

ABSTRACT

ROMANS 12 LIVING: OLDER ADULTS AND THE CALL TO SERVE

by

Jeffrey Arthur Hosmer

North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, is a flourishing congregation in a burgeoning retirement community. With a congregational median age over 70 years, the challenge is to sustain effective discipleship with older adults. In particular, some older members seem to edge toward a spectator faith, eager to attend worship and receive ministry from the church but less inclined to engage in ministry themselves. This project considers how (1) to promote the perception that Christian vocation or calling extends well into advanced adulthood, (2) to encourage the members' recognition of their capacity to serve, and (3) to spur members to pursue active engagement in ministry. These three underlying and interrelated questions—calling, capacity, and commitment to serve—generate the purpose for this research project.

The ministry intervention was a seven-week sermon series and congregation-wide focus on Romans 12 living with four accompanying shared practices involving prayer, remembering the baptism covenant, video testimonies, and discernment questions. Preintervention and postintervention surveys examined the calling, capacity, and commitment to ministry among older adults, as well as the impact of the Romans 12 series. With over nine hundred questionnaire respondents, and fourteen participants in a follow-up focus group, the research probed the correlation between aging and Christian serving.

The data helped to confirm and quantify several suppositions for ministry with older adults. The research also uncovered dynamics that impact effectiveness at engaging older persons in volunteer roles. First, the sense of calling declines with age. This finding is nuanced because even the 85+-age group affirms overwhelmingly that serving is an essential part of the Christian faith, and many commit to serve as their calling diminishes. However, the individual's reported sense of calling diminishes with the advance of years. Second, the perception of capacity declines with age. Many older adults believe they are unable to volunteer because of personal limitations and circumstances. Those feelings of incapacity increase with age and predominate the 85+-age group. Third, ages 65-84 encompass the peak years for volunteering. These years represent a stage of life when family and career obligations are generally reduced while capacity is strong. Persons in this age group play a huge role in the mission of God through the church and beyond. Fourth, a surprisingly large number of older adults feel underutilized in the church. They have abilities and time to offer but are not sure how or where to serve. They are waiting for someone to ask them or to receive a clear, calling signal from God. Finally, the Romans 12 message and framework provide an effective way to promote serving and voluntarism. A *therefore* mentality links serving to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. It integrates serving and faith in a way that reduces the sense of duty and obligation, emphasizing instead a joyful, living response and self-offering. This emphasis creates a healthier environment to enhance a sense of calling, capacity, and commitment.

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When I began work on the Doctor of Ministry at Asbury, my wife Bobbi and I were making frequent trips to college soccer and football games to cheer for our twin daughter and son who were halfway through college. Now we do not have any children still under the age of thirty. Then all three of our children were single. Now all three are

married, and we are grandparents. All three of them—David, Rachel, and Jordan—and their spouses have become the cheering section for Dad to finish this project and his degree.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, connects to the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), a denomination with a membership median age of 59. According to the Pew Research Center, the PCUSA has the second highest median age of all denominations and religious groupings in America (Lipka). The median age of North Lake Presbyterian Church (NLPC) is higher still. The NLPC congregation, chartered in 1992, has grown up with The Villages, a nearby age-restricted community. The Villages requires at least one resident to be 55 years of age or older, and it does not permit full-time residents under the age of nineteen. The migration of retirees into the area for the climate, recreational facilities, and community ambiance resulted in The Villages being designated the fastest growing city in America for two recent, consecutive years (Rocco). The community has more than doubled in size since 2010. Reflecting that explosive growth, NLPC has slightly more than fifteen hundred members and averages nearly fourteen hundred adults in Sunday worship. According to the congregational statistical report filed at the beginning of 2016, 81.9 percent of members are 65 years of age or older.

NLPC leadership desires to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28), not just mature in years. Although the sheer number of attendees provides a remarkable pool of volunteers, the congregational culture does not feature a widespread engagement in Christian service. A core group of volunteers scrambles with the staff to sustain the basic needs for Sunday worship, fellowship events, education, and local mission

initiatives. However, volunteers are stretched thin because of a lack of involvement among the attendees. Frequently, statements related to age, or stage of life, deflect efforts to recruit volunteers. Many older newcomers arrive with extensive church backgrounds but are reluctant to get involved in another church. A common refrain is, “I’ve already done my church thing,” or, “I moved down here for the recreation and leisure life.” Indeed, the biking, pickleball, and 621 holes of golf in The Villages predominate, along with hundreds of other social clubs and entertainment options. Furthermore, some maintain, “I’m too old to contribute anything at this point in my life.” Others assume, “Someone else will step up to take care of that in this large church.” The problem is the gap between attendance in worship and engagement in service.

Nominal commitment is not unique to any congregation or denomination, but the age factor at NLPC seems to weigh heavily in the dearth of volunteers. Most would acknowledge a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, perhaps a relationship that has been tenderized by the aging process and an increasing awareness of mortality. Most seem quite sincere about their connection to God and quite enthusiastic about the Sunday morning experience. They voice strong support and gratitude but also appear content to consume the worship and other ministries of NLPC without offering the leadership or volunteer hours that a robust congregational life requires.

Exceptions certainly exist, and NLPC could not have reached this level of growth without extraordinary volunteer efforts. However, the NLPC culture does not support or promote ministry engagement by all members. The congregational system seems to have accommodated the assumption that an aging membership will not serve as extensively and effectively as needed. Therefore, the church faces three interrelated issues. First, how

NLPC can promote the perception that Christian vocation or calling extends well into advanced adulthood. Second, how NLPC can encourage the members' recognition of their continuing capacity to serve. Third, how NLPC can motivate and engage members in active ministry?

This project tested an approach to cultivating a servant discipleship developed out of chapter twelve of Paul's epistle to the Romans. The twelfth chapter beckons all readers to respond to what God has already done through Jesus Christ, which Paul painstakingly describes in the first eleven chapters. The shift in style and purpose is marked at the outset by the conjunction *therefore*. Marva J. Dawn in her book-length treatment of the chapter observes, "The word *therefore* at the beginning of Romans 12 invites us to connect what Paul is about to say with what he has already said.... In fact, this one word is the hinge between all of Paul's comments about God's love in Romans 1-11 (the doctrinal formulations) and about the Christian community's love for one another in Romans 12-16 (the ethical exhortations)" (2-3). Romans 12 seeks to form a community established in response to divine mercies, a vital covenant relationship with God who has already acted decisively on behalf of his people. Because God has been *there for* his people in a loving, saving, abiding way, Paul appeals to Christian brothers and sisters to worship God with a living sacrifice of themselves. The believer's living sacrifice is an active, *therefore* response to the mercies of God.

Paul then proceeds with a series of imperatives. Chapter 12 provides a remarkable breadth of instruction for disciples concerning their relationship with God, with one another, and with persons outside their faith community. His readers are urged to becoming a living response to the grace of God, a *therefore community*. God has

intervened for all in the person and work of Jesus Christ; therefore, his disciples will seek to live in response to his intervention. Paul points backward to the motivation and forward with specific directives and an impressive ecclesiology. This combination makes Romans 12 particularly helpful as a framework for developing disciples, for community formation, and for encouraging servanthood.

Purpose

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement among older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, as a result of a seven-week sermon series and congregational focus on Romans 12 presented over a period of two months.

Research Questions

This purpose required the exploration of four questions. The first two questions provided a comparison of the participants' overall responses before and following the Romans 12 study. The third question explored possible correlations to age and other intervening variables among the participants. The fourth question examined the impact or effectiveness of specific components of the ministry intervention.

Research Question #1

What perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry exist among the study participants prior to the seven-week study?

Research Question #2

What changes occur in the participants' perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry by the conclusion of the seven-week study?

Research Question #3

How do the perception of Christian calling, the recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry correlate to age or other intervening variables among the participants?

Research Question #4

What elements of the seven-week study (sermon series and shared practices) were most impactful in cultivating an active, serving faith?

Definition of Terms

The investigation of the impact of the Romans 12 study focused on the attitudes and behaviors regarding Christian service.

Calling

Calling refers to an awareness and inclination to fulfill a vocational purpose as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is possible to function in a church or mission volunteer role without a sense of discipleship or calling. Sociological factors (e.g., companionship or connection with a family member or friend) can motivate serving. However, calling or vocation is the theological foundation for Christian servanthood.

Capacity

Capacity denotes a disciple's comprehensive ability to serve in terms of time, skills, experience, and personal resources. Capacity correlates best to the theological

concept of grace, the ways in which a disciple is *gifted* or endowed by God with the ability to serve.

Commitment

Commitment indicates an active and intentional engagement in a serving role. The volunteer role could be within the ministry framework of NLPC or with another local mission organization. The role could even be as a caregiver for a family member or neighbor whose needs warrant a major servant-assistant response. The key element of this commitment is an active and intentional engagement in a serving role as an expression of Christian discipleship or following Jesus.

Ministry Intervention

The ministry intervention was a seven-week sermon series and congregation-wide focus on Romans 12 living with four accompanying shared practices. The entire series was predicated on the *therefore* shift from theology to practice at the beginning of Romans 12. The series repeatedly invited and challenged the congregation to live in response or “in view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1). The sequence of the messages was

1. Therefore,
2. Live as an offering to God,
3. Live as an instrument of grace,
4. Live as members of one another,
5. Live as a spiritual fountain,
6. Live as a blessing to others, and
7. Live as a force for good.

In conjunction with the sermon series, the NLPC congregation shared four practices for the duration of the intervention. First, a simple *therefore* prayer (with a sense of calling, capacity, and commitment) was composed, printed on a bookmark, and distributed to the entire congregation for daily prayer. Second, each worship service during the series included a moment that allowed listeners to remember their baptism, their calling to serve as a part of the covenant community in Christ. Third, each worship service included a brief video testimony from a member of the congregation speaking about his or her experience in a particular serving role. Fourth, all attendees were asked to establish a small circle of discernment partners, two or three trusted friends or family with whom they would discuss weekly questions about their serving capacity and role, “so that you may discern what is the will of God” (Rom. 12:2, NRSV).

Context

The broadest context for this study was the landscape of North American mainline denominations with aging congregations. The central, immediate context of this study was North Lake Presbyterian Church, planted in 1992 in Lady Lake, Florida, approximately forty-five minutes northwest of Orlando. Because of its proximity to The Villages, an age-restricted, master-planned community that has grown from a few thousand to well over a hundred thousand in population, the congregation grew rapidly and reflected the older adult population that moved into the vicinity. NLPC is comprised mostly of retirees who had the means to relocate at the end of their careers. Even with a contemporary service designed to attract a younger population, the vast majority of regular attendees are in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. A typical Sunday also includes a fair number in their nineties.

Like many Florida churches, the attendance at NLPC swells in the winter months and shrinks in the summer. The attendance from January to Easter ranges between 1,600 and 1,800 with many nonmember visitors from northern states. The summer attendance hovers around 1,200 while many members and regular attendees travel north to avoid the heat and humidity. Spring and fall represent the mid-range of 1,400-1,500. The three services show a relatively even distribution of attendance. Two traditional services at 8:15 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. offer worship in a formal sanctuary that seats approximately 1,200. The contemporary service in the fellowship hall consistently represents about one-third of the overall attendance. The message and focus are essentially the same at all three services. However, the music styles and instruments, the formality of dress, the inclusion of children, as well as the worship spaces themselves differentiate the traditional and contemporary services.

NLPC grew rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s but leveled off and declined slightly in the past five years, despite continuing growth in the surrounding population. The church completed the most recent of three major building campaigns three years prior to the study. The church added a multipurpose fellowship hall with flexible seating for seven hundred and fifty in worship, converted a large courtyard into a central lobby and welcoming space, and added an immense, fully equipped kitchen. The kitchen was necessary to support Operation Homebound, a local mission to prepare and deliver more than two hundred meals daily in the community. Operation Homebound functions every single weekday of the year, including holidays. NLPC also owns and operates on weekdays a food pantry, strategically located in a neighborhood slightly more than a mile from the church campus. The missional footprint of NLPC is large in the community, but

the volunteer workforce struggles to keep up with the expectations that have grown with the programs.

Methodology

The research in this study was an explanatory, mixed-method design, including both quantitative and qualitative data. The nonexperimental quantitative design yielded numeric data from survey questions seeking specific, measurable information about the impact of the intervention upon individuals. The quantitative data addressed research questions #1 and #2 concerning the preintervention and postintervention attitudes and behaviors of the participants with regard to Christian servanthood. The statistics were analyzed for comparisons and relationships among select groups within the sample. They also provided data for Question #3 and the possible factors or intervening variables that could affect attitudes and behaviors toward serving. The qualitative data from a postintervention focus group provided answers for Question #4, attempting to determine the impact or effectiveness of distinct components of the Romans 12 focus.

Participants

The population was the group of worship attendees at North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, during the fall of 2016. The participants included members and nonmembers. All who attended worship on Sunday, 2 October 2016 were asked to complete the preintervention survey. All who attended worship on Sunday, 20 November 2016 were asked to complete the postintervention survey. Following the intervention, fourteen persons, approximately 1 percent of the average adult worship attendance, were selected to participate in a focus group. The participants were men and women

representative of the various age categories, preferred worship style and service, years of connection to NLPC, and length of time as followers of Jesus Christ.

Instrumentation

The research incorporated two different instruments for quantitative and qualitative data. A researcher-designed survey obtained quantitative data. The questions and protocols for a postintervention focus group provided qualitative data.

The Romans 12 questionnaire included essential demographic data and questions pertaining to the calling, capacity, and commitment to Christian servanthood. Participants in the study took the instrument preintervention (R12Q1, see Appendix D) and postintervention (R12Q2, see Appendix G) to measure the impact of the intervention. It was administered by hard copy to maximize the participation of the older adults in worship.

Following the completion of the seven-week series, I convened and facilitated a focus group with predetermined questions to assess the impact of the different components of the intervention. Participants were chosen based on the subgroups identified and specified in the demographic data of R12Q1. The focus group questions were sent to them in advance. The data collected in the ninety-minute discussion was recorded and then transcribed into an eighteen-page document.

Variables

This study consisted of one independent variable, one dependent variable, and three anticipated intervening variables. The independent variable was the Romans 12 series. The dependent variable was the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement as measured by the

changes between the two surveys R12Q1 and R12Q2 and by the responses within the focus group discussion (R12FG, see Appendix P). Three intervening variables were anticipated. First, the research took into account the possibility that some participants would not be able to complete the seven-week series. However, the population and sample size was sufficiently large to be valid even with some attrition. Second, because of the length of the study, other life events and other sources of instruction could have influenced their discipleship and specific attitude or behaviors toward Christian service. No study can insulate participants from such intervening variables. However, participants taking the R12Q2 were asked to identify in writing any other significant factors in the previous two months that had affected their attitudes and behaviors toward Christian service. The third intervening variable anticipated other factors, such as gender, length of time connected with the church, and length of time as a follower of Jesus. The demographic questions in R12Q1—and repeated in R12Q2—permitted some isolation of factors and analysis to assess those variables.

Data Collection

The R12Q1 collected data at the beginning of all three worship services on Sunday, 2 October 2016. The R12Q2 survey collected data at the end of all three worship services on Sunday, 20 November 2016. The focus group gathered ten days after the completion of the seven-week series in a space at the church suitable for fourteen participants. An assigned recorder took notes during the meeting to assist in the transcription of the recording of the discussion.

Data Analysis

The study was a mixed design of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data from the R12Q1 and R12Q2 was analyzed through descriptive statistics to address research questions #1, #2, and #3. The qualitative data from R12FG was filtered through protocols designed to address research question #4. The data analysis was aligned with the purpose of evaluating the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement as a result of a seven-week sermon series and the congregational focus on Romans 12.

Generalizability

Several factors delimited this study. First, it was conducted in a congregation of a mainline denomination (PCUSA). Second, the research was done in a robust, growing retirement community. Third, participants largely had the will and financial means to relocate to Florida for an intentional season of retirement. Fourth, participants were predominantly European-American, reflective of the congregational population. Fifth, participants were generally well-educated and valued education. Sixth, this study focused on an approach to Christian servanthood framed by Romans 12. Furthermore, the weaknesses that limit the study included (1) testing a congregation already familiar with me as preacher and researcher conducting the study, (2) relying upon self-report data, and (3) having the period covered by the study such that it allowed other independent variables to affect the dependent variables.

Within these limitations, the study contributed to current research and new approaches to promoting Christian service among older adults. It prompted consideration

of a new scriptural framework for servanthood. Finally, it tested a Romans 12 focus and shared practices that could be utilized in other congregational settings.

Theological Foundation

At the beginning of chapter twelve in his letter to the Romans, Paul turns a corner from theological instruction to ethical instruction. Paul has finished a lengthy, penetrating analysis of God's plan and provision for salvation, including how that applies both to Gentiles and Jews. Chapter 11 concludes with an emphatic ascription of praise: "For from him and through him and in him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." Then Paul launches into a lengthy section of instruction that encompasses Romans 12-15. Throughout he is urging the Roman Christians to live in a manner appropriate for those set "free from the law of sin and of death" (8:2). A correlation of belief and behavior is essential for Paul. Of course, he is clear that observances of the law or efforts for righteousness are insufficient for salvation. Nevertheless, throughout the epistle he points to a new sanctified condition that obtains for those who are baptized into Christ. He has told the Romans they may "live a new life" and consider themselves "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:4, 11). Moreover, he expects them to live accordingly in "the obedience that comes from faith" (ὕπακοήν πίστεως) to which he refers in both the salutation (1:5) and the concluding doxology (16:26). In the salutation Paul identifies the faithful obedience among all the Gentiles as an objective for his apostleship. He also connects his apostolic calling and objective to his Roman readers who are "called to belong to Jesus Christ" and "called to be his holy people" (1:6-7). Then at the end of the epistle, he uses the same obedience phrase in a doxology. As he lifts final praise to God, he acknowledges that all has been disclosed so that "Gentiles might come to the obedience

that comes from faith” (16:26). With the beginning and the ending of the letter, Paul stakes out a purpose “to bring the obedience of faith among all Gentiles” (Rom. 1:5). This obedience or compliance of the faithful is the framework for understanding Paul’s exhortation in the latter chapters of the epistle.

In Romans 12 Paul begins to spell out the specific implications. It is the pivot point for the transition from Christian theology to ethics. The chapter covers three types of relationships: (1) between believer and God, (2) between believer and believer, and (3) between believer and nonbeliever. The focus of the first two verses is the believer’s relationship with God. Verses 3-16 apply largely to the relationship among believers, although verse 14 (“Bless those who persecute you ...”) is an obvious exception. That admonition and verses 17-21 apply to the believer/nonbeliever relationship. While the general flow of the passage follows this pattern, some of the imperatives defy any ironclad divisions. What is undeniable is that the starting point is the believer’s relationship with God.

Paul appeals to the Romans “in view of God’s mercy” (12:1). Presumably, his readers already have these mercies in view from his earlier recitation of God’s salvation plan, but he also reminds them that they are recipients of God’s mercy (11:30-32) just before concluding chapter eleven with the lofty ascription of praise. Then he begins chapter twelve with the adverbial conjunction *therefore*, connecting the prior teaching with the exhortation that follows. The imperatives of faith derive from the indicative of faith. Urging a new lifestyle, a prescription for community, and an ethic of service follow once the mercies of God are established and understood. Having spent the first eleven

chapters delineating the mysterious—but merciful—divine plan, Paul appeals to them to live in response to what God has already done.

First, he compares the new life to worship and asks them to present their bodies as living sacrifices to God. The new life in Christ requires an understanding that the giving of self, rather than some extrinsic offering, is the sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. It clarifies that a faith response is more than assent to doctrine; it is an active offering of the totality of life to God. Eugene H. Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases, “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering” (12:1 MSG). Furthermore, those who offer their lives to God as their spiritual worship are not “conformed to this world” (12:2) or age. Their new life in Christ breaks with their past and with the patterns of this world. Paul enjoins them to “be transformed by the renewing of your minds” (12:2). These imperatives, although expressed in a passive (deponent) voice, suggest that disciples have active agency in their own transformation. This verse likely echoes his point in Romans 8:5-8. The mind renewed and directed to the Spirit is able to discern what is good and pleasing to God. More than any academic or cognitive advancement, the mind set on the Spirit is renewed to find and comply with God’s will.

Paul continues with the operation of the mind in verse 3, using the word *φρονέω* three times in two forms. He suggests a proper way of thinking about oneself, proscribing an inflated self-estimate of importance or ability. Believers should not be overly impressed as they think about themselves. Instead, their minds should be under control, curbed, tempered by “the measure of faith God has assigned.” Self-perception is more accurate and healthy when it contains both a reverent awareness of God and a vital

connection with community. However, Paul introduces this section by acknowledging his own reliance on grace to make such a pronouncement: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you” (12:3). Three verses later Paul notes “we have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (12:6). Whatever grace has assigned to someone, he or she is to use it in fulfillment of a God-given purpose. All are called to be instruments or agents of grace in accordance with their full range of gifts (*χαρίσματα*).

Paul injects the metaphor of the body of Christ to emphasize the essential Christian unity, despite distinctive functions, within the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, he expounds in greater detail upon this image, but in Romans 12 Paul is primarily concerned with the unitive and connectional value of the body metaphor. Paul uses the reciprocal pronoun “one another” (v. 5 ἀλλήλων) for the first of four times in the chapter. “Members” of one another will also “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor” (v. 10), and “live in harmony with one another” (v. 16). This mutuality is inherent in the body-of-Christ connection.

Through the remainder of the chapter, Paul unleashes a series of more than twenty imperatives. Each clause or imperative stands alone, but their collective force shapes the expectations for a Christian disciple. Read or recited quickly, they have an overwhelming effect. Some are naturally joined and their meanings enrich each other. Some clauses are paired opposites (e.g., “hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good”, v. 9; “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,” v. 15). Other clusters seem to gain momentum and meaning, such as, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (v. 11). Similarly verse 12, “Be joyful in hope, patient in

affliction, faithful in prayer,” reminds the readers of spiritual resources that can be found from within and in prayerful connection with God.

Verses 9-16 tend to outline the behaviors suitable for a Christian community, for believer to believer relationships. Paul is appealing to them to establish and fortify a peaceful, mutually edifying community centered on Jesus Christ. This theme reverberates in the later chapters (e.g., 14:19 and 15:5-6) because of its importance to Paul and his readers. Notably, Paul concludes verses 9-16 with the theme introduced in verse 3: humility. Paul returns to the cognates stemming from *φρονέω* and related to the way disciples think about themselves. Jesus’ followers are not thinking of themselves in a high or lofty manner. Believers avoid haughtiness or conceit that gets in the way of quality relationships with all kinds of persons. Christian community is based upon the renewed minds of persons who see themselves with humble clarity and who grasp God’s will for harmonious, loving connections.

Within the trajectory of verses 9-16, several verses highlight compassionate responses to those who are suffering or in need. Verses 13 and 14 specifically direct attention outside the circle of their immediate community. Paul calls for hospitality provided to strangers and blessings conferred upon persecutors. These verses continue the momentum of his instruction, adding new ways for Jesus’ followers to live as a blessing to others.

The pacing of verses 17-21 slows down as Paul contends with the matter of evil and outside threats to Christian life and community. He adjures his readers to act with restraint, to live peaceably (qualified by “whenever possible”), to leave the vengeance to God (quoting Deut. 32:35), and to adopt a positive approach to enemies (quoting Prov.

25:21-22). This prescription for a believer to nonbeliever encounter also reflects a missional undercurrent. The right way of thinking and acting toward those who threaten and harm Christians can be a powerful witness to enemies and to other observers. The Roman church is challenged to think ahead, to consider in advance “what is right in the eyes of everybody” (v. 17). Paul concludes this section and the chapter with his greatest challenge: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (v. 21). The community of Christ-followers is called to live as a force for good, even and especially in the face of evil.

The theological foundation for this approach to discipleship and Christian service is “the obedience that comes from faith” (1:5). Jesus’ followers, with God’s mercies in view, live as a *therefore* community in the manner spelled out by Paul in Romans 12. Disciples develop a new pattern of thinking and serving, which does not conform to the world but is transformed by the Spirit and the will of God.

Overview

This study explores a new approach to promoting Christian servanthood among older disciples based on the twelfth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the centrality of servanthood in mission and the life of a disciple, ministries with older adults, the interpretation of Romans 12, the use of shared practices as a pedagogical tool, and appropriate methods for evaluating the effectiveness of this ministry intervention. Chapter 3 details the methodology of the research conducted to assess the impact of the seven-week series on Romans 12. Chapter 4 reports the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collected. The final chapter analyzes the findings and explores the implications of the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

The leadership of North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, desires to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28), not just mature in years. With a congregational median age over 70 years, the problem is sustaining effective discipleship with older adults. In particular, the older members seem to edge toward a spectator faith, eager to attend worship and receive ministry from the church; they become less inclined to engage in ministry themselves. The church is challenged (1) to promote the perception that Christian vocation or calling extends well into advanced adulthood, (2) to encourage the members’ recognition of their capacity to serve, and (3) to spur members to pursue active engagement in ministry.

The literature review examines the centrality of servanthood or ministry within the life of a disciple as the basic theological framework. The first section looks particularly at more recent configurations of ministry in light of the missional movement. Section two investigates the connection of ministry and discipleship in studies pertaining to older adults. The review proceeds in the third section to consider the twelfth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans as a suitable focus for a congregational intervention. The fourth section examines the role of Christian practices employed for faith formation. The fifth section explains briefly the resources that shaped the design of the research in this project. These lines of investigation provide the necessary background to fulfill the purpose of the research, which was to evaluate the changes in the perception of Christian calling, the recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement among

older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, as a result of a seven-week sermon series and congregational focus on Romans 12 presented over a period of two months.

Joining the Mission of God

N. T. Wright in his lucid presentation of *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* establishes an explicit connection of “believing and belonging” for Jesus’ followers (199-215). Believing in Jesus means more than an individual apprehension of spiritual truth or a personal transaction of salvation. Believing in Jesus means understanding his purpose and dominion, recognizing and joining his mission in the world. The belonging of disciples is not only belonging to a Christian family; it is belonging to the flow and work of God’s kingdom. Wright attaches two primary purposes to the church: “to worship God and to work for God’s kingdom in the world” (211). However, he notes a third purpose that serves the first two: “to encourage one another, to build one another up in faith, to pray with and for one another, to learn from one another and teach one another, and to set one another examples to follow, challenges to take up, and urgent tasks to perform” (211). The way disciples relate to each other within the Christian community supports the greater purposes that point and extend far beyond the church: worshipping God and working for his kingdom in the world.

Wright notes that one important biblical metaphor for belonging is the body of Christ. Believers individually and collectively belong to the body. He reminds readers that the trope of Christ’s body conveys an active agency in the world: “‘The body’ is more than merely an image of unity-in-diversity; it’s a way of saying that the church is called to *do* the work of Christ, to be the means of his *action* in and for the world”

(original emphasis; *Simply Christian* 201). Believers who belong to the body are incorporated into the work of Jesus, extending his reach and impact by their own actions. Believers in the Lord and Savior belong to, and embody, the mission of the One who has claimed them.

The earliest notions of discipleship and apostleship, of taking up one's cross and following Jesus, of being sent into the world by him and for him, make the connection between believing in Jesus and belonging to the mission of Christ. While the connection has been manifest in various ways through the history of the church, this connection has been explicit and emphatic in the missional church literature through the past twenty-five years since the publication of *Transforming Mission* by David J. Bosch. Before considering the connection between believing and belong in more detail, a brief scan of the landscape he addressed will be helpful.

Prior to Bosch's seminal work, the antecedent lines of a missional mentality are traceable. For example, one could point to Martin Luther and the *priesthood of all believers* for opening the gate to an understanding of ministry that was not dependent upon clergy or hierarchy. In the middle of the twentieth century, the *ministry of the laity* surged, encouraging the calling and service of every believer. Hendrik Kraemer gave this movement its clearest theological expression. David W. Miller regards the ministry of the laity as a key predecessor of the Faith at Work movement. He examines and advocates the practice of businesspeople applying their faith in the work setting, a trend he regards as an outgrowth of the ministry of the laity, gaining traction in the mid-1980s. He points out that those who apply their faith at work are often doing so with the support of Christian peers and parachurch organizations instead of their own church. In spite of a

half-century of stirring, congregational leaders have scarcely noticed or endorsed the movement among laity to seek meaning, guidance, and expression of their Christian faith in their work.

Robert E. Reber sensed this minimal progress in his 1988 assessment of the ministry of the laity. He worked with groups of men and women, 20 to 60 years of age, in eighteen different congregations within six denominations. The study participants covered a broad spectrum of occupations. However, they struggled to describe how their daily work represented Christian ministry although they could readily describe what they did inside the church as ministry. In fact, most participants felt a wide gap between their Sunday church experience and the nagging, everyday problems in their households or at work. Reber identified several key issues that impede the ministry of the laity. For example, he observed that in spite of considerable literature on the call of all to ministry and the variety of gifts among God's people, very little has been done to promote the empowerment of the laity. Second, he points out that too often the ministry of the laity is reduced to activities inside the church and institutional maintenance. Perhaps most telling is the equation of ministry and the work of the clergy, so that the term *lay ministry* is employed to differentiate it from the work and call of the clergy. Reber critiques the clergy-lay split as a false distinction, "a kind of dualism that is almost impossible to overcome" (410). His research thirty years ago indicated that the church had not actually moved very far toward the *priesthood of all believers*.

Similarly, R. Paul Stevens identifies the long-standing division of those who *do* ministry and those to whom it is *done* (3). As a passionate spokesperson for the ministry in daily life movement, Stevens insists that "every legitimate human occupation (paid or

unpaid) is some dimension of God's own work: making, designing, doing chores, beautifying, organizing, helping, bringing dignity, and leading" (119). Ministry involves all of Jesus' followers, "putting ourselves at the disposal of God for God's purposes in the church and the world" (157). He is adamant about eliminating the false dichotomy between clergy and non-clergy.

Thomas Gillespie, former President of Princeton Theological Seminary, summarizes the obstacles for the ministry of the whole people of God to be unleashed: "It will be realized only if the 'nonclergy' are willing to move up, if the 'clergy' are willing to move over, and if all of God's people are willing to move out" (qtd. in Stevens 158). The movement *out* reflects the emphasis of the missional church literature. The Trinity, the Incarnation, and the perpetual work of the Spirit all exhibit God's radical movement toward, and on behalf of, his creation. God moves into the human condition and continues to transform humankind from within by the Spirit. Furthermore, a missionary God is implicit in the *missio Dei* and the very existence of the church. The movement of God the Father is to be with the world through the Son and the Spirit and the church, as Bosch makes explicit:

The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another movement: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (390)

Stephen Seamands describes the missionary identity and function of God in this way:

The Father is the first missionary, who goes out of himself in creating the world and sending the Son for our salvation. The Son is the second missionary, who redeems humanity and all creation through his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. The Holy Spirit is the third missionary, who creates and empowers the church, the fourth missionary, to go into the world. (161)

Belonging to God, Father, Son, and Spirit involves belonging to the *missio Dei* and movement out into the world.

Believing and belonging ultimately represent a conversion to the mission of God. Charles Van Engen makes that explicit in a three-step process for a complete conversion: “(1) conversion to God in Jesus Christ; (2) conversion to the Church, the body of Christ, and (3) conversion to ministry in the world for whom Christ died” (152). Full conversion includes a commitment to the mission of God, to become *God’s Missionary People*. The closer one gets to Jesus as a disciple, the more surely Jesus sends us that person out as an apostle. Movement into the world as apostles—sent ones—is fundamental for all followers of Christ. To the disciples the Risen Lord declared, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). Disciples are not withdrawn or separated from the world but sent and assigned to show the reign and love of God.

