2015

Deep in the Burbs : a Participatory Action Research Project Exploring How the Social Trinity Impacts Spiritual Formation in Suburban ELCA Congregations

Steven P. Thomason
Luther Seminary

DEEP IN THE BURBS:

A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

EXPLORING HOW THE SOCIAL TRINITY IMPACTS SPIRITUAL FORMATION

IN SUBURBAN ELCA CONGREGATIONS

by

STEVEN P. THOMASON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2015
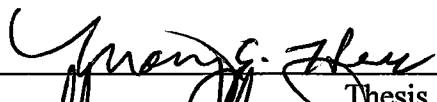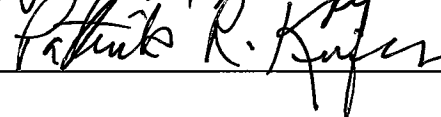
LUTHER SEMINARY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

PH.D. THESIS

Title of Thesis: Deep In the Burbs: A Participatory Action Research Project
                     Exploring How the Social Trinity Impacts Spiritual Formation in
                     Suburban ELCA Congregations

Author: Steven P. Thomason

Thesis committee: _____   _6/26/15_
                                        Thesis Adviser   Date

                     _____   _6/26/15_

                     _____   _6/29/15_

ABSTRACT

Deep in the Burbs: A Participatory Action Research Project Exploring How the Social Trinity Impacts Spiritual Formation in Suburban ELCA Congregations

by

Steven P. Thomason

Deep in the Burbs is a *participatory action research* project that gathered members from three upper-Midwest suburban ELCA congregations to explore how engagement with the social Trinity might impact the research team's ideation or praxis of spiritual formation. The research team pursued this question through the practice of Dwelling in the Word—specifically in select passages from the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)—various modalities of communicative learning, and communicative action projects in the community. The data indicate three major themes that became important to the research team: the essential nature of relationships, the necessity of reflection, and the awareness of the Holy Spirit's agency in the world. These findings indicate that the process of *participatory action research* itself is a *Trinitarian praxis* that empowered the research team to shift from a *vertical-personal* ideation and praxis of spiritual formation to a *horizontal-communal* ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. This shift demonstrates the self-transcendence inherent in spiritual formation. These findings also provide practical implications for leaders of the missional church who seek to engage the suburban neighbor in the Gospel of peace—to the glory of God, through Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

February 5, 2007. 3:00am. I was in bed and awakened to hear a voice. "Steve," the voice said, "move to Minnesota and get your PhD." I looked over at my wife, Lona. She was sound asleep. "Lord," I responded, "have you met my wife?" This is the woman who told me she would never move to Minnesota. We lived in Nevada, where it was warm and sunny. The next morning I told her about my experience. She said, "If that is what God wants us to do, then I am not going to stand in the way."

Eight years later she is still supporting me on this journey. We moved to Minnesota, with our four children, dog, and two birds. She braved the frigid winters to honor God's leading. I could not have completed this dissertation without her love, support, and encouragement. So many nights she told me to get back to the study when all I wanted to do was sit on the couch with her and watch television. She sacrificed many evenings by being alone so that I could get more work done. This dissertation happened because of her loving faithfulness and encouragement.

I must also acknowledge my four wonderful children that made the journey with us. Three of them have graduated from high school since that day in 2007. They, too, cheered me on and pretended to be interested when I shared my latest theological discovery at the dinner table. Each one of them helped me come to understand the communicative rationality that I argue in this paper. They taught me how to listen, to embrace new ideas, and how to find a third way of love in a changing, postmodern world.

My parents have also been key to this project. They welcomed us to Minnesota and offered us their home when we first arrived. They have been a constant source of encouragement and support every step of the way. My mother continually asks questions and allows me to rehearse new ideas. Her curiosity is refreshing. My father, too, has been a rock of stability for me. I don't know how I could have processed this journey without my weekly coffee meetings with him. His spiritual perception, openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and adaptability to the changing culture has been a source of inspiration to discern the movement of the Triune God. Many of the ideas expressed in this paper are the result of those coffee talks with him.

I must also give special thanks to Pastor Mark, to the congregation that I serve, and to the many individuals who have supported me, both financially and prayerfully. These people have sacrificed so much to create space for me to focus on this research. My benefactors, both in our local congregation and from other parts of the country, are true partners in ministry. It is my hope and prayer that the findings from this research will be the fruit of their generosity that will be seeds for future fruit in the Kingdom of God.

My family and friends have supported me along this journey, but my academic mentors cleared the theological path for me. Dr. Craig Van Gelder welcomed me into the *Congregational Mission and Leadership* (CML) department at Luther Seminary and advised me through the coursework. He shaped my understanding of the missional church and set the standard for the life of the scholar. Dr. Gary Simpson introduced me to the conversation of the social Trinity and its essential connection to the missional church. Dr. Patrick Keifert first introduced me to *Dwelling in the Word* at a conference in 2006, and then reconfigured my understanding of the theological task as it relates to the local

congregation during our work in the CML program. Finally, my thesis advisor, Dr. Mary Hess, has been a constant source of encouragement along they way. She introduced me to the work of Robert Kegan, to the practice of participatory action research; she expanded my understanding of spirituality and adult learning, and has been a co-conspirator in the role of digital media in higher education. I have soaked up as much of the knowledge and wisdom as possible from these scholars and teachers of the church. I pray that the work in this paper will honor them and bring glory to God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AELC   American Evangelical Lutheran Church

ALC   American Lutheran Church

B/D   Bedroom-Developing Suburb

DITB   Deep in the Burbs

ELCA   Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

LCA   Lutheran Church in America

LCMS   Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

PAR   Participatory Action Research

RT   Research Team

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

Figures

PROLOGUE

Let the reader be aware. This dissertation exists in an alternate reality. Its alternate—and I might argue, primary—existence is on the internet as www.deepintheburbs.com.[1] It was my intention, from the beginning of my PhD work, to blog my research. I am a visual, non-linear, synthetic thinker and the hyperlinked, visually-driven, communicative nature of the Web 2.0 matches my thinking, learning, and communicating style. One might argue that the web-based version of this dissertation also embodies the communicative action that I will argue throughout this project. That, however, is the thesis of an entirely different kind.

