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## THE INTEGRITY OF MINISTRY: COMMUNICATIVE THEOLOGY AND THE LEADERSHIP OF CONGREGATIONS

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**Abstract:** According to law professor Stephen Carter, “Integrity...is a kind of wholeness, and most religions teach that God calls us to an undivided life in accordance with divine command.” If we are to possess integrity as congregational leaders—construing integrity as wholeness, congruence of act and faith, humility, purity of heart, and correspondence between our “private” and “public” selves—then we must engage in on-going theological reflection. A robust Christian doctrine of sin not only doubts the wisdom of entrusting a group’s fate to the unchecked will of a single leader, it also calls into question the *wisdom* of *seeking wisdom* in the mind of any lone individual. If our leadership is an expression of faith in the perceptions and hopes of others, if, indeed, our leadership is ultimately an expression of faith in the God whose knowledge and wisdom are beyond all human understanding, then our leadership is also an expression of trust in the collective wisdom of the congregation and considerable distrust of our own partial and flawed perceptions.

### A Case in Point

The phone call came from an elder in the Canyon View Church.<sup>1</sup> She was active on her congregation’s governing board (being Presbyterian, it is called the session). She was deeply distressed. Her pastor had recently said to the governing board that the church was

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<sup>1</sup> This vignette has been fictionalized both to emphasize the issues at stake and to protect the identity of the church and leaders, lay and ordained, involved. The author wishes to express his gratitude to David Forney and the peer reviewers who made a number of extremely helpful suggestions with reference to how the theme of integrity could extend throughout this essay.