The Greek word for church—*ekklesia*—refers to those who are *called out*. They are called out but not to stay out of the world. They follow Jesus into a life of sentness and servanthood. The church gathers those who are called to worship and intimacy with God but also called and sent to serve the world that is the target of his love. Abraham was called in order to be sent to a new place. Likewise, the disciples are called in order to be sent somewhere else. Calling and sending are inseparable dynamics of the Christian faith; disciples are called by a sending God.

The people of God are elected for mission, converted to mission, sanctified and equipped for mission, and sent out to do his mission. Each Christian is an apostle, sent out to bear witness to the reign of God, providing a personal link between the gospel and the world. This sending is what Bosch refers to as “the apostolate of the laity” (470) and

Van Engen calls the “transferred apostolate” (119). Robert W. Bohl, preaching on 16 July 1995 at the 207th General Assembly (Cincinnati) of the PCUSA, recounted that Albert Schweitzer at his African medical mission said to patient after patient as they came to him, “I am Albert Schweitzer; Jesus Christ has sent me to help you get well.” *Jesus Christ has sent me* is the essence of an apostolic faith. The church is comprised of persons who respond to the invitation of Christ and to the commission of Christ. The church is, and always has been, the community of those called and sent by God. Apostleship is shared among all the believers, not limited to the twelve or to a particular era of the church or to missionaries who are sent a great distance to a foreign land.

The literature of the missional church has emphasized the *sentness* of Jesus’ followers moving into a world that is increasingly foreign without leaving their neighborhood or immediate context for mission. From the beginning, the church has gathered and sent forth witnesses to the reign of God, beginning in local neighborhoods and extending globally or “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Each individual member lives and serves as part of the *missio Dei*, regardless of location. This assignment of missional responsibility to all believers is a major premise of missional theology. The premier example is Darrell L. Guder’s work:

God’s mission is calling and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ, to be a missionary church in our own societies, in the cultures in which we find ourselves. These cultures are no longer Christian; some would argue that they never were. Now, however, their character as a mission field is so obvious as to need no demonstration. (5)

Two years earlier Craig Van Gelder had published another essay announcing that America is a mission field (“Great New Fact” 68). How quickly the recognition of America as a mission field moved from a great new fact to an obvious, indisputable

statement. Van Gelder argues that churches need to seek new patterns and forms of ministry to accommodate the changing mission culture in America. Eventually he offered his own fuller prescription in *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, describing a Spirit-created and guided church that is missionary at the deepest level of its genetic code (93). He envisions and reengineers the church in terms of Spirit-led discernment, leadership, and organization so the community of faith and all members can participate fully in the work of God in the mission field of the US.

Bosch characterizes evangelism as a call to serve: “At its heart, Jesus’ invitation to people to follow him and become his disciples is asking people whom they want to serve” (418). The question is not whether to serve but whom to serve. Disciples who believe and receive the blessings of the Good News of Jesus Christ are forgiven, freed, and equipped to serve others after his example (Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27). Sondra Matthaei, in the third chapter of her work, highlights that service after the model of Jesus is nonhierarchical. It is unranked partnership of all the people of God “following in the footsteps of love.” The partnership community is created by baptism: “Baptism is more than an individual experience; it incorporates persons into a community of faith formed by God’s grace and called to serve God in the world.” Believing and belonging is confirmed in baptism, but the dying and rising with Christ (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:12) means a new life lived to God and for others. The one baptism joins all to a community of servanthood modeled by Jesus.

Belonging to the suffering Servant-Messiah means belonging to the circle of those who serve him (John 12:26) and serve others in his name because he came “not to be

served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Seamands observes:

The Greek words usually rendered in our English translations as “minister” (*diakonos*) and “ministry” (*diakonia*) ... in everyday speech meant “to serve,” especially in a personal capacity, and particularly “to wait at table.” Our English word *deacon* is derived from these Greek words. By definition, then ministers, like good restaurant wait staff, are those who focus on the needs and interests of others, not their own. (82)

Serving is inherent in the identity and mission of the church. The servant community centered on Jesus learns from him how to read and respond to the signal that someone needs assistance. The servant response becomes increasingly natural and reflexive.

To summarize, believing in Jesus and belonging to the body of Christ means being enlisted in the mission of God. The workflow of a missionary God extends from Father and Son and Spirit through the church. Believing and belonging activates all members of the body in an intentional serving role or ministry. The ministry of the laity and the missional church literature at this point: disciples are called and sent into the world, engaged in some expression of service, attentive to the needs of others, following the example of Jesus.

Ministry with Older Adults

If discipleship means joining the mission of Christ, then aging poses a question about the disciple’s continuing engagement in the mission of Christ. It should not mean dropping out of God’s mission in and to the world, but it surely makes a difference in one’s mission role and mission field. Serving Christ with older adults means encountering certain challenges and opportunities because of the mind-set and cultural norms that define the landscape for that season of life. While aging is universal and inevitable, the experience of aging is widely varied. Older adults cannot be classified

simply by the number of accumulated years. Furthermore, their approaches to life defy a monolithic description. A serious ministry with older adults will honor the personhood and uniqueness of each one. Their distinctive stories and circumstances provide one of the colossal opportunities: tapping into their perspective and awareness of God's activity in their lives. As Michael Parker writes, "Seniors of faith, our true spiritual elders, can reflect what happens to people when they have experienced the love of Christ across a lifetime" (Houston and Parker 13). Their storytelling becomes a form of testimony, allowing them to describe what they have seen and heard and experienced, which may serve as an encouragement and stimulus to others.

However, not all stories are encouraging. Many have descended to depths of loneliness and despair, wondering if that condition is the antechamber to the Father's house with many rooms that Jesus promises on the other side of death (John 14:2). Some barely get out of their rooms, except for medical appointments and worship, and that outing requires a Herculean effort or the support of others. Many are eventually forced to relinquish the independence of driving. Many experience the growing isolation induced by hearing impairment or failing vision or fraying memories. Some retain their mental acuity while their bodies refuse to cooperate. Others are healthy except for the slide into dementia. Some persons deny the difficulties; some acknowledge the problems; some cannot speak of anything but their problems.

Some exhibit an emotional and spiritual regression that resembles childhood.

James M. Houston and Parker connect the dynamics of a second childhood and a sense of entitlement:

Sadly, churches contain those whose reversal to a "second childhood" is worse than the first. The besetting weakness of so many churchgoers lies

in [a] false assumption that they have a “club membership” and therefore deserve to enjoy its privileges of association without much commitment and the evidence of any growth in Christ. (68)

For those persons, the concepts of lifelong learning, growth, and responsibility get swallowed in a rising tide of childish or self-centered behaviors. A more subtle version are the older adults whom Richard Rohr describes as preoccupied with the issues and work suitable for the first half of life: “They must and will be concerned with identity, boundaries, self-maintenance, self-perpetuation, and self-congratulation” (141). He asserts this development is quite natural because “the human ego prefers anything, just about anything, to falling or changing or dying. The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo, even when it is not working. It attaches to past and present, and fears the future” (xxiv). This approach to life has a hard time of letting go and progressing beyond self-preservation. It is particularly tragic when this self-preservation persists into the later years of life and the stage closest to death.

Gail Sheehy popularized much of the literature available. Her approach to a “second adulthood” was not just about longevity but integrity. She also uses the term “sage-ing” and encouraged steps toward successful aging instead of passive aging. She acknowledges that “second adulthood” can be a new passage of inconsolable losses. However, “if every day is an awakening, you will never grow old. You will just keep growing” (429). Her bestseller aides adults in the mapping of their lives, helping them to navigate through new passages and prescribing steps for self-care. However, it conspicuously omits any significant treatment of the spiritual work for that life stage or the need for meaningful engagement and servanthood.

Jimmy Carter provides another popular perspective on aging in his book of approximately the same vintage as Sheehy's. The former president defined the virtues to include "both the blessings that come to us as we grow older and what we have to offer that might be beneficial to others" (frontispiece). He also entitled a chapter, "Seniors Can Do Great Things for Others." He provides examples from his personal experience and observation. He encourages his readers to find specific ways to get involved serving. His simple, straightforward message connects work with continued growing and life satisfaction for older adults. His view of aging is unmistakably shaped by his deep faith.

Derrel R. Watkins proposes that aging is an "ever-growing love affair with God" (35). He and others champion the idea that older adulthood is a prime time for spiritual discovery and depth even when other dimensions of life are in decline. While he encourages physical, emotional, and social wellness, and all that contributes to them, he hypothesizes that "persons who have clear minds have the capacity to grow spiritually, even if their physical conditions prohibit significant social interaction" (32). Spiritual development and wellness can extend well beyond the other factors that limit activity.

Kathleen Fischer describes this potential for spiritual growth in poetic images. She acknowledges the paradox of decline and ascent, loss and gain, in aging. She laments, "Individuals often fear aging as a downhill battle, a gradual decrease in vitality and increase in vulnerability. This is changing: the growing edge of discussion on the meaning of aging is its spiritual dimension" (12). She has an expansive view of spirituality so that it is "not one compartment of life but the deepest dimension of all of life" (12) that incorporates all questions, hopes, fears, and loves. She celebrates that "the later years provide the most intense and vivid revelation of the paradox at the heart of the

Christian Gospel: that in losing our lives we somehow find them; that loss can be gain, and weakness, strength; that death is the path to life” (19). Fischer contends that journey through all the seasons of life, including winter, enables one to see and appreciate more fully the grace of God operating in every season. It provides a holistic, transcendent perspective for telling the narrative of life.

Although uniqueness characterizes each person’s story, some common elements of aging are identified. John M. Hull devotes an entire chapter to “an evolving faith for an evolving self” (147) in which he explores the developmental theories for adults. He examines the work of Daniel J. Levinson, Erik Erikson, James Fowler, and Robert Kegan, assessing the implications of each. He notes, for example, the common recognition that while older adults have accumulated more and more experience, they also grasp that they have “less and less to be anticipated” (171). The diminishing life horizon precipitates a spiritual crisis that Erikson frames as integrity versus despair. If a person can understand how the latter stage of life is integrated into the totality of what God has provided, a hopefulness vanquishes despair. Then aging culminates in a virtue of wisdom, a healthy and vibrant perspective.

Joan Erikson, in the chapters she added to her husband, Erik H. Erikson’s work, stipulates a ninth stage beyond the struggle of despair versus integrity, occupied primarily by those in their late eighties and nineties. She reflects and writes of this stage out of her own experience:

An elder in his or her eighties or nineties is also apt to have experienced many losses, some of distant relationships and some of more profound and close relationships—parents, partners, and even children. There is much sorrow to cope with plus a clear announcement that death’s door is open and not so far away. (113)

She speaks of navigating through these obstacles with the basic trust and hope that was developed as a foothold all the way back in the first stage of life.

J. Erikson's final chapter outlines and endorses the "gerotranscendence" concept of Lars Tornstam. The theory describes a mystical transcendence at the far frontier of life. Gerotranscendence involves an increasing detachment from the scurry and demands of life: "The race and competition are over and done with; to release oneself from hurry and tension is mandatory in old age" (125). The sense of self stretches to connect and identify with the Other and countless interrelated others. Time and space categories shrink to a more immediate zone of experience, while the person apprehends a greater cosmic communion. Death is embraced as syntonic: the way forward, normal, healthy, and harmonious. This gerotranscendence—or dance—rises above worldly existence and burdens. J. Erikson writes, "Transcendence may be a regaining of lost skills, including play, activity, joy, and song, and, above all, a major leap above and beyond the fear of death" (127). The ninth stage of gerotranscendence described by Joan Erikson sounds like the postgraduate or celestial-bound discoveries of the human spirit.

Geriatrician William H. Thomas has contributed a broad and thoughtful analysis of aging. He takes full account of the biological and medical realities of aging. He also examines and critiques the historical understanding of elders and more recent social trends. For the predominant anti-aging view, and other deficient views of aging, Thomas prescribes a "developmental aging" approach that celebrates and cultivates elderhood beyond adulthood. He observes that "a person who willingly sets aside the clatter of adulthood and enters deliberately and specifically into a life beyond adulthood becomes a beacon of hope to others" (283). Thomas cites the blueprint work of Zalman Schachter-

Shalomi and Ronald S. Miller. They challenge society to legitimate, respect, and welcome the insights of old age. Thomas goes even further to envision an “eldertopia” (299), an elder-rich community that improves the quality of life for people of all ages. He argues, “Far from being society’s expensive leftovers, elders and the elderhood they inhabit are crucial to the well-being of all” (302). Eldertopia supposes a deeply beneficial, generational reciprocity among children, adults, and elders.

Houston and Parker would concur from a congregational perspective. They observe that “the most frail and physically dependent person may also be the most ardent prayer warrior or the most wise or courageous member of a congregation” (124-25). Then they conclude their chapter on “successful aging” with this panegyric:

Elders can leave us a multitude of legacies, including how to live sacrificially, how to appreciate traditions that teach us to value history, how to treasure the moment, how to confront our materialistic tendencies, how to value life from the womb to the grave, how to maintain a robust health and intellect for as long as possible, how to live successfully with and learn from chaos and difficulty, how to live courageously, how to persevere, how to express faith in love, how to genuinely worship, how to live on a budget, how to forgive, how to live in unity with other Christians, how to share one’s faith, and how to glorify and enjoy Christ now and forever.

Like Thomas and others, they affirm the cumulative gifts and perspective of older adults. They have much more to offer than the contemporary antiaging culture seems to acknowledge.

Hull also highlights the dynamic of older adults noticing the advance of the generations behind them, how much younger persons “are placed in positions of authority and responsibility” (171). That experience corresponds to Erikson’s seventh of eight stages: generativity versus stagnation or self-absorption. The person who navigates successfully through this stage develops a virtue of care, “being able to take care, to tend

and foster other people and things” (174). Spiritually mature persons in this stage see their own stories and capacities as assets to share, to invest in others, so that the larger story of God’s work continues well beyond their own personal achievements or direct engagement.

Jerry W. McCant similarly notes the importance of Erikson’s psychosocial stages and crises in later adulthood. He sees the preservation of generativity and ego integrity still expressed through active involvement in service. Three of his ten suggestions for ministry with older adults involve developing and enlisting older persons for ministry in the church. Their service tilts them toward wisdom and away from despair, so it is personally helpful. However, having older persons engaged in caring ministries, transgenerational education, and leadership is also beneficial for the church. McCant writes, “We need their memories to instruct the church concerning its traditions, history, and ritual. The church can lose its ‘story’ and its reason for existence unless we employ the services of senior adults” (34). McCant wants to leverage their memories and their grasp of God’s story woven into the church and personal lives.

Clive Baldwin and Jennifer Estey focus their essay on the disruption of one’s story or the ability to narrate one’s life. Sometimes the loss is precipitated by dementia. However, the authors regard narrative loss “an inevitable part of aging” (210), with or without the capacity to remember. Baldwin and Estey elaborate particularly upon two threats to one’s story: “the first being the threat to the self that may be posed by a failing body, the second being a self-imposed premature foreclosure of one’s life story” (210). They credit the term “narrative foreclosure” to M. Freeman and cite four premature conclusions to one’s personal narrative: (1) the dead end with nothing new to anticipate

and nowhere to go; (2) the point of no return on a trajectory of loss, including the exhausted ability to live purposefully; (3) the irrevocability of the past laden with regret and resignation; and, (4) the extreme of existential despair (210-11). Having established the critical role of storytelling, so that life is not just “one damned thing after another” (217), Baldwin and Estey suggest approaches to recover fragments and to repair and extend narrative of one’s life. They focus on storytelling as a method of making meaning and discovering purpose, as an interpretive or discernment task. Storytelling has cognitive value, even when cognition is threatened. Other approaches to ministry with older adults prescribe more active options.

More than three decades ago, Werner C. Graendorf cited the work of Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg:

Gray and Moberg in their definitive study of aging and the church quote a government study on aging which notes, “The core of the aging problem ... derives from the fact that ... we have thus far failed to provide meaningful roles and opportunities for many of the millions who are living beyond the commonly accepted period of usefulness and into the new later years.” (38)

Graendorf pays particular attention to the dimension of usefulness. “The older adult as a useful disciple” is the fifth of his five biblical principles (43). He laments the various ways in which the lack of usefulness or purpose hastens the retreat into places of isolation and dejection. He prescribes a proactive effort to engage older persons as useful disciples in the Christian mission (44-45).

David P. Beal agrees that “senior adults are being set on the shelf” (5). In a study conducted within his own congregation, he found that “only 12 percent felt their talents were being used at an optimum level; 27 percent said their talents were being used somewhat; but 61 percent either answered negatively or failed to respond” (5). He decries

the “disengagement theory” and the “discontinuity theory,” both of which negate the ability of inclination of older adults to serve actively in God’s mission. His opening salvo is President Kennedy’s famous line: “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” And Beal insists a similar approach “needs to be applied to senior adult ministries,” challenging older persons to seek “what they can do for Christ and His church” (5). Beal supplies the example and analysis of Paul Tournier, a Christian psychiatrist and author who proposed that successful aging involves a replacement of lost roles, “a second career” that transforms purpose and usefulness. Interestingly, Beal attaches this concept of a second career to Romans 12:1-2 and the offering of self to God in a new and transformative way. His conclusions converge with Beth E. Brown. She argues to dispel myths that older adults are “incapable of meaningful contribution” because of infirmity or decline (19). Instead, the needs of older adults are best met as they recognize their ability to serve each other and answer the call to serve each other as God’s children and as commanded by Paul in Galatians 5:13: “to serve one another in love” (24).

David P. Gallagher agrees that a primary objective is to “encourage continuing usefulness among senior adults in the congregation” (66). In a practical handbook of suggestions, he emphasizes the “use me or lose me” principle with older adults (63). He encourages the cultivation of senior servants with a list of fifty distinct ways to involve them in ministry. The most successful strategies are designed not only to serve the needs of older adults but to recognize and mobilize their capacity to help others.

From a secular standpoint, Robert C. Atchley reinforces this notion. He notes how spirituality and community service may intersect in middle to late adulthood in a way that

was not possible earlier in life: “The spiritual journey and the journey of service can complement each other” and satisfy “a need for new direction” (104). Atchley recognizes the emotional and spiritual benefits for the older person serving in an appropriate role.

These various approaches to older adult ministry support the objectives of this study and ministry intervention. The literature highlights the importance of extending God’s call into the later stages of life, highlighting and developing the capacity of older adults to serve, and enlisting them in meaningful commitments and activity that coincide with God’s mission. Hull makes explicit the connection between calling and maturity:

This is why in learning Christ, one does not simply take on board an orthodoxy of belief. One becomes a pilgrim on a way. He is the true and living way, and he is always before us, disrupting our present equilibrium, and calling us through the pain and transition into the maturity which is our Christian calling. (195)

This calling reinforces personal narrative and refreshes the sense of purpose. The continuing call to follow Christ in a life of service aims toward a maturity that cannot be measured in years.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans and the Background for Romans 12

Study of the epistle to the Romans has produced some consensus concerning Pauline authorship, the Roman audience, and the approximate date of the letter. No serious arguments have questioned whether Paul was the source of this letter, with Tertius as his secretary (16:22). Although the specific circumstances of the Roman church are murky, and undoubtedly copies were made for distribution to other communities, most textual scholars agree that the original manuscript was targeted to all God’s beloved saints in Rome. The date of the letter is consistently placed late in Paul’s apostolic career (CE 55-64, Achtemeier 19; CE 55, Barrett 5; CE 57, Bruce 14; CE 55-

57, Dunn, *Romans 1-8* xliii; CE 57, Keck 30; CE 54-58, Mounce 26). Many scholars accept Corinth, or its port of Cenchreae, as the place from which Paul dictated the letter during his third missionary journey. At the time he composed his message, he had not yet set foot in Rome, although that was his expressed intention (1:13; 15:22-24). Thus, it is the only one of Paul's letters written to a congregation he did not know directly and personally.

Paul conveyed his ambition not only to visit Rome and be mutually encouraged but also to carry the Gospel beyond to Spain (15:24, 28). He intended to make that journey after delivering the contributions of Macedonian and Achaian congregations back to the needy in Jerusalem. Because he was apprehensive about the situation awaiting him back in Judea (15:31), he requested prayers. He also acknowledged writing boldly of his ministry to the Gentiles and his excitement to observe what Christ accomplished through him "in leading the Gentiles to obey God" (15:18). His commitment to ministry with the Gentiles was unequivocal and unwavering, but he also had to help Christian Gentiles understand God's continuing relationship with the Jews, including non-Christian Jews. According to Leander E. Keck, that was one of his motives for writing "Romans as his theology of mission" (31). Paul was eager and unashamed to proclaim the gospel in Rome "because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (1:15-16). The gospel connected what Paul was doing on his return errand to a potentially hostile Jerusalem and his aspirations to proclaim Christ where no one had preached previously. Hopefully, his Roman readers would not only welcome him but also sponsor him for the work further west, just as

Antioch had commissioned him for his early journeys. Laying the groundwork for future plans, he wrote to the Romans his most extensive account of God's work in history.

Paul J. Achtemeier regards Paul's "history as the relationship between Creator and Creation," describing the sweep of the first eleven chapters as "the story of God's gracious lordship rejected and restored" (13-15). The structure of Achtemeier's commentary divides the first eleven chapters into three major sections—past, present, and future—each posing a problem vis-à-vis God's Lordship. The problem of the past pits God's grace and wrath in 1:1-4:22. Grace and law collide as the problem of the present, covered in 4:23-8:39. The problem of the future, in Romans 9-11, is the outcome of Israel and God's gracious plan. Eventually, Achtemeier turns with Paul to the problems of daily living under God's Lordship (193). By then the reader is saturated with a sense of grace, God's past, present, and future all working for the benefit of the people of his creation.

Although the letter to the Romans was not composed as systematic theology, most regard it as Paul's theological magnum opus, his longest, most comprehensive exposition of God's character and purposive activity with humankind. With many others, F. F. Bruce accepts 1:16-17 as the purpose of the letter and the theme of the gospel, "the righteousness of God revealed" (73). James D. G. Dunn similarly views the epistle through the lens of the "righteousness of God." He traces the progression of the first eleven chapters "from God's faithfulness to man's faith" (*Romans 1-8* 50). Wright also poses "God's righteousness" as the theme of Romans. The justification and salvation available to faithful humans are corollaries of the central gospel: God's justice and righteousness that exceed even that of the imperial capital. Paul helps the Romans to see that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. Wright asserts that Paul's aim is "to explain to the

Roman church what God has been up to and where they might belong on the map of these purposes” (*Letter to the Romans* 404). He affirms that God’s people in Christ represent the “true humanity” (508). In this regard, chapters 5-8 establish the outcome of God’s righteous operation described in chapters 1-4 and point ahead to the implications for the community of believers in chapters 12-16.

The merry-go-round of motifs—righteousness, law, sin, wrath, death, grace, faith, justification, salvation, reconciliation, Spirit, eternal life, glory—plays the melody of God’s loving intervention through Christ Jesus on behalf of his people. God takes the remedial action that only God can take, what Keck calls God’s rectifying rectitude (56). God makes right all that has been wrong in creation, in human nature, in the relationship between Creator and creation. Then, according to Keck, chapters 12-15 constitute “the resulting ethos of the rectified” (37). These chapters depict what human life and community look like when everything has been made right, according to God’s mercies.

In his classic commentary on Romans, Karl Barth labels his discussion of chapter 12-15 on ethics “The Great Disturbance” and asserts that “human behavior must inevitably be disturbed by the thought of God” (424). Thoughts of God and the merciful intervention disrupt the normative patterns of human thinking and acting. Barth describes this intervention as “the wholesome disturbance and interruption which God in Christ prepares, in order that He may call men home to the peace of His kingdom” (425). The gospel, if it means anything, means a new way of living.

Barth and many others caution against a rigid separation of Paul’s theology and ethics. Instead, a dialectic or integration of the two is what he sought. His exposition of the gospel was not for doctrinal purposes but for a new way of life, raised with Christ,

alive in the Spirit, discerning practical daily applications. His early letter to the Thessalonians transitioned midway with a benediction (1 Thess. 3:11-13) into instruction on living a life pleasing to God. He wove the fruit of the Spirit and various admonitions into the theological treatise of Galatians. His letter to the beloved Philippians and his correspondence with the Corinthians reveal how smoothly he shifted from kerygma or proclamation to paraenesis or moral exhortation. Although the Roman letter turns more abruptly with chapter 12, the two are interwoven. Belief and behavior “are the breath and blood of Christian living, the twin signs of life” (Wright, *Letter to the Romans* 700). Paul sought the translation of doctrine into practice (Bruce 212). Dunn calls it “the outworking of the Gospel for the redefined people of God in everyday terms” (*Romans 9-16* 705). Achtemeier probes Romans 12 to see how God’s Lordship and grace manifest in community and daily living (194). Clearly Paul considered moral formation an important part of his writing and teaching ministry.

In his textbook on teaching ministry, Richard Robert Osmer highlights how Paul’s “exhortation is grounded in his theological concern that his congregations embody a way of life consistent with their election—their calling, justification, and sanctification as God’s new covenant people” (33). Paul addresses his Roman readers in postconversion terms—as saints, as persons already belonging to Christ and evincing faith. Osmer compares Paul’s exhortation to contemporaneous versions of moral philosophy in the Greco-Roman world. Paranaetic letters in the Greco-Roman world typically assumed conversion to a new and better way of life, so the writers encouraged progress and imitation of the right ideals and steered new converts away from habits or actions that were detrimental (7). Paul regarded the Romans as having already responded to the

saving event of Christ's death and resurrection. He addressed them as witnesses and recipients of the mercy of God. According to Osmer, "he is reminding his readers that they are God's new covenant people and is teaching them how to refashion their identities to better embody their calling, justification, and sanctification in Christ Jesus" (9). These theological truths will show up in new patterns of life, new habits of attitude and behavior, and new ways of relating to God and each other.

Keck refers to the new patterns as the "community's transformed ethos" (289), not seeking "this age" conformity or self-fulfillment but rather fulfillment of God's will (310). In fact, Keck underscores the eschatological—or end-times—horizons of Paul's instruction for a community living while "the night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (13:12). Romans 12 living is prompted not only by the saving intervention of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but also by the new era and installation of God's reign. Keck labels it a "daybreak ethos" (289). Wright agrees. The teaching of Romans 12 "draws explicitly on the essentially Second Temple Jewish view that world history divides into two ages, the 'present age' and the 'age to come,' and insists that the two now overlap and that Christians belong in the latter" (*Letter to the Romans* 701). The community ethos is created and transformed by the proximity to God's ultimate and unopposed reign. The new day entails new ways of living oriented to God's promised future for creation.

God changed their status through Jesus and in a new daybreak of history, so the Roman Christians were summoned to live according to their new identity. Osmer cites the indicative and imperative connection, again an integration of belief and behavior. The indicative is what God had done already in Christ on their behalf to establish their new

identity. Osmer explains, “By imperative, I mean the way Paul exhorts Christians to adopt certain patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting in response to God’s prior activity and to embody in the shared life of the community their identity as God’s people” (41). Paul had already used his discussion of baptism in 6:1-11 to establish the already and not-yet layers of their Christian identity. Already in baptism they have been united with Christ in a death such as his. The second half of verse 5 is in future tense: “[W]e will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” Baptism incorporates believers into a community formed by the death and resurrection of Jesus. According to Osmer, Paul helps the Romans “to think and live eschatologically” (16) with his teaching on baptism. Baptism helps them remember their participation in Christ’s suffering and death, elements of struggle that were already too real to them. Baptism helps them also to anticipate with hope the new creation that lies ahead. By baptism, they are what Osmer calls “participants in the Theo-drama of the triune God” (238), called to live personally and corporately as those “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

Osmer represents the prevalent efforts to avoid reading the Romans 12 imperatives as a new set of laws or commands or boundaries. Because Paul framed the entire section with the “view of God’s mercy” (12:1), with righteous and graceful actions spelled out in chapters 1-11, the imperatives flow from the indicatives of their Roman Christian identity. Osmer, aligning the indicative and imperative in Paul, perceives moral formation as integral to the apostle’s methodology of discipleship or catechetical instruction. Romans 12 is an invitation to live into the new, baptized, covenant community status offered by a merciful God.

Roy A. Harrisville argues that the Romans 12 imperatives cannot be imposed upon the Christian:

From that kind of imposition, which Paul calls the “law of sin and of death,” the Christian has been set free (Rom 8:2). To the Christian who still lives in this world ... the imperative works to proffer the possibilities of the new life, as if to say, “See, Christian! This is what you can do, what Christ has set you free to do.” (90)

In this reading, the Romans 12 imperatives are indicative of what is newly possible in Christ.

Nicholas P. Wolterstorff takes the invitation-interpretation of imperatives a step further. Imperative can be not only an invitation to live according to a new status in Christ but also an invitation to flourish. He acknowledges that divine calling “is automatically, unthinkingly taken as God calling us to do something, as God laying responsibilities on us ... as coming in the imperative mood” (256). He also conceives of imperative as invitation. Taking an example from the fifth day of creation, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22), he reads that imperative as reflecting the optative mood, “May you flourish.” The Creator’s directive is rendered not as a rule or mandate but as a blessing. Wolterstorff writes, “It’s an invitation to flourish that God speaks over humanity. It’s an invocation of flourishing, not a command” (258-59). He was considering divine imperatives more generally, not specifically Romans 12, but his analysis may apply. A people who become a new creation in Christ, a new covenant community, may also be invited to flourish in the manner set forth in Romans 12, in the imperatives that are not new rules as much as they are invitations to live in a direction that leads to blessing.

The *invitation-to-flourish* approach to biblical imperatives has a winsome, edifying tone. However, it is also predicated more on self-interest than on obedience. The invitation to live into a new status, described at length by Osmer, bears an ontological weight: each is to become fully the person who is already you already fashioned anew in Christ. In that framework, obedience is not only the fulfillment of God's will but also the fulfillment of the new human identity and community. In her book Dawn entitles a chapter "Transformation to the Truth about Ourselves." She offers a synthesis that argues the "people of God have a unique freedom to take the shape of their possibilities," and "we are always becoming who we are meant to be" (40). Her approach celebrates the transformation that breaks from conformity and confinement in structures of this world. She describes an inherent joy in such freedom and transformation by the Spirit of God. Dawn uses hilarity (*hilarótēs* from Rom. 12:8) throughout her book to characterize the profound cheerfulness or gladness attached to the followers of Jesus and Christian community. Though she acknowledges that the faithful seem far from hilarity and the ideal community, she intentionally wonders and poses "what would it be like if the Christian Church were truly a community that thoroughly enjoyed being itself" (xi). Those who have fully accepted and understood the mercies of God are shaped into persons and communities for whom hilarity or gladness is the norm.

Paul, familiar with all the hardships and costs of discipleship, seems unlikely to use an invitation to hilarity—or even an invitation to flourish—to induce moral formation. He is more attuned to the "obedience that comes from faith," mentioned in both his introduction (1:5) and conclusion (16:26). In fact, the cultic, sacrificial approach (i.e., "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice") urged at the beginning of Romans 12 tilts

toward obedience. However, this call for living sacrifice illustrates the greater paradox of faithful discipleship and the invitation of Jesus himself: “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matt. 16:25). Even Jesus recognized and appealed to the bedrock of self-interest. The ethics of Jesus and Paul exhibit the complexity of motives, intentions, and outcomes.