My advisor, Dr. Mary Hess, shared my enthusiasm for the cyber existence of my project and advocated to Luther Seminary that I be able to submit, *in toto*, in such a fashion. I appreciate her support and advocacy, but, in the end, it was to no avail. So, I have proceeded to function with dual modalities in the year prior to the completion of this task. I continued to blog and create visual representations of my ideas—through hyper-linked blog posts, drawing, and animation—while simultaneously crafting the linear, text-based form of the project which you are about to read.

---

[1] Please note that I officially ceased adding new content to this URL on the day that I submitted the final draft of the printed dissertation. I anticipated this cessation in the summer of 2014 and migrated all content to my primary website www.stevethomason.net. From that time forward I multicast all content on both sites. www.deepintheburbs.com will exist as an historical artifact of this project. Its data has been assimilated into my larger body of work and will continue to evolve as I progress in my ministry.

Please do not misunderstand the tone of this confession. I am grateful to Dr. Hess for her advocacy, to be sure. I am equally grateful, and I humbly submit, to the strict standards of the long-held institution of the text-based, paper book that will physically inhabit space on the shelf. I love books and I am humbled by the thought that I will add a bound tome to the vast collection that sits on those hallowed shelves.

My experience of functioning within these dual modalities has taught me a great lesson that has implications for the missional leader. It demonstrates the transitional space in which the missional leader must function in this, and perhaps the next, generation. We are in a time of massive cultural shifts in which long-standing institutions are struggling to maintain relevance in the midst of a flattening, digital world. The missional leader may be tempted to abandon traditions and press into a radically progressive space. I would caution against this temptation. The missional leader would be wise to honor and submit to traditions, just as I have benefitted greatly from submitting to this tradition of the written thesis. I have learned much from the mental rigor of harnessing my non-linear, visual concepts into a methodical, logical, linear progression of thought. It has been a slow, meditative process that has expanded my horizon and made me a better scholar. Yet, the missional leader, and the future theological academy, must not suppress the progressive future either. We must not ignore the possibilities that the new media afford us; both in the scope of audience and the modalities of communication.

I invite the reader to engage in two ways. First, I invite you to notice the footnotes that refer to media on the website. Much of my ideas have been expressed through animation and visualization that simply cannot be translated to the printed word. Second, I invite the reader to proceed through this mode of being: To dwell in the printed word.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I am a suburban pastor. I love the suburbs and the busy suburbanites that live in them. It is my native environment and I would not trade it. However, I must confess something. It is difficult to be a suburban pastor. It is especially difficult to be a suburban pastor who is trying to cultivate spaces for spiritual formation and a missional imagination for a Lutheran congregation.

Suburbanites are busy people who are pulled in a hundred directions and feel immense societal pressures to be successful and productive in every area of life. Beyond that, they are expected to produce even more successful children. The suburban Lutheran family has the additional pressure to make sure that their children are not only the best in sports, academics, and the arts, but are also properly baptized, catechized, and confirmed along the way. Suburbanites find themselves running from one activity to the next, constantly trying to decide which is the most efficient use of their precious time to yield that greatest result to meet all of the expectations placed upon them.

Suburbanites are also dominated by a sense of autonomous power. The typical suburbanite is a product of modern, Western rationalism. S/he is a radical free agent, able to make decisions and choose what activities to do and what ideologies to uphold, or at

least believes that s/he is, or should be.[1] These radical, autonomous bodies tend to bang against each other and take "sides" on volatile issues. The modern world is plagued by the polarization between *us* vs. *them*. The suburban congregation is often perplexed by polarization over cultural and political issues that foster isolation, dissension, and an environment that is toxic to spiritual formation and community.

The suburban pastor is faced with a challenge. How do we cultivate spaces of spiritual formation when church involvement is merely one item on a vast menu of choices? How do we cultivate spaces for spiritual formation when the suburbanite sees herself or himself as being on one side of a dichotomy that has to be "right" and prove the other side "wrong?" Is it possible to cultivate missional spirituality in the suburbs? Can we be *deep in the burbs*?

The Story of the Question

This dissertation is more than an academic endeavor for me. It is part of the ongoing story of my own spiritual formation as a suburban pastor and missional theologian. I had an experience with the *social Trinity* that significantly impacted my understanding and practice of spiritual formation and the missional church.[2] I became convinced that the *social Trinity* and *relational ontology* was an essential theological framework for cultivating a missional imagination and wholistic spiritual formation. This experience led to a question. I wondered what would happen if other people were exposed to the *social Trinity*, like I was. Would they have a similar experience to mine,

---

[1] I am making bold generalizations for effect in my opening statement. I will ultimately argue that there is no such thing as a "typical" suburbanite. This project will focus on suburbanites who do have the privilege of autonomy and relative power in society.

[2] See appendix A for the detailed story.

or would it be different? Is there a connection between the *social Trinity* and spiritual

formation? Is the *social Trinity* essential to a missional imagination for the suburban

church?

This is the question that shaped the *Deep in the Burbs* (DITB) project:

How might an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity

impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?
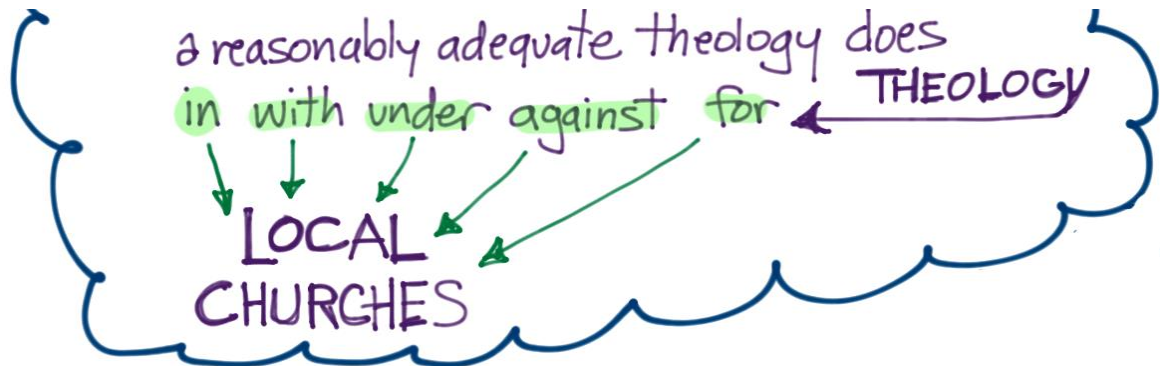
Figure 1. A Reasonably Adequate Christian Theology

