Principal Investigator. This is an invitation to participate in a research study for a doctoral dissertation. The title of the dissertation is Spirituality in Higher Education: A Narrative Analysis. You may contact Dr. Wurdinger at (507) 389-2919 or [scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu](mailto:scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu) about any concerns you have regarding this study. You may also contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at (507) 389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) with any question about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The IRB# is 805667.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time during the interview you decide that you would prefer not to answer a question or discontinue the study, you are completely free to do so. Your decision whether or not to participate or to discontinue the interview will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. You will not receive compensation for your time. The identity of participants, as well as the names of the institutions where they work, will be kept confidential. All information will be kept private by the staff of this study. All information will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Normandale Community College. It can be viewed only by authorized research staff members. No names will be recorded other than the consent forms.

Your participation will consist of an individual interview and will take about one (1) hour of your time. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions relating to your own understanding of spirituality. The goal of this study is to understand the role spirituality plays (or does not play) in decision-making for leaders within MnSCU. The number of participants will be between 9 and 12 individuals. It is my hope to conduct these interviews during fall, 2015, and I will gladly travel to you for your convenience. Interviews will be audio recorded and erased after the study is completed.

Spirituality is a private matter and discussing it may bring up memories of childhood or times when you may have struggled with spirituality. However, the risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life. By examining your own understanding of spirituality, you might choose to include it as one of the tools to make decisions in your current position.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please contact me at [jeff.judge@normandale.edu](mailto:jeff.judge@normandale.edu). My direct line is (952) 358-8585.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey F. Judge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J".

Jeffrey F. Judge  
Doctoral Student: Educational Leadership  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

## Appendix B

**CONSENT FORM**

Study title: Spirituality in Higher Education: A Narrative Analysis of its Use By  
Leaders  
Within Minnesota State Colleges and Universities  
IRBNet#: 805667

My name is Jeff Judge, and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This is a research study conducted through individual interviews. We invite you to participate in the study, which will involve leaders within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to stop at any time without negative consequences. Simply give the word and I will stop the interview. No records will be kept if the participant chooses to end the interview. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship to Minnesota State University, Mankato. You have a right to obtain a copy of the consent form. I can provide this for you at any time. Please contact me at the number or email listed in the next paragraph.

This research project is being directed by Dr. Scott Wurdinger. He is the Principal Investigator. You can contact Dr. Wurdinger at (507) 389-2919 or [scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu](mailto:scott.wurdinger@mnsu.edu) about any concerns you have regarding this study. I may be reached at (952) 358-8585 or [jeff.judge@normandale.edu](mailto:jeff.judge@normandale.edu). You may also contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at (507) 389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) with any question about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This study is being done as part of a doctoral dissertation. The goal of this study is to understand the role spirituality plays (or does not play) in decision-making for leaders within MnSCU. The number of participants will be between 9 and 12 individuals. The time commitment for this study will be one (1) hour spent in an individual interview. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions relating to your own understanding of spirituality. Interviews will be audio recorded and erased after the study is completed. Your participation in this study includes being audio recorded. I will contact you as soon as the study is complete to let you know that the recordings have been erased. These recordings will be transcribed and analyzed and coded for common themes and ideas. You will not receive compensation for your time.

**Possible Risks:** Spirituality is a private matter and discussing it may bring up memories of childhood or times when you may have struggled with spirituality. However, the risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life.

**Possible Benefits:** By examining your own understanding of spirituality, you might choose to include it as one of the tools to make decisions in your current position.

The identity of participants, as well as the names of the institutions where they work, will be kept confidential. There will be no identifying markers within the dissertation to trace back to any individual. All information will be stored in a locked file cabinet at Normandale Community College. It can be viewed only by the researcher. No names will be recorded other than the consent forms.

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ **IRB# 805667**

## Appendix C

**Transcriptions of Research Interviews**

## Interview 1 (RH)

At any rate, you had a chance to look ahead at the questions.

Yeah.