This complexity of Christian discipleship and ethical responsibility cannot be thoroughly teased out for this study and does not need to be. Paul’s opening verses in chapter 12 establish the priority of God’s will over any human motive. Achtemeier stresses the fundamental response of “allowing oneself to be shaped totally by that new lordship” of God displayed in his Son (194). For the “redefined people of God,” Dunn points to submission as the basis of responsible living:

God’s will cannot be reduced to a set of rules and regulations; the key, however, is the willing and eager submission of the creature to live out of his dependence on God—to seek to *know* God’s will as the first objective, and his enabling for the still hard task of *doing* it. (original emphasis; *Romans 9-16* 718)

While no commentators or theologians would suggest Paul has created new prerequisites for God’s favor and salvation, all would observe that Paul prescribes seeking God’s “good, pleasing, and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2), which is at the heart of Romans 12 living.

Romans 12 Living

In Romans 12 Paul continues the trajectory of his teaching, drawing his readers into the specific implications for their new life and community in Christ. The entire chapter functions as vision as much as prescription. Wolterstorff submits the value of the image of a kaleidoscope. He points out that the English word derives literally from three Greek words: *kalos* meaning *beautiful*, *eidōs* meaning *form*, and *skopos* meaning *view*.

Wolterstorff concludes, “putting them all together we get ‘view of a beautiful form’” (254-55). The biblical account of creation—and new creation—invites disciples forward with such a view of a beautiful form. Romans 12 spins with a kaleidoscopic vision of daily living and community shaped by God’s merciful actions and Spirit. The beauty of the vision beckons and elicits a response.

The peril for Paul, and for any who attempt to describe the new life in Christ, is the reduction of a colorful, dynamic vision into separate jagged pieces with sharp angles and points. Barth issues this warning in his introduction to Romans 12:

To be sincere our thought must share in the tension of human life, in its criss-cross lines, and in its kaleidoscopic movements. And life is neither simple, nor straightforward, nor obvious. Things are simple and straightforward and obvious only when they are detached from their context and then treated superficially. (425)

The danger of taking apart the kaleidoscope is losing the context, the patterns, and the connections among the pieces. However, communication is impossible without individual clauses, sentences, and sections. Therefore, the exegetical task requires the dissection and examination of the constituent pieces, as well as how they interplay with each other. Furthermore, the rhetorical and pedagogical tasks of preaching require some simplifications to assist the newcomer to Romans 12. The length and layers of the chapter beg for some delineations and combinations to assist in the absorption and application of the imperatives.

Before setting out the framework for a Romans 12 series, and bearing Barth’s caveat in mind, two important connections must be secured. First, every piece of Romans 12 flows out of the preceding chapters and the view of God’s mercy that Paul has presented. Various interpretations of God’s mercy may be supplied, but all contribute to

the mainstream current headed for a new way of life. Nijay K. Gupta provides one view of God's mercy through investigation of the Septuagint background for the phrase. Because Paul's use of *oiktirmos* for mercy is unusual, Gupta traces its extensive use in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. There he identifies a three-fold mercy: God's revelatory mercy, God's forgiving mercy, and God's rescuing mercy. Gupta compares that pattern to Paul's case in Romans 1-11 for a righteousness of God that is revealing, redeeming, and forgiving. He concludes, "[T]hese mercies, though Paul almost certainly did not have three separate categories in mind, form the foundation for a new sacrifice of the self—free, at peace with God, empowered" (96). The good news of that freedom, reconciliation, and God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ streams into Romans 12. Mark Reasoner proposes another view of the mercies, roughly correlated to preceding chapters: freedom from death (5), freedom from sin (6), freedom from the law (7), life with God through the Spirit (8), and "God's covenant faithfulness that is examined and re-affirmed in Romans 9-11" (295). The mercies attached to God's lordship (Achtmeier), God's righteousness (Bruce; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*; Wright, *Letter to the Romans*), or God's rectifying rectitude (Keck) flow into the ethos of daily living and community. Belief and behavior interpenetrate. The indicative and imperative align.

Second, whatever else the mercies entail, they surely point to and enable new relationships. Righteousness is about right relationships. At the center is God whose predisposition or very being is righteousness. God reaches out to unrighteous humanity, to those who have, by their sin, ruptured the bond. In Christ Jesus, God has made decisive repair, offering humanity a renewed relationship (Achtmeier 62-63). Romans 12 highlights that reconciled relationships are not only between individuals and God. The

mercies of God and the work of the Spirit infuse human relationships. In his detailed essay on the meaning of *faith* in Romans, Ben C. Dunson argues that faith serves two primary functions, one individual and one communal. He writes, “[F]aith is the divinely appointed means of the salvation of the individual as well as of the building up of the believing community in love and self-sacrifice” (22). Dunson argues compellingly against any false dichotomy of faith’s relevance both to individual and community. “Instead,” Dunson insists, “faith as Paul sees it leads to the salvation of the individual *in community* and to the edification of the community *by individuals*” (original emphasis; 46). A faith-righteousness gift to an individual (3:22-25) and the “measure of faith” apportioned an individual in community (12:3) fit together; they correspond and need each other. Faith establishes and manifests in restored or healthy relationships. Romans 12 begins at the center with the individual believer’s relationship with God (vv. 1-2), proceeds to the relationships among believers in community (vv. 3-16), then extends to the relationship with persons beyond the community of believers (vv. 14, 17-21). However, all of these relationships are transformed and redefined by the mercy and intervention of God.

Peterson observes bluntly, “We can’t get community right if we don’t get theology right” (“Titus” 198). Paul devoted eleven chapters to theology before turning attention to community. The overall movement of Romans 12 is from the relationship with God to the relationships within the Christian community to the relationships with those outside the community. This movement roughly corresponds to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. In that passage, Paul progresses from (1) living to please God to (2) love for one another in the community to (3) behaving properly to outsiders. However, this structure

approximates but does not hold entirely for Romans 12. For example, the blessing of persecutors (v. 14) signals a shift. However, the “live in harmony with one another” imperative (v. 16) reverts to consideration of the in-group dynamics. Achtemeier applies that three-fold structure in his commentary but virtually ignores the first part of verse 16 in his treatment of verses 14-21 as “Grace and the Secular Community” (200-03). Wright attempts a rather forced chiasmus pattern involving chapters 12 and 13 (*Letter to the Romans* 703). Dunn proposes a similar *abcdcba* structure extending into chapter 15, but even he concedes it is “rough and unbalanced” (*Romans 9-16* 706). Keck regards the instruction in verses 3-8 and the forceful triads and couplets clustered in verses 9-21 as help for the reader in the task of verse 2, “as they discern what God’s will actually calls for in detail” (310). Runar M. Thorsteinsson, whose essay seeks to demonstrate the congruence of Paul’s moral teaching and Roman Stoicism, assesses the lack of structure from a very different perspective, entirely unconcerned about extolling or interpreting Paul’s thought. Verses 9-21 “offer a series of exhortations which seem to be singled out rather randomly,... a jumble of loosely related maxims” (145). He maintains that attempts to impose a coherent, calculated structure have essentially failed.

No single, simple organization of Romans 12 satisfies. Thematic, grammatical, and linguistic handles do not provide any ironclad structure. Interestingly, C. K. Barrett in his early commentary was content to treat verses 3-21 without any divisions or categories, interpreting each clause or phrase without explaining the interconnections or sequence. For purposes of this project and the requirements of preaching, Table 2.1 provides the sequence that was developed and will be explained further in consideration of each of the segments.

Table 2.1. Romans 12 Living Sequence (NIV)

Topic	Reference
Therefore	v. 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy ...
Live as an offering to God	vv. 1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers (and sisters), in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.
Live as an instrument of grace	vv. 3-8 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
Live as members of one another	vv. 4-5, 9-10, 15-16 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
Live as a spiritual fountain	vv. 11-12 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
Live as a blessing to others	vv. 13-14 Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
Live as a force for good	vv. 17–21 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This division of verses provided the framework for the Romans 12 living sermon series featured in the ministry intervention. What follows is a brief exegetical sketch for each of the segments.

Therefore (Romans 12:1a)

Paul crowns his first eleven chapters with a gleaming ascription of praise to God, glorifying the source, conveyor, and destination of *all things* (πάντα) in 11:33-36. This phrase echoes the *all things* that “God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (8:28). Paul acclaims God’s wisdom and intentionality behind all the plans for mercy. Wright describes this as “the summit of the mountain range, the place from which you can see around in all directions” (*Letter to the Romans* 702). The reader accompanying Paul has reached the vantage point from which *all things* can be understood in terms of God’s original and ultimate merciful purpose. Although much remains a mystery and the ways of God are inscrutable (11:33-34), what the believer can see is a sufficient and compelling view of God’s mercy.

The transition from the theological ascent toward the descent into practical application is contained in the opening words of chapter 12: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy.” The view of God’s mercy is not merely a reference to the doxology at the end of chapter eleven or the mercy described in 11:30-32, but to the *all things* view that Paul has reached through the first eleven chapters (Barrett 230; Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 708; Hiebert 311-12; Keck 291; Mounce 50). “With eyes wide open to the mercies of God” is how J. B. Phillips paraphrased the beginning of verse 1 (qtd. in Dawn 8). Paul wants believers with wide open eyes to grasp how God’s loving action has decisively changed the way believers connect to God, to each other, and to the world beyond their Christian circle. Paul urges his readers to recognize who they have become in Christ and to live accordingly urges.

Dawn observes about the conjunction (οὖν). “[T]his one word is the hinge between all of Paul’s comments about God’s love in Romans 1-11 (the doctrinal formulations) and about the Christian community’s love for one another in Romans 12-16 (the ethical exhortations)” (3). The entire epistle hinges on an adverbial conjunction. *Therefore* connects faith and conduct, theology and ethics, belief and behavior, the indicative and the imperative. Having established “the ground of Christian ethics” (Barrett 230), the apostle transitions into an appropriate human response, illuminating the meaning of glorifying God with daily life and community.

Paul urges the Jesus followers in Rome to become a *therefore* community, a living and intentional response to their view of God’s mercies. This aim was articulated at the outset as “obedience that comes from faith” (1:5) and repeated at the end of the letter (16:26). Such obedience from faith is, of course, unnecessary and insufficient for salvation. “It is not what we must do in order to be justified but what we are unable not to do because we are justified” (Mounce 50). This obedience flows from God’s prior mercy through a faithful response. Believers can “live a new life” (6:4), “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11), “free from the law of sin and death” (8:2). This new life and community are “under the structuring power of grace” (Achte-meier 195). Dunn emphasizes that Paul is redrawing the boundaries and redefining “the characteristics which mark out the people of God” (*Roman 9-16* 716). Keck names it the “community’s transformed ethos” (289). Robert A. Bryant employs a musical image; he contrasts the cacophony of life without God’s intervention and the symphony possible because of what God has done. The project of God’s mercy has reached “to a rebellious creation that is bent on living life on its own terms rather than on God’s terms” (1). God has intervened to break “sin’s power

to pervert and destroy our lives and relationship.” Therefore, humanity is capable and called to new, harmonious ways of living and relating.

The revelation and work of God in Christ supply the basis for Paul’s admonitions. Bruce points out that Paul uses his preferred word (παρακαλέω) to introduce exhortation when he wants to be diplomatic (213). Paul proceeds gently to deliver twenty-one verses of ethical instruction. However, no diplomatic or polite preface can mask the enormity of his first directive, asking the Roman Christians to offer themselves sacrificially to God.

Living as an offering to God (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul’s first of many admonitions in the twelfth chapter is “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” After eleven chapters of detailing God’s mercies, the number one response that Paul urges for his brothers and sisters in faith is sacrifice. This immediate reference to sacrifice (θυσία) accomplishes at least two things. First, without an explicit reference to the imitation of Christ (as found in 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 15:5), Paul connects a believer’s conduct to the example of Jesus. Sang Meyng Lee, in his examination of discipleship in Mark’s Gospel, asserts, “The image of Jesus is characterized as self-denial for the will of his Father and self-sacrifice for humankind” (6). These core virtues of discipleship are both emphasized in Romans 12:1-2. Paul begins the chapter by pointing to sacrifice, knowing that followers of Jesus are directed to take up their crosses (Mark 8:34) and to participate in his suffering (Rom. 8:17) and death (Rom. 6:5). Second, Paul’s allusion to the cultic practice of sacrifice, observed in different forms by both Jews and Gentiles in Rome, allowed him to connect with their background (Keck 291) and simultaneously redefine the new people of God. Dunn makes the most forceful case for this transformation of the ritual offerings.

Paul helps the Roman Christians see that their previous rituals, however rooted and practiced, are effectively replaced by a new form of living sacrifice. According to Dunn, “The boundary of cultic ritual is transposed from actual cultic practices to the life of every day and transformed into nonritual expression, into the much more demanding work of human relationship in an everyday world” (*Romans 9-16* 717). Romans 12 follows with the details of what the living sacrifice looks like in terms of relationships.

Paul’s call for a living sacrifice in verse 1 echoes his statement in 6:13: “offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him.” Sarah Whittle connects the living sacrifice to the newly-alive-in-Christ status (94). The believer’s sacrifice is offered by one who has “been brought from death to life,” who has died with Christ and been raised with Christ. Consequently, the living sacrifice is more than an alternative to the cultic killing of an animal on an altar or a Savior on a cross; it means the ongoing offering of the new life that has been granted in Christ.

The parallel to 6:13 also suggests that Paul bypasses a kind of hokey-pokey sequence of trying to figure out what part or portion to put in for God. “Offer every part of yourself” (6:13) requires putting in the whole self. “Offer your bodies” (12:1) is a synecdoche, a figure of speech for the totality of self. Just a verse earlier in the ascription of praise in 11:36 he acknowledged that *all things* (πάντα) are from, through, and for God. He proceeds to ask disciples to present their own *all-things*-lives before God. Hiebert apprehends the *all things* dynamic in this imperative and writes, “While believers may be prone to speak about ‘Making sacrifices for the Lord’—an expression not found in the Bible—Paul’s appeal goes vastly beyond such a view of Christian

responsibility” (315). Peterson paraphrases, “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering” (Rom. 12:1 MSG). The living sacrifice is a comprehensive presentation of self in every moment and activity.

This complete self-offering is “holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). These are additional terms from the ritual practice of sacrifice (Barrett 231). *Holy* indicates *dedicated* or *set apart* for God. Wright points out that the concept of *pleasing* was important enough to Paul that he repeated it in verse 2 because “what a Christian does, in Christ and by the Spirit, gives actual pleasure to God” (*Letter to the Romans* 704). This manner of sacrifice is the “true and proper worship” that God desires. Paul uses a phrase (λογικὴν τὴν λατρείαν) that resists any easy English equivalent (Keck 292; Wright, *Letter to the Romans* 705). The noun *latreia* is typically translated as *worship*, but it refers more particularly to a “duty in the service of God” (Keck). The modifier derived from *logikos* is often rendered as *spiritual* (NRSV), but the root indicates thought or rationality; thus, the King James Version uses “reasonable worship.” Taken together with Paul’s insistence on offering bodies, the phrase conveys the mind-and-heart (or spiritual) aspects that make for a complete living sacrifice.

Dawn emphasizes that sacrifices engage every dimension of life, eliminating the false dichotomy between sacred and secular work:

Our jobs—as waiters, mechanics, businesswomen, or artists—are a living, holy, and acceptable service. Our workplaces are places of worship, and all the activities of our days are part of our worship. I worship as I brush my teeth, exercise, take a nap, care for someone, kiss my husband, scrub the kitchen floor, or start a cozy fire and listen to a symphony. (26)

The offering of self to God is not limited to so-called religious service; instead, it is extended to the full schedule and span of human activity, properly understood as *all things* directed to God.

Paul attaches the living sacrifice to the pursuit of God's will in verse 2. Jesus' followers are "not conformed to this world (aeon), but transformed by the renewing of their minds" (Rom. 12:2), their rational, thinking capacity. Such thinking is devoted to the testing and approval of God's will. Osmer regards this discernment as essential to the moral formation of the individual and community (55, 284). Lesslie Newbigin associates the Romans 12:2 discernment with a complete conversion to the missional task. Radical conversion involves the mind as well as the heart or will; believers see the world, not as the prevailing culture does but with a perspective that focuses on God's plan and goal. Discernment allows and propels alignment with the mission of God (38). Stevens points to a passion for the matters about which God is passionate. He uses the term *orthopathy* to indicate a passion that is properly aligned with God's mercy and mission. He describes orthopathy as "caring for what concerns God, caring for God's concerns in daily life, and caring for God above all" (254). The living sacrifice shares the cares, purpose, and mission of God. The *all-things-self* is offered for the "good, pleasing, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Living as an Instrument of Grace (Romans 12:3-8)

From the reaching quest to ascertain and fulfill the will of God, Paul retracts to a more modest tone and subject: receiving grace to fulfill one's role as part of the body of Christ. The gift of grace is not separate from the "view of God's mercy" already received and noted. Romans 12:3-8 continues to acknowledge God's activity and to extend the

therefore response of God's people. Bryant emphasizes, "The logical (12:1, *logikē*) response to God's saving work in Jesus, therefore, is to trust God and to allow one's self to be shaped completely by God's gracious love" (287). The "ever-transforming power of God's grace" continues the work among the faithful, enabling them "to be instruments of God's transforming love" (288). Paul mentions three receptions from God in this passage. First, he uses his own reception of grace as an example and authorization for his teaching on humility to frame the section on spiritual gifts. Second, he refers to the "faith that God has distributed to each of you" (Rom. 12:3). Third, he speaks of the different gifts assigned according to the grace given to each person. The examination of these three receptions will illumine Romans 12 living as an instrument of grace.

When Paul began verse 3, "For by the grace given me," he was articulating a "sense of commission and enabling" (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 720) that positioned him to speak a challenging word. He prefaced what he was to say to every one of them by referring to the receipt of "grace and apostleship" in 1:5. That reception of grace in the letter's introduction was expressed in the first person plural, including his readers also in the grace and mission to call Gentiles to belong to Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in 12:6 Paul restates that grace is given to each one in new community founded on Christ. He realizes that he is speaking to others who are *graced* when he challenges them to a right way of thinking derived from their new and right relationship with God. Here and later in the chapter (12:10, 16), Paul is trying to inculcate a new mind-set appropriate for those who belong to Christ, a humility that is essential for community. In verse 3 "he emphasizes a way of thinking by using a form of *phronein* four times: 'Do not think of yourself more highly (*hyperphronein*) than you ought to think (*phronein*) but think (*phronein*) sensibly

(*eis to sōphronein*)” (Keck 296-97). Humility, not high-mindedness, is a prerequisite for community, especially a community with Jewish and Gentile Christians. A right or sober regard for self is a necessary corrective for ethnic, cultural, moral, or charismatic pride (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 732) that damages relationships and impedes unity. Paul speaks this word to them from the grace-given position of his calling.

This healthy self-assessment is more than a virtue; it is a self-discernment with the assistance and perspective of God. In verse 2 Paul introduced the notion of testing and approving God’s will. In verse 3 he suggests that a right-minded self-assessment is done “in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” This revised 2011 translation in the NIV has weakened the 1984 NIV translation of the “measure of faith,” an expression used also in the NRSV and as far back as the KJV. The recent change in the NIV to “distributed” sidesteps the original Greek μέτρον πίστεως (measure of faith) and the question of what exactly has been measured and apportioned by God to all.

Most interpreters are reluctant to suppose that God has assigned different amounts of faith to his people. Faith in Jesus that justifies and leads to new life is not elsewhere described in gradient quantities. Consequently, interpreters of the “measure of faith” have probed the meaning of either measure or faith. Several have argued that the phrase indicates a common measuring function of faith, given to all God’s people. Keck would render this expression the “measure that is faith” (297). Similarly, Wright decides upon “a measuring-rod, the same for all, called ‘faith’” (*Letter to the Romans* 709). Others allow for the measuring to be different if the notion of faith is more malleable. Older interpreters seemed to prefer this approach. Barrett points to 1 Corinthians 13:2 and identifies instances when *faith* in Paul’s writing denotes “power given by God to do

certain things (for example, to remove mountains)” (235). Bruce also calls it “the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his or her special responsibility” (215). The measuring function of faith seems to work best in verse 3 as Paul urges a new and right way of thinking about oneself, self-discernment from the perspective of God. However, the notion of power or spiritual capacity seems to anticipate his use of *faith* again in verse 6. John C. Poirier argues in detail that *faith* in verse 3 is best understood as stewardship or trusteeship. He examines the semantic range of πίστις in Paul and proposes that the best way to explain the term in both verses 3 and 6 is the differentiated assignment of ministries entrusted to all of God’s people.

Whatever the rendering of *faith*, Paul unequivocally attaches gifts or *charismata* to the renovated people of God. Each and all have gifts and functions entrusted to them. “To be in Christ,” writes Bryant, “also means one is a recipient of a spiritual gift, a gift that contributes to the health of the body of Christ and its work in the world” (289). The church has the unity of a body with different members and functions. Dawn points out the position of the word different (διάφορα) at the end of the clause for emphasis (97-98). Literally verse 6 begins, “[W]e have gifts according to the grace given us different.” Grammatically, *different* is an adjective that correlates to gifts, but the modifier is placed syntactically for emphasis and to introduce a series of varied examples that extend through verse 8 (prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, showing mercy). Bruce points out, “Diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God’s handiwork. It is so in nature; it is equally so in grace, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community” (214). Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 exhibit the variety of gifts and liberality of God’s grace at work in individuals as part of the community. The “grace-

gifts,” according to Dawn, are cited in plural “to suggest not only that the community as a whole has many gifts, but also that individuals probably have more than one” (93). The *charismata* are distributed generously across the community with many different manifestations of God’s grace.

Although individual gifts could be differentiated, none were negligible. Paul avoids any inferior-superior division of gifts; such a hierarchy would have a corrosive effect on community (Achte-meier 197). Instead, all gifts are shared, intended to be edifying for the newly defined community. The edifying purpose of gifts was already clear in Paul’s introductory statement to the Romans: “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (1:11–12). The grace-gifts or “charisms” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16*) are both a manifestation of God’s grace and a means of extending God’s grace—to strengthen, build up, encourage, or guide the community. Whether the charisms are supernatural gifts of the Spirit or natural “abilities” applied to God’s purposes, “the point for Paul is that words and actions are only charisms insofar as they express and convey grace” (734). All of God’s people alive in Christ are recipients of the gifts that work for the good of the entire body of Christ. The charismatic body of Christ is filled with persons who are instruments of God’s grace.

Dawn explains that as she was writing her chapter on “Gifts from the Fullness of Grace” her radio began to play a concerto for two flutes. She paused to listen and appreciate two masters performing an incredibly difficult composition. Eventually she compares their playing with the performance of Jesus’ followers: “Just as the two flautists sounded glad to use their musical abilities, so we experience great delight when

we use our grace-gifts” (96). Romans 12 living includes the delight and fulfillment of serving as instruments of God’s grace, playing beautifully the assortment of gifts and talents for his purposes.

Living as Members of One Another (Romans 12:4-5,9-10,15-16)

Paul develops the *body* metaphor in three passages (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7-16) and applies it to charisms or gifts of ministry (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 734). The body of Christ also provides a framework to connect the unity and the diversity of the people of God, which was especially critical for a community of Jewish and Gentile Christians. With the image of body, Paul establishes “an indispensable corporeality” and “an active membership” (733) so that believing in Jesus necessarily creates a communal connection. God’s grace has the power to confer gifts and the power to structure relationships (Achte-meier 195). Consequently, verses 4-5 lead directly into verses 6-8 and the gifts for ministry, but these verses also point beyond to other imperatives that define the new community. Paul’s admonitions clarify how a *therefore* community, living in response to the view and reception of God’s mercies, manifests the new-life-in-Christ relationships.

Romans 12 spells out the restored, vital relationships with God and with others, inside and beyond the circle of believers. Such transformed relationships reflect also the living-sacrifice mode of self-offering to God and for others. The nexus of these relationships is the body of Christ. Membership expresses a spiritual connection with Christ and his body. However, the membership connection also makes explicit the communal connection of individuals to one another. Wright cautions:

[W]e are so used to the word “member” referring to someone who belongs to a society or club that we are in danger of ignoring the fact that here

“members” (μέλη *melē*) means “parts of the body” and belongs with the extended metaphor. (710)

Paul makes a particularly strong statement with the reciprocal pronoun (ἀλλήλων). The individual members not only form one body, they are also, literally, members of one another. Believers belong not only to God in Christ but also to one another, sharing gifts, sharing the interdependence of functions, and sharing the sort of love that Jesus mandated for his disciples in John 13:34-35: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” In Romans 12 Paul developed that reciprocal love of Jesus’ new command into one of the essentials for community.

The love that is characteristic of disciples must be genuine and discriminating—between good and evil (12:9). Paul begins his “lightning sketches of ways to build up the community” (Wright, *Letter to the Romans* 710) with love, the core behavior of Jesus followers also cited in 1 Corinthians 13 and Colossians 3:14. Love in this context targets others within the community. Verse 10 stipulates a devoted, honoring, mutual or one-another (ἀλλήλων) love for the brothers and sisters who comprise the body community. Dawn, who writes with memories of being a single adult in the church, is especially sensitive to the character and importance of Christian love. According to Dawn, “Paul exhorts us to be ‘devoted to one another’ in the family of Christ. The phrase—literally to be ‘tenderly affectionate’—means to have a heartfelt love and gentle care toward each other” (164). This reciprocal love means that each has a stake in the well-being of the other and that will manifest in a close identification and empathy with the emotions of the other (e.g., “Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn” 12:15). The life of one transformed by God’s grace has an increased capacity to sense and respond to

the situation of others. Dawn sees that “much of the emptiness and perversions and violence of our culture” could be remedied more effectively by “the gentleness of an assuring touch and the warmth of someone’s affirming affection” (166). The tender awareness and concern will mitigate the experience of loneliness or isolation for members of the body community.

This love also engenders a one-another (ἀλλήλων) harmony (12:16). The harmonious living and loving stems from the proper self-assessment Paul urged in verse 3. Again, in verse 16 he uses two forms of *phronein* to exclude a way of thinking that is high-minded or self-minded. That mind-set creates barriers with persons of all stations and conditions of life, including the lowly (ταπεινός). Followers of Jesus naturally and humbly associate with such persons as members of the same body. The reprise of this theme emphasizes the importance Paul attached to believers sharing the mind of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:2) and the organic unity of the body of Christ.

The imperatives of verses 15-16 might be left entirely in the context of the church, functioning to achieve the necessary social solidarity. Dunn supposes that they are probably addressed to the Roman house churches and especially the tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians (*Romans 9-16* 739). However, Achtemeier and Wright regard them as descriptive of how Christians should relate to pagan neighbors as well as believers. When members of the body are living in a right mind-set aligned with Christ, the body community lives beyond itself as a natural extension of God’s grace. The core structure of grace and starting point is the one-another (ἀλλήλων) living and loving prescribed in verses 5, 10, and 16. Living as members of one another is the home base or outpost for the church’s mission in the world.

Living as a Spiritual Fountain (Romans 12:11-12)

Amidst the instructions for relationships with others in and beyond the body community, Paul inserts a set of imperatives that draws attention back to the believer's immediate connection with the Lord. They differ from the surrounding verses in that they do not elaborate on love or specific appropriate responses to other persons. Instead, the focus is upon one's internal resources. The accent in these verses is not on what to do but "on the *manner* in which these relationships and deeds are to be expressed" (emphasis original; Keck 304). With verses 11-12, Paul seems to call time-out from the rigors of a new community and a consuming love. All loving behaviors constitute a living sacrifice, a self-offering that is set apart and pleasing to God. Paul provides the basis to make sure the right relationships are properly motivated and fueled. He exhibits awareness of the difficulty in developing and sustaining community with new persons or with those who are very different. Earnest efforts to love and serve demand sacrifice. Midway through the chapter, Paul ties the teaching again to the "view of God's mercy" (Rom. 12:1) and the response of a grateful, obedient *therefore* community. He urges the Romans to tap into the spiritual resources that come from their relationship with the Lord.

The backdrop for these verses, if not the whole of Romans, is the struggle to persevere as believers in community in times of distress or conflict or uncertainty. What afflictions they faced cannot be stated precisely. Paul was certainly addressing the uneasy or contentious relationships between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians in Rome. In chapter 12 he also refers to persecution and evil in nonspecific ways. Beyond these conflicts is the disciple's formidable challenge of living sacrificially. Timothy Sensing articulates the difficulty of a steadfast, ongoing sacrifice:

Many of us, I think, would be willing to display mercy in one giant heroic act. We would go up to Jerusalem and die with [Jesus]. Yet often we are called to let our mercy flow to others one drop at a time. (185)

The slow drain of loving and serving over an extended time leads to depletion and discouragement. Dawn summarizes well what is going on in these verses:

The goal before us is what enables us to keep on keeping on, no matter what befalls us, as we seek to offer ourselves as living and holy sacrifices, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, to use our gifts for the upbuilding of the community, to love with the genuine love of Christ, and to express that love in affectionate and honoring ways. (178)

Paul interrupts the flow of chapter 12 to remind the community to be replenished for their sacrificial loving and serving.

Zeal or diligence (σπουδή) and spiritual fervor (πνεύματι ζέοντες) for serving the Lord are essential. Paul creates an opportunity for self-assessment, for those hearing his admonitions to check the fuel indicator on the dashboard. The responsibility for diligence resides with the believer. However, spiritual fervor is a resource that believers cannot manufacture or command, which makes the imperative a bit quixotic. The root verb for ζέοντες (zéō) suggests something bubbling or boiling. Of the three phrases in verse 11, the first represents a human endeavor, the second acknowledges a spiritual source upon which the believer is dependent, and the third affirms the fundamental activity or purpose toward which the first two are directed. Dunn explains the second and third phrases in the triplet:

The love which binds a congregation together needs that inner spontaneity bubbling up within if it is to remain fresh and personally real, but it can easily become too experiential and ‘frothy’ unless it expresses also the fundamental commitment to Christ as Lord and is motivated by the desire to serve him. (*Romans 9-16* 753-54)

The “inner spontaneity bubbling up” suggests a fountain of spiritual energy and motivation to serve the Lord by fulfilling the other directives of Romans 12.

Paul had told the Thessalonians not to extinguish the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), which encourages the RSV translation of 12:11, “Be aglow with the Spirit.” Dawn translates the phrase literally, “in spirit boiling” (*Truly the Community* 182). Whether the image is burning embers or a bubbling pot, the fervor conveys heat and energy devoted to the service of the Lord. Paul’s imperative for spiritual fervor, along with zeal or diligence in verse 11, indicates the believer’s responsibility for monitoring and tending their spiritual condition. Dawn compares this attentiveness to adding a log to a woodstove: “Similarly, our spirits require continuous input to keep boiling” (183). John Ortberg has written about *Soul Keeping* in his book by that title. Drawing extensively on the writings and wisdom of Dallas Willard, Ortberg likens the soul to a small stream that needs tending to keep it clear and flowing. When the stream of soul is fluid and free of impediments, it delivers refreshment and spiritual renewal to every dimension of human life and activity.

Paul’s attention to the spiritual condition extends into verse 12. The Christian’s joy bound up in hope is only possible with a “view of God’s mercy” (Rom.12:1), with the vista afforded by their dead-to-alive status. Recognition of what God has already done—and promised to do—yields patience despite affliction in the present moment.

Furthermore, since God is the ultimate catalyst for zeal and spiritual fervor, for joy and patience, the lifeline of dialogue with God must be kept open, maintained faithfully. The participle Paul attaches to prayer (προσκαρτεροῦντες) has even greater intentionality and intensity; it conveys a strong and persistent holding fast, an endurance or perseverance in prayer. The steadfast connection with God is essential for all that Romans 12 expects of

believers. Dawn insists that “prayer is the basis for our service, our zeal and commitment, our love, our use of gifts, and our offering of ourselves together as a holy, living sacrifice” (*Truly the Community* 200). The one who perseveres in a relationship with God, a relationship that includes listening intently as well as pouring out the contents of a mind and heart, discovers a bubbling up of spiritual fervor, joy, hope, patience, and all the resources necessary to serve the Lord. In verses 11-12 Paul invites the Roman Christians to live as spiritual fountains, tapped into the grace of God that supplies all they need to fulfill the loving relationships enjoined in Romans 12.