I believe that a reasonably adequate Christian theology is done *in*, *with*, *under*,

against, and *for* the local congregation.[3] Theology is not the construction of abstract ideas

about God, but is the experience of God at work in particular congregations through

communicative action. Therefore, the only way I could explore my question was to figure

out how to expose a group of suburbanites to the *social Trinity* in such a way that I did

not manipulate the situation to get them to have the same experience that I did, or come

to the same conclusions that I did. I decided that the best way to do this was to form a

participatory action research (PAR) team. The PAR process is designed to facilitate a

---

[3] I am indebted to Dr. Patrick Keifert for this important understanding of the nature of theology. This is his modification of David Kelsey's assertion that theological education is done *about*, *against*, and *for* the local congregation. David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

communicative, participatory space in which community members can be empowered to dream new dreams for their community around specific issues of importance to them.

I invited eighteen people from three ELCA[4] congregations in three adjacent suburbs to form a PAR Research Team (RT) at the end of February, 2014.[5] We met eight times to discuss and reflect upon our ideas about the Trinity, spiritual formation, and life in the suburbs. I invited the team to dream new dreams about spiritual formation in the suburban context. The team members created action projects that expressed their new ideas about the *social Trinity* and spiritual formation. They carried out those projects in their own contexts over the course of seven months. Finally, the team regrouped in November, 2014 and tried to make sense out of what happened in our experiences. We began to claim that the PAR experience itself was *Trinitarian praxis* that impacted each member of the RT in a unique way. This dissertation is the story of that team, what we learned, and why we think it matters for the missional church in the suburbs.

Every Story has a Prologue

Before I move any further into the story of this dissertation, let us first address some questions that will serve as an introduction to the story and the storytellers. There are four basic questions that will provide an outline for the introduction. *How am I writing? To whom am I writing? Why am I doing this? Why is this question important?*

---

[4] The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. See www.elca.org (accessed April 3, 2015)

[5] I will define participatory action research in chapter two.

How am I Writing This?

I will intentionally write in the first person and imagine my reader as an individual who brings his or her own story to the telling of mine. I do not believe this diminishes the scholarly pursuit in any way. Further, I think it enhances the scholarship since it tears through the facade of objectivity and invites you, the reader, to engage in your own experience of these stories as you read them in your own time and in your own way.[6]

To Whom am I Writing?

I have three intended audiences and one accidental audience in mind as I write this dissertation. It is important to name these audiences, since the process of story*ing* is an embodied one in which my lived experience meets yours. Keeping you in mind— whichever audience you may be—will help to focus my telling of this story.

To the Research Team

The first audience is the *Deep in the Burbs* Research Team. This project, and the findings that emerge from it, belong to the RT as much as they do to me.[7] Yes, I invited the team members to be part of the project. I asked the question. I set the table for

---

[6] Fink argues for a conversational, first person style in his dissertation. He claims that the nature of his topic—public discourse—necessitated his choice. I make a similar move here. I will be making a case that spiritual formation flows from the relationality of God and is embodied in a communicative rationality. We are called to listen to God in the other as well as tell God's story as it is lived out in our experience. By directing the reader in the first person I am embodying the very thing that I propose. See Ben Fink, "Organized Ideas, or Defeating the Culture Wars (What We Need to Know, and How We Need to Know It)" (PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2014), ix-xii.

[7] Here I am writing to the fictitious, disembodied "reader" which is a larger category that addresses any potential reader. The process of writing sometimes requires language that speaks to all audiences, even though specific audiences are identified. You, as a specific reader within one of the identified audiences are invited to grant me the necessity to slip in and out of the direct address as the context demands.

discussion. Beyond that, however, the team participated in a communicative, collaborative, co-creative process that took this research to places that I could have never imagined on my own. It is my job to express, in writing, what we discovered and created together. I write this dissertation *with* them and *for* them.

The RT is comprised of eighteen people from three ELCA congregations in three adjacent suburban cities in an Upper-Midwestern Metropolitan area.[8] One of these congregations is my own congregation where I serve as the Pastor of Spiritual Formation. The other two congregations are members of the same conference and synod in which our congregation is a member. All of the RT members are white, middle-class, educated, English-speaking, adult, male and female suburbanites that grew up in the Midwest United States and are actively involved in one of these congregations.[9] Some are life-long Lutherans, others are not, and thus they all bring to the conversation a fairly diverse range of Christian experiences. It is important to note these demographics because this research focuses on spiritual formation in the ELCA suburban context. The RT is a good representation of the kinds of people that comprise the majority of the three congregations, and most suburban ELCA congregations in general.[10]

---

[8] I will use pseudonyms for the members of the RT and for the congregations in which they participate. I will describe the suburban context in which these churches exist, but I will not name the specific cities. This is an attempt to protect the anonymity of each team member. The most accurate location I will provide is that this is an upper-Midwest metropolitan environment in the United States. This is an important detail because each region of the United States has its own cultural distinction.