So, maybe we can just start at the top and anything you want to add or modify, just say so.

So just for my keeping myself on task, how to you define spirituality in your life.

*1. How do you define spirituality in your life?*

It's kind of more of the contemporary way, not necessarily aligned with any organized religion, or faith or any denomination. I guess more inclusive would be a better way. I would say it could be more about just centering oneself. Personal growth. Sort of in line with pursuing that truth whatever it might be.

Truth. That's an interesting choice. I like that. I like that. And I also appreciate that you brought in the word secular because I believe there are a lot of misconceptions about spirituality mixing with religiosity. And that is not what I've discovered in my reading. Anything you want to add?

Yeah. I would say too that spirituality is more action oriented. It's a process. It's more intentional and it's more a result of searching. It's not so much a thing as much as an action. It that makes sense.

*2. Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

I thought about this one for a while. And I guess the best way that I can think of it is just believing in that power of capability in each person and personal growth that we all can aspire toward something greater and through purposeful, intentional action we can better ourselves. And so that is I feel, a lot of what my job is. I'm in the position as dean where I'm trying to help people grow. I like to mentor folks who are around me. Students are obviously engaged in that process of trying to better themselves. And so I wouldn't necessarily say the growth is spiritual, although it might be in some ways for some students. But it's just that ability of helping someone maybe find their own truth. Now I sound like some 70's hippie, but find maybe aspects of themselves that they didn't realize



or discover. Sort of passion or joys that help deepen and enrich themselves. So I know I'm speaking in more general terms.

You mentioned intentionality. Would you equate spirituality as something intentional?

Yes. Some of my most spiritual moments were maybe when I was hiking or backpacking or something like that where my goal was to kind of get away and purify myself and find some peace of mind where I could think clearly and be at peace and balance. And I have to be intentional about that. Especially in the positions we are in. We are so easily distracted. We're doing too many things at once and it's almost impossible to gain that clarity without intentionally trying to seek it out.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions?*

I think it's possible. I don't know if it's preferable. I think of those moments when they are divorced as when I'm not really thoughtfully responding to them.

I love that: reacting instead of responding.

And that's taken me a long time. When I first started I was copied on a lot of emails. I don't know why. And I felt some compelling need to respond. I needed to insert myself. And I've since realized I need to take the things back, think it through, and gain a more purposeful approach to the conversation is usually a much healthier, much more positive result.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I think it would depend on that definition of spirituality. Blankly throwing out spirituality I could see some people getting a little suspicious and nervous about that as if I'm filtering it through some religious lens versus them understanding that it's more about reflecting and meditation upon a situation in hopes of better understanding it and gaining clarity. I think then they might appreciate it. So I guess it's just the way that I would frame it.

And it depends on the individual?

Yes. I just had an interesting encounter a few weeks ago. I had a friend who I think of as a friend, who, through life choices has never gotten married or had kids. I have two kids and in a conversation I mentioned them. He sent an email saying, "Why do you talk about your kids so much? Not everybody wants to hear about your kids." And I was really thrown off because I don't feel as though I talk about my kids that much. But it

forced me to kind of reflect on that perspective angle and how life situations might color the way people perceive my actions or words. And so I've tried to be more conscious about it. I ran into her this past weekend and I had my kids with me. I didn't go through the trouble of introducing them because I didn't want to make her uncomfortable. But I think it speaks to what you are talking about people's perceptions and how that might alter their interpretation of the situation.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

I don't see spirituality as the same thing as church. In fact you see a lot more books now that talk specifically about spirituality which I think is interesting. It's just a component like a balance, like personal growth. Approaching things in a more pragmatic way. I think we live in a time when, and certainly it might depend upon region, but I did some of my undergraduate in Oklahoma, it was different. Some of the rural parts of MN people would have a different way of responding to that question.

We have such a huge difference of religions on campus. What might be over-the-top for one group might be overlooked by another group. That answer has grown over my lifetime. Philosophy is one of the areas I'm over. We try to get students to interact with other religions and cultures.