Living as a Blessing to Others (Romans 12:13-14)

After a brief detour reconnecting the Romans to the “view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1) and the spiritual resources available by divine grace, Paul resumes instructions pertaining to human relationships. Mounce summarizes, “The essence of love is giving” and particularly to those who are in need, reflecting God’s compassionate response to those who are hurting (51). In verses 13-14 any division between insider-outsider relationships in the body community dissolves. Love and practical care applies to people in need, whether they belong to the immediate nexus of relationships or not. Paul calls on the Romans to bless others inside and outside their body community. The ethic clearly extends beyond the family imagery of verse 10 to strangers and even to persecutors.

Verse 13 begins with giving to “the Lord’s people” (literally *saints*, *ἀγίων*) in need. Meeting the basic needs of each other in the fledgling Christian community was an expression of their one-another (*ἀλλήλων*) membership (v. 5), one-another devotion (v. 10), and one-another harmony (v. 16). Dawn refers to this one-another responsibility as

“being partners together in meeting the needs of the set-apart people of God” (*Truly the Community* 215). The Greek verb translated in the NIV as *share* is the participle form of κοιτωνέω, familiar to many as *koinonia* or fellowship. It reflects a vital participation or immersion in the needs or situation of others. Barrett pushes the idea beyond “share in” to “partake of” the needs of fellow believers (240). Keck says that Paul urges solidarity with persons in particular circumstances but leaves ambiguous which needs should be met. Meanwhile, even while he wrote, Paul was delivering an offering from Gentile congregations to God’s people who were in need in Jerusalem. The care extended from one Christian to another, or from one Christian community to another, was foundational for their group identity as Jesus followers.

This sharing or care extends to those in need while they travel or sojourn away from their own families or community. Paul reminds the Romans to practice (or, better, “pursue” Keck 305) hospitality. From his own missionary journeys, Paul knew intimately how important this ancient practice was. Shelter, food, company, and encouragement were essential for all travelers, and they were indispensable for the connectedness of Christians. Wright elaborates that hospitality is not something different from love, “but is part of what Paul and other early Christians meant by that large and all-embracing term” (*Letter to the Romans* 712). Furthermore, because the cosmopolis of Rome was a destination city for traders and travelers, the role of hospitality would have been magnified. Both the hospitality (the compound construct φιλοξενία, which means literally *love for stranger*) and the sharing-fellowship (κοινωνία) in verse 13 emphasize “mutual interdependence and communal support” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 754). The experience of

community helps to fortify the diligence, spiritual fervor, joy, hope, and patience that Paul illumined in the preceding verses.

The mutual blessings within the one-another (ἀλλήλων) community do not stop there. Care for others in need, especially strangers or outsiders, was seen as congruent with the gospel. Paul extends that care further to those who were hostile toward Christian believers. When he writes in verse 14, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse,” he resonates with the teaching of Jesus, which would eventually be recorded in Matt. 5:44-45 and Luke 6:27-28. He also anticipates the expanded treatment given in verses 17-21. The response to persecution is grounded again on the “view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1), which puts all things in perspective. Furthermore, if the believer truly avers that “all things are from God, through God, and for God” (11:36), and that nothing, including persecution, “can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35-39), then the person alive in Christ is capable of a loving response even toward persecutors. The positive response goes “beyond both nonresistance and nonretaliation, as did Jesus, as well as Paul himself in 1 Cor. 4:12: ‘When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure’” (Keck 306). The new believer transferred from death to life, who consciously offers a living sacrifice of self, is able to respond to persecution in a surprising manner.

Dunn observes that Paul “was mindful of the political realities which confronted these new small groups” and that “the little churches in Rome were an endangered species, vulnerable to further imperial ruling against Jews and societies” (*Romans 9-16* 755). Although no evidence confirms overt or official persecution in Rome in the early 50s (Wright, *Letter to the Romans* 713), Paul takes for granted “the atmosphere of threat

and intimidation within which these Christians had to live out their discipleship” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 755). At some level he may have understood his counsel as pragmatic, an outgoing goodness that was less likely to provoke a cycle of malice and retaliation. However, even more apparent is the way it echoes the social ethic of Jesus.

The ethos of the Christian community is not only internally defined. It is also shaped by the external factors, including the most dangerous and antagonistic relationships. By putting the injunctions of verses 13 and 14 side by side, Paul makes explicit the extension of Christian loving responses from an interior community base to others in the world. Paul did not divide a Christian’s life into “two sets of attitudes and obligations—one to fellow believers, the other to nonbelievers” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 756). Instead, the practice of love and the desire to bless is omnidirectional, reaching far beyond the expected mutuality of the church. Shirley C. Guthrie states this missional role even more forcefully. The work of God’s grace is not to create a haven for Christians but “to prepare them morally, spiritually, and corporately to go into the world as ambassadors of the justice, compassion, freedom, and peace of the kingdom of God that is not just for Christians but for all people everywhere” (75). The Roman Christians are called to live as a blessing to others within their immediate circle, a blessing to others in the extended body community and to others who were outside—or even aggressively opposed to—their faith.

Living as a Force for Good (Romans 12:17-21)

In the final verses of the chapter 12, Paul charges the Roman community to become a force for good in the world. At the conclusion of what feels like a marathon of imperatives, Paul issues perhaps the toughest: “Overcome evil with good” (v. 21).

Perhaps it compares to a marathon runner who nears the finish, reenters the stadium, and on the closing lap is expected to pole vault a great height. The compassionate sharing, the hospitality, and all the expressions of one-another love within Christian community comprise miles and miles of effort. However, because they are reciprocal, they are more intuitive and understandable. The course is difficult, but possible. What Paul asks in the concluding verses is so demanding that at one point he even injects a qualifier: “if possible” (v. 18). He also develops this single theme across five verses, unlike the terse, staccato style leading up to this passage.

Paul has acknowledged evil already in v. 10, as something malevolent or wicked (*πονηρός*) to be abhorred or detested, something in opposition to the good (*ἀγαθός*). He is starkly aware of the treachery and social malignancies, the forces of death and destruction against which he has warned earlier in the letter. He knows that the believers will not be “living their lives cut off from contact with the wide community” (Dunn, *Romans 9-16* 756). They will “continue to live within that society, but with a different set of values and different goals” (Achtmeier 202). Therefore, predictably, they will confront evil in many forms.

Paul turns to that directly in verse 17 with an imperative framed in the negative: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” The Greek verb behind *repay* suggests doing something necessary or obligatory, as if vengeance is expected and automatic. However, Paul nullifies that expectation by transferring the vengeance role to God. Using a composite of Hebrew Scripture (principally Deut. 32:35), in verse 19, Paul reinforces his “do not repay” imperative. Dunn comments, “[V]engeance in human hands is a treacherous commodity which destroys the good it is meant to defend and must perforce

be left to God alone” (*Romans 9-16* 756). God alone is positioned to judge and avenge evil. Instead of human vengeance, Paul prescribes three specific responses before the concluding imperative.

First, “be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody” (v. 17b). Paul wants the Romans to think ahead of their reaction (προνοέω) and to select intentionally a course of action. This thoughtful response to hostility is markedly different from a reflexive vengeance, an obligatory retribution. Furthermore, it is not passive. The believer aims for what is right, in Greek καλός, which is better translated as *good* or *beautiful*. Paul sets up *the good* as their target. He uses the word for *good* that also represents something aesthetically pleasing, something that will look good to the eyes of others. This imperative raises awareness of their missional identity. They will consider how their witness, their conduct, looks to all people. A “missionary lifestyle” (Bosch 137) is an explicit goal in 12:11 as well as in 1 Thessalonians 4:12, “so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.”

Second, “if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (v. 18). Again, Paul has in mind the interaction of the Christian community with the wider community, with everyone. The character of that relationship affects their witness for Christ. Living in peace with everyone is advantageous, not only because of the inherent blessing of peace but also because of the way it manifests God’s reconciling love for the world. However, Paul, with no illusions, qualifies the peace imperative in two ways: (1) if it is possible, and (2) as far as it depends on the believers’ agency. Believers can be assigned responsibility to create a new community in Christ, but Paul recognizes a

broader peace cannot be unilateral. Roman Christians are enjoined to do all in their capacity to cultivate irenic relationships with everyone.

Third, rather than an aggressive reaction to enemies, Paul prescribes a benevolent treatment: food for the hungry enemy, drink for the thirsty. The passage proposes softening the enemy's attitude with unexpected kindness, quoting from the Jewish wisdom literature of Proverbs 25:21-22. Such unexpected and undeserved thoughtfulness will "heap burning coals" on the head of the enemy. "Gracious deeds thus burn away the hate within. Such treatment of opponents has as its goal reconciliation and peace, not another's defeat and suffering" (Achtmeier 202). Paul supplies this example as something that would be good, beautiful, and praiseworthy in the eyes of all people, and it has a better chance of fostering peace than any retaliation. Dawn comments: "To give up our desires for revenge and to work instead toward meeting the needs of our enemies is a means by which Yahweh can bring us back to *Shalom*" (*Truly the Community* 285). Paul's theology and the entire letter of Romans points to a comprehensive restoration of creation, a new wholeness and community that is possible for everyone because of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The final verse of chapter 12 summarizes verses 17-20: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Dawn points out that after a string of plural imperatives, directed collectively to all the people, Paul switches in the final verse to the singular, "emphasizing that each of us as individuals must do our own overcoming of evil, or else we as particular persons will be overcome" (*Truly the Community* 288). The struggle with evil is not simply cosmic or social; it is personal. It confronts each believer in various and changing forms. Every Jesus follower is challenged to live as a force for

good, contending with the insidious evil within (as Paul describes in Rom. 7), as well as the more obvious malignancies outside the body-community. Keck advises that this verse is more than a bumper sticker slogan for believers:

One should not take this injunction for granted, as if it were a motto (though it sounds like one), for defeating evil with good is precisely the work of God. Paul has the audacity to urge the readers to do as God does—precisely in response to evil. (310)

With his concluding imperatives in chapter 12, Paul declares that all who live “in view of God’s mercy” are recruited to offer themselves as a living sacrifice and force for good in a world where evil cannot be ignored or avoided. The entire Christian community, with a panoply of gifts and the empowerment of the Spirit, can be mobilized and aligned as a force for good, reinforcing God’s graceful intervention in the world.

Faith Formation and Shared Christian Practices

A set of teeth marks scars the top wooden panel of our Baldwin spinet piano. They are just above the model name Acrosonic, just in front of the stand where the music is placed, just where I put them more than fifty-five years ago—as a young boy, just frustrated and angry because I was forced to sit and practice my lessons. They are a prominent, charming reminder yet today of the resistance to practice new lessons. Many individuals resist the practice and discipline required to acquire a new dexterity and skill, a new way to play at life. Eventually, the fundamentals, technical study, and practice can produce something playful and creative. However, initially practice can provoke frustration or boredom or teeth marks.

Preachers need to anticipate and understand the teeth marks. Proclaiming “You have the calling and capacity to live in a new way” is easy. Leading others into disciplined faith formation, particularly the moral formation at the heart of Romans 12, is

anything but easy. Proclamation is not enough. The overall objective is Romans 12 living, not merely knowledge of the Christian values, principles, and imperatives contained in the chapter. Harold Burgess cites the Yale Studies (conducted in the 1920s by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark A. May) that “found very little correlation between knowledge of religious ideals and actual moral behavior” (21). The aim of Paul in chapter 12 is not simply to deliver admonitions for the Romans to remember and hold dear but to transform the lives and community of those who see God’s mercies.

Romans 12 concerns practicing the faith, the new life made possible in Christ Jesus. Barth, commenting on Romans 12, expresses the utter impotence of the preacher to effect change in the life of the believer:

Preached from the pinnacles of humanity, all such moral exhortations bear the marks of their inevitable weakness. For the voice of the preacher, even though it be pitched in the key of absolute truth, wobbles from note to note, is raucous, croaking, and utterly unimpressive.... Human exhortation, therefore, is justified only when it is seen to be void of human justification; that is to say, when it is grounded upon the mercies of God. (429)

Barth and Paul recognize that no preaching or exhortation can instigate the desired transformation. The basis for any exhortation is what God has mercifully done already in Christ, continues to do in the Spirit, and promises to do in the future. God alone justifies and creates the new life in Christ; this truth the preacher proclaims with delight. However, the task of leading others on the journey into new life is formidable. For eleven chapters Paul had delivered and interpreted the *kerygma*, the proclamation of God’s righteousness and intervention on behalf of his people. After he pivots on the *therefore* at the threshold of chapter 12, he is trying to get the Romans to practice a new life in Christ.

A sermon series on Romans 12 aspires to moral formation and the practice of a new life. Marinading for seven weeks in the imperatives of a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1) is not enough. The objective is what James Michael Lee terms “action-oriented learning” and specifically the fourth of his cardinal goals for religious instruction: “The modification of process behavior so that the learner can ongoingly think, feel, and act in a continually relevant Christian way” (qtd. in Burgess 193). Burgess endorses Lee’s fusion of understanding, love, and action to create a lifestyle distinctively Christian. The operational question is whether the lifestyle of the believer “correspond[s] with the agreed upon aims which are deliberately formulated to be in harmony with the Christian stance toward life” (195). The emphasis is upon performance or behavior rather than cognition.

Of course, cognition is not disposable. Paul calls for the “renewing of their minds” (v. 2) and for new ways of thinking about themselves (v. 3). He integrates *kerygma* and *paraenesis* through the letter, and the twelfth chapter is no exception. He continues to be the herald of good news even as he describes the contours of the new covenant community the Romans are able—and expected—to be. Osmer stresses the importance of presenting “moral teachings in a holistic framework that relates them to a narrative of God’s covenants” so that moral responsibilities flow from “our identity as God’s new covenant people” (277). The flow from covenant identity to moral responsibility is epitomized by the conjunction *therefore* in 12:1. The narrative framework is seen and understood by those who live “in view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1). A renewed mind understands the story of God’s activity in the world and perceives

the personal connection to one's life. God's merciful activity provides the context, as well as the motivation and empowerment, for changes in lifestyle or performance.

Learning by doing has been around a long time, and one of its strongest proponents has been Thomas H. Groome. His shared praxis model is a substantial contribution to Christian pedagogy. He details a methodology weaving together the components of "1) present action, 2) critical reflection, 3) dialogue, 4) the Story, and 5) the Vision that arises from the Story" (184). He proposes a comprehensive notion of present action as the totality of intentional human activity. However, all such activity is scrutinized and subject to critical reflection, as well as dialogue among participants in a community. The community centers around, and is shaped by, the story of God's activity in Jesus Christ. Disciples live "in view of God's mercy" (Rom. 12:1) and into the vision or lived response to God's call and the kingdom hope. This process fits exceedingly well with the Romans 12 living series in which human activity and critical reflection interact with God's story and vision as disclosed in Romans 1-11 and then culminating in Romans 12. Romans 12 living is a *therefore* response to God, providing a shared praxis and continued learning model or discernment for a community.

However, even with a persistent desire for new life and new community, the believer needs guidance, encouragement, reinforcement, and practice. Otherwise, as Ortberg says, "[H]abits eat willpower for breakfast" (70). New habits are needed to replace old habits, so an emphasis of religious education in recent years has been the ancient practices of faith. One champion of this recent focus is Dorothy C. Bass. She authors several essays and defines Christian practices as "things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of

the world in Christ Jesus” (5). Various contributors explore how practices such as keeping the Sabbath, hospitality, healing, forgiveness, and discernment have formed faith. The attention is on practices that shape faith for an individual and a community. The authors note that the Christian habits or patterns of action have a practical, down-to-earth, make-a-difference approach to faith. Christian practices help believers “perceive how our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God is doing in the world” (8). Furthermore, because they are shared, they have the capacity to define identity and community.

Nearly all of the educators and practical theologians promoting Christian practices acknowledge their debt to philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre’s work. Craig Dykstra builds his definition on the foundation of MacIntyre’s analysis of social practices (68-69). David I. and James K. A. Smith assert that practices “are not just ‘things we do’; they do something *to us*” (original emphasis; 15), and they build their model on MacIntyre’s target of virtue toward which practices should be aimed (7-11). Wolterstorff highlights the connection MacIntyre makes between social practice and being inducted into a tradition, including the tradition’s history and disputes (263). Paul Miller credits MacIntyre with perceiving the importance—and the loss—of narrative in cultivating virtue (16-17). Narrative is a necessary conveyor of meaning and virtue for communities to remain intact. Consequently, shared practices help tie individuals to the larger story of God’s activity in the world. All who trace their work from MacIntyre appreciate the role of practices to define a community and to incorporate an individual into that community. Osmer recognizes peripheral or lesser practices, but he emphasizes the religious practices that “have sufficient depth to forge a common sense of identity among the members of a

community and to shape the character of individual participants” (92). This identity formation is a common function of ritual, although the cited authors prefer to speak in terms of repeated actions, disciplines, patterns, shared activities, and communal practices.

In his own book on Christian practices, Dykstra notes that “devotional practices have historically been disciplined, patterned actions designed to create distinctive ways of seeing, understanding, and being” (7). Practices have formative value and effect. Smith and Smith examine how historic faith practices can be employed in the pedagogical approach of Christian university professors to create or form the desired learning and faith outcome. Practices occur continually, with or without awareness. Dykstra adds, “The life of Christian faith is the practice of many practices” (67). However, not all have considered the power of practices. Some traditions (e.g., Romans Catholic and holiness) have been vastly more aware of practices and eager to cultivate them. P. Miller, writing from his perspective in the United Church of Canada, acknowledges the lack of attention to practices in mainline Protestantism. He celebrates the efforts to reclaim formative practices that are “intentional, historic, and communal” (12). This movement seeks a more conscious attention and development of repeated communal actions to stimulate and fortify Christian faithfulness.

Benjamin D. Espinoza and Beverly Johnson-Miller provide another example. Although they do not explicitly connect their article on catechesis to the dialogue on Christian practices, their argument taps into the ancient, formative role of catechism. Without dismissing the contributions of developmental theory, they promote a fresh vision based on “the historic practice of catechesis,” which is “a comprehensive and life-long means of forming and transforming people in the life of faith” (15). It is a shared

practice that features congregational engagement (18) and intergenerational learning (17). Long before developmental theories and the modern *how* of learning, catechesis had its own pedagogy and effective transmission of the *what*—or content—of the Christian faith. Espinoza and Miller advocate the recovery of this practice as a corrective for the developmental theories that emphasized process rather than substance or content. The article's citation of Scripture and early church documents accentuates the intentional, historic, and communal practice of catechesis.

Osmer ties catechesis directly to the concept of practices (250-52). He actually identifies it as the first of three tasks (catechesis, exhortation, discernment) in Paul's teaching ministry (27-32). Throughout his analysis Osmer poses questions about what catechesis is present in a congregation's practices. Dykstra agrees that deliberate instructional patterns and structures are necessary as "the means of grace" (41) to provide an environment "in which people may come to faith and grow in life in Christ" (42). They are also necessary for the long haul to refresh and buttress the life of faith (29) due to withering pressures, bleak circumstances, and all that tests perseverance.

In her preface, Bass emphasizes that practices are "not a matter of trying very, very hard until finally we learn to keep things under control" (xviii-xix). If practices cultivate a certain level of mastery or excellence, they do not achieve "righteous behavior" or control over one's circumstances and the world. Instead, the practices enable believers "to enter more fully into receptivity and responsiveness, to others and to God." Accordingly, the practices correspond to what many traditions have referred to as a means of grace, a device or vehicle by which the grace of God accesses and transforms lives. In this respect the practices come as an invitation, not a mandate. They are intended

to be life-giving, not rigidly imposed and observed. Bass in a later work with Susan R. Briehl invites her readers forward with this vision: “Living a whole life ... attentively ... together ... in the real world ... for the good of all ... in response to God” (8). She might have written this invitation in tandem with Romans 12, making clear that whatever disciples practice is a response to what God is up to in the world. Christian practice is consistently “in view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1).

Since the Christian life is “a practice of many practices” (Dykstra 67), many have produced lists or versions of the practices. The original compilation of Bass considered twelve practices, including some obvious ones, such as testimony and singing, and some less obvious, such as dying well. Dykstra compiles a list of fourteen traditional, significant practices that endure today (42-43). Osmer cites six identity-shaping practices observed in a Korean Presbyterian congregation (99). P. Miller describes the “five practices of the Christian community before the watching world” (18-19). Bass and Briehl assembled a new list with greater attention to care for creation, justice, peacemaking, and loving neighbors of other faiths. For the purpose of this ministry intervention, four practices are connected with the sermon series on Romans 12 living: prayer, baptism, testimony, and discernment. A brief word is in order regarding each of them.

Prayer

Prayer makes almost every list of Christian practices or disciplines. Bass and Dykstra affirm, “Every Christian practice requires prayer, as Christians doing things together attune themselves to take part, with trust, in the risky activities of God” (194). While prayer undergirds every other practice, it is a discrete Christian activity practiced

individually and collectively. Dykstra writes that prayer is essential because it epitomizes “receptivity and responsiveness to the creative and redemptive grace” of God (76).

Earnest prayer does not aim toward mastery over the world, control of one’s circumstances or manipulation of God’s will; on the contrary, the receptivity manifests in clarity and alignment with God’s mission, as well as in gratitude and trust. As with other practices, prayer is not merely something Christians do; it is the connection with God that alters the person who prays. Prayer is a response to God’s merciful initiative. Prayer opens the mind to discern God’s will and opens the heart to offer oneself as a living sacrifice for God’s purposes and glory.

Baptism

Baptism signifies both the grace of God and the human response or reception of grace. The waters of baptism represent cleansing, forgiveness, sanctification, and Holy Spirit living, that is, new life on the far side of death. Paul attests in Romans 6 that the “newness of life” (v. 4 NRSV) follows the dying with Christ represented in baptism. Bass and Dykstra quote the saying attributed to St. Francis: “In baptism we have already died the only death that matters, leaving us free to risk every other death for the sake of life” (200). As a practice, Christian baptism has historically been preceded by catechism or instruction in the Jesus way of life. Then it provides “passage to full membership—becoming members of Christ’s body” (197). As a practice associated with worship and accorded sacramental status, baptism establishes a call to new life, a commission to serve, and a sending into the world. Briehl observes that worship is a gathering to receive grace. However, she agrees with St. Augustine: “In worship we become what we receive” (Bass

and Briehl 215). Baptism then can be practiced as an expression and extension of God's grace in the believer's life.

Testimony

Testimony as a Christian practice derives from the ancient witness of believers, sharing their personal account of God's gracious activity in their lives. Thomas Hoyt, Jr. contributes a chapter devoted to testimony. He writes, "Witnesses—those making the testimony—must speak the truth as they have seen, heard, and experienced it" (90). This sharing is "basic to human community" (91). It confers value to the voice and perspective of individuals in the community. They testify to how they have seen the triune God at work, or even how they have participated in God's mission. The testimony may contain new insight, an account of transformation, an example of a grace-filled breakthrough, direct encouragement or an implicit challenge for others. The practice of testimony invariably connects a personal story to God's story, doing so in a public and scrutable manner. It tacitly invites others to consider their own life of faith, so that all the listeners may be more attuned to what God is doing and how their own lives overlap or manifest the divine narrative.

Discernment

Discernment is a practice deeply rooted in Christian history and community. Frank Rogers, Jr. illumines discernment as a practice. He identifies the Ignatian model for discernment, which "always aims at enhancing one's participation in the work of God" (105). That model is predicated on (1) "a passionate commitment to follow God," (2) "an attitude of indifference toward all other drives and desires," and (3) "a deep sensitivity to the ways and being of God" (106). Discernment, according to Rogers, is "the intentional

practice by which a community or an individual seeks, recognizes, and intentionally takes part in the activity of God in concrete situations” (105). The object is not merely to understand God’s will but to perform it.

Jennifer Grant Haworth applies discernment to the call of God. She proposes a different three-fold process grounded in human experience:

(1) to pay attention to our daily experience and what it stirs in us; (2) to reflect on what we notice there, sorting and sifting in order to understand what is leading to greater life and love and what is not; and (3) to take loving action on what we have learned. (41)

She also expresses appreciation for the example of Saint Ignatius. She retells his narrative in a way that fits her three steps, how Ignatius discovered his deep heart to serve God and took loving action on what he learned, not knowing where it would lead. Discernment leads to a calling if not a destination. Jack Seymour and his coauthors locate the primary purpose of Christian education at the intersection of meaning, learning, and vocation. Discernment is an interpretive task, seeing and discovering meaning. However, the learning is directional. It includes the belief “that God participates with us—we are co-creators in loving and transforming the world” (131). Reflection and learning lead to vocation, to a calling, to a living aimed at wholeness and responding to the needs of the others around us.

Despite best efforts at sorting and sifting or, to use Paul’s words, “to test and approve what God’s will is” (Rom. 12:2), many ambiguities and subtleties in experience are easily misunderstood. Humans also have an immense capacity for self-deception, so the better practices of discernment involve community. More eyes, more perspectives and minds devoted to the question, and more hearts open to the operation of the Holy Spirit, all combine to create a more reliable discernment of God’s calling and mission. More

eyes and more voices also generate more mutual encouragement and accountability, increasing the prospects for genuine, durable change. If discernment can be regarded as a form of transformational learning, then Johnson-Miller's writing relates also to the transformational potential in discerning conversations about the deepest dimensions of life and meaning and direction ("Conversational Teaching" 381). Discernment, like conversation, is a collaborative practice. Rogers describes it as collective listening "for the steps of God's Spirit in our midst, and as we seek ways to attune our own steps to these, we will find ourselves taking part, not only with God but also with one another, in the healing of the world" (116). Discernment helps individuals and communities to clarify and fulfill their calling as collaborators with God and each other.

Shared Christian Practices—Summary

The varied practices of Christian faith are intentional, historic, and communal. They represent a means of grace for persons to receive and extend the grace-filled activity of God in the world. Practices are essential because they are habit-forming and identity-forming. The entire weight of each practice presses to shape identity and community in Christ. Dykstra adds the urgency to "lead people beyond a reliance on 'random acts of kindness' into shared patterns of life that are informed by the deepest insights of our tradition, and ... beyond privatized spiritualities into more thoughtful participation in God's activity in the world" (67). It is always shared activity. The new concerto can be played beautifully together with a lot of practice.

Research Design

The research in this study was an explanatory, mixed-method design (Creswell 560), including both quantitative and qualitative data. Priority was placed on

nonexperimental, quantitative, numeric data from survey questions seeking specific, measurable information about the impact of the intervention upon individuals. A smaller qualitative component followed to assist with interpretation of the data from the quantitative study. The quantitative data addressed research questions #1 and #2 concerning the preintervention and postintervention attitudes and behaviors of the participants with regard to Christian servanthood. The statistics were analyzed for comparisons and relationships among select groups within the sample.

The researcher-developed instrument assessed attitudes using a simple Likert scale without a neutral option (Patten 35). The questions included some items with favorable and other items with unfavorable attitudes towards servanthood (38). In addition, the survey utilized a question that resembled a question designed by Beal in his research regarding older adults in his congregation (14). The advantage of doing so was to have another benchmark of comparison for the North Lake study.

The qualitative data from a postintervention focus group provided data to answer research question #4, attempting to determine the impact or effectiveness of distinct components of the Romans 12 focus. The qualitative data was gathered as a second phase, slightly more than a week after the conclusion of the series and the postintervention questionnaire. Preliminary results of the quantitative data from R12Q1 were compiled and available prior to the focus group. The researcher-designed, open-ended questions (Creswell 225) for the focus group were drafted initially after examining several samples of follow-up interview questions (e.g., Baker 94). The final version of the questions included several seeking specific input on the results of the quantitative study.

Summary

The challenge at North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, is to promote effective discipleship among older adults, particularly their personal engagement in ministry. The prevalent literature concerning the *ministry of the laity* and the *missional church* model converge in agreement about the centrality of active servanthood in the life of a disciple. The need for personal engagement in ministry is apparent for disciples of all ages and notably among older adults. Their involvement in serving roles produces a sense of ongoing purpose, value, and connection to the body of Christ. The twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans presents a clear and compelling case for offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice, so that service is a faithful response to God's mercies in Christ. The presentation of that chapter in a preaching series, accompanied by specific congregational practices, is a suitable ministry intervention to be researched. The outcome hoped for in this study is that older persons who are inclined to disengage will (1) perceive that their Christian vocation or calling extends well into advanced adulthood, (2) recognize their continuing capacity to serve, and (3) pursue active engagement in ministry. By so doing, they demonstrate that they are not only mature in years; they are also mature in Christ.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

The problem addressed in this study is an apparent spectator faith among hundreds of older adults eager to attend worship but not to serve in any observable capacity. Weak engagement in ministry is not unique to any congregation or denomination, but the age factor at North Lake Presbyterian Church seems to weigh heavily in the dearth of volunteers. Over time, the congregational culture has accommodated the assumption that an aging membership will not serve as extensively and effectively as needed. Therefore, the church faces three interrelated issues. The first is how NLPC can promote the perception that Christian vocation or calling extends well into advanced adulthood. The second is how NLPC can encourage the older members' recognition of their continuing capacity to serve. The third is how NLPC can motivate and engage older members in active ministry. These three underlying and interrelated questions—calling, capacity, and commitment to serve—generate the purpose for this research project.

The ministry intervention designed to address this problem flows from the teaching of Paul in the twelfth chapter of his letter to the Romans. He grounds his ethical instruction on the mercies of God, spelled out in the first eleven chapters, and urges his Roman brothers and sisters to offer themselves as a living sacrifices to God. The entire chapter aims toward patterns of living that serve God by serving with others in the body of Christ.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement among older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, as a result of a seven-week sermon series and congregational focus on Romans 12 presented over a period of two months.

Research Questions

This purpose required the exploration of four questions. The first two questions provided a comparison of the participants' overall responses before and following the Romans 12 study. The third question explored possible correlations to age and other intervening variables among the participants. The fourth question examined the impact or effectiveness of specific components of the ministry intervention.

Research Question #1

What perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry exist among the study participants prior to the seven-week study?

The answer to question #1 provided a baseline of the participants' attitudes and engagement in ministry, prior to the introduction of the independent variable, which was the Romans 12 living sermon series and focus on serving others. The preintervention Romans 12 questionnaire (R12Q1) was the instrument for gathering this data. Questions 1-21 on R12Q1 supplied the answers to establish the starting point to determine how much, if any, change occurred in the attitudes and actions of study participants. Question 23 on age allowed for the analysis of distinct ranges of older adults in the study.

Research question #1 also provided data on the interaction of calling, capacity, and commitment. For examples, persons might disqualify themselves from serving because they do not believe that service is their current vocation or because they feel incapable of serving. The instrument posed questions on all three without indicating the categories on the survey. Questions 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 17 pertained to the issue of calling. Questions 1, 5, 7, 10, 16, and 18 related to capacity for ministry. Questions 3, 8, 14, and 21 assessed current involvement in serving. Questions 19 and 20 involved a combination of both capacity and commitment—or current involvement—level.

Research Question #2

What changes occur in the participants' perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry by the conclusion of the seven-week study?