[9] Ages range from 30-75 years old

[10] This is speculation, of course, but the demographic data from the ELCA indicate that the RT represents the majority of the ELCA in all regions—urban, suburban, or rural. See ELCA demographic data at http://www.elca.org/Resources/Research-and-Evaluation (accessed February 8, 2015)

To the Academy

The second intended audience is the academy. You might find it curious that I have placed the academy second. Is this not an academic, doctoral dissertation? I place the academy second, behind the RT, for one simple reason. I know my own academic context within the department of *Congregational Mission and Leadership* at Luther Seminary. Our goal in this program is to explore and live into a new imagination—a *missional* imagination—that will encourage church leaders to discern what God is doing in the world and join God in God's mission.[11] The purpose of this dissertation is not to demonstrate my ability to use academic jargon and join an elite club. The goal is to engage in robust academic research and then clearly communicate the findings to the RT and the church. I believe that one of God's primary callings on my life is to be able to bridge the gap between the academic world and the local congregation. I seek to practice that calling in the writing of this dissertation.

To God

It is important that you see how I understand God to be present in, with, and through the research process and the writing of this paper. I write this paper as I participate in the Trinity—the three persons of God in dynamic, creative, sustaining relationship.[12] The first person—God the Creator—has given me life and calls me into a

---

[11] This is the *missio dei*. This concept has been at the heart of the missional church conversation since it first came to the forefront during the IMC meetings of the 1950s and 1960s. I choose not to dwell on the term *missio dei* because it has become muddied in the last decade as different camps have tried to frame it within their own imagination of the God-Word-World relationship. See T. Engelsviken, "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology," *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003).

[12] See Samuel M. Powell, *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

preferred and promised future in which my vocation as a pastor and theologian is an integral part. The second person—God the Redeemer—has embodied this calling through the incarnation of the Word-became-flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, recorded in the canon of scripture, embody God's self-emptying, other-oriented love that demonstrates, in physical ways, how God invites me into the way of the cross, to be emptied of my false self, so that I might fully engage with other human beings for the purpose of love and peace. It is through the reconciling advocacy of Jesus with the Creator that I am at peace with God and find direction for my vocation. The third person—God the Sustainer, the Holy Spirit—is the ever-present, animating force of life that moves throughout the world like wind, fire, and water. The Spirit is that which indwells, illumines, empowers, convicts, and compels me to follow the way of the cross and unites me to all things in God's created universe and, ultimately with God. It is the dynamic relationship of these three persons that creates my life and in which I live and move and have my being. I write these words cognizant of the fact that it is for the Creator, through the Redeemer, and in the power of the Sustainer that I am able to write anything and contribute anything of value to anyone.

To the Accidental Reader

Finally, it is important to note one last audience. The *accidental* audience. A text like this takes on a life of its own and may be read by many different people over a long span of time.[13] This is especially true in the digital, Internet age. You may be reading this

---

[13] I also name the accidental reader to acknowledge the theoretical bias from which I am writing. I will explore this more fully in the postfoundational frame in chapter two. For now, let me simply acknowledge that this text will take on a life of its own—a *horizon*—and become a subject with which the reader will engage and bring his or her own horizon. May the fusion of those horizons produce the fruit of God's Spirit in the world.

in the year 2073, orbiting around Mars, or you may be in the year 2016, in the next

suburb over from me, with no idea that we've walked past each other in Wal-Mart. I

invite you, the accidental, but beloved reader, to engage in your own experience of these

stories as you read them in your own time, through your medium of choice—laptop,

tablet, phone, printed copy—in your own space—coffee shop, office, public bus, bamboo

hut—for your own reasons, and interpret them in light of your own story. My hope, and

prayer, is that you will learn something new, see something in a new way, and be inspired

to move further into your own set of stories with hope for God's preferred and promised

future.

Why am I Doing This?

The reason I am writing this dissertation boils down to one simple word. *Love*. I

love *God*, *the church*, and *the world*. I realize that this may sound trite, but I truly mean

this. Let me explain. First, when I say *love*, I don't mean that sentimental feeling we get

when we watch a Hallmark movie, or see a cute puppy, or go on a first date. No, *love* is

something much deeper than that. It is like a root that burrows deep into the core of your

being that wraps so tightly inside of you that when it seems that all else has been stripped

away by the storms of stress and conflict, the root remains.

I Love God

I cannot explain God. In fact, the more I study theology the less I can explain

anything and the more I stand in awe at the complexity, beauty, and incomprehensible

love and grace that is the Triune Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of this amazing

universe. I have known God's love since I was a child. It was first manifest through my

parents as they demonstrated faithful love to me, to my brothers, and to the congregations

they served. I have always wanted to live my life in service to and for the glory of God.

My understanding of God has been viewed through my experiences in the Baptist lens,

the Mega-church Evangelical lens, the Emerging/House Church lens, and now is

expanding exponentially through the missional/Lutheran lens. The constant throughout

all these lenses is my personal experience of God's love and grace in my own life and the

deep sense that God has led me to each place that I have lived and served. I have

followed these leadings, because I love God and trust in God's love and faithfulness to

me and to the world God is creating. Now, I believe that God has led me to this research

project. It is my prayer that the things we learned will help others grow deeper into the

love of God.

I Love the Church

My love for the church is not a naïve love. I grew up as a pastor's kid and watched

the church repeatedly abuse my parents through angry disagreements and church splits. I

have been a pastor in the local suburban church for over twenty years and have also

experienced the same kind of anger and division in the church. So, why do I love the

church? Because the church is people and people are a wonderful mess that are loved by

God and are in the complex process of growing up and growing into the grace of God. I

am just as messed up as anyone else. The Church, with all its faults, is the only place

where people are gathered around the risen Christ and, in the power of the Holy Spirit,

are sent to be prophetic partners in the world.

I write this dissertation because I think the church is deeply divided over many

issues. These divisions cause a destructive polarity—an *us* against *them* mentality—in the

body of Christ. If the church is going to be the *prophetic public companion* that it is

called to be, then the things we learned in this project may prove helpful for the church to

find a third way of peace between warring factions.[14] Hopefully, this will create spaces

for God's love to flow more freely in the church and in society as a whole.