Interview 2 (EI)

*1. How do you define spirituality in your life?*

In my life? I think I know that the term spirituality can have so many definitions of who you are. And part of me resists or I'm a little, there are some elements of how this is being used that are not very appealing to me at all. I think there are a lot of things being done in the name of spirituality that frighten me. So I'm a little bit skeptical. I do know that spirituality plays a role in my life not only because I was a pastor's kid. As an adult now, I do go regularly to church. I know it guides my interactions. I think it defines how I lead. It sort of seeking of some kind of inner faith and truth, justice, to serve people. My job is a calling. It guides me. I seek the same in other people to thrive their inner core. Something that grounds them. That's why I believe in forgiveness and in second chances. I believe in saving face. So I think it is all what's my sense of spirituality.

*2. Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

I believe first of all that I constantly am aware of mindful or seek to know what my impact is on others. Is my compass in the right place. To be an authentic leader you need to be doing that self-evaluation constantly. And by doing that I end up being a better leader. I don't believe my title makes me a leader. People will follow me not because I'm the dean, but because of who I am. And I think that's the heart of it. Leadership is an awesome responsibility. I can't take it for granted. It's my journey to walk with others and doing what I can do to help others along that journey. One of my first weeks, my assistant, who I inherited from the previous dean, comes to me with a paper from the business office. And he is shaking because he thinks he is going to be scolded. What's going on? He explains what happened. We you can fill it out and how you are trying to stop it from happening. I'll initial it and I'm sure that will be acceptable for the business office. He was empowered and he took pride in what he was doing. He needed to lead his own actions. From then on, he always had suggestions. He was a different person. I allowed him to build his inner faith. No disappointment. This is reality. It's forgiveness. I also need to allow and forgive myself.

*3. Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

If your sense of spirituality is behaviors, yes. That's not how I do it. This is my work. It's part of my core. There are moments I'm not proud of myself with mean thoughts. I'm truly frustrated and those are the moments when I'm the weakest. In those moments I'm removed from it.

*4. When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I still struggle and I put a label on it. If I put a label on it, it makes me nervous. I don't think there will be a discord in that sense. Some may be surprised. I'm sure there are some who never think in those terms. That would be an alien thought. I'm not sure how to respond to that.

*5. How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

To me that's sort of just by being spiritual or leading with that makeup, I think one should do that. You can do that without a specific religion.

Interview 3 (MH)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

I was a preacher's kid. So I think faith has always been part of my life. It's always been there. During college I went to a Jesuit college and that challenged my faith. I think spirituality has always guided my decisions and always been there. I can't imagine it not being a part of my life. So when I see people who find it later in life I'm almost jealous because they lived without it and then they have it. I've always had a moral guide. I've always had it.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

I think as a leader it totally forms the way I treat people. Mine is Christianity. I feel I have to lead my life in a Christian way with fairness and compassion. But also balancing. I'm not out there imposing. I'm a caring person. That reflects back on my leadership. I have a moral compass. I handle discipline as a learning experiences. We talk about consequences not as a punishment.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

My response is absolutely yes. No matter what you come into it can be counter to your faith. If it's the law, definitely I can separate it. I'm a rule follower. Like the bakers against gay marriage, I'd just make the cake. I don't feel I run into things that often that are against my faith.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I don't go around saying I'm a preacher's kid. Some people say that that explains it when they find out. I hope what I try to portray comes back to me. Sometimes in education we are pretty liberal. I'm more conservative.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

It's about how you put it into practice. I don't think it's a church and state issue. It's about moral decisions. Oh he's treating me like a Christian.... No he's treating me like a good person. I used to work in a Catholic school. I just don't think the way I use it could interfere. I'm not Catholic and there was always the check against me that I didn't belong. I couldn't advance so I went back to school.