Research question #2 is the essence of the project, evaluating the impact of the ministry intervention, the independent variable. The postintervention Romans 12 questionnaire (R12Q2) gathered data for this purpose. Changes in the participants' attitudes toward calling and capacity for ministry, as well as current engagement in ministry, were assessed using identical questions 1-21 on R12Q1 and R12Q2. The anonymous coding of individual respondents on R12Q1 and R12Q2 permitted more detailed, focused analysis of the changes among participants.

Research Question #3

How do the perception of Christian calling, the recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry correlate to age or other intervening variables among the participants?

Research question #3 sought patterns according to age groups or other factors such as gender, length of time as a follower of Jesus or connected to NLPC, worship service preference, and number of Sundays in the series attended. The demographic information in questions 22-26 provided data for this analysis. Question 23 again enabled the grouping of distinct age ranges. The postintervention questionnaire R12Q2 added four questions, including two open-ended questions for additional input that might identify intervening variables.

Research Question #4

What elements of the seven-week study (sermon series and shared practices) were most impactful in cultivating an active, serving faith?

Research question #4 examined separate elements of the ministry intervention, namely the combination of sermons and shared practices to enhance the experience of Romans 12 living. The approach to this question relied on the qualitative input from the open-ended questions of R12Q2 as well as the focus group following the series. The specific questions raised for discussion with the participants of the focus group are included in Appendix P. The data gathered for research question #4 also assisted in the interpretation of the quantitative data drawn from R12Q1 and R12Q2.

Population and Participants

The population for the study was drawn from the worship attendees at all three Sunday services of North Lake Presbyterian Church. On 2 October 2016, 931 persons from the three worship services voluntarily submitted a completed R12Q1 and the informed consent form (see Appendixes D and F). On 20 November 2016, 781 worship attendees submitted a completed R12Q2 and the informed consent form (see Appendixes

G and I). The data from all surveys was recorded and processed for an aggregate report. However, the submissions were filtered to identify a target sample. The target sample was created by selecting persons who (1) reported serving less than three hours per week at the start, (2) attended all seven weeks of the Romans 12 series, and (3) provided matchable codes for comparison of the R12Q1 and R12Q2 surveys.

The fourteen participants in the focus group were selected to represent the various age ranges, as well as the factors of length of time connected to NLPC, service preference, and years as followers of Jesus (see Appendix O). They were chosen to reflect different levels of current ministry engagement. Approximately half were obviously active in church ministries; the other half had little or no apparent involvement at the beginning of the series.

Design of the Study

The project studied the attitudes and behaviors toward serving among older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida. In particular, the study examined the impact of a congregational focus on Romans 12, with a seven-week sermon series and four related congregational practices. The entire worshipping congregation was invited to participate in the surveys at the beginning and at the conclusion of the series.

The shared practices were

1. a *therefore* prayer based on Romans 12:1 that was used weekly in worship and encouraged for individual praying each morning;
2. weekly *remember your baptism* liturgies in worship, reminding all that they are called and set apart to serve in God's mission;

3. videotaped members' testimonies about serving in the weekly worship services; and,
4. encouragement of NLPC attendees to gather on their own in small groups of three to four people as discernment teams with instructions and discussion questions for their exploration of ministry calling, capacity, and commitment.

The study used an explanatory, mixed-method design. Priority was given to the quantitative results gathered in the pretest and posttest instruments. A subsequent collection of qualitative data through a focus group added contextual information and assisted the interpretation of the quantitative data. The quantitative study allowed for maximum participation of the worshipping congregation to yield an aggregate snapshot before and after the Romans 12 series. The demographic data also provided a comparison of the older age groups with the under-55 category. However, the research design focused on older adults and those who had attended at least five Sundays of the series. The qualitative results from the focus group probed the correlations of the quantitative results and the impact of specific elements of the series of sermons and congregational practices.

The project stretched across three phases—preseries, series, and postseries—from mid-September until late November 2016. The preseries preparation included advance notification to the congregation, inviting them to participate in the study and advising them that a survey (R12Q1) would be given at the beginning of the services on Sunday, 2 October. The study was explained to the congregation in print newsletters, a weekly e-mail newsletter, and worship bulletin announcements (see Appendixes A-C). The preseries phase included the preparation of all materials for the shared practices portion of the series. The first phase culminated with the administration of R12Q1. The series ran

from 2 October through 20 November, interrupted on one Sunday (23 October) because of a guest preacher from Mozambique who had been invited a year earlier. The time during the series also permitted the processing of the data from R12Q1. The postseries phase commenced immediately with the administration of the concluding survey, R12Q2. The postseries phase included the enlistment of persons for the focus group, the actual gathering of the focus group, and the data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative.

Instrumentation

The study included two researcher-designed instruments with twenty-six overlapping questions. The preintervention questionnaire (i.e., R12Q1, printed on white paper) established a baseline of attitudes and behaviors regarding service. The postintervention questionnaire (i.e., R12Q2, printed on pale yellow) posed identical questions for the purposes of comparison. R12Q2 added four questions to assess the participants' involvement in the series and to invite further comment. Both R12Q1 and R12Q2 included demographic questions because of the certainty that different respondents would attend the two Sundays of survey administration.

Five demographic questions were included in both R12Q1 and R12Q2. Two of them used a nominal scale for participants to indicate gender and worship service preference at NLPC. Three questions used an interval scale. Question #22 sought ages in ten year intervals, bracketed by under 55 and over 85. Question #23 used an interval scale to establish the number of years the respondent has been a follower of Jesus. The simple term *follower* provided a more generic, less-threatening synonym for disciple. Question #24 used an interval scale for respondents to indicate the duration of their connection to NLPC. The question avoided the term *membership* because many NLPC attendees are

nonmembers. The intervals were selected to reflect essentially five-year increments bracketed by less than one year and more than sixteen years.

R12Q1 included eighteen questions to reflect attitudes or behaviors by indicating agreement or disagreement on a four-choice Likert scale without a neutral option. The items were framed with both favorable and unfavorable perspectives (see Appendix D). Appendix R exhibits the questions and weighting used to develop the composite mean for calling, capacity, and commitment. Questions 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 17 researched the subject's sense of calling to ministry. Questions 1, 5, 7, 10, 16, and 18 researched the subject's recognition of capacity for ministry. Questions 3, 8, and 14 assessed the subject's current involvement in serving. Question 21 also researched the subject's time commitment to serving, using an interval scale based on the number of hours served in a typical week. Questions 19 and 20 inquired about both capacity and current involvement level in a multiple-choice format.

R12Q2 included the same twenty-six questions of R12Q1 and added four more. Two closed-ended questions provided the necessary data to assess the subjects' participation in the series. Question #27 established how many Sundays of the series were attended, scaled to screen easily those who were present for fewer than five Sundays. Question #28 used the same interval scale, closed question style, to establish the participants' involvement in the weekly discernment team discussion. R12Q2 also posed two open-ended questions. Question #29 inquired about any other factors (i.e., intervening variables) that might have impacted the subjects' attitude or practice of serving. Question #30 invited further comment about the survey or study of calling,

capacity for ministry, or commitment to serve. The two open-ended questions allowed for qualitative input from all who completed the quantitative instrument (see Appendix G).

Pilot Test

A draft of the R12Q1 instrument was tested on 10 August 2016 with a group of ten persons at the Graceway (Presbyterian) Church in Leesburg, Florida, approximately fifteen miles from NLPC. Seven women and three men volunteered the previous Sunday at the invitation of their pastor. The scheduled time of 2:00 p.m. assured that the majority of participants would be retirees. They represented a range of ages from late 60s to early 80s. I briefed the volunteers on the purpose of the pilot test and the overall project as I handed out the packet, including a cover letter of explanation for the pilot test (see Appendix J). They read a draft version of the instructions (see Appendix K) and took the draft version of R12Q1 (see Appendix L). Then they provided immediate collective feedback in discussion. Their surveys were also collected and compiled for analysis.

The participants agreed that fifteen minutes was sufficient time to read the instructions and complete the survey. Most were finished in eight to ten minutes. They affirmed the format and font of the questionnaire, observing that it was easy to read. Based on their input, the cover letter was edited in several places for clarity. The consent form was placed after the letter and before the questionnaire. The instructions for the questionnaire code were modified. Two questions (#15 and #20 in the final version) were sharpened in focus, and one question was added (#11 in the final version). The meeting lasted slightly more than an hour. I thanked the participants verbally and sent a letter of gratitude to each of them (see Appendix M).

Variables

This study consisted of one independent variable, one dependent variable, and three anticipated intervening variables.

Independent variable. The independent variable was the Romans 12 congregational study, consisting of the seven-week sermon series and four congregational practices, involving prayer, baptism remembrance, testimony, and discernment.

Dependent variable. The dependent variable was reflected in the changes of the participants' responses before and after the intervention, assessed in the comparison of responses to the R12Q1 and R12Q2 surveys. The dependent variable was also reflected in the data gathered in the focus group at the end of the study (R12FG).

Intervening variables. Three intervening variables were anticipated. First, some respondents on 2 October would not be present at the conclusion on 20 November. Conversely, many present at the end of the study would not have been present at the start. The overall sample size was sufficiently large to be reliable even with this variable. However, the instrument was designed with coding to identify and compare responses from the same subjects. Furthermore, the additional questions on R12Q2 allowed for filtering the study based on a minimal level of attendance and participation. The second anticipated intervening variable was associated with the length of the study. Given the two-month duration from start to finish, other life events and factors could influence the subjects' attitudes and behaviors regarding serving. Since no study can insulate participants from such intervening variables, question #29 on R12Q2 asked participants about any other factors that might have affected their responses. The third intervening variable anticipated other factors, such as gender, length of time connected with the

church, and length of time as a follower of Jesus. The demographic questions in R12Q1 and repeated in R12Q2 permitted some isolation of factors and analysis to assess those variables.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the research needed to apply to both quantitative and qualitative data. The pilot test was the primary step taken to maximize the reliability (or consistency) of the survey instrument. The mixed method also helped to maximize reliability by comparing results of the survey instrument with the qualitative data from the focus group. The validity of the survey was aided by the pilot test and by an assessment of how well the answers related to calling and capacity actually correlated to a commitment to serving.

Reliability. The pilot test of R12Q1 enhanced the reliability of the instrument. Based on direct input from the participants, several questions were edited for clarity or to sharpen the focus. A simple version of a split-half test, using the sample from the pilot test, verified that the mean score of seventeen intended favorable and unfavorable items were measured, as expected, above and below the midpoint of the range with one exception (see Appendix N). That lone exception was rewritten for clarity as an unfavorable item. Although the sample size was small, the respondents answered predictably on the favorable/unfavorable items for calling and for capacity. The qualitative data for the focus group in the third phase of the project provided another source that was consistent with the results of R12Q2, tending to corroborate the reliability of the research.

Validity. The validity of R12Q1 was observed in the pilot test in the measurement of calling and capacity as factors contributing to a commitment to serve. The higher the indications for a subject's sense of calling and recognition of capacity to serve, the higher the reporting of a commitment and behavior of serving. The person with the lowest score for calling also had one of the two lowest scores for serving (or strength of commitment). The sample also included one person with a strong sense of call and capacity but a lower score for serving; however, the answers to questions 18 and 19 indicated that the church was not utilizing the time and abilities that this person could offer. The pattern of responses suggested that the measurement of attitudes and behaviors has an internal validity. The design of the instrument also allowed other factors to be identified and scrutinized or controlled for analysis. Again, the mixed-method approach afforded an opportunity for direct questions and verification of validity through qualitative input in the focus group. Moreover, if test results did not parallel the qualitative input, the difference was noted.

Data Collection

The data collection was designed to accommodate the older adult population of NLPC. Although some are computer savvy, the majority is not comfortable with online surveys. Therefore, all documents and instruments were printed, using fourteen-point Times New Roman font to make reading easier. Primary data collection took place at the beginning or conclusion of worship services.

Beginning in early September, newsletter articles, weekly congregational news e-mails, and bulletin announcements notified the congregation regarding the plan and purpose for a survey on Sunday, 2 October 2 (see Appendixes A-C). Worshippers

arriving that Sunday at all three services were handed a stapled packet containing a cover letter of explanation, an informed consent form, and a copy of R12Q1 (see Appendixes D-F). Prior to the start of worship, I invited the congregation to participate in the survey, providing brief instructions, stressing that the participation was voluntary and anonymous. Fifteen minutes was allocated for the participants to read the cover letter, read and sign the consent form, and complete the questionnaire. Most were finished in ten to twelve minutes. While the survey was administered, church musicians provided quiet reflective music that also served as an extended prelude to worship.

After fifteen minutes, those who wished to submit their responses were told to detach and keep the cover letter. Consent forms and surveys were passed to the aisles where they were collected by ushers. The forms and surveys from all three services were taken to the church office and secured.

That afternoon and the next day, my father and I manually separated the consent forms and surveys, verifying that a consent form accompanied each questionnaire. Any questionnaire that was not accompanied by a consent form was discarded. Later in the week, consent forms were alphabetized by volunteers and filed separately. Volunteers also sorted the questionnaires according to the individualized codes used by the respondents. Several volunteers assisted me in manually entering all the questionnaire answers onto SurveyMonkey to record and analyze the data more easily.

The actual Romans 12 living series commenced with the 2 October worship services, the same day as the collection of R12Q1. The series followed this message schedule provided in Table 3.1. The overview of sermon objectives is found in Appendix V. On Sunday, 23 October, the pulpit was filled by a guest preacher from Mozambique,

whose visit had been scheduled more than a year earlier. Otherwise, the Romans 12 focus was maintained through the eight weeks from start to finish.

Table 3.1. Romans 12 Living Sermon Series

Date	Sermon Title
Sunday, October 2	“Therefore”
Sunday, October 9	“Live as an Offering to God”
Sunday, October 16	“Live as an Instrument of Grace”
Sunday, October 30	“Live as Members of One Another”
Sunday, November 6	“Live as a Spiritual Fountain”
Sunday, November 13	“Live as a Blessing to Others”
Sunday, November 20	“Live as a Force for Good”

The ministry intervention (independent variable) also included four congregational practices. On Sunday, 2 October, at the beginning of the series, a brief *therefore* prayer was used in worship and suggested for daily use (see Appendix W). The prayer was printed on bookmarks (with the seven message titles on the other side) and distributed to all the congregation. The *therefore* prayer was utilized each Sunday in worship throughout the series. NLPC worshippers were regularly reminded that the prayer was a good waking prayer for each day.

Beginning Sunday, 9 October, a brief liturgical moment in each service urged the congregation to remember their baptism and their calling to serve in God’s mission (see Appendix X). The repeated practice was done by one of the pastors at the baptismal font, with Scripture, and with visible water lifted and dripping from the pastor’s hands. The

baptism remembrance was not commenced on the first Sunday because communion was served on 2 October and because of the time limits imposed by the survey administration.

In addition, on 9 October, the series began to use video testimonies of church members describing their sense of purpose and fulfillment in various forms of service. Each video was produced at the church by the worship and technical support staff during the month prior to the series. I selected seven members who were not especially well-known or identified as leaders but who represented various ways of serving and who could articulate their calling, capacity, and commitment to serve. The videos were filmed as interviews, so that the featured persons could answer naturally and without reliance on a script. The final version of the videos were edited down to three minutes or less, eliminating the questions and highlighting the testimony of the servant. A different video was shown each week from 9 October until 20 November in all three of the worship services. The video transcripts are in Appendix Y.

The fourth congregational practice involved discernment teams. Worshippers were encouraged to gather in groups of three or four on their own time during the week. Simple instructions and a set of questions were included in the bulletin each Sunday, beginning 2 October (see Appendix Z). The three or four questions were designed to promote the participants' recognition of their unique calling and capacity to serve. The practice encouraged a conversational model of learning and discernment. Question #28 in R12Q2 measured participation in this practice.

The postintervention questionnaire, or R12Q2, was administered at the conclusion of the worship services on Sunday, 20 November, using a process similar to that of 2 October (see Appendix G). The stapled packets were handed out again as people entered

worship. During the announcements the packets and survey were briefly explained so that people, especially newcomers, would know what they had and why. Following the benediction, the congregation was invited to participate and additional instructions were given. The packet included another informed consent form, a necessary redundancy because different persons were in attendance and responding to the survey (see Appendix I). No specific time frame was given, as had been the case on 2 October at the start of worship. The absence of a time limit was particularly important because of the four added questions, including two open-ended questions. Respondents left as they finished, submitting their consent forms and surveys to ushers at the doors when they exited. From that point, the handling of the documents was identical to R12Q1.

Data was also collected from a focus group convened on Wednesday, 30 November in a suitable room at NLPC. The fourteen focus group participants constituted approximately 1 percent of the worshipping congregation. They were selected to assure representation of gender, age ranges, different services attended, years of connection to NLPC, and apparent level of service prior to the series. All focus group participants attended at least five of the seven Sundays during the Romans 12 series. They also viewed missed Sunday messages as a video on the church Web site.

The focus group received the questions in advance and again at the start of the meeting (see Appendix P). Several follow-up questions were posed for clarification and to inquire about the preliminary results from the compilation of R12Q1. All participants were given opportunity to share comments, if they wished, with each question. I served as facilitator of the group. Chris Kao, a highly regarded office staff employee at NLPC functioned as the recorder. She also posed a final question to solicit feedback after I had

left the room. Responses were recorded anonymously and included in the focus group transcript.

Data Analysis

The primary statistical procedures for the R12Q1 were distribution analysis of the demographics and means analysis of the attitude scores on the related items on the Likert-scale. The mean was selected as the average, and the standard deviation was used as the measure of variability. In particular, the research focused on calling, capacity, and commitment or engagement in serving. The interrelationship of those three aspects of serving was examined. The analysis also considered possible correlations of attitude with the demographic variables.

The analysis of R12Q2 emphasized comparing the means results of the pretest and posttest instruments, measuring the impact of the independent variable. The added questions on R12Q2 assisted in the filtering of data according to participation in the series and to identify or control for intervening variables. The qualitative analysis focused on the impact of different elements of the series and addressed certain patterns or trends that emerged from the quantitative data.

Ethical Procedures

The research project with a significant majority of older adults required sensitivity to the vulnerability and limitations that many feel already, conditions that might be magnified by participation in a study about serving and volunteering. Even during the pilot test of the survey instrument, the open discussion surfaced difficulties that persons had in completing a survey, any survey, because of issues such as palsy or limited eyesight. The administration of the instrument was designed to be as inclusive as

possible, without giving a sense of obligation. Care was taken to make the survey available to all because those least likely to participate would make key contributions to the data, but also as a tangible expression of how they live as members of one another, even in the manner the survey was accomplished. This inclusiveness gave the survey an added sense of integrity. I also attempted repeatedly to communicate to the participants my sense of accountability to them, not only as researcher but as pastor.

The advanced explanations, as well as the written and verbal instructions, emphasized the voluntary nature of the participation. The process of data collection protected their confidential information and assured their anonymity in the data. All understood their responses were voluntary and signed their consent on the forms submitted with the survey instruments, both the pretest R12Q1 and the posttest R12Q2 (see Appendixes F and I).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

This research examined a problem stemming from a lack of volunteers in a large congregation with predominantly older-adult attendance. The average worship attendance at the church, by itself, would predict no difficulty filling the various ministry and mission needs. However, the number of persons who actually serve in some capacity seems low. Many cite their life stage and physical limitations as reasons for not getting more involved. Many point out that they have served in the past but do not choose to do so now. Many also have migrated to a warmer climate for the winter—or year round—to maintain an active lifestyle that emphasizes recreation, not volunteer roles.

An effective deployment of older adults in ministry must be based on an improved understanding of their perception of the needs as well as their ability to meet the needs. Attempts to motivate or recruit older adults into volunteer roles must take into account numerous factors, including age, that potentially affect their decisions to serve. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement among older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, as a result of a seven-week sermon series and congregational focus on Romans 12 presented over a period of two months.

Participants

North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, had 1,531 active members at the conclusion of 2016. The average Sunday worship attendance was 1,375. All who

attended worship on 2 October 2016, and on 20 November 2016 were invited to participate in the surveys administered. The attendance on 2 October was 1,173, and 931 questionnaires (R12Q1) were submitted. The attendance on 20 November was 1,466, and 781 questionnaires (R12Q2) were submitted. The number of responses to each question fluctuated depending on how many persons skipped the question. For example, of the 781 surveys returned on 20 November, twenty respondents skipped the question concerning age. The demographic information regarding gender and age was fairly consistent, even with the reduced number of second surveys (see Table 4.1). The responses showed roughly a 2:3 ratio of male to female participants.

Table 4.1. Participants by Gender

Gender	R12Q1 (N=918)		R12Q2 (N=764)	
	%	n	%	n
Male	38.7	355	40.8	312
Female	61.3	563	59.2	452
Total	100.0	918	100.0	764

The distribution of ages was also fairly predictable with the combined age groups from 65-84 comprising 80 percent of the responses in both surveys (see Table 4.2). The surveys also harvested demographic information regarding years of following Jesus (as a disciple), years of North Lake membership, and service attended.

Table 4.2. Participants by Age

Age	R12Q1	N=924	R12Q2	N=761
	%	n	%	n
54 & under	3.5	32	3.4	26
55-64	8.8	81	8.1	62
65-74	38.7	358	40.2	306
75-84	40.2	371	40.5	308
85 & over	8.8	82	7.8	59
Total	100.0	924	100.0	761

These numbers represent the total number of participants. They provide aggregate data for research questions #1 and #2. In addition, the data was filtered to yield a target sample for before and after comparison. The R12Q1 responses were filtered for persons who served three hours or less per week and who provided a matchable ID code. The R12Q2 responses were filtered for persons who attended all weeks of the Romans 12 series and who provided a matchable ID code. The comparison of those two lists yielded forty-two common respondents. Four were removed from the forty-two because they had answered fewer than half of the questions. The remaining thirty-eight constituted the target sample who (1) began with a lower commitment to volunteering in the church or community, (2) attended the entire series, and (3) responded to all questions, or all but one question, on the surveys (see Table 4.3). The filtering unintentionally eliminated anyone under 55 as well as the eldest category of 85 and over. Otherwise, the target sample roughly approximated the overall breakdown of the total participants.

Table 4.3. Target Sample by Gender and Age (N=38)

Category	%	n
Gender		
Male	36.8	14
Female	63.2	24
Total	100.0	38
Age		
54 & under	—	0
55-64	15.8	6
65-74	47.4	18
75-84	36.8	14
85 & over	—	0
Total	100.0	38

Finally, the participants in the focus group were selected to approximate the demographic breakdown of the total participants, particularly regarding gender, age, and hours served in the church. The final number of focus group participants was fourteen (see Table 4.4). Because several invitees were unable to attend, the percentage of men and women was evenly split, and the age group 55-64 was not represented.

Table 4.4. Focus Group by Gender and Age (N=14)

Category	%	n
Gender		
Male	50	7
Female	50	7
Total	100	14
Age		
54 & under	7.1	1
55-64	—	0
65-74	50.0	7
75-84	35.7	5
85 & over	7.1	1
Total	100.0	14

Research Question #1

What perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry exist among the study participants prior to the seven-week study?

Table 4.5 lists the survey questions for the measurement of calling, capacity, and commitment to ministry. The table indicates the numeric value of responses used for the calculating the composite mean. If the question represented a favorable response or attitude, the Likert scale was valued from 1 to 4, with 4 attached to strongly agree. If the question represented an unfavorable response toward calling, capacity, or commitment, the Likert scale value was reversed with 4 attached to strongly disagree.

Table 4.5. Questions for Calling, Capacity, and Commitment

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Numeric Value of Responses			
Calling				
2. Serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith.	1	2	3	4
4. I don't need to serve at the church because others will step forward to cover the volunteer needs.	4	3	2	1
6. I am aware of my call to serve and how that affects my decisions about priorities and schedule.	1	2	3	4
9. I believe some people have a call to serve, but I do not have that calling.	4	3	2	1
11. I am open to serving in the church and community if I am asked.	1	2	3	4
12. I believe my years of active serving are behind me.	4	3	2	1
13. I am uncertain about how I should serve others.	4	3	2	1
15. I am alert and receptive to new ways to serve others.	1	2	3	4
17. I have other life priorities that do not include serving.	4	3	2	1
Capacity				
1. I have life experience, wisdom, and compassion that could benefit others.	1	2	3	4
5. I don't know what I could do that would be valuable to others.	4	3	2	1
7. I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service.	4	3	2	1
10. I have little to offer in the way of service.	4	3	2	1
16. I have as much to offer others now as I've ever had to offer.	1	2	3	4
18. I have skills and abilities that could benefit others.	1	2	3	4
Commitment				
3. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my church.	1	2	3	4
8. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my community.	1	2	3	4
14. I am currently serving others in my neighborhood on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4

Table 4.6 summarizes the data for research question #1, developed on the basis of mean composite scores for calling, capacity, and commitment drawn from the aggregate answers given in the initial questionnaire (R12Q1) administered on Sunday, 2 October.

The mean composite score for calling was based on weighted answers for R12Q1

questions #2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 17. The mean composite score for capacity was based on weighted answers for R12Q1 questions #1, 5, 7, 10, 16, and 18. The mean composite score for commitment was based on weighted answers for R12Q1 questions #3, 8, and 14. The table also reflects the comparison of the target sample of thirty-eight persons who reported serving less than three hours a week, with the total respondents, and with an active group of persons who reported serving eight-plus hours a week.

Table 4.6. Mean Composite Scores for Calling, Capacity, and Commitment

Category	Target Sample (n=38)	Total Respondents (N=931)	Active—serving 8+ hours (n=114)
Calling	2.96	3.04	3.22
Capacity	2.86	2.95	3.13
Commitment	2.33	2.66	3.03

Since all responses were weighted 1 to 4 on the Likert-scale questions with 4 being the highest positive, the higher the score, the stronger the agreement with calling, capacity, and commitment. The midpoint is 2.5. For calling and capacity, anything higher than 2.5 reflects a generally positive attitude (i.e., a positive perception of one's Christian calling and a positive recognition of one's capacity to serve). For commitment, anything higher than 2.5 reflects an active volunteering role in the church and community.

The target sample scores were consistently below the aggregate scores for total respondents and active persons serving eight-plus hours per week. The scores in all three columns decline from calling to capacity to commitment. The target sample score for commitment was the only score to drop below the midpoint of 2.5. The responses to the questions generally indicated persons had a stronger perception of calling than their

recognition or confidence of capacity to serve. The actual commitment to volunteering lags behind both calling and capacity.

Research Question #2

What changes occur in the participants' perception of Christian calling, recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry by the conclusion of the seven-week study?

Figure 4.1 reports the positive movement for all respondents from R12Q1 and R12Q2, comparing mean composite scores for calling, capacity, and commitment. The changes in the participants were measured with the surveys administered before and after the seven-week Romans 12 series. The identical questions of R12Q1 and R12Q2 were tabulated to create before-and-after mean composite scores for calling, capacity, and commitment. The comparison is reported in three ways: (1) the mean composite scores of the total respondents, (2) the mean composite scores of active persons who initially reported serving eight-plus hours, and (3) the mean composite scores of the target sample. Each group showed movement in a positive direction in all three categories of calling, capacity, and commitment. The greatest change occurred in the target sample group, which began with the lowest scores. The smallest change occurred in the active group of persons who began with the highest scores.

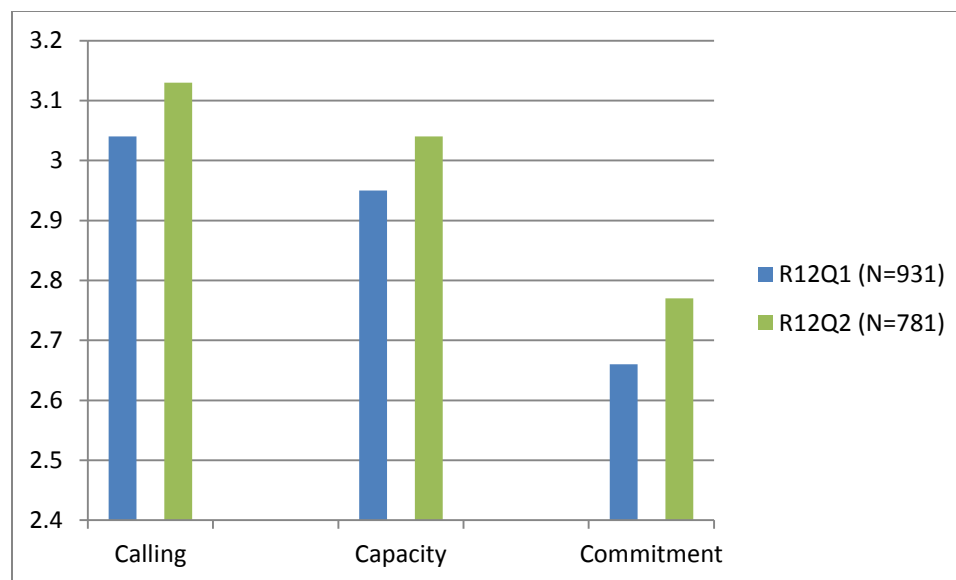


Figure 4.1. Change in participants—total respondents.

Figure 4.2 compares the R12Q1 and R12Q2 answers of active persons who reported serving eight-plus hours per week. In the initial survey, 12.6 percent of respondents ($n=114$) answered that they were serving at this highest level. In the follow-up survey, 14.6 percent ($n=106$) reported serving at this highest level. Interestingly, when the before-and-after mean composite scores are compared for active persons, the most significant increase was in recognition of capacity, which rose from 3.13 to 3.22. The smallest increase was in commitment, probably because they are already giving significant time to volunteer roles.

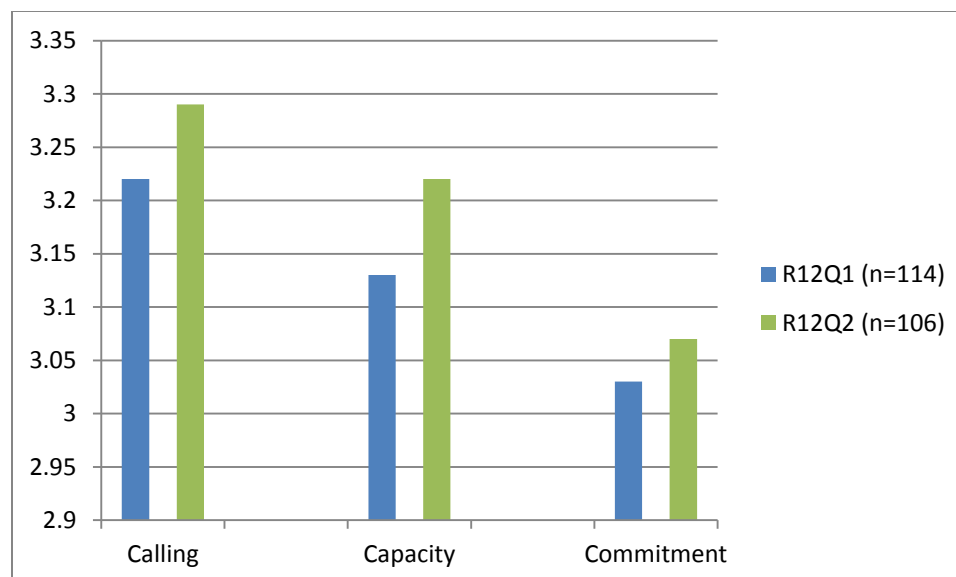


Figure 4.2. Change in participants—active -serving 8+ hours/week.