I Love the World

I'm not referring to the *world* that the Apostle John noted when he said, "Do not

love the world" (1 John 2:15). He was referring to the distorted thinking of human

systems that is contrary to the grace of God. That is not what I mean when I say that I

love the world. What I mean is that I love this universe that is God's creation. The

universe is eternally *being* created by the relationship of the Triune God. The vast

complexity and diversity of the universe is the natural reflection and essence of God and

the medium through which God is continually speaking.[15] I love the world because I am

part of this world and cannot be anything other than that. Additionally, the *world* that the

Apostle John mentioned—the broken human systems of pain and violence—needs to

know the grace and love of God that is a peace that passes all understanding,

demonstrated through Jesus, and made accessible through the Holy Spirit. This is God's

mission in the world and we are invited to join it every day.

Why is this Question Important?

This is an important question on three levels. It is important for me personally, for

the academy, and for the whole church.

---

[14] I am indebted to Dr. Gary Simpson for the phrase *prophetic public companion*. I will expound more fully on this concept as we progress. Gary M. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 144-145.

[15] I will articulate this theological perspective more clearly in chapter two under the Trinity frame.

Personal Importance

This topic is important to me for many reasons. I have already stated that this dissertation is part of my story. It is not merely an academic exercise. It is a spiritual practice in which I am engaging. It is also an expression of my vocation as a pastor of spiritual formation and a theologian. I want to know how to cultivate spaces in which the Holy Spirit can ignite the members of the congregation to be active participants with God's mission in their local context. The process of engaging with the RT for nine months has changed me and plunged me deeper into the life of the Triune God.

Academic Importance

The research question is interdisciplinary. It weaves together three fairly new fields of academic study—social Trinity, missional ecclesiology, and Christian spirituality. Each of these disciplines has found its own academic footing only recently. Therefore, little academic work has been done on their interdisciplinary connections. This research will offer a very helpful new lens into each individual discipline by demonstrating how they are vitally connected in the life of the local congregation.

Congregational Importance

The research question is important for the local church for the same reasons it is important to me. The DITB project is the story of a specific group of suburban Christians who experienced an encounter with the social Trinity and made some important discoveries. Our findings regarding spiritual formation, the Trinity, and life in the suburbs may offer helpful suggestions to encourage the local suburban congregation to grow toward a reimagined and/or deepened missional identity.

The Dangers of Studying Spirituality

Sandra Schneiders identifies two dangers inherent within the academic study of Christian spirituality. The first is its *interdisciplinarity*. The second is its *self-implicating* nature.

The Danger of Interdisciplinarity

The study of spirituality itself is an interdisciplinary field as it covers history, sociology, psychology, theology, etc. My research is even more interdisciplinary than that since the interdisciplinary field of spirituality is only one of the disciplines I will explore. The research also looks at Adult Learning Theory, Epistemology, Suburban Studies, and Theology. The fear for me is that, in an academic sense, I will be a mile wide and an inch deep. Schneiders says,

> One implication of this intrinsically interdisciplinary character of the study of spirituality is that the scholar in the field is usually not an 'expert' in the traditional sense of one who dominates the subject matter and controls the literature in a particular recognized academic sphere. I venture to affirm that no one is, or ever will be, a universal expert in spirituality. Rather, the scholar becomes a specialist in some area or aspect of spirituality and continue to learn throughout his or her career. However, the panic or sense of generalized incompetence that this can generate in students, and even in established scholars is probably unfounded....What we need to avoid in ourselves and prevent in our students is, on the one hand, and 'undisciplined' mixing of methods used without sufficient attention to the demands of the disciplines involved and, on the other hand, imprisonment in narrow disciplinary enclaves through fear of being less than expert.[16]

Interdisciplinary methodology, then, requires a fine balance between breadth and depth. It must be "sufficiently broad and sufficiently focused that the [researcher] will be

---

[16] Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 14.

neither a shallow generalist nor an academic lone ranger."[17] Kenneth Reynhout explores

this issue through an investigation of Paul Ricoeur's work. Reynhout warns that "one

discourse should not colonize another discourse, or carelessly co-opt terms and ideas as if

they are automatically univocal from one disciplinary context to another. This can result,

Ricoeur warns, from 'the hegemonic tendency of every scientific discipline to redefine

the aims of adjacent fields in its own terms.'"[18] How then can we have interdisciplinary

study? Reynhout continues, "Interdisciplinarity…involves a form of hermeneutical

translation where terms and concepts from one discipline are appropriated (and

interpreted) by another. This is more than an academic exercise; for Ricoeur it is also a

matter of ethics: 'To translate is to do justice to a foreign intelligence, to install the just

distance from one linguistic whole to another.'"[19]

<center>The Danger of Self-Implication</center>

Another danger in the study of spirituality is its self-implicating nature. Modern

scientific methodology is built upon a positivist notion that the researcher is a detached,

objective observer of reality. The researcher is looking for "just the facts, ma'am."[20] The

data retrieved from quantitative research is believed to be broad enough and statistically

viable so that it can be generalized and construed as an accurate representation of reality.

The study of spirituality is difficult to fit into that positivist mold. Schneiders says,

---

[17] Ibid., 13.

[18] Kenneth A. Reynhout, *Interdisciplinary Interpretation: Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Theology and Science*, text, 221.

[19] Ibid., 226.

[20] An allusion to the character Sergeant Friday on the 1960s television show *Dragnet*.

> Many of us probably felt drawn into spirituality precisely because our questions about spirituality were not heuristic devices to generate research projects or ways of participating in a scholarly guild. They were real, intensely personal questions that had implications for our own lives....Hidden in the attraction to the study of spirituality is probably, for many people, a deep yearning to see God....Somehow, the researcher has to gain methodologically valid access to subjective data without denaturing the experience or getting mired in the purely private and idiosyncratic.[21]

Schneiders' statement is most definitely true for me and for the motivation behind this research project. I am not interested in dead facts about spiritual practices, the church, or God. I am vibrantly involved in a relationship with God, the church, and the world and I believe that this research has changed me in the process of its unfolding.

How Do We Navigate these Dangers?

Schneiders offers us a perspective that brings comfort and legitimacy to the interdisciplinary and self-implicating nature of this research.