Interview 4 (KH)

*1 How do you define spirituality in your life?*

I really appreciate getting these ahead of time. What makes it important. I am a practicing Christian. For me, spirituality is driven by the holy spirit which is part of the trinity of God, Jesus, and the holy spirit. To define it further is to live a life that is filled with the motives and intentions and the actions to serve that trinity as communicated in the bible. Part of that trinity is based in faith, conscious mind and body, practice. So what is faith? This is a good exercise. In Hebrews it's being certain of what you hope for and certain of what you can't see. That's faith. A soul is a mind, free will, and a heart. Practice is putting that into action, like reading and interjecting those into my daily life.

*2 Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

It really is an approach. It is a foundation for decision making. It is a framework in which to take problems to take problems. Ethical decision making is part of that. I thought about that role. The action of that brings me to see things with kindness, empathy. It's holistic. It makes me consistent, to be mindful of my actions with other people in a particular position. I come back to those principles in higher ed. How I embed them is in the curiosity of learning. I don't live in a dictatorial state. When I have conflicts, like the union, I ask what is the root of how I approach things. They are spiritually based. If I had my mind made up before, wasn't conscious. I was processing this question as a result of a recent meeting. The meeting went well and people left with things they were going to work on. There was no tension. That looks different. I can't control that grievance reps actions. I've been called names. I said I'm not going to tolerate that. That confidence is about respecting self. That also goes back to spirituality. My tone has a direct impact.

*3 Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

No. Clarity of values helps me choose where I want to work. My values are more in line with a two-year institution. I've had lots of job offers. My values work here. I've constantly gone back to those values and principles. I'm going to work where it reflects me. Students work the same way. If I'm overly firm, why have the meeting? The learning curve is to understand the problem. Empathy and kindness are essential. I use those same principles. I've gotten better and better.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I don't think they'd be surprised at all. Most know that I'm spiritual. I am principled in these areas. If they thought if I collaborate, do I praise people, do I have a good work ethic, am I optimistic. Moving forward. It's all about your mindset. You are calm. You don't jump to conclusions. You are not biased. You find ways to seek and build real feedback. In authentic leadership, servant leadership, those all have the same principles of spirituality. They are all the same.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

It think it's hard to say that it interferes because if it is imbedded in your values, how can you say it's separate? Right? I mean, that almost divorcing who you are and how you behave.

Interview 5 (LE)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

I don't find myself being religious. I grew up Lutheran and converted to Catholic. I was misguided by the monks at St. Johns. My arriving there is a recognition of knowing that there is something greater to consider. Almost I have a philosophical bend to Buddhism. It frames that we are all part of a framework.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

We've been in a budget bind. One thing I've done well is managing courses. I'm upfront saying what we can offer adjuncts, like in English comp. I'd rather be generous later than offer them too much. It might sting up front. At first, they didn't like it. I think it's about having that compassion so they can look at other institutions. We are part of a larger whole. Being a safe environment, I take all the extraneous burdens. We have a student complaint process. We are very legalistic. I'm trying to bring that compassion aspect. It's always received as a punch in the gut. It's not about you. It hurts egos. It always come up as you are in the wrong. I ensure we have the practices that make sure we comply with the law.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

I don't think so. Anywhere you sit, even if you are not spiritual, you have some sort of core values. Those are imbedded. It's easy to remove religion, but not spirituality.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I think some people would be put off at first. It depends on the conversation. It's not problematic that that is how I work. It wasn't until you asked to do this that I put any sort of reflective thought into how I made decisions. I believe I was doing it subconsciously. I have different roles is the grounding principle. If I had time I think it would be received well.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

I see the slippery slope. I wouldn't apply Catholic doctrine. There are a lot of checks and balances in higher education that keep us from sliding down. Hopefully the relationships I've built mean I have not made it problematic. That's my world. I'm not



showy. I'm not outwardly emotional person. I don't wear it visibly. I move through the school undercover. I don't talk about that stuff.