Figure 4.3 shows the results for the target sample group. That group of thirty-eight was established based on their self-reporting in R12Q1, indicating they volunteered less than three hours a week in church and community. In R12Q2 they also reported attending all Sundays in the series and provided matchable ID codes for accurate before-and-after comparison. This group began with the lowest mean composite scores. In calling and capacity, they showed increases comparable to the total respondents and active group. However, the target sample group reflected the most significant increase in commitment, from 2.33 to 2.5 (from below midpoint to midpoint on the 1 to 4 Likert scale). Fourteen of the thirty-eight respondents reported an increase in the hours per week they are serving in the church and community. The mean score of commitment for the target sample increased by 6.8 percent, well above the 4.1 percent increase among total respondents and 1.3 percent increase for the active group.

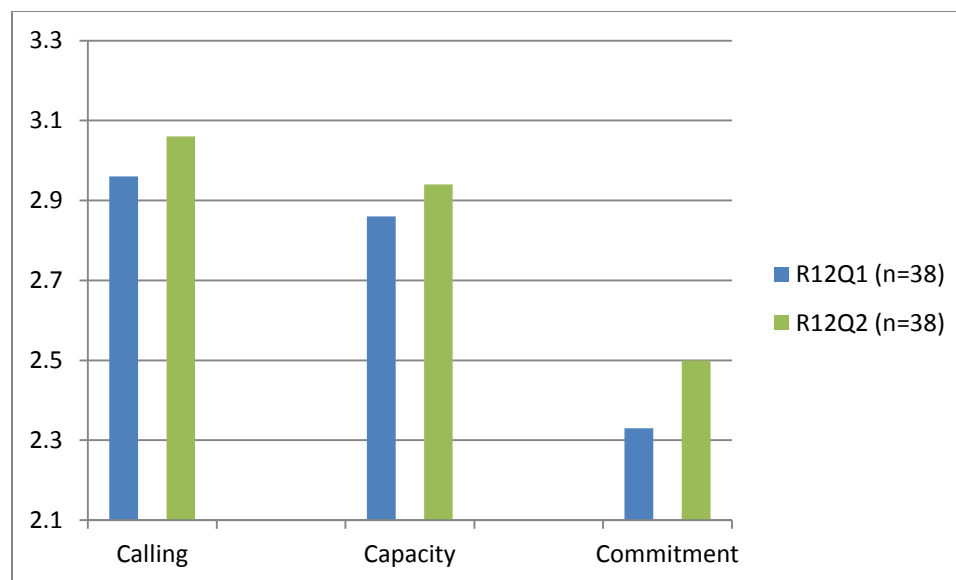


Figure 4.3. Changes in participants—target sample.

Research Question #3

How do the perception of Christian calling, the recognition of capacity to serve, and active commitment to ministry correlate to age or other intervening variables among the participants?

The relevance of age showed up in fifteen of the eighteen questions used to calculate the mean composite scores for calling, capacity, and commitment in the initial survey (R12Q1). The data drawn from total respondents (924 persons answered the age question) revealed a common pattern. Twelve of the questions (#1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18) had a similar frequency pattern with positive attitudes regarding calling and capacity, declining with each age group. Two examples of the downward-step pattern from calling (questions 9 and 12) and two examples from capacity (questions 7 and 15) are illustrative. In the case of question 9, Table 4.6 includes the detail of the frequency

spread, which provides the data for Figure 4.4. The data for questions 12, 7, and 15 are appear in Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7 (see also Appendixes S and T).

Table 4.7. Question 9 Frequency by Age (N=903)

Answer Options	Age					Response Count
	Under 55	55-64	65-74	75-84	85 and above	
Strongly disagree = 4	13.00	23.00	96.00	89.00	17.00	
Disagree = 3	12.00	48.00	189.00	170.00	35.00	
Agree = 2	6.00	8.00	56.00	88.00	26.00	
Strongly agree = 1	0.000	0.00	14.00	11.00	2.00	
Weighted mean	3.23	3.19	3.03	2.94	2.84	903
				<i>answered question</i>		903
				<i>skipped question</i>		21

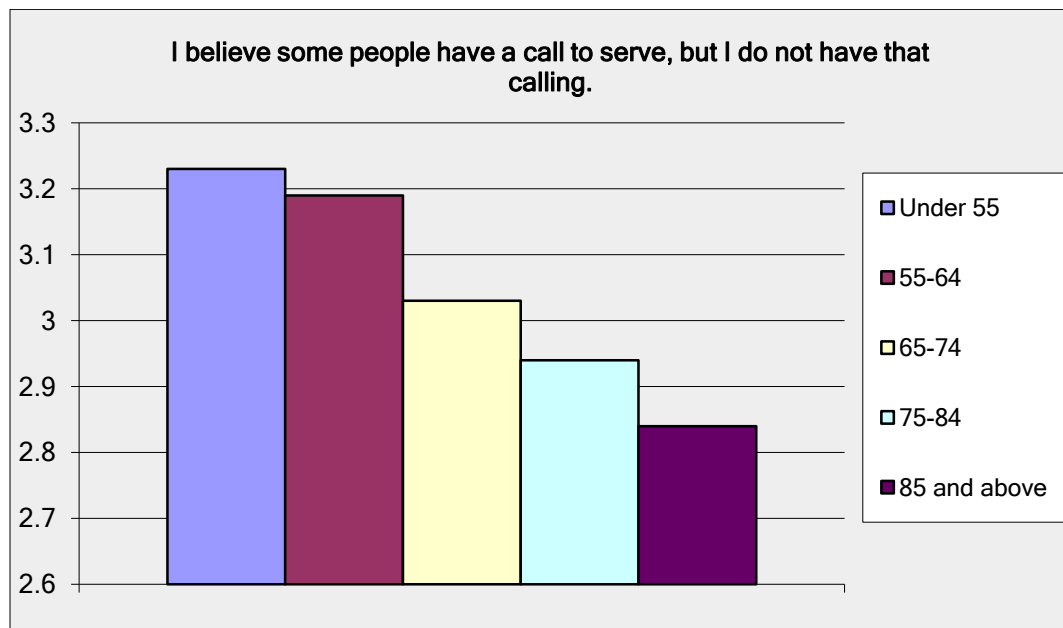


Figure 4.4. Question 9—frequency by age (N=903).

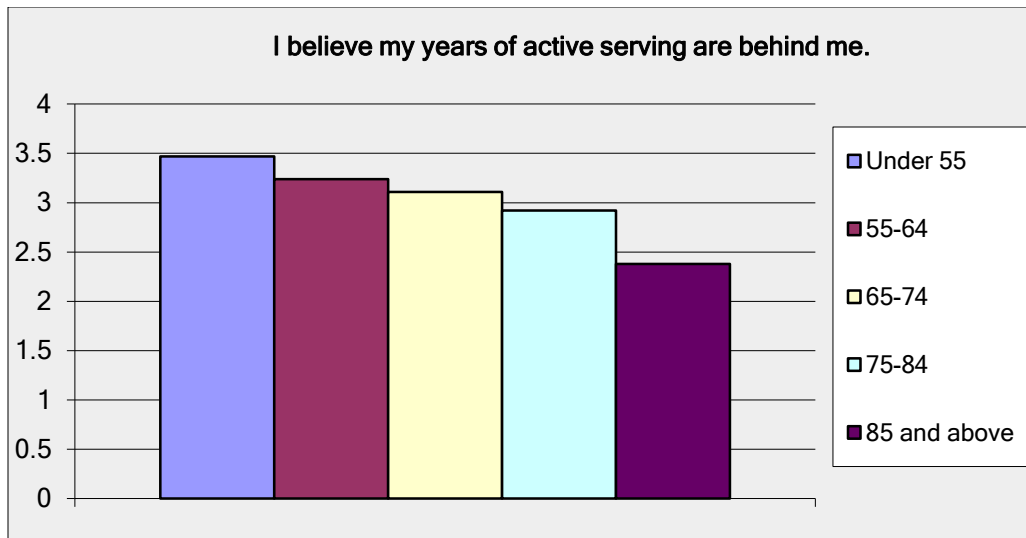


Figure 4.5. Question 12—frequency by age (N=903).

Questions 7 and 15 pertain to capacity. Despite a small anomaly in the question 7 pattern, with the under-55 group reporting slightly more health concerns than the 55-64 age group, the overall correlation of age with declining attitudes continued.

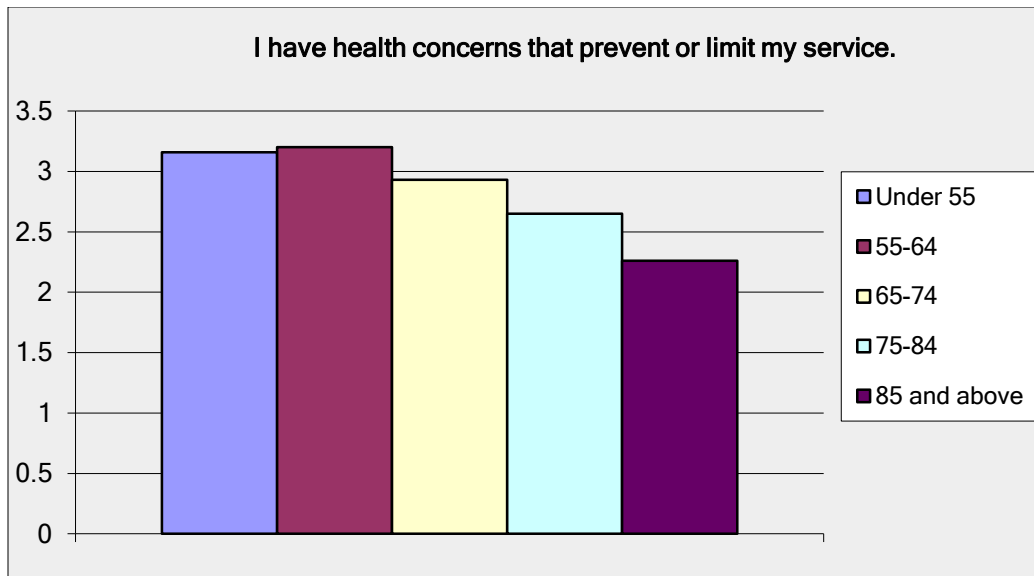


Figure 4.6. Question 7—frequency by age (N=914).

The results of question #7 pose a slight exception to the downward-step pattern with each age group. The under-55 group registered slightly more health concern than the 55-64 group. Then the predominant downward pattern resumes. That chart is nearly identical to the results of question #1 regarding “life experience, wisdom, and compassion to benefit others.” In question #1 the under-55 group responded just slightly lower than the 55-64 age group. Another slight exception to the downward-step pattern was question #4 (“I don’t need to serve because others will step forward to cover the volunteer needs”); the responses of the 65-74 and 75-84 age groups are essentially the same. Question #2 (about the importance of Christian serving) and questions #6 and #17 (about priorities) present more level responses by age frequency. These are minor exceptions and none of them radically defy the pattern.

The older the participant in the study, the more likely he or she has a reduced perception of calling and capacity to serve. The results of question #16 are typical of this

declining view: The older the age group, the less they believe that they have to offer compared to their past. The correlation of aging to a diminished perception of calling and recognition of capacity was repeatedly manifest in the study.

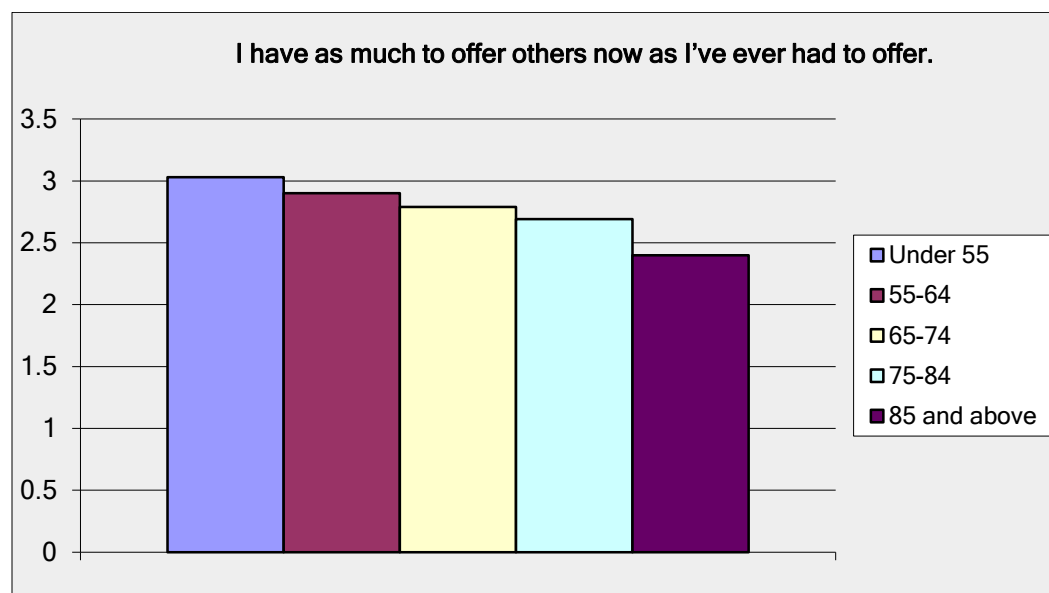


Figure 4.7. Question 16—frequency by age (N=904).

No other intervening variables had such an impact on calling and capacity. The gender analysis verified that a higher percentage of women (59.6 percent) than men (53.7 percent) volunteer in the church. However, the overall results for women and men were remarkably similar. Question #1 regarding capacity for ministry yielded essentially identical weighted averages: male—3.18 and female—3.19. Men and women had the exact same weighted average (3.04) on question #11: “I am open to serving in the church and community if I am asked.” Other tested factors such as the length of time someone was following Jesus as a disciple or the number of years attending North Lake, or the particular worship service attended showed no particular patterns or correlations,

certainly nothing that rivaled the impact age had on perception of calling and capacity for ministry.

As expected and reported with research question #1, those who volunteered eight plus hours per week had a higher sense of calling and capacity to match their commitment. However, the measure of commitment (in questions #3, 8, and 14) also displayed the relevance of age. The frequency-by-age pattern of these three questions was consistent: The highest responses came from the 65-74 and 75-84 age groups. Table 4.7 and accompanying Figure 4.8 exhibit the frequency distribution for question #3, which was mirrored by the other two questions on commitment or active volunteering roles.

Table 4.8. Question 3 Frequency by Age (N=879)

I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my church.							
Answer Options	Age:					Rating Average	Response Count
	Under 55	55-64	65-74	75-84	85 and above		
Strongly disagree = 1	6.00	14.00	23.00	24.00	7.00		
Disagree = 2	12.00	29.00	122.00	111.00	29.00		
Agree = 3	9.00	15.00	113.00	124.00	28.00		
Strongly agree = 4	4.00	20.00	87.00	92.00	10.00		
Weighted mean	2.35	2.53	2.77	2.81	2.55	2.73	879
						<i>answered question</i>	879
						<i>skipped question</i>	45

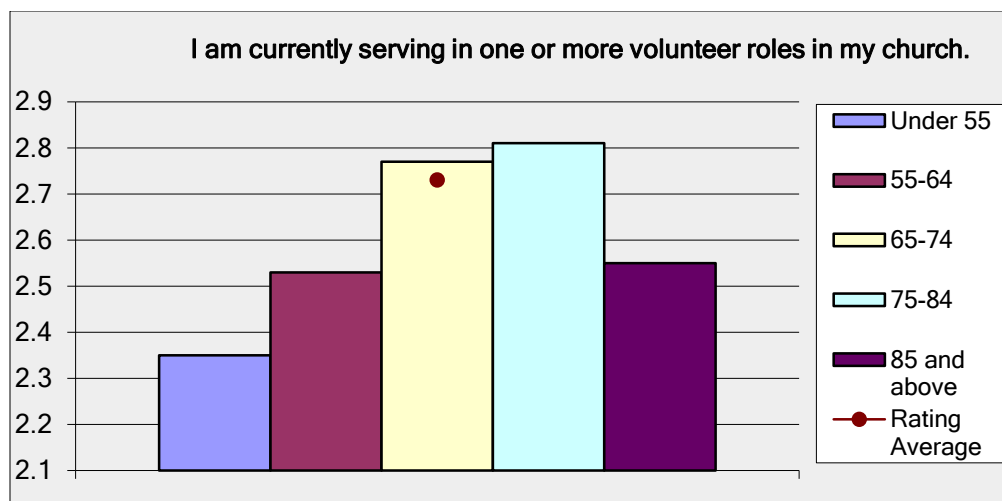


Figure 4.8. Question 3—Frequency by Age (N=879).

The commitment to serve at North Lake is strongest in the 65-84 age bracket. It is markedly lower among the younger age groups and drops off sharply in the 85+ group. This commitment pattern is significantly different from the calling and capacity downward-step patterns, which drop in positive attitudes with each successive age group. The results show that the 65-74 age group and, even more decisively, the 75-84 age group continue to serve in ministry while their perception of calling and recognition of capacity are waning.

Research Question #4

What elements of the seven-week study (sermon series and shared practices) were most impactful in cultivating an active, serving faith?

The answer to research question #4 was drawn from the focus group input as well as from 543 written responses to the open-ended questions #29 and #30 in R12Q2. The overall impact of the series is relatively easy to document, quantitatively and qualitatively. Research question #2 examined the measurable impact of the series in

terms of calling, capacity, and commitment. The open-ended questions regarding other factors or thoughts on serving yielded thirty-one unsolicited comments affirming the series, comments such as, “I have found the Romans 12 Living Series to be engaging, filled with so many ‘point-on’ examples, with clear Biblical life applications.... I know of my calling ... I know my commitment to serve must be reactivated. Thank you!”

Another wrote, “Through the Romans 12 sermon series I have felt God’s calling to serve others in a greater capacity. I am in daily prayer asking God to guide me in those areas I can be used.” The wave of written and verbal responses indicated a momentum or congregational shift toward serving. However, much more difficult is the assessment of the impact of the distinct elements (i.e., the messages, the common daily prayer also used in worship, the remember your baptism liturgy each Sunday, the weekly video testimonies by persons serving in various ways, and the message-related questions to be shared with a discernment team).

The focus group participants came prepared to discuss the series based on the questions shared in advance (see Appendix P). In the course of our 1½-hour meeting, many of them recounted memorable themes or illustrations from the messages. For example, one new member reflected on the “Live as Members of One Another” theme and the way it encouraged him to engage the church in a way that was entirely new. One of the oldest participants, who had recently lost his wife, applied the “Live as a Spiritual Fountain” message to his own circumstances; he recited, almost verbatim and with some acknowledged tears, one of the stories illustrating the message. Two participants at the table did their own riff on “Live as an Offering to God.” Many of them wrestled with the “Live as an Instrument of Grace” message and the ways in which their own talents or

gifts have changed through the years. One man, in the prime of his volunteer years, described unusual moments as a driver delivering meals for North Lake's Operation Homebound. His weekly contacts with the recipients have grown into durable relationships and have stretched him to new roles, such as helping one woman get her ceiling fan working again and helping an elderly man rid his garage of two snakes. He had the whole group laughing as he described how his serving took him beyond his comfort zone. He understood the servant connection to "Live as a Blessing to Others." Clearly, the message themes and illustrations influenced the way that participants reflected on their own calling, capacity, and commitment.

Few people mentioned the therefore prayer distributed at the beginning of the series, used in weekly worship, and encouraged for daily use at home (see Appendix W). Those who did cited it as a significant framework for their experience. In response to question #30, one respondent wrote, "The prayer [Romans 12] is usually my last prayer of the day and first in the morning." One of the focus group participants explained, "I totally connected with the prayer. I did not connect as much with the [emphasis on] baptism, I'm not sure why, but I didn't. Prayer, it's perfect for me. I memorized it, say it in the morning, say it at night." Another grasped the visual and communal nature of the prayer. Holding up the bookmark containing the prayer, she said, "I am a visual person and I don't know why, but this meant so much to me. And to pray it, . . . I felt like I was part of a community, like I belong." Only a handful of people cited the impact of the prayer, but for them it was very significant for their devotional life and connection to God. However, the actual impact it had on their calling, capacity, and commitment was not measured.

The weekly remember your baptism liturgy was affirmed by persons in the open-ended questions as well as the focus group (see Appendix X). Several mentioned how much they appreciated it. However, even those who discussed how much they liked the baptism emphasis did not seem to make the connection with serving, that is, being baptized into the ministry of Jesus or dying and rising to a new life that features the offering of oneself. Perhaps that connection was too subtle in its weekly presentation. Based on the data from the focus group and R12Q2 questions, no significant impact from the baptism liturgy can be asserted.

Although the video testimonies were not frequently cited in the open-ended questions or focus group, they did make an overt connection with serving (see Appendix Y). Those who mentioned them specifically acknowledged being inspired by seeing how others were serving. The video examples, shown at all three services each Sunday, generated a positive atmosphere around the Romans 12 series and highlighted a variety of ways in which persons were already serving. One unanticipated by-product was the impact upon the persons involved in the videos themselves. One woman involved in the video testimonies and in the focus group affirmed that the series had encouraged her to undertake something she would not have otherwise:

If I had been asked to do the video at the beginning, I would have been NO WAY! But I was asked towards the end, and I felt that God was telling me that this is something you need to do. Because I would have normally tried to bail out of it. But I knew that I had the capacity to do that.

We heard similarly from others willing to be interviewed and recorded that it was a source of tremendous encouragement, as well as a sign of personal growth, rising to a new challenge.

Participation in discernment teams with the proposed questions each week was minimal (see Appendix Z). R12Q2 question #28 recorded the level of participation. Four hundred and sixty-eight respondents skipped this question, which was a dramatically higher number than any other quantitative question on the survey. The next highest was seventy-two skips. Of the 313 persons who did respond, slightly more than 68 percent reported that they did not discuss the Sunday questions with a discernment team or small group more than twice. Because of the poor construction of question #28, that 68 percent could entirely represent persons who paid no attention to the discernment questions. One focus group participant expressed appreciation for the questions but found difficulty initiating discussion with anyone other than her spouse. The laissez-faire approach to the discernment teams clearly did not work; stronger promotion and facilitation was required for more participation. However, those who did use the question in small groups (10.5 percent reported doing so all seven weeks of the series) found the discussion robust and helpful to consider their calling and capacity. Two participants in the focus group voiced this perspective.

Finally, although the survey instruments were not intended as part of the series or measured for impact, several respondents cited the questionnaires as helpful for them to consider their attitudes toward serving. Following worship on 2 October, one man who sings in the choir said to me, "I loved your sermon and the start of the series, but I found the survey even more provocative." The questions themselves raised awareness among the participants, an awareness of their serving levels as well as attitudes. In this regard the questionnaires meant to test results also shaped the results, cultivating a more active, serving faith.

The qualitative data for research question #4 is insufficient to assess with any precision the relative impact of the messages, prayer, baptism liturgy, video testimonies, and discernment questions. From the anecdotal evidence, the messages had the most durable and significant impact upon serving. The impact of the baptism liturgy was negligible. The impact of the video testimonies seemed much more significant and widespread, affirming those who already serve and encouraging persons to consider new ways to serve. The impact of the prayer and the discernment questions was similar for both: narrow but intense for those who connected or engaged with them. The collective weight of the series elements had a desired effect. One man in his early 80s responded:

I think the series for me was more like a catalyst because I have a sense of calling to serve, but it has been sort of, maybe, dormant, and I think this kind of awakened me a little bit to act on it.

Awakening the call to serve among older members was a primary objective of the intervention. Comments such as these reinforced the measurable impact registered in the quantitative data.

Summary of Major Findings

The research for this project measured the ministry intervention of the Romans 12 living series. The data has helped to confirm and quantify several suppositions for ministry with older adults at North Lake Presbyterian Church. It also uncovered dynamics that impact our effectiveness at engaging persons in volunteer roles. The major findings are as follows:

1. The sense of calling declines with age. This finding is nuanced because even the 85+ age group affirms overwhelmingly that serving is an essential part of the

Christian faith, and many commit to serve as their calling diminishes. However, the individual's reported sense of calling diminishes with the advance of years.

2. The perception of capacity declines with age. Many older adults feel unable to volunteer because of personal limitations and circumstances. Those feelings of incapacity increase with age and predominate in the 85+ age group.

3. Ages 65-84 are the peak years for volunteering, and they represent the vast majority (80 percent) of North Lake Presbyterian Church attendees or survey respondents. Therefore, the ministry potential is huge.

4. A surprisingly large number of respondents (48.8 percent) feel underutilized in the church. They have abilities and time to offer but are not sure how or where to serve. They are waiting for someone to ask them to serve or for a clear, calling signal from God.

5. The Romans 12 message and framework provides an effective way to promote serving and voluntarism. The *therefore* mentality links serving to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. It integrates serving and faith in a way that reduces the sense of duty and obligation, emphasizing instead a joyful, living response and self-offering. This joyful, *therefore* mentality creates a healthier faith environment and enhances a sense of calling, capacity, and commitment.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

The identified problem is the apparent disparity between the large worship attendance of older adults and a considerably smaller number of them engaged in volunteer roles in the church. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the changes in the perception of Christian calling, recognition of the capacity to serve, and active ministry engagement among older adults in the North Lake Presbyterian Church in Lady Lake, Florida, as a result of a seven-week sermon series and congregational focus on Romans 12 presented over a period of two months.

Diminished Calling with Age

Research question #3 produced extensive data that the sense of calling diminishes with age, despite the fact that the 85+ age group agreed overwhelmingly (97.5 percent) that serving is an essential part of the Christian faith. Although the sense of calling declined, the level of commitment, perhaps from a lifelong pattern or feeling of duty, was remarkably resilient among the older respondents. This nuanced finding might be summarized by the attitude expressed in this sentence, “Even though I know that serving is essential to the Christian faith, and even though I am still doing what I can in serving roles, my awareness and understanding of my personal calling is in decline.”

The age-correlation to the calling questions revealed a consistent downward-step pattern. Each age group reflected incremental decreases with nearly every question. The most overt version (question #9) represented a denial of calling, and the more elderly were the most likely to agree. The older respondents were less open to serve if asked

(question #11), less receptive to new ways to serve (question #15), and more likely to agree that their active serving was behind them (question #12). Their larger uncertainty about how to serve (question #13) could be conflated with the perception of their decreasing capacity. However, overall the declining sense of call was obvious when examined by age categories.

Meanwhile, some form of religious participation and responsibility is essential for a healthy aging process. Houston and Parker highlight how such engagement “has been found consistently to be associated with longer life, less disease and disability, improved cognitive and immune functioning, less depression, more freedom and less dependence, and a greater sense of meaning and purpose” (121). The authors propose a calling or mission statement found in Psalm 71 for all seniors:

For you, O Lord, are my hope,
 my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
 Upon you I have leaned from my birth ...
 So even to old age and gray hairs,
 O God, do not forsake me,
 until I proclaim your might
 to all the generations to come.

They are not dropping out of God’s mission, but their calling is redefined. The senior or elder Christians may be challenged to think of their calling not in terms of driving to deliver meals or teaching Sunday school or volunteering in the church office but in their gentle, hopeful witness to the unfailing, mighty grace of God. They can enjoy the “ever-growing love affair with God” (Watkins 35) with more clarity and less clutter. Their elderhood can become an encouraging model and “beacon of hope to others” (Thomas 283). Regardless of their age and physical limitations, they can “be the most ardent prayer warrior or the most wise or courageous member of a congregation” (Houston and

Parker 124-25). Their calling transitions to another role; their usefulness persists in another form; their value and engagement is through *saging*, i.e., reflection, narrative, testimony, and encouragement for the following generations.

Circumstantially Sidelined

The qualitative input reinforced the quantitative evidence and prior observations that personal circumstances—health and otherwise—impeded serving at greater levels with advancing age. This outcome was no surprise; it was anticipated in the statement of the problem as well as the literature review. However, the research verified the health factor and the overall decline of perceived capacity.

The study confirmed that many at North Lake believe they are unable to serve because of circumstances (e.g., physical limitations, illness, caregiving roles, grief). The open-ended questions on R12Q2 yielded eighty-nine voluntary responses from persons about why they were not serving more. The single largest category was health related. Thirty-three mentioned explicitly some health, disability, or medical issues that interfered with serving. Question #7 (“I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service”) verified the correlation of health and aging. Approximately 15 percent of respondents under 65 years of age agreed with that statement. For the 65-74 group, the agreement was 22.7 percent. Agreement increased to 32.3 percent for ages 75-84 and then soared to 65.5 percent for the 85+ group of respondents.

Many older adults feel unable to volunteer because of health limitations. Those feelings of incapacity increase with age and predominate in the 85+ age group. One man wrote succinctly on his survey, “I’m 93 with medical issues.” A woman in the 75-84 age group reflected the experience of a widening gap between calling and capacity:

I feel strongly that all of us as believers have a real obligation to commit to serve our church, our community and our nation as best we can. I have always tried to do that, but aging limits my participation. I have been extremely active throughout my lifetime, and while I still have the motivation to continue that active service, I feel I cannot do nearly as much as I'd like.

In her reply to the previous question she acknowledged “a few health issues.” The gap between calling and capacity eventually produces the drop-off in commitment (the measure of active engagement in ministry). However, that disengagement is not necessarily bad.

During the focus group, the eldest participant listened mostly. When he did speak, he did so with tremendous affection and enthusiasm for North Lake. He said, “I’ve been heavily involved in this church until about 2010,” which is when he turned 85. He affirmed the leadership and direction. Then he said, “I don’t think that I am personally going to be too involved in it at 91. I don’t have the mental capacity that I used to have, and I go through some rather difficult personal issues.” He spoke matter-of-factly, without any self-pity, acknowledging that he was sidelined by his circumstances, unable to participate in a leadership role but still active in his prayerful support for the church.

For others, the experience of being circumstantially sidelined came with much more anguish. Seventeen persons responded to the open-ended questions with some reference to the consuming role of caregiving (e.g., frontline care for a daughter who was dying, guardianship for a grandson with a heroin addiction, and several persons looking after spouses declining with dementia). Another group of responses cited grief as a limiting factor for their service. One woman wrote, “Loss of my husband. This has diminished my drive to serve—burned out—washed out.” She recognized the impact her grief and depression had upon her calling and capacity to serve.

The risk of “narrative loss” due to a failing body or self-enclosed premature foreclosure (Baldwin and Estey 210) seemed high for some who shared stark comments of loss and exhaustion. The circumstances of aging will eventually sap the ability to engage a serving role in the church or community. For some, that decline represents a larger crisis of despair that threatens their ability to live purposefully. Others experience the decline with a calm wisdom and sense of integrity (Erikson), such as the 91-year-old in the focus group who could see his own contributions to the community in an ongoing and hopeful fashion.

Thomas writes, “To live is to age. To live long is to age much” (33). His work is profoundly hopeful but squarely realistic concerning the physical decline. He describes the tradeoff in the aging process:

Old age has richness and complexity that, when appreciated, provide a powerful counterweight to the measurable, progressive, steady decline in bodily functions. In old age, the body instructs the mind in patience and forbearance while the mind tutors the body in creativity and flexibility.
(24)

He extols the aging process and the new heights that may be reached, including the “gerotranscendence” model of Tornstam (Thomas 27). This holistic approach to aging appreciates the emotional, spiritual, and relational gains that may accompany old age. His assessment is a helpful counterbalance to the findings that may too easily slide and settle toward the image of declining capacity because of the repeated downward-step pattern depicting the age correlation on numerous questions.

The Romans 12 focus reminds all at North Lake that they are part of a *therefore* community, a living response to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. At every age and stage of life, persons can live “in view of God’s mercies” (Rom. 12:1) and as full

participants in his grand and graceful narrative. Those who feel circumstantially sidelined from service may still experience the empowerment of God and live as a spiritual fountain. They also help individuals to remember that the *live as members of one-another* dynamic creates a community that is alert and responsive to those who cannot assume an active servant role at this time.