> While we affirm the critical ideals of modern scholarship, it is past time to admit that the Enlightenment ideal of scientific objectivity is, and always has been, an illusion. A benefit of the recent explosion of "social location" theory has been to make us all aware that the only kind of knowing available to us as humans is subjective. There is no presuppositionless, non-perspectival knowing mind that conforms to a free-standing object known in its totality and without affecting it. All human inquiry is self-implicating and all knowledge is personal to some degree. The only true critical approach to the knowing process is self-knowledge and honesty about our social location and presuppositions, and methodological control of their effects.[22]

Schneiders claims that this form of research has found its place within the academy with the rise of *constructive postmodern* thought. She contrasts this to *deconstructive postmodern* thought which, she claims, leads only to nihilism. However,

---

[21] Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," 17-18.

[22] Ibid., 20.

Such constructive postmodernism is perhaps a context in which Christian spirituality as an academic discipline can find dialogue partners. The conversation will be humbler, no doubt, but perhaps more in tune with reality than either the totalizing discourse of medieval Christendom which knew it was the only game in town, or the inflated rhetoric of the Enlightenment "man" who was the exultant measure of all things, or yet the deconstructivist who makes and unmakes a tinker toy reality as a playful diversion until cosmic bedtime. For the immediate future, spirituality, in the context of the modern academy, will have to march to a different drummer. But the postmodern beat is getting louder. In a constructive postmodern context, spirituality as a self-implicating discipline will be no stranger.[23]

I name these dangers and I claim the limitations involved in qualitative, interdisciplinary research. The findings that I will present in chapter four cannot provide grand generalizations that are universally true, according to the measurements of statistical reliability. I will only be able to name the lived experience of this very small group of people, in one small section of a tiny part of a Metropolitan area, which is only one of thousands in the world. I am also aware of how much my bias is present in the data.

Some scholars may dismiss this research as anecdotal. Yet, I believe that the lived experience of this group of people is valuable. It is like the sparrow that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 10:29. It is small, but it is an important particularity in God's vast universe. It is worth studying, and, in the studying, we encounter God. You are invited to bring your story into conversation with our story. As you dwell in this text, I pray that you hear the Word of God as the Word, through this story, dwells deeply in you.

---

[23] Ibid., 21.

An Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation will move from the general to the specific. First I will provide

theoretical and theological frames for the nature and scope of the research project. Then I

will describe the methodology and design of the project, followed by a thick description

of the lived experience. Finally, I will reflect theologically on the findings of the research

and provide some possible implications for the missional leader.

Chapter two will discuss the theoretical frames. First, I will explore the frame of

spiritual formation through the lens of adult learning theories. The work of Parker

Palmer, Stephen Brookfield, Robert Kegan, Mary Hess, and Peter Block provide the

framework for why *participatory action research* was a necessary methodology to

facilitate a communicative space where the research team could co-create meaning from

the experience. Second, I will explore the definition of *spiritual formation* through the

dual lens of Schneiders—from the *ecumenical* side—and Willard—from the *evangelical*

side—and discover a robust, stereoscopic view. Third, I will place the research in its

suburban context and discuss the unique characteristics of that setting.

Chapter three will discuss the theological and biblical frames for the research

project. First, I will explore the epistemological frame for this research and reveal that I

am writing from a postfoundationalist perspective. Second, I will establish that this

research is done *from* and *for* a missional imagination for the church. Third, I will define

my use of missional and how the *social Trinity* is a vital framework for it. I will detail the

twentieth century conversation around the Trinity and locate my understanding of the

social Trinity within it. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between scripture and the

Word of God and establish a rationale for why practicing *Dwelling in the Word* was a vital part of the research process.

Chapter four will describe my methodology and design. I will explore the nature and purpose of participatory action research and discuss why it was a necessary choice for this research project. Then I will map out the original design for the project that ran from February – November, 2014.

Chapter five will provide a thick description of the lived experience of the project and of the data produced as a result of it. I will explain the process I used to code the data and reveal the primary findings. The data indicated that *relationships*, *reflection*, and an *awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit* were the key elements of spiritual formation for the suburban context in which this research team dwelt.

Chapter six will provide an initial interaction and interpretation of the data. I will explore how the project increased the awareness and understanding of the social Trinity. I will also provide an initial and provisional interpretation of the data findings and present a fundamental shift in the research team's ideation of spiritual formation.

Chapter seven will provide a theological reflection on the findings and offer practical implications for the missional church leader. First, I will bring the primary findings—relationships, reflection, and the awareness of the Spirit's agency—into conversation with three types of frames—the motion picture frame, the structural frame, and the picture frame—and discuss the essential nature of communicative, Trinitarian praxis for missional spirituality. Second, I will discuss my own experience of leading the project and explore possible metaphors and practices that may prove helpful for the missional leader in the suburbs.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMES

Deep in the Burbs (DITB) was a participatory action research project. It was a gathering of nineteen people from three suburban ELCA congregations that wondered how an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity might impact our ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. We encountered the social Trinity in a communicative space and took action in our communities. In this chapter I will provide the theoretical framework for why it was necessary to use participatory action research as the methodology for this particular question. I will explore theories regarding adult learning and spiritual formation. I will also discuss the ELCA in a suburban context and the particular situation of each participating congregation of the DITB project within it. First, I will discuss the use of the term *frame* as a metaphor in this context.