Interview 6 (PE)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

So are you looking for an actual definition? For me it is very personal. It's not something I speak about. It's something I've struggled with on and off in my life. It's a very important part of my life. I don't think a lot of people know that about me. That's kind of the way I want it. I find it to be emotional.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

At first there's that initial feeling that that's not appropriate. I'm glad I had the questions ahead of time. I see it playing a part in how I lead, like the assumptions I have. There are more sides to every story. I think that comes from my connection to spirituality and to the church because it's hard to separate those. It's all interwoven. It was my dad's expectation that we were all raised in the church. He passed away six years ago and for a long time I couldn't go back because it was so hard for me. So emotionally draining that it was easy not to go. My daughter told me she wanted to go back to church. She was confirmed this past May. Because of that it is who I am and you have to look at the reasons why someone is doing what they are doing. We have to assume that people are coming from a place where they want to be part of something.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

On the surface, yes. I think that's what's expected. When you really think about it, no. It's unfortunate we don't take the time to talk about those things. I think that's ok. The hard part is that...people want to be good by my spirituality. Don't people have the right to act the way they choose?

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I don't think they would be surprised. We are trying to take time to talk about our values. People have a hard time separating their day-to-day tasks from the bigger mission of the college. They have asked for more conversation about purpose. They would not be surprised and they would support it, truthfully. If someone brings it up. I treat it like it's private for other people too. Some might actually be encouraged. I wrestle with tough decisions. We have a student who went through the discipline process who made some threats. I don't know what's going on with him, but I had to make tough decisions. In some way I think my staff would be heartened.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

I disagree with that. I'm not sure how you use it. This is a personal tool for development. You are not making your decision saying everyone has to be Christian. I don't know how it could interfere unless you are trying to make people think like you.

Interview 7 (MP)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

It is a way I interact with other people based upon how I want them to interact with me. It is not tied to a religion. It's tied to my basic belief of doing good to others as you'd like them to do unto you. I know that's tied to a religious thing we learned as children. It's tied to karma that what you give is what you get.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

I always want to do the best job I can and I always want to make people feel good. I think in my role I try to lead by example. I seek opportunities where I can influence others with my mindset on doing good and modeling behavior doing no harm. In MnSCU I have joined committees and introduced topic that make people uncomfortable. It needs to be discussed because it has to be discussed. MN nice: let's talk about the race part. People were shocked and didn't want to talk about it. Well, you have to talk about it because how else can you interact without having these honest conversations. We try to understand why the mn nice is made to be bad. I have tried to introduce that understanding into my leadership role. Mindset: it's a new buzzword

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

No. Not for me. Any action I take I have to be at peace with. I know there will be an impact emotional, financial, I have to balance and weigh that with the institution. There is an upset to the people. I need to know that I've done everything I can. When you get to that point it becomes corporate – meaning the dollar. I don't want to operate like that way.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

Some would understand it because they are operation from the same place. For those on the outside may not see that. They may not agree with it. If they are coming from a place where spirituality doesn't play into it, then they might think she shouldn't be doing that. There's no way to deny who I am as a leader.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

I don't believe there's a separation of church and state. On our money it says, "In God We Trust." That is the federal government, state, all of that. God is part of the church. It's a Christian view so it's not taking into account others. Whatever you operate from: spiritual, agnostic, atheist, plays out how you interact with people. I have this Catholic upbringing, but wayward, it's a part of me. I can't deny a part of me and be a leader. It's not authentic. People won't believe you because you are not being true.

Interview 8 (KM)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

When I was growing up, I was raised Catholic. I got married in a Catholic church and went into the Lutheran faith. For me, for a long time, spirituality was church. As I've gotten older, and as I've seen things in the church that I don't like, the idea of spirituality has changed for me. I still am a very big believer in God. I want to make him happy. I'm not perfect. I need to have a positive direction and uplift others. God put us here to love, not to judge. I can have great dialogue and I have to love and support.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

Leadership is a triangular model. It doesn't work in practice. My job is to reverse the triangle and support everyone I supervise and live that model. I have to live and support them. I'm going to be ok if I support them.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

No, and I hope nobody would want me to. If I remove that, I wouldn't do a good job. Viewing spirituality as church means you would have to. Now, I don't have to and don't want to.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

I hope they would be supportive. I want to support and uplift them. It's not about the God I worship. Sometimes the decisions we make are not in alignment with our spirituality, but as long as we support them, I hope.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

I don't think there needs to be interfering. It's like the Golden Rule. Using it is an aid. Using religion to help make your decisions would be wrong.