The practice of ministry with those who are circumstantially sidelined involves at least three specific efforts:

1. Adjusting the serving expectations with sensitivity and grace so that the emphasis on serving does not add guilt to the existing frustration of those who cannot engage at the level they remember or desire. Several survey respondents did acknowledge a sense of guilt because they cannot do more. The congregational message on serving needs to be calibrated and delivered in a way that does not compound the negative feelings of those in this group.

2. Legitimizing and affirming repeatedly the ministries of which they are capable and the ones in which they are engaged. This legitimization is essential for caregivers who need to know that their church endorses and supports the demanding servant role they have with a loved one. The affirmation of ministry calling and capacity should also extend to those whose servant role is, for example, intercessory prayer, daily phone calls to a lonely neighbor, or forwarding devotional e-mails to six people every morning. All of these examples and more were mentioned in the open-ended questions. The church needs to recognize all the serving roles and the *ministry of the laity* that takes place outside the organizational bounds of the church. In short, they are not really sidelined at all when the full scope of ministry or service is considered and affirmed.

3. Considering strategies to celebrate and express gratitude for persons who can no longer fill their volunteer roles within the church. Just as community rituals ordain and install persons into particular offices, perhaps some rites of passage would mark the conclusion of a season of service and ease the transition for someone unable to serve in a particular capacity.

4. Emphasizing the gift of receiving help. The willingness to receive support is also a great gift to community. In order for the church to *live as members of one another*, persons must be willing to receive help as well as give help. One can *serve* the church by allowing others close enough to receive assistance. This reception of help is a huge challenge because of the value placed on self-sufficiency and privacy. For example, the number of NLPC Stephen Ministers trained and ready for one-on-one caring relationships consistently exceeds the number willing to be care receivers. Men especially resist this kind of support. For the circumstantially sidelined, the necessary message may be that they are serving the church well when they allow the church to be the church, to come alongside them during this season of their lives.

The Peak Years for Older-Adult Volunteering

One of the most encouraging aspects of the research was the 99.5 percent agreement that serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith. That response was by far the strongest (in terms of percentage and weighted average) of any of the questions. The variance of weighted average for each age group was negligible. However, the questions that tested commitment and actual engagement in serving showed clearly that ages 65-84 are the peak years for volunteering.

As reported in Chapter 4, the commitment to serve at North Lake is strongest in the 65-84 age bracket. Figure 4.8 (p. 124) graphically portrays the noticeable drop-off in the commitment to serve among younger, preretirement persons and then with the 85 and older age group. Those younger and older may share the conviction that serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith, but many factors significantly impede their ability to do so. The persons 65-84 are at the peak of their serving years. Even though their perception of calling and capacity diminishes through those years, the actual behavior defies that downward-step trend. Furthermore, since that 65-84 group comprises the vast majority (80 percent) of North Lake Presbyterian Church attendees or survey respondents, the potential for volunteering is extensive. Without excluding those younger or older, the evidence suggests this age category is the target group for mobilizing persons to serve in the church and community.

In particular, many of the younger retirees express a strong interest in exploring new serving roles or cited their serving as a key life purpose in this stage of life. One person wrote, "I made a promise to myself that when I retired I would try to spend 1/3 of my time giving back/volunteering. I feel this is what God is calling me to do. When I serve, I gain back as much as I give." Another said, "I now have the time to serve-difficult before retiring.... Being retired has now given me the time to say 'Yes' in many places that I said 'No' to for so many years. It is now my turn." This shift toward serving was a recurring theme in the survey answers as well as in the focus group. The participants in the focus group included several who have not yet retired, including one man who spoke thoughtfully about his serving trajectory in the next couple years as he approaches retirement.

Many study participants in the early years of retirement reflect the analysis of Beal and Tournier regarding the importance of a second career that transforms purpose and usefulness in a successful aging process (Beal 7). Scores affirmed the purpose and fulfillment they derive from serving, whether a former teacher working with the children's ministry or a business executive delivering meals for Operation Homebound. Several articulated this dynamic with high self-awareness. For example, a retired medical doctor in the focus group reflected on the amount of teaching and lecturing that he did over the course of his career. Now he is one of the favorite Bible teachers in the congregation.

This age group reflects the intersection of the spiritual journey and the journey of service (Atchley 104). They largely understand, accept, and desire to fulfill their serving role in a stage when they have both the time and the spiritual maturity to contribute significantly. They combine belief and behavior in a way that exhibits a full conversion or joining in the mission of Jesus Christ to the world (Van Engen; Wright, *Simply Christian*).

The data for persons 65-84 is exciting. Their commitment and enthusiasm indicates they are not "lacking in zeal, but keep spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). They reflect the living sacrifice that Paul urges in Romans 12:1. This sizable group at North Lake, with their distinctively high commitment, represents the peak years for volunteering.

The research highlights the importance of reaching younger retirees and newcomers to North Lake with the message and options for serving. That contact and connection should be made as soon and as clearly as possible in a way that is inviting but

not manipulative. Many are entering a new, adventurous season with discretionary time and a wide spectrum of choices of how to spend it. Helping persons 65-84 connect with a fulfilling servant role should be a priority for a congregation ministering with this age group. A younger retiree or newcomer who has a positive experience of volunteering within the church or community is likely to sustain that service, to continue in a meaningful role even as his or her capacity diminishes. The data suggests that commitment outlasts capacity. If the serving experience is tethered to one's faith, an individual will only give it up reluctantly when circumstances dictate.

Unintentionally Sidelined

A surprisingly large percentage of respondents to R12Q2 question #19 felt underutilized at North Lake. Despite the huge potential for volunteers at NLPC, or perhaps because of it, 48.8 percent of respondents indicated that their abilities were being used very little or not at all by the church. That score actually improved by 5 percent from the initial survey; the R12Q1 response was 53.8 percent.

This question was inserted for comparison with the Beal article in which he reported that 61 percent of the older adults in his congregation had a negative response or no response to a similar question of engagement. If the number who had no response (34) to R12Q2 question #19 is added to the calculation, 51.1 percent at North Lake had a response comparable to the 61 percent in the Beal survey. If only the 65+ population is considered at North Lake, the picture actually improves, dropping to 45.4 percent. Some encouragement might be derived from this favorable comparison or by the improvement registered from R12Q1 to R12Q2. However, the data still represents approximately half

of the North Lake congregation as “unintentionally sidelined,” not engaged in a way that uses their abilities well.

Question #20 approached this disengagement from a slightly different angle, trying to get to the cause of the underutilization. The largest reason given was, “I am not sure what I am called to do” (26.8 percent). More than a quarter of the respondents affirmed that they have abilities and time to offer but are not sure how or where to serve. This uncertainty also registered in the open-ended questions. Dozens of responses such as the following showed up in questions #29 and #30:

- “My desire is to do more. I have been praying about it and am awaiting God’s guidance at this time.”
- “I have helped in the past, but now do not know where I can serve.”
- “Praying for direction—being ‘still’ to listen for God’s direction.”
- “I would like to serve, but I don’t know where.”
- “I need to find a way to serve.”
- “Willing to help. Need some ‘calling’ and direction as to where to plug in.”
- “I wish I knew what would ‘light my fire.’”
- “I need to currently find a place for my talents. I need to be involved to feel more of a sense of belonging.”

The quantitative and qualitative data converge, pointing to a significant group of persons who have capacity but no sense of direction or calling. Question #20 also revealed 14.5 percent who would be willing to serve, but they have not been asked. The unintentionally sidelined includes those awaiting someone to ask them or for some other clear signal from God. Three persons even reported that they had tried to volunteer but

had no follow-up from North Lake. For example, one said, “I have filled out several comment cards indicating my ministry interests and desires, but have not been contacted.” Although persons may have a strong sense (1) that serving others is essential to Christian faith, (2) that they are personally supposed to be engaged in serving, and (3) that they have something to offer, they may still grope to find their serving role in the church and community. NLPC needs to do a better job of assisting them in this discernment process.

A congregation-wide emphasis on serving must go beyond the scriptural and thematic slogans of “Live as an Offering to God” and “Live as an Instrument of Grace.” The church needs to investigate the dynamics and failures that underutilize persons willing to share their time and abilities. The volunteer system needs rigorous attention, especially in a large congregation. The system needs to maximize follow-up and minimize obstacles. The system needs to develop patterns of effective matching, guiding persons into serving opportunities for which they are well-suited, allowing them ample time to decide and settle in but also periodic reviews of the match and permission to change when necessary. The system needs to be highly personal and interactive to assist in the discernment process. Newsletter and bulletin notices for volunteer recruitment are woefully insufficient.

While North Lake was attuned to Romans 12, the church was also trying out a pilot program of fifteen trained ministry coaches to meet one-on-one with each new member received in October. The ministry coaches were asked to assess a person’s interests and capacity and to help match that person with possible serving opportunities within North Lake and the community. One new member responded to the R12Q2

survey, citing the ministry coach as a key factor in deciding where to serve. That pilot program is a start to improve the culture-wide serving emphasis at North Lake and to reduce the number of those unintentionally sidelined.

Romans 12 and a Culture of Serving

The Romans 12 chapter provides an effective message and framework to promote serving. The results reported in research question #2 suggest that a short-term series can have a positive impact on measurements of calling, capacity, and commitment. Even more important may be the long-term effect, providing a language and concepts that help shape a congregational culture of serving.

The *therefore* mentality, widely grasped and often quoted by members, linked serving to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. It integrated serving and faith in a way that reduces the sense of duty and obligation, emphasizing instead a joyful, living response and self-offering. Participants in the focus group discussed this impact of the Romans 12 series. One woman, whose magnificent artwork graces our sanctuary, described what this shift has meant for her:

I've been a little brown church mouse for way more than 25 years, and it's just kind of a way of life just to volunteer for things at our church. We went to [a large Presbyterian Church in CA] for 30 years and we, you know, did many things, and that's where I started decorating. And the thing the Romans 12 series brought to me is the idea of offering it to God. I didn't think of it that way ever. It was just more my struggle to do something good. But an offering to God lifts it so.

As often as the church speaks of offering worship to God and offering one's gifts to God, remarkably this dedicated servant had not made such a connection with her artwork. Some of the seasonal panels she has created are more than twenty-four feet high and wide with stunning images for Christmas or Easter. Other works are slightly smaller and

mounted permanently on the walls. However, she humbly and earnestly acknowledged missing the self-offering element in what she was doing.

Another in the discussion came back to that point a few minutes later to register this comment: “I can follow up on what [name] said about offering. I feel, and that ties into my earlier comment about attitude, that it being an offering to Christ in what I’m doing makes a gigantic difference. It moves me from works to service.” She elaborated further on her transition from works to grace and how she could live in response to what God had done in Jesus. The Romans 12 framework based on, “Therefore, in view of God’s mercy” (Rom. 12:1) had released her from a heavy weight of obligation and works or at least helped in that process.

The careful teaching of Paul at this hinge point in his epistle creates a healthier message to enhance a sense of calling, capacity, and commitment. His imperatives are intended to be life-giving, not rigidly imposed. They are invitational, not obligational (Wolterstorff). Romans 12 can be read as an invitation to flourish. With all of its directives, it can be experienced as a beautiful kaleidoscope of patterned and faithful living, in Christian community, in response to God who is at the center. Bass and Briehl articulate a vision, an invitation that might be attached to Romans 12: “Living a whole life ... attentively ... together ... in the real world ... for the good of all ... in response to God” (8). Such a vision for community has a sustaining, creative impact. A sensitive reading and rendering of Romans 12 has tremendous visionary potential for shaping a congregation. It can elevate the mundane and dutiful to the sublime and joyful offering of oneself for God and others.

Implications of the Findings

First and foremost, the research provided a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the problem. The data shed light on the gap between the number of worshippers and the number of persons serving at North Lake. It verified that respondents understand and agree that serving is essential to their Christian faith, while clarifying and quantifying many of the reasons why persons are not currently serving in the church or community. The qualitative data also highlighted the obstacles many face when they desire to serve. The findings can help North Lake move toward a congregation-wide culture of serving.

Romans 12 itself has proven very useful and inspiring for the congregation. Certain emphases of Romans 12 can be retained and reprised to encourage self-offering. Peterson's paraphrase of Romans 12:1 in *The Message* should appear frequently to remind all of the simple, ongoing offering of one's life: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering." Romans 12 can be presented to new members and summarized with the congregation periodically. The hinge at the start of Romans 12 ("Therefore, in view of God's mercy") establishes personal and community behavior as a living response to what God has already done in Jesus Christ. As several focus group members attested, that response mentality can be freeing and may generate a whole new attitude toward a life of serving. One focus group participant summarized her response to the series:

I am fairly involved because I am a care-giver and involved in a variety of service roles. But Romans 12 helped me focus and change my attitude. And it made me feel more engaged for Christ versus checking off on an Excel spreadsheet or something. And I try to think about Brother

Lawrence who felt called to even slice celery. So I think it changed my attitude.

Furthermore, Romans 12:2—with its emphasis on being transformed and discovering God’s will—can be developed further to promote discernment. Although the ministry intervention in this project made only a feeble attempt at discernment teams, those who were intentional about the questions and discussion found them extremely useful.

Romans 12:2 may bolster the purpose and impact of new ministry coaches. Finally, the overall themes of Romans 12 may help to articulate the core values that shape the faith community of North Lake.

Beyond the value of Romans 12 as a framework for serving, the research also points to several strategic steps. NLPC, and other churches similarly interested in growing the servanthood of older adults, can:

- Pay particular attention to the serving potential of the 65-84 age group. Without excluding those younger and older, find ways to engage newcomers and new retirees as soon as possible.
- Devote careful attention to the volunteer system. Understand how its deficiencies create unnecessary obstacles for people on their way to serving. Work to create an easier on-ramp for volunteers to personalize the interaction with prospective servants, to maximize the match of the individual with the service opportunity, and to monitor satisfaction.
- Consider the message and serving emphasis as it applies to the 85+ age group for whom the visible volunteering role becomes less likely, if not impossible. Understand that older adulthood is still an active season spiritually and relationally even if it does not manifest in an active commitment to serve in the church and community. Consider ways to encourage and implement an *aging-to-saging* approach with those in their eighties and beyond.

One specific implication of the Romans 12 series derived from the favorable reception and the effectiveness of the video testimonies from persons who were serving in various ways. The video testimonies produced for the series featured persons who were under 85 and currently active in roles of serving. To build on that impact, North Lake

produced a longer interview video with an African-American member and retired dentist from Chicago. He had been a financial supporter of Martin Luther King, Jr., acquainted personally with the civil rights leader, present at the Washington Mall for the historic march and “I have a dream” speech in 1962, and active for decades in the struggle for racial justice and reconciliation. Two segments of that beautiful interview were woven into North Lake worship services on the January Sunday closest to the national holiday celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. The impact was colossal, for the congregation to hear from one in their midst, a kindly sage whose experience of skin color has been very different. This video was another way to feature the story of someone who has served in ways that most of the congregation would not otherwise have known. The Romans 12 series set the precedent and trajectory for this kind of video testimony.

Limitations of the Study

The research from this study may be relevant for other congregations with a predominantly older-adult membership. However, the extent to which the data was skewed by the Florida factor of seasonal migration is unclear. In the open-ended questions several respondents mentioned that they are snowbirds or they split time between North Lake and a church in the north. Worship attendance fluctuates dramatically between summer and winter. This research data does not reflect how much the pattern of seasonal attendance affects the calling, capacity, and commitment of the respondents.

A second limiting factor is the nature of the surrounding community, the largest such retirement community in the nation. The recent rapid growth means that many are newcomers to the area and are predisposed to new relationships and new serving

opportunities. That dynamic may not translate in equivalent fashion to another congregation with the same age distribution.

Another limitation stems from administering the surveys to the entire worshipping community on a voluntary basis. A huge amount of quantitative data was gathered in aggregate form and in the comparative analysis of the Target Sample. However, the research has no way of assessing the impact of the nonresponders. Hundreds of persons in attendance on 2 October and 20 November choose not to complete the questionnaires. The study has no way to know what that nonparticipation signifies (e.g., whether it reflects persons who attend only seasonally, if many in the 85+ age group self-selected out of participation, or if many chose not to do R12Q2 because they believed they had already completed one survey). The nonparticipation represents a sizable unknown regarding the overall percentages of the worshipping congregation.

Another weakness that limited the study and its relevance for others was the lack of quantitative questions pertaining to research question #4 on the impact of the different elements of the series, which derived all of its qualitative data from the open-ended questions of R12Q2 and the focus group. The anecdotal input was illuminating, but the research could have been strengthened by several additional questions on R12Q2. Because of the qualitative input, the learnings from research question #4 are probably limited to the unique series and situation at North Lake.

Finally, the research design of this project spanned only two months. The surveys provided snapshot comparisons from the beginning and the end of the Romans 12 series. The project provides a short-term study of older adults and their calling, capacity, and commitment to serving. The period of time was hardly long enough for persons to

explore their calling and to find new ways of serving, much less settle into new serving patterns. These short-term results cannot be generalized or extrapolated to long-term efforts and shifts toward serving as a living response to God's mercy and love.

Unexpected Observations

Two significant surprises emerged as a result of the ministry project and analysis. First, the high percentage (48.8 percent) of those who feel underutilized by the church was unexpected. Based on the Beal article and results (61 percent), this high percentage of underutilization might have been anticipated. However, the level was still considerably higher than I would have projected at NLPC. If asked at the outset how many felt underutilized, I would have replied in the range of 25 percent. Therefore, the dynamic of persons feeling their abilities are not used well or at all by the church was twice as high as expected. In addition, I was surprised to see in R12Q1 that 127 persons (14.9 percent) identified with the statement that they are not engaged in serving at the church because they have not been asked. That information was surprising and hard to absorb because of the incessant attempts to recruit persons into new roles at the church. However, this surprise was also encouraging because it represents a factor that church leaders can address actively and directly.

The second unexpected observation was the number of persons who voiced appreciation for the Romans 12 series as a catalyst to reflect upon their serving role. Dozens of respondents in the open-ended questions, as well as the focus group, affirmed the implicit challenge in the series. As mentioned previously, some found the survey questions provocative, stirring their minds about ways they are or are not serving. One person wrote, "Through the Romans 12 sermon series I have felt God's calling to serve

others in a greater capacity. I am in daily prayer asking God to guide me in those areas I can be used.” Many with the same thoughts commended the series because it focused on and stimulated their awareness of what they are doing, what they can do, and where else they might actually make a difference. By contrast, I was not surprised by the number and details of persons explaining their difficulties in serving at this stage of their lives. Meanwhile, I was pleased to hear from many that Romans 12 living awakened their mindfulness and their resolve about serving.

Recommendations

Numerous intended changes in ministry practice have already been covered. Here are listed three additional recommendations: one pertaining to implementation, the second and third suggesting areas for further investigation.

First, the scope and complexity of mobilizing persons to serve requires a clear strategy and system for doing so. A smaller congregation may have a volunteer coordinator who handles all the work and individual matching of persons to serving opportunities. A larger congregation such as North Lake needs to have a more extensive system to accomplish this task. The pilot program with ministry coaches, that was peripheral to this study, has been promising. It is a more personalized, interactive way to guide persons, especially new members, into serving roles for which they are well suited. Some who are not shy and have a clear sense of their capacity will step forward to find their role in a church busy with ministries and mission into the community. Many will not; so the church needs to monitor and facilitate this process with greater intentionality and effectiveness.

Second, the open-ended responses included five individuals citing negative volunteer experiences from a former church connection. They acknowledged the carryover of those memories and how they were a deterrent to stepping forward to serve in a new church. The research in this study uncovered a factor that has not been further examined here: the extent to which a person's prior volunteer experience affects adversely his or her willingness to try something new or to try again in a new congregation. Surely the reverse is true. When someone has had a favorable experience (e.g., as a choir member or deacon) in a prior congregation, that positive participation carries over to the new church, increasing the probability that he or she will try out a similar role. Unfortunately, some persons are recovering volunteers, hurting from a combination of factors in a prior experience. The response to these persons would require sensitive probing and steps for restoration, so that someone is willing to try again. Because North Lake receives so many who come south from other churches, it is the beneficiary of persons who come with positive church experiences. It is also the recipient of persons who are wounded from negative experiences. Their situation and the church's response warrant further reflection that goes well beyond the scope of this project.

Third, the factor of seasonal migration deserves much more weight and consideration than this study has included. Persons who split time between two church homes have to make difficult decisions regarding how to allocate their time, talent, and treasure. Several cited their snowbird status as a reason why they do not commit to a serving role in Florida. However, the same may be said to their church in another state, so that their level of engagement is minimal in either case. Additional research to understand and address this dynamic is probably available, underway, and still needed.

Postscript

Selecting Asbury Theological Seminary to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree was a bit counterintuitive because of my Presbyterian/Reformed background. I had some familiarity with the area because of living in Cincinnati and because my daughter was attending a Kentucky college not too far from Wilmore. My exploratory campus visits to Asbury confirmed the sincere, robust Christian faith of this community. I sensed that an Asbury doctorate would be intellectually rigorous but much more than an academic exercise. I was never disappointed. Each stay on campus for a class or research had a significant retreat dimension, as if my soul was being refreshed and fortified for ministry. Asbury has been a spiritual oasis for which I am grateful. I have felt that gratitude and refreshment whether or not I ever completed the work on this dissertation and degree.

When I began at Asbury I had no way of knowing that my ministry journey would lead to central Florida. Fortunately God and Asbury had already planted the Dunnam campus in Orlando, scarcely an hour away from my new location. That situation proved to be a welcome convenience for ongoing research.

When I began at Asbury, I already recognized that Romans 12 was very important in my approach to congregational leadership. I was uncertain and curious about what direction that would take for a ministry project. The opportunity to apply Romans 12 in the new ministry setting of North Lake was invigorating. It infused the work with a genuine relevance that fueled me through days when I was weary of tracking down new sources, reading, writing, and editing. My field mentor and my Research Reflection Team, clergy colleagues in the vicinity, were also a tremendous help. They read what I

sent them and asked for more, affirming that this project also has some application in their congregational settings.

When I began at Asbury ten years ago, many of my life circumstances were different, but the fundamental motivation for enhanced ministry is the same. In the month that I hope to graduate from Asbury, I will become eligible for Social Security. However, if the Lord grants sufficient health and vitality, I anticipate continuing in ministry at North Lake for many years and applying the learnings of this degree and research regarding ministry with older adults. If nothing else, I have a greater understanding and appreciation for the changes that are right around the corner for me personally.

APPENDIX A

COMMUNICATION TO NLPC IN SEPTEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

Dear North Lake:

Many of you have inquired about my doctoral studies, especially after the concentrated period of writing in July. Thank you for your supportive prayers and interest! I'm pleased to let you know that I am on track for graduation next May. But I'm even more excited to share this work with you in another way.

The design of a Doctor of Ministry degree includes a final element of practical application. After several years, I've completed all course requirements; I am done in the classroom. Through this past summer I finished the research and writing for the first three chapters of my dissertation, about 140 pages of text and appendices. Based on that learning, approved by my three-professor team at Asbury Theological Seminary in KY, I will offer a seven-week sermon series from Romans 12.

Here are a few points to let you anticipate what's ahead in the next few months:

- The "Romans 12 Living" series will begin on October 2 and conclude on November 20.
- I will hand out a voluntary, anonymous survey at the beginning of worship on October 2. This will be your opportunity to help me by answering about 25 questions on serving and volunteer work. I will be compiling and analyzing those results.
- At the end of the series there will be a follow-up survey, on November 20. Again, it will be voluntary and anonymous. This will provide some before and after comparisons.
- The results will be written into chapters four and five of the dissertation. After my dissertation defense, probably late winter or early spring, I can share with all of North Lake the overall results and learnings of that research.
- The series will be seven messages spread across eight weeks. On Sunday, October 23, you'll get a break from me to hear the Rev. Nedson Zulu, our North Lake mission partner from Mozambique. We have anticipated his visit for over a year!
- Ordinarily, Pastor Mike preaches at least one Sunday a month. Because this schedule means that he will not be preaching in October, I have asked him to preach twice in September. So he will lead with the messages on Sept. 18 and 25.
- On September 4, we will welcome Holly Reimer back to the North Lake pulpit before she heads into her final year at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, GA. Our former youth ministry director has finished two years of her Master of Divinity degree, aiming toward ordination. She is just back from serving this summer in South Africa.

Hopefully you are encouraged to know these plans for the coming weeks. Closer to October 2, I'll provide more specifics about the series and surveys.

As I near the finish line for my doctorate, Pastor Mike has recently begun his. I know you'll want to keep up with his progress and support him as well. One member recently sent this verse to us in an email: "I thought of you both and your continuing education when I read James 1:4—*Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*" I loved getting that message. I'd like to finish the work, to keep growing toward maturity and completeness in Christ. However, finishing a Doctor of Ministry degree doesn't eliminate all deficiencies; it just means I'm more aware of what I am lacking as a preacher and pastor. But thank you for your grace and encouragement each step along the way as we keep growing together in Jesus Christ!

In His love,

Jeff

APPENDIX B

COMMUNICATION TO NLPC IN SEPTEMBER 29, 2016 E-NEWS

Dear North Lake members and friends:

This Sunday we start a series entitled **Romans 12 Living**. The introductory message will be based on Romans 12:1, specifically the beginning of that verse: *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy....”* The message will be brief to accommodate the sacrament of communion and also a congregational survey at the beginning of the service. Let me try to answer some anticipated questions.

What’s this survey all about?

As you walk into the Sanctuary or Fellowship Hall on Sunday, the ushers will hand you a bulletin and a survey. The actual survey is only one page (2 sides), but there is also a cover letter with more explanation and a consent form to sign if you want to participate. The questions are mostly about Christian serving, and the answers will contribute to the research project I am conducting for a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Does the survey need to be done on a Sunday morning?

The purpose of doing it on Sunday is to make it as easy as possible for as many as possible. By incorporating it into a Sunday morning we make the survey participation open to the full attendance of our congregation. We’re also doing it on paper to make it simpler for persons who are not comfortable doing a survey online via computer.

What if I don’t want to do the survey?

That’s fine. No one is obligated to complete the survey. It is entirely voluntary. If you don’t want to participate, simply enjoy the quiet music in preparation for worship. Perhaps during that time you can be praying for North Lake, our ministries, mission, and leaders.

What should I bring?

You can bring a pen or pencil to complete the survey. We’ll have plenty of extras, if you need one. But it might be easier if you bring your own.

What if I’m not going to be there Sunday?

If you are going to miss worship this Sunday, and you still want to participate, you can come by the church office next week when it is open (Monday-Thursday, 8:30-4:00; Friday, 8:30-Noon) to complete a survey.

What if I need assistance completing the survey?

If you need assistance completing the survey, please call the church office (XXX-XXX-XXXX). For example, if you are visually impaired, and you’d like someone to administer the survey by reading the questions and recording your answers, let us know and we can arrange an appointment for someone to meet with you next week.

Hopefully, this advance information is helpful. If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact me. I continue to pray that this doctoral project will be a huge blessing to North Lake, another great way for us to serve and grow together in Christ!

Blessings,

Jeff

APPENDIX C

COMMUNICATION TO NLPC IN OCTOBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

Dear North Lake Beloved:

I experience joy as a member of the worship leadership team at NLPC. Every Sunday we are blessed with soaring music that lifts our hearts and glorifies God. I observe how much thought and preparation goes into elements of the service (for example, announcement videos, sacraments, children's moments, and prayers). Our pastors, elders, musicians, and technical staff work intentionally and collaboratively to make our worship vibrant and relevant. The office staff carefully prepares a colorful, detailed bulletin each week. By the time you walk into the Sanctuary or Fellowship Hall for worship, several hundred person-hours have already been expended getting ready for Sunday morning at NLPC. Then you can add to that all the volunteers who greet, serve coffee, hand out bulletins, and usher people to their seats!

Of course, we can prepare all we want; but it would still be flat and lifeless without the Spirit of the Lord. We cannot command or manipulate God to show up, but we can certainly feel his presence when he is at the center of our worship. That is our prayer and objective every week and every service. So we hope you will come expectant and exuberant, looking for God who also attends NLPC!

It is also a privilege to preach in a congregation where folks are curious about scripture, committed to grow in their relationship with the Lord, and eager to apply their faith in daily life. That's why I am especially excited to share the upcoming series with you: **Romans 12 Living**. From October 2 through November 20 we will focus our attention on the 12th chapter of Paul's great epistle to the Romans. This single chapter, although no more important than any of the other scriptures, is an excellent guide for our future together. After eleven chapters devoted to theological teaching, Paul switches to consider what it means to be disciples and to be a community shaped by what God has done for us in his mercy.

As we progress through Romans 12 we will have specific elements woven into the worship services to reflect the theme. Also, in the weekly bulletin there will be several questions that correspond to the message. You are encouraged to gather with two or three others willing to discuss these questions and help each other to "test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will" for your life (from Romans 12:2). We'll refer to this as your "Discernment Team." This might be a class or small group you are already a part of, or it could be with some neighbors or friends, or it might be simply over Sunday lunch. The time you spend reflecting upon the questions is an aspect of Romans 12 Living. Finally, we are suggesting a daily prayer that we can all use. Our office has printed that prayer on laminated bookmarks so that we can hand them out to everyone. A simple prayer, offered each morning, will be another expression of our community in Christ and Romans 12 Living.




I want to say a huge “Thank you!” to all of our worship leadership team and staff members who have helped to coordinate the plans and pieces for this upcoming series. May this offering of worship be holy and pleasing to God!

Jeff

APPENDIX D

ROMANS 12 QUESTIONNAIRE 1 (R12Q1)

Survey of Attitudes and Habits of Serving

Please fill in your unique six-digit code:		
 First 2 numbers in street address (01-99)	 First 2 letters in mother's maiden name	 Month you were born (e.g., April = 04)

For the purpose of this survey, *servicing* refers only to volunteer (not-for-pay) efforts to serve God by serving others in the church, community, or neighborhood.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Question	Strongly			Strongly disagree
	Agree	Agree	Disagree	
1. I have life experience, wisdom, and compassion that could benefit others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I don't need to serve at the church because others will step forward to cover the volunteer needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I don't know what I could do that would be valuable to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am aware of my call to serve and how that affects my decisions about priorities and schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I believe some people have a call to serve, but I do not have that calling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I have little to offer in the way of service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I am open to serving in the church and community if I am asked.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
12. I believe my years of active serving are behind me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I am uncertain about how I should serve others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I am currently serving others in my neighborhood on a regular basis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. I am alert and receptive to new ways to serve others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I have as much to offer others now as I've ever had to offer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. I have other life priorities that do not include serving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I have skills and abilities that could benefit others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

19. How well do you feel your abilities are being used by the church?

- Very well Well Very little Not at all

20. Select the **ONE** statement that best describes your situation.

- a) I have time and abilities (talents, skills, knowledge, experience) to serve that are not being used, because I am not sure what I am called to do.
- b) I have time and abilities to serve that are not being used, because I have not been asked.
- c) I have time and abilities to serve that are not being used, because I am not interested in doing anything more right now.
- d) I am fully utilizing the time and abilities I have to serve.

21. In a typical week, what is the average number of hours you expend serving others?

- 0 hrs 1-2 hrs 3-5 hrs 6-8 hrs More than 8 hrs

To put your answers in context, the following personal information is helpful. All responses are anonymous and confidential.

22. Gender: Male Female

23. Age: Under 55 55-64 65-74 75-84 85 and above

24. How many years have you been a follower of Jesus:

- Less than 1 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-25 years
 26-50 years 50+ years

25. How long have you been connected with North Lake Presbyterian Church:
 Less than 1 yr 1-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-15 yrs 16+ yrs
26. What worship service do you normally attend:
 8:15 AM 9:45 AM 11:15 AM

APPENDIX E

R12Q1 COVER LETTER—2 OCTOBER 2016

Dear North Lake Members and Friends:

The attached questionnaire is part of the research project that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. This questionnaire studies attitudes about serving and volunteer work. I will also invite you to participate in a follow-up survey on Sunday, November 20th, at the conclusion of the sermon series on “Romans 12 Living.” You are encouraged to complete this survey, whether or not you expect to be able to complete the second in November.