Why Talk about Frames?
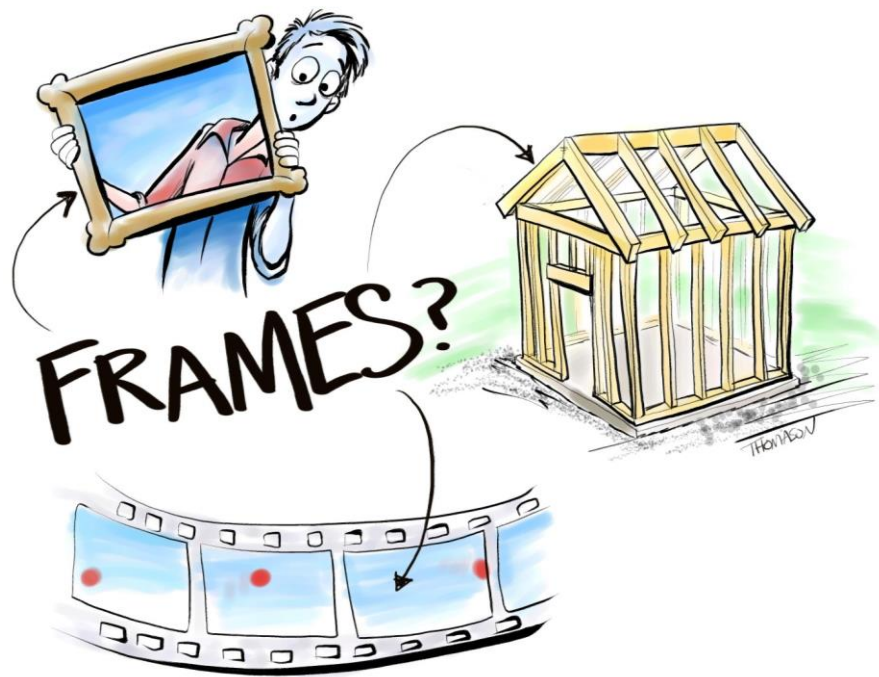
Figure 2. Three Types Of Frames

The term *frame* brings three very different images to my mind. The first is a picture frame, or the boundaries in which a photographer/painter captures an image. A picture frame is limited and cannot capture the entire three-dimensional reality it seeks to describe. What is left outside of the frame is as important as what is captured in the frame.[1]

The second picture is that of the framework of a house. Carpenters frame a house with wood. This is the basic structure that determines the shape and stability of everything else that will follow in the construction process. The computer equivalent is

---

[1] Jolyon Mitchell provides an excellent discussion of this use of frames. Jolyon P. Mitchell, *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 30 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the hardware of a computer that dictates how the software works. Taken this way, the frame is the prejudice and presuppositions that someone brings to a topic.[2]

The third picture is that of film. Motion pictures travel at a rate of 24 frames/second. They are a sequence of still images that create the illusion of movement when run together so quickly. A single frame is a static snapshot—frozen in time—that tells only a fraction of the larger story. It is accurate, but incomplete.

All of these images are helpful when using the term frame in discussing a topic. They each share one thing in common, but also provide a helpful nuance to the meaning. Their common theme is limitation. Human beings are limited. We are bound by language, culture, intellect, knowledge, physical bodies, time, etc. No one person can know everything, talk about everything, or see something from every perspective. The frame describes our unique limitation within which we must operate and enter the discussion.

Each image offers a unique nuance to the notion of limitation. The picture frame describes our limitations in terms of choosing to look at one thing, but needing to leave something else out of the discussion—whether intentionally or out of necessity.[3] The house frame describes the limitation as a fixed way in which ideas form within our mind. This seemingly rigid architecture is due to various predetermined factors, e.g. language,

---

[2] Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks of fruitful prejudices and the boundaries of language—linguisticality—that makes human communication limited. Gadamer's equivalent to our discussion of frames is the term *horizon*. He calls for a *fusion of horizons* in order to achieve true, peaceful, and productive communication. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 244-255, 317.

[3] Again, this is an interesting discussion regarding what is left out of a frame. Sometimes we leave things out because we simply cannot include everything. Our argument would become muddied and meaningless if we included everything. Scholars often use footnotes—like this—to attend to that which has been left out. Even then, we cannot attend to everything. Other times the things that are left out of the frame are things that are still invisible to the author. These things still lie behind the author's horizon.

culture, training, tradition, etc.[4] The movie frame describes our limitation in terms of time and history, as any statement—whether spoken or in writing—is immediately locked into a static moment as the rest of experience and knowledge moves beyond it.[5]

I have frames. I have limitations. I am a white, middle-class, middle-aged, post-protestant, neo-Lutheran, mid-western, suburban, heterosexual, married, male with a ministry background in mega-Evangelical, and micro-Emergent-house church who has a specific historical and geographical location. I can only know and perceive the world from within these frames.

The task and challenge of the scholar and theologian is to: 1) seek to be as aware as possible of one's own frame, and, 2) expand that frame as much as possible through conversation with people from other frames.

I offer my frames to you, the reader, not as the absolute truth behind my research, but as a snapshot of where I am while I am asking the questions that I am asking during this research project.

The Spiritual Formation Frame

The research question itself has both explicit and implicit implications for how we should frame this project with regard to how people are formed. It explicitly names the

---

[4] Wittgenstein would go so far as to say that these rigid boundaries make it impossible to actually communicate across language boundaries. Each language is its own game, using its own rules, and meaning is lost between games.

[5] This is the danger in writing. Things we write today become fixed in time and take on a life of their own. Twenty years from now we may have moved past that horizon and have a completely different perspective on the topic. And yet, the text remains. A reader may pick up the earlier text fifty years from now, long after the author is dead, and create a distorted perception of the author's perspective if the reader consults only that single text, fixed in time. I have experienced this already within my own body of work. It is important to consult as much of an author's writings as possible before attempting to represent the author's perspective. However, as Derrida would say, the text has its own life, and the reader is ultimately the one who imputes meaning into the text.

term *spiritual formation*, thus it will be necessary to discuss and define this term in the

context of the research. The question also implicitly refers to adult education in that it

asks how an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity might impact

ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. Therefore, it will be necessary to frame the

project within a particular theoretical perspective on adult learning and pedagogical

methodologies.[6]

<div align="center">Theories of Adult Learning</div>

The research question presented an educational challenge in which the

pedagogical and research methodology was as important as the question itself. I was

faced with a fundamental question during the planning phase of this project: Would I use

modernist, instrumental methodologies to convince the team that certain ideas regarding

the social Trinity are preferred to older models, or would I engage the team in a

collaborative discovery process in which the outcome of the learning experience was

unknown to me? I will articulate, in this section, how I framed the research project within

a postfoundational, constructivist, participatory methodology by drawing upon the

theoretical models found in Palmer, Kegan, Brookfield, and Hess.

---

[6] It is important to note that spiritual formation/spirituality and adult education are not mutually exclusive topics. There is a growing body of literature within the field of adult learning that addresses the inherent connection between spirituality and adult pedagogical methodologies. Elisabeth Tisdell says that spirituality is "personal belief and experience of a divine spirit or higher purpose, about how we construct meaning, and what we individually and communally experience and attend to and honor as the sacred in our lives." Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 200. See also Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Jane Kathryn Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*, Rev. ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Dent C. Davis, "Dialogue of the Soul: The Phenomenon of Intrapersonal Peace and the Adult Experience of Protestant Religious Education," *Religious Education* 102, no. 4 (2007); John M. Dirkx, "Images, Transformative Learning the Work of Soul," *Adult Learning* 12, no. 3 (2001).

Parker Palmer and Subject-Centered Learning
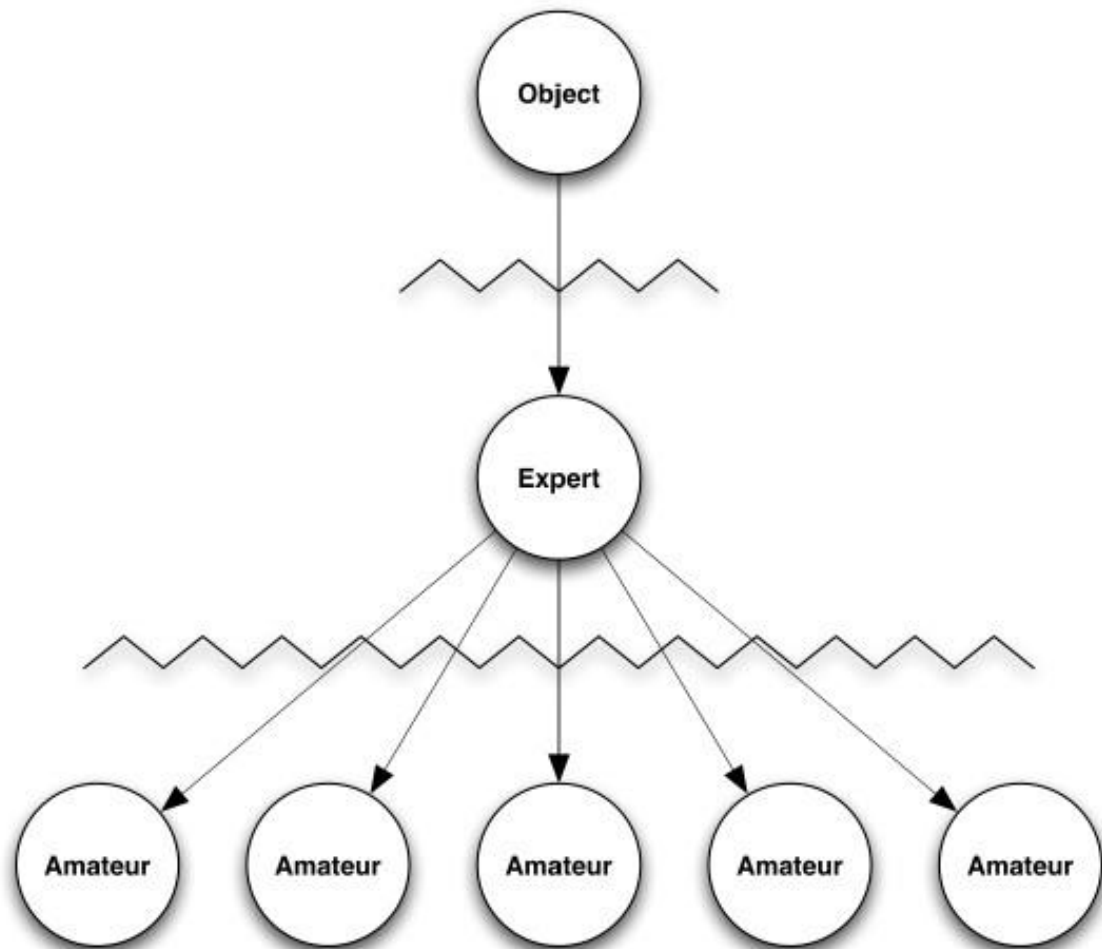
Figure 3. Teacher-Centered Learning[7]

Parker Palmer provides a helpful contrast between two pedagogical models that

describe the shift from modernist to postfoundational methodologies and that help

explain my choice of methodology for the DITB project. The first model is the teacher-

centered model that is built upon the myth that knowledge is something that can be

obtained through objective observation of a topic. The role of the teacher, in this model,

is to acquire enough knowledge about the object of study to be considered an expert in

---

[7] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 10th anniversary ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 100.

that particular field. The teacher then turns away from the object of study and turns toward the students, who lack knowledge and are amateurs in the field. The students are empty vessels that must be filled up with knowledge by the expert until the students reach a level of knowledge when they, too, have the potential to be considered an expert.

The teacher-centered model is untenable for the missional leader for both epistemological and ethical reasons. Knowledge is hermeneutically situated within the relationality and perspective of the knower.[8] Therefore, according to this epistemological perspective, objective knowledge is a myth. The teacher-centered model is ethically untenable because it creates a power differential within the learning environment that is dangerous in two ways. First, it establishes a power hierarchy in which the teacher is considered essentially better and more powerful than the learner. Second, this hierarchical system promotes hegemony and colonizing tactics for the indoctrination of ideas and the perpetuation of command-and-control political systems rather than the freedom to explore new ideas and the ability to discern what God is doing in the world.[9] It would be very difficult for the leader of a local congregation to utilize a teacher-centered methodology and seek a missional imagination in the church.

---

[8] I will argue this point in chapter three.

[9] I will argue in the Word of God frame and the missional frame that the missional leader seeks to facilitate spaces in which the local congregation can dwell in the Word and in the World in order to listen and to discern what God is doing in the world and to join God in the *missio dei*. A teacher-centered hierarchical system would be toxic to this goal.