Interview 9 (LM)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

So a little bit about my background. I was brought up in a universalist church with very eclectic and inclusive. Puts burden on you. I'm not active in the church now. For me, there is the layer of trying to figure out the truth of things and what's meaningful. The biggest thing is valuing people and their inherent worth. This is also appreciating the natural world. I love being outside – it feeds my soul. It is all interconnected. Related to the worth of people is a belief that people can change and grow – that there's a potential for everyone.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

Valuing diversities is the biggest for me. You have people who have different work styles. There are different strengths. Sometimes there are collisions. I did a good job making sure everyone has value. Our team is stronger because of the different approaches you have. Respecting both. Hiring someone who didn't fit the stereotype of admin assistant. The other one didn't. She has a degree. I had a sense she'd bring diversity. That's an example of value-based. It's not the safest decision. Another person was in a different position and I always thought this guys has potential. A part of that is valuing and seeing people's potential. Generally not, but it depends on the kind of decision you are making. If it affects the mission, I think not. I think there are degrees. Buying garbage cans – I might want to do something green.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

No. Not if it's part of who you are and how you think. I don't think I'd want to.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

It's a word that's got power in it. I don't know. People interpret it differently. I think if you said do I operate with a value system, they'd say yes. People would not be surprised.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

A church is different from spirituality. Everyone brings a value base. If you were talking about it within MnSCU you wouldn't want to use the word. You'd want to find something else. There's a profound responsibility – you can make good things happen for people if they feel honored.



Interview 10 (AU)

1. *How do you define spirituality in your life?*

It's a connection to a higher power to help me govern my life and those I'm responsible for. There are certain texts I rely on and certain people I rely on to help assist in my particular journey of spiritual growth. I am talking about Christianity: I believe in God and Jesus Christ. I am not only the leader of my family not only in financial matters, but first and foremost in spiritual matters. I am able to oversee my family so that they may be saved and have hope in the resurrection.

2. *Focusing on your position in MnSCU, How do you see spirituality playing a part in how you interact and make decisions? And do you have any examples you could share?*

Left to my own devices, who knows what I might do? I believe everyone has a moral compass. There are rules and regulations for other things. It's just natural to have this lead me in this particular position. You can't just drive any speed. There is a limit. Green means go and red means stop. We have rules to govern ourselves. I feel I'm a responsible driver, but sometimes I speed. The speed limit is a reminder and the officer on the side of the road is a reminder. So, our lives are set up that way. Even with my inner moral compass, being a person who is Christian, I think of people as my brothers and sisters. Jesus did the same with the disciples. I try and I fail, but I try as much as possible. An example, I listen often a little bit harder who talk about spirituality. I can bring this up or initiate conversations about that, but often students ask me about my spirituality. It allows me to form a trusting relationships. The moment they find out that I'm a believer, anything I say after that is gold. This supersedes being a person of color. You also get compliance because they know what it means.

3. *Is it possible, in your opinion, to remove spirituality from your decision-making process or your regular actions.*

In how I treat you, impossible. In the decisions I make, yes. In our relationships, no. You are trying to be a noble man, so I need to treat the person this way. You may never know why I treat you in a certain way. When it comes to making decisions, I follow the rules and regulations of the college.

4. *When you think about all the people with whom you interact, and oversee, how do you think they would react knowing that spirituality played a part in your decision-making?*

The vast majority would say it makes sense. I've told people who are atheist, what is it you appreciate about me? They mention it's because you are a believer.

5. *How would you respond to the idea that using spirituality as a tool for decision-making interferes with that separation of church and state?*

Look in the papers. With everything we block, it's impossible not to.