Answering the questions will probably take eight to ten minutes, but we have allotted fifteen minutes before the Call to Worship. Your participation is voluntary, and there is no compensation for completing the survey, other than the satisfaction of knowing you are assisting in my doctoral research. Please be completely honest in your answers. Your responses are strictly confidential. You are not being asked to provide your name on the questionnaire, so all responses are anonymous. You will create your own simple, six-digit code to place on both surveys.

The next attached page is your “informed consent” to participate in this study and to have your answers included in the collected data. Again, all information is anonymous and confidential, but I cannot utilize your survey answers unless you sign and submit this form with your survey. A copy of the consent form is printed on the back of this letter for you to keep.

When you have signed the consent form and finished completing the questionnaire, please pull this cover letter away from the staple and keep it. Then you can pass your consent form and questionnaire to the nearest aisle for collection by the ushers. They will be secured in the office. Tomorrow a group of volunteer tellers will separate the consent forms and surveys into two piles, verifying that a consent form has been submitted with each survey.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study! Please feel free to ask me any questions about the project. I will be able to share the overall results sometime next spring when I finish writing the dissertation.

Blessings!

Jeff Hosmer
Senior Pastor

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM—2 OCTOBER 2016

Title of the Research Project: Romans 12 as a Way to Stimulate our Life of Serving

Name of Primary Researcher: Jeff Hosmer

Primary Researcher's Phone Number: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Purpose and Background: The researcher (Jeff Hosmer) is a doctoral student who is conducting this study for his thesis under the direction of Professor Chris Kiesling at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the research is to help understand and promote attitudes and habits toward Christian serving.

Procedures: You are being asked to complete a questionnaire with 21 questions concerning your thoughts and practice of serving. You are asked to indicate your gender, an age range, and several other categories of connection to North Lake Presbyterian Church. You will be asked to complete a similar, follow-up questionnaire at the conclusion of worship on Sunday, November 20, 2016.

Risks and Confidentiality: Some of the questions request responses which might cause discomfort or stress. You are free to decline to answer any of the questions and/or to stop your participation at any time. You will *not* be asked to put your name on the questionnaire. You will create a unique six-digit personal code that no one else will know. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential.

Benefits and Compensation: There are no direct benefits from participating in this project. No compensation is paid to participants. However, this research is expected to yield information that will help churches promote volunteer serving.

Questions: Any questions can be directed to the primary researcher, Jeff Hosmer, who will be present when the questionnaires are administered, or who may be contacted by calling the church office at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Agreement: Informed Consent

I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that participation is voluntary. I am free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw my participation at any point. I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Please print your name _____

APPENDIX G**ROMANS 12 QUESTIONNAIRE 2 (R12Q2)**

This questionnaire was identical to R12Q1 (Appendix D) with the addition of the following four questions:

27. How many of the “Romans 12 Living” Sundays have you been able to attend in the past two months?
- 1-2 3-4 5-6 All 7
28. During the Romans 12 series, how many weeks did you participate in a small group or “discernment team” to discuss your sense of calling, capacity, and commitment to serve?
- 1-2 3-4 5-6 All 7
29. Aside from the Romans 12 Living series, what other factors that have affected your thinking about, or practice of, serving in the past two months?
30. Is there anything else you would like to comment on that would help explain your sense of calling, capacity for ministry, and commitment to serve?

APPENDIX H

R12Q2 COVER LETTER—20 NOVEMBER 2016

Dear North Lake Members and Friends:

The attached questionnaire is the second and final survey in the research project that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. This questionnaire studies attitudes about serving and volunteer work. I am eager to have you take this at the conclusion of our focus on “Romans 12 Living.” You are encouraged to complete this survey, whether or not you did the survey in early October.

Answering the questions will take a few minutes, but we will have some quiet music while you are taking the survey. Your participation is voluntary, and there is no compensation for completing the survey, other than the satisfaction of knowing you are assisting in my doctoral research. Please be completely honest in your answers. Your responses are strictly confidential. You are not being asked to provide your name on the questionnaire, so all responses are anonymous. You create your own simple, six-digit code to place on the survey.

The next attached page is your “informed consent” to participate in this study and to have your answers included in the collected data. Again, all information is anonymous and confidential, but I cannot utilize your survey answers unless you sign and submit this form with your survey. A copy of the consent form is printed on the back of this letter for you to keep.

When you have signed the consent form and finished completing the questionnaire, please pull this cover letter away from the staple and keep it. Then you can hand your consent form and questionnaire to one of the ushers at the door when you leave worship. Your forms will be secured in the office. Tomorrow a group of volunteer tellers will separate the consent forms and surveys into two piles, verifying that a consent form has been submitted with each survey.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study! Please feel free to ask me any questions about the project. I will be able to share the overall results sometime next spring when I finish writing the dissertation.

Blessings!

Jeff Hosmer
Senior Pastor

APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT FORM—20 November 2016

Title of the Research Project: Romans 12 as a Way to Stimulate our Life of Serving

Name of Primary Researcher: Jeff Hosmer

Primary Researcher's Phone Number: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Purpose and Background: The researcher (Jeff Hosmer) is a doctoral student who is conducting this study for his thesis under the direction of Professor Chris Kiesling at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the research is to help understand and promote attitudes and habits toward Christian serving.

Procedures: You are being asked to complete a questionnaire with 21 questions concerning your thoughts and practice of serving. You are asked to indicate your gender, an age range, and several other categories of connection to North Lake Presbyterian Church.

Risks and Confidentiality: Some of the questions request responses which might cause discomfort or stress. You are free to decline to answer any of the questions and/or to stop your participation at any time. You will *not* be asked to put your name on the questionnaire. You will create a unique six-digit personal code that no one else will know. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential.

Benefits and Compensation: There are no direct benefits from participating in this project. No compensation is paid to participants. However, this research is expected to yield information that will help churches promote volunteer serving.

Questions: Any questions can be directed to the primary researcher, Jeff Hosmer, who will be present when the questionnaires are administered, or who may be contacted by calling the church office at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Agreement: Informed Consent

I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that participation is voluntary. I am free to decline to participate in this research study, or I may withdraw my participation at any point. I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Please print your name _____

APPENDIX J

PILOT TEST LETTER OR EXPLANATION

August 10, 2016

Dear Graceway Friends:

Thank you for your willingness to assist in this pilot test of a questionnaire intended for use in the research project for my doctoral thesis at Asbury Theological Seminary. Your input will be essential to clarify and sharpen the final version of the questionnaire.

Please read the instructions and take the survey. When you are finished, I have several questions to discuss with you. Your suggestions and critical feedback will help to refine this survey instrument and the data that will be collected.

I am not focused on your answers, but on the clarity and quality of the questions. When I will collect your surveys, I will process the data as a sample, which will also help me to prepare for the onslaught of data that will be harvested in October and November. When I am finished with the sample processing, I will shred your completed surveys.

If you have any additional suggestions or questions about this process, you can feel free to contact me at the address or phone number below.

Thank you again!

Yours in faith,

Jeffrey A. Hosmer

Senior Pastor
North Lake Presbyterian Church
975 Rolling Acres Road
Lady Lake, FL 32159
XXX-XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX K

PILOT TEST DRAFT OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR R12Q1

October 2, 2016

Dear North Lake Members and Friends:

The attached questionnaire is part of the research project that I am doing for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Asbury Theological Seminary. This questionnaire studies attitudes toward serving and volunteer work. A follow-up survey will be administered on Sunday, November 20th, at the conclusion of the sermon series on “Romans 12 Living.” **You are encouraged to complete this first survey, whether or not you expect to be able to complete the second in November.**

Answering the questions will take five to ten minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and there is no compensation for completing the survey, other than the satisfaction of knowing you are assisting in a doctoral research project. Be assured your responses are strictly confidential. You are not being asked to provide your name on the questionnaire, so all responses are anonymous. You will create your own simple identity code to place on both surveys so that the research can compare your answers before and after the sermon series.

The attached page three is your “informed consent” to participate in this study and to have your answers included in the collected data. A copy of the consent form is printed on the back of this letter for you to keep. Again, all information is anonymous and confidential, but I cannot utilize your survey answers unless this form is signed and submitted.

When you are finished completing the questionnaire and reading and signing the “informed consent,” please detach those pages from this cover letter. As you leave our worship space, you can place them in the separate containers for SURVEYS and CONSENT that will be at the exits.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study! Please feel free to ask me any questions about the project. I will be able to share the overall results sometime next spring when I finish writing the dissertation.

Blessings!

Jeff Hosmer
Senior Pastor

APPENDIX L

PILOT TEST DRAFT OF R12Q1

(Formatted to fit on 2 sides of one sheet)

Survey of Attitudes and Habits of Serving

For the purpose of this survey, “serving” refers only to volunteer (not-for-pay) efforts to serve God by serving others in the church, community, or neighborhood.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have life experience, wisdom, and compassion that could benefit others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my church.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I don't need to serve at the church because others will step forward to cover the volunteer needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I don't know what I could do that would be valuable to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am aware of my call to serve and how that affects my decisions about priorities and schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I believe some people have a call to serve, but I do not have that calling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I have little to offer in the way of service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I believe my years of active serving are behind me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. I have a call and desire to serve, but I am uncertain what to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I am currently assisting or serving others in my neighborhood on a regular basis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I have other life priorities that do not include serving.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. I have as much to offer others now as I've ever had to offer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I am continuously on the lookout for new ways to serve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. I have skills and abilities that could benefit others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

18. How well do you feel your abilities are being used by the church?
 Very well Well Very little Not at all
19. Select the **ONE** statement that best describes your situation.
 a) I have abilities (talents, skills, knowledge, experience) to offer that are not being utilized.
 b) I am using a portion of my abilities and time, but I have much more to offer in service.
 c) I am fully utilizing the abilities and time I have to serve.
20. In a typical week, what is the average number of hours you expend serving others?
 0 hrs 1-2 hrs 3-5 hrs 6-8 hrs More than 8 hrs

To put your answers in context, the following personal information is helpful. All responses are anonymous and confidential.

21. Gender: Male Female
22. Age: Under 55 55-64 65-74 75-84 85 and above
23. How many years have you been a follower of Jesus:
 Less than 1 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-25 years
 26-50 years 50+ years
24. How long have you been connected with North Lake Presbyterian Church:
 Less than 1 yr 1-5 yrs 6-10 yrs 11-15 yrs 16+ yrs
25. What worship service do you normally attend:
 8:15 AM 9:45 AM 11:15 AM

APPENDIX M

PILOT TEST THANK-YOU LETTER

August 15, 2016

XXXXX
XXXXX
XXXXX

Dear _____:

Thank you again for your time and effort last Wednesday to take the pilot test of the questionnaire for my doctoral research project. I am grateful for the serious attention you gave to it. The discussion we had was substantial and helpful.

Based on your input, the cover letter was edited in several places for clarity, the consent form was placed after the letter and before the questionnaire, the instructions for the questionnaire code were modified, two questions were sharpened in focus, and one new question was added. The resulting survey will be significantly better because of your contributions. Hopefully you also enjoyed be a part of the process with other Graceway friends!

I mentioned at the outset of our meeting that I have felt a strong connection with Graceway (formerly Lake Square) for more than a decade. That has been especially true over the recent months since I moved to FL and during the difficult period you all have faced. I am pleased that my friend Ron Fritts is now providing pastoral and worship leadership for your congregation. I pray that you are entering a new, joyful, and fruitful season at Graceway. And know that you have another pastoral friend praying for you, just “around the corner” of Lake Harris at North Lake Presbyterian Church.

Thank you again!

Blessings,

Jeffrey A. Hosmer
Senior Pastor
North Lake Presbyterian Church
975 Rolling Acres Drive
Lady Lake, FL 32159

APPENDIX N

PILOT TEST SAMPLE RESULTS

Pilot Test data for questions 1-17

Ten participants

Question	Total Score	Mean Score	Favorable Unfavorable
1	24	2.4	Favorable
2	29	2.9	Favorable
3	22	2.2	Favorable
4	2	0.2	Unfavorable
5	13	1.3	Unfavorable
6	17	1.7	Favorable
7	11	1.1	Unfavorable
8	18	1.8	Favorable
9	7	0.7	Unfavorable
10	7	0.7	Unfavorable
11	4	0.4	Unfavorable
12	17	1.7	Unfavorable
13	19	1.9	Favorable
14	13	1.3	Unfavorable
15	18	1.8	Favorable
16	17	1.7	Favorable
17	21	2.1	Favorable

Attitudes on 0 - 3 Likert scale

calling
capacity
commitment

APPENDIX O
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS
30 NOVEMBER 2016

Gender	
Male	Female
7	7

Age				
Under 55	55-64	65-74	75-84	85 and over
1	0	7	5	1

Years of following Jesus	
26-50	50+
4	10

Years of connection to NLPC				
Less than 1	1-5	6-10	11-15	16 and over
1	2	3	6	2

Worship service		
8:15	9:45	11:15
5	1	8

Hours served per week			
1-2	3-5	6-8	More than 8
2	5	3	4

APPENDIX P

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

(sent in advance to participants)

Focus Group Questions

November 30, 2016

Based on the **Romans 12 Living** series:

Therefore ...

Live as an offering to God.

Live as an instrument of grace.

Live as members of one another.

Live as a spiritual fountain.

Live as a blessing to others.

Live as a force for good.

1. What, if anything, in the Romans 12 Living series influenced your sense of **calling to serve** in the church or community at this stage of your life?
2. How would you describe your **capacity to serve** at the beginning of the series? Are you aware of any changes in the way you now perceive your ability to serve? If so, how have you changed?
3. What, if any, difference has the Romans 12 Living series made in your decisions or **commitment to serve** God as a volunteer in North Lake or the community?
4. What thoughts or reaction did you have to any these additional **elements of the series**:
 - a. The Romans 12 “Therefore” prayer, used each week in worship and handed out on bookmarks, suggested for daily prayer?
 - b. The “remember your baptism” moment in worship, to remember your new identity in Christ and calling to His mission?
 - c. The video testimonies shared by church members?
 - d. The weekly questions suggested for reflection and discussion with others?
5. **What else would you like to share** about this experience?
6. I will leave the room and our recorder will ask: “What feedback would you like to provide anonymously?” Responses will be recorded and included in Focus Group transcript without any names attached.

APPENDIX Q

FOCUS GROUP—INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Project: Romans 12 as a Way to Stimulate our Life of Serving

Name of Primary Researcher: Jeff Hosmer

Primary Researcher's Phone Number: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Purpose and Background: The researcher (Jeff Hosmer) is a doctoral student who is conducting this study for his thesis under the direction of Professor Chris Kiesling at Asbury Theological Seminary. The purpose of the research is to help understand and promote attitudes and habits toward Christian serving.

Procedures: You are being asked to participate in a focus group with questions concerning your thoughts and practice of serving. You are also asked to indicate your gender, an age range, and several other categories of connection to North Lake Presbyterian Church.

Risks and Confidentiality: Some questions may be awkward for you to answer, especially with the researcher present. There will also be an opportunity to provide feedback with the primary researcher out of the room. You are encouraged to be thoroughly honest, which will benefit the project research. And you are free to decline to answer any of the questions and/or to stop your participation at any time. Obviously others in the group will hear your responses and the meeting will be recorded for transcription to help with the research project. The notes, recording, and transcriptions will not be made available to anyone other than the primary researcher and his doctoral advisors. Although statements you make might be incorporated into the dissertation, you will NOT be quoted by name.

Benefits and Compensation: There are no direct benefits from participating in this project. No compensation is paid to participants. However, this research is expected to yield information that will help churches promote volunteer serving.

Questions: Any questions can be directed to the primary researcher, Jeff Hosmer, who will facilitate the focus group, or who may be contacted by calling the church office at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Agreement: Informed Consent

I agree to participate in this focus group. I understand that participation is voluntary. I am free to decline to participate or to withdraw at any point. I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Your signature_____

Date_____

Please print your name_____

Please help further by providing the following personal information:

Gender: Male Female

Age: Under 55 55-64 65-74 75-84 85 and above

How many years have you been a follower of Jesus:

Less than 1 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-25 years
 26-50 years 50+ years

How long have you been connected with North Lake Presbyterian Church:

Less than 1 year 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16+ years

What worship service do you normally attend:

8:15 AM 9:45 AM 11:15 AM

In a typical week, what is the average number of hours you expend serving others?

0 hrs 1-2 hrs 3-5 hrs 6-8 hrs More than 8 hrs

How many of the "Romans 12 Living" Sundays were you able to attend?

1-2 3-4 5-6 All 7

APPENDIX R

QUESTIONS FOR CALLING, CAPACITY, AND COMMITMENT

Question for Calling with Weighted Responses Used for Composite Mean	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. Serving others is an essential part of the Christian faith.	1	2	3	4
4. I don't need to serve at the church because others will step forward to cover the volunteer needs.	4	3	2	1
6. I am aware of my call to serve and how that affects my decisions about priorities and schedule.	1	2	3	4
9. I believe some people have a call to serve, but I do not have that calling.	1	2	3	4
11. I am open to serving in the church and community if I am asked.	1	2	3	4
12. I believe my years of active serving are behind me.	4	3	2	1
13. I am uncertain about how I should serve others.	4	3	2	1
15. I am alert and receptive to new ways to serve others.	1	2	3	4
17. I have other life priorities that do not include serving.	4	3	2	1
Question for Capacity with Weighted Responses Used for Composite Mean	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I have life experience, wisdom, and compassion that could benefit others.	1	2	3	4
5. I don't know what I could do that would be valuable to others.	4	3	2	1
7. I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service.	4	3	2	1
10. I have little to offer in the way of service.	4	3	2	1
16. I have as much to offer others now as I've ever had to offer.	1	2	3	4
18. I have skills and abilities that could benefit others.	1	2	3	4
Question for Commitment with Weighted Responses Used for Composite Mean	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
3. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my church.	1	2	3	4
8. I am currently serving in one or more volunteer roles in my community.	1	2	3	4
14. I am currently serving others in my neighborhood on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX S

AGE-CORRELATED DATA FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #3

R12Q1 #12

Age		“I believe my years of active serving are behind me.”					Total	Weighted Average
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree			
Under 55	%	50.00	46.67	3.33	—	3.32		
	n	15	14	1	0	30	3.47	
55-64	%	35.00	55.00	8.75	1.25	8.86		
	n	28	44	7	1	80	3.24	
65-74	%	25.00	62.22	11.36	1.42	38.98		
	n	88	219	40	5	352	3.11	
75-84	%	20.44	53.59	23.20	2.76	40.09		
	n	74	194	84	10	362	2.92	
85 & above	%	6.33	39.24	40.51	13.92	8.75		
	n	5	31	32	11	79	2.38	

Corresponds to Figure 4.5 on page 119.

APPENDIX T

AGE-CORRELATED DATA FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #3

R12Q1 #7

		“I have health concerns that prevent or limit my service.”					
Age		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Weighted Average
Under 55	%	43.75	31.25	21.88	3.13	3.50	
	n	14	10	7	1	32	3.16
55-64	%	41.25	40	16.25	2.50	8.75	
	n	33	32	13	2	80	3.24
65-74	%	25.63	46.20	23.66	4.51	38.84	
	n	91	164	84	16	355	2.93
75-84	%	18.31	36.34	37.70	7.65	40.01	
	n	67	133	138	28	366	2.65
85 & above	%	11.11	20.99	50.62	17.28	8.86	
	n	9	17	41	14	81	2.26

Corresponds to Figure 4.6 on page 120.

APPENDIX U

AGE-CORRELATED DATA FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #3

R12Q1 #15

Age		“I am alert and receptive to new ways to serve others.”					Weighted Average
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	
Under 55	%	—	12.90	64.52	22.58	3.44	
	n	0	4	20	7	31	3.10
55-64	%	—	10.00	70.00	20.00	8.89	
	n	0	8	56	16	80	3.10
65-74	%	0.28	5.37	80.79	13.56	39.33	
	n	1	19	286	48	354	3.08
75-84	%	0.28	10.03	79.39	10.31	39.89	
	n	1	36	285	37	359	3.00
85 & above	%	1.32	21.05	71.05	6.58	8.44	
	n	5	31	32	11	79	2.38

Corresponds to Figure 4.7 on page 121.

APPENDIX V

ROMANS 12 LIVING: SERMON OBJECTIVES

Sunday	Sermon	Text	Objective
2 Oct.	“Therefore”	R12:1a	The introductory sermon 1) provides sufficient background on R1-R11 and the “view of God’s mercy” and 2) establishes that our Romans 12 Living is a grateful response to what God has already done in Christ. We live as a “therefore” people and community.
9 Oct.	“Live as an Offering to God”	R12:1-2	Therefore, we offer to God the totality of our lives and the moments of each day as a living sacrifice, the worshipful offering of one’s self, seeking to discern and fulfill God’s will.
16 Oct.	“Live as an Instrument of Grace”	R12:3-8	Therefore, we understand that God’s transforming grace works in us and through us, and by God’s grace we have much to give to each other, to the body of Christ, and to the community in the name of Christ.
30 Oct.	“Live as Members of One Another”	R12:4-5, 9-10, 15-16	Therefore, we live together as members of the body of Christ, in mutual belonging, in mutual love, in mutual concern and harmony, honoring one another.
6 Nov.	“Live as a Spiritual Fountain”	R12:11-12	Therefore, we tap into the spiritual resources at the center of who we are in Christ, so that our zeal, fervor, joy, hope, patience, faithfulness are replenished even as we serve the Lord by serving others.
13 Nov.	“Live as a Blessing to Others”	R12:13-14	Therefore, our Romans 12 Living and the offering of one’s life shows in very practical and concrete ways, sharing with others in need, showing hospitality, intending to bless—and not curse—others around us.
20 Nov.	“Live as a Force for Good”	R12:17-21	Therefore, understanding that we reside and participate in a world plagued by evil, we offer ourselves as a force for good, because the way we respond to evil is essential for God’s mission and our witness to Jesus in the world.

APPENDIX W

PRACTICES: “THEREFORE” PRAYER

This prayer was prayed each Sunday in worship through the Romans 12 Living series. It was also printed on bookmarks and distributed to the congregation. All were encouraged to incorporate this prayer into their daily devotions.

God of mercy, thank you for the forgiveness and new life offered through your Son Jesus. By faith I receive your gifts and desire to be a living response to your love. Therefore, I offer myself and this day to you. Guide me so that I can fulfill your purpose. Amen.

APPENDIX X

PRACTICES: BAPTISM LITURGY

This liturgy was woven into all services during the Romans 12 Living series.

Friends, remember your baptism.

Baptism is a sign that we belong to God, and it is a cleansing seal of our salvation.

By water and the Holy Spirit we are made members of the body of Christ, baptized into his mission.

With joy and thanksgiving we remember that we are marked as Christ's own forever.

Baptism signifies that we die to our old lives of sin and rise to new life in Christ.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.
(Romans 6:8)

Offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him.
(Romans 6:13b)

Our baptism calls us to live in ways that are pleasing to God, following the example of Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This is the basis of our Romans 12 Living.

APPENDIX Y

PRACTICES: VIDEO TESTIMONY TRANSCRIPTS

Persons were asked to respond to the question: “Why is it important to serve God at North Lake and how is it enriching to do so?”

Toni Miller—Holy Grounds Café Ambassador

Being a part of North Lake Presbyterian feeds your soul. You become a part of the community. I am one of the ambassadors of the Holy Grounds coffee bar, and I watch miracles happen every Sunday in this little area right here. You see miracles happen, friendships renewed and new friendships acquired. It’s amazing to stand back behind the coffee bar and watch what God does over a cup of coffee and a cookie.

This church is a family. Everybody knows everybody, but when you come into the church and you work to be a part, people look for you to be here. And it is a great, it’s a great thing. God has given me this gift.

A couple of years ago I suffered a severe illness and I had said to Him before I left the hospital “what am I to do?”, and this is what I’m to do. To be a part of this world, God’s world, this is a gift. I’m alive today because of Him, and my service is this coffee bar.

Randy Braddom—Sunday School Teacher

For me personally it probably goes back to the way I was raised. My parents, both of them were Sunday school teachers for decades. And as a matter of fact as a teenage boy I was often pressed into service by my father to teach a class, a Sunday school class at the church, if another teacher didn’t come because they were sick or something. So it was kind of a family tradition to serve. And we served so much in fact that we were at the church almost every day for one thing or another.

But in my travels around the country with my job, I have been a member of a number of different churches. And I think it is true the old saying that 10% of the people in the church do 90% of the work. I have always thought that that was inappropriate and that it would be better if we would all do our fair share and serve. And Romans 12 is a wonderful instruction in that regard, where it says we should serve according to our talents. And it lists 7 talents and there are many more of course. And teaching is one of those talents, and so I enjoy teaching a Sunday school class at 9:30 on Sunday morning. And we go through the bible and it’s a service that I enjoy doing. It takes 2 or 3 hours a week just to prepare for it. But it is one of the things that I can do. And I think if each of us does a personal inventory, one of those seven talents mentioned in Romans at least, most of us will have at least one of those.

Vince Nicholas—Stephen Minister

It is important to serve God in the church because He has blessed with talents and we really need to apply those. And with Stephen Ministry we get to actually apply them to other people by listening to them speak in a confidential type setting where they can sort through the difficulties that they are going through in their lives and grow closer to God. And that is how it is enriching is we allow them to grow closer to God.

Kay Kennedy—FAB Tuesday Dinner Coordinator

When we were attending another church in the area many years ago, the pastor did a series on the prayer of Jabez which says, “Lord, increase my territory,” which to me meant give me more things to do. Show me what I should be doing. I took that pledge and that promise that I made to the Lord very seriously and I still take it seriously. I think it’s my requirement to work for the Lord.

I have done many things in the church, but the thing that I am doing right now that is the most meaningful to me is the FAB dinners. We are now meeting once a month, the second Tuesday, and there’s lots of opportunities for people to come and help out. But it is important that everyone take an opportunity to present themselves to the Lord in a fashion that they can complete a job or take on a task. Be willing to do something when asked, no matter how small it is. If that is what needs to be done, that is a big important job. Because doing work in the church and doing work for the Lord is the most rewarding thing that I have ever experienced in my lifetime.

Rick Martin—LOGOS (mid-week, after-school ministry) Volunteer

First of all, my name is Rick Martin. I am part of the LOGOS program here for the children. And it is a wonderful outreach program for children to come and to learn about God and learn about experiences with God, that God is there for them always. He will always be there for them, even if there is nobody there for them. At any time, any place the children can go to God for help.

And that is what enriches my life. Because my life is centered around what God would want me to do. It is so important for me in my private life, my professional life, and my personal life for me to know what God would want me to do. And I do that to make my life better, you know it is very, very important. And He is always there for us during the good times and bad, you know. You could be by yourself any place, and you can stop and say, “God, help me with this problem. Help me with this situation.” It doesn’t matter where you are, you can sit and pray and ask God for assistance with whatever you need. And that is a wonderful thing. That is why God is so important in my life because I can go to him anytime and that is a wonderful feeling. And I want children to understand that they can have that same feeling whether they are in their room alone or are at school or wherever it is, that they can go to God for their encouragement and they can go to God for their prayers.

Ann Vaughn—Violinist in Praise Band

When my husband and I joined the church, thirteen or fourteen years ago now, I remember how excited I was to not only join the church, but to come back to the service every Sunday. And when I look back at that time, I think a lot of it had to do with the music. Music is a way to worship. Music enhanced the worship service for me.

I'm a member of the Praise Band at the contemporary worship service, and I play every Sunday with the band. You know, when I think about all the things that we have, our possessions, our friends, our family, even our time, our talents, our abilities ... these are all gifts from God. And every Sunday when I play, I think "if I can touch one member in that congregation, if I can enhance the service in any way even for just one member, then I'm using the gift that God has given me." And I think that's His intent.

So why do I think it's important to serve God in the church? Because I'm then using something God has given me. And when you do, you get far more than you give.

APPENDIX Z

PRACTICES: DISCERNMENT QUESTIONS

Suggested questions for your Discernment Team

Gather two or three persons willing to discuss these questions and help each other to “test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will” for your life (from Romans 12:2).

October 2, 2016: “THEREFORE”

1. How have you personally witnessed the mercy of God? What is your view of God’s mercies? How is your life shaped by God’s compassion, forgiveness, and salvation?

2. How would you finish the sentence: “I have seen and experienced the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, **therefore** . . .” What do you do, or will you do, because of what God has done?

October 9, 2016: “LIVE AS AN OFFERING TO GOD”

1. How do you describe what difference Jesus has made on the road of your life? What does new life in Christ mean to you?

2. Baptism is a multi-layered, sacred symbol of God’s presence and blessing in our lives. It is appropriately administered to infants, children, and adults as a sign that we belong to the Lord and are sealed for salvation. Baptism also signifies dying and rising with Christ, here, now, and forever. What does your baptism mean to you? How does your life reflect that you are baptized?

3. A *living sacrifice*, or offering of self to God, is not limited to so-called religious activities, going to worship, serving as a church volunteer, etc. Instead, it extends to the full schedule and span of human activity. Author Marva Dawn writes, “all the activities of our days are part of our worship. I worship as I brush my teeth, exercise, take a nap, care for someone, kiss my husband, scrub the kitchen floor, or start a cozy fire and listen to a symphony” (*Truly the Community*, p. 26). What do you think about her statement? How easy or difficult is it for you to consider the fullness of your life as an offering to God?

October 16, 2016: “LIVE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GRACE”

1. Paul teaches that the gifts of God just keep on coming! In addition to the gifts of love, forgiveness, and salvation, God gives us various gifts, strengths, talents, and abilities. What grace-gifts do you think you were born with or have had as long as you can remember? What grace-gifts have you discovered or developed in the past five to ten years?

2. Ask your Discernment Team, or a couple persons who know you especially well, what grace-gifts they see in you. How do you feel about their observations about your grace-gifts? Are there any surprises? How are you using your grace-gifts?

3. What can you do to be an even more effective instrument of grace?

October 30, 2016: “LIVE AS MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER”

1. In what organizations do you have *membership*? What does *membership* mean for you? Why is it—or is it not—important to be a member of a church?

2. How and where do you find community? What is important to you in your experience of community?

3. How can you contribute to the quality of Christian community at North Lake Presbyterian Church?

November 6, 2016: “LIVE AS A SPIRITUAL FOUNTAIN”

1. When and how have you experienced “burn out,” “compassion fatigue,” or something close to that?

2. What do you do to replenish your emotional and spiritual resources? How is that built-in to your regular schedule or routine?

3. How would you advise a new Christian about practices or habits to sustain a vibrant, faithful, servant lifestyle?

November 13, 2016: “LIVE AS A BLESSING TO OTHERS”

1. Think of a moment when you observed one person blessing another. What did that act of blessing look like? What did you feel when you experienced it? What difference did it make, or what was the outcome?

2. When and how have you received a blessing from someone, other than God?

3. What would it be like for you to go through your day, living as a continuous, intentional stream of blessings to the persons around you?

November 20, 2016: ‘LIVE AS A FORCE FOR GOOD’

1. When and how have you observed evil in the world?

2. Jesus taught us to pray: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” What do you think he meant by the petition: Deliver us from evil? Given the context, do you think he might have been talking about evil that comes from within us when we succumb to temptation?

3. What is one good and beautiful thing you can do in the face of evil?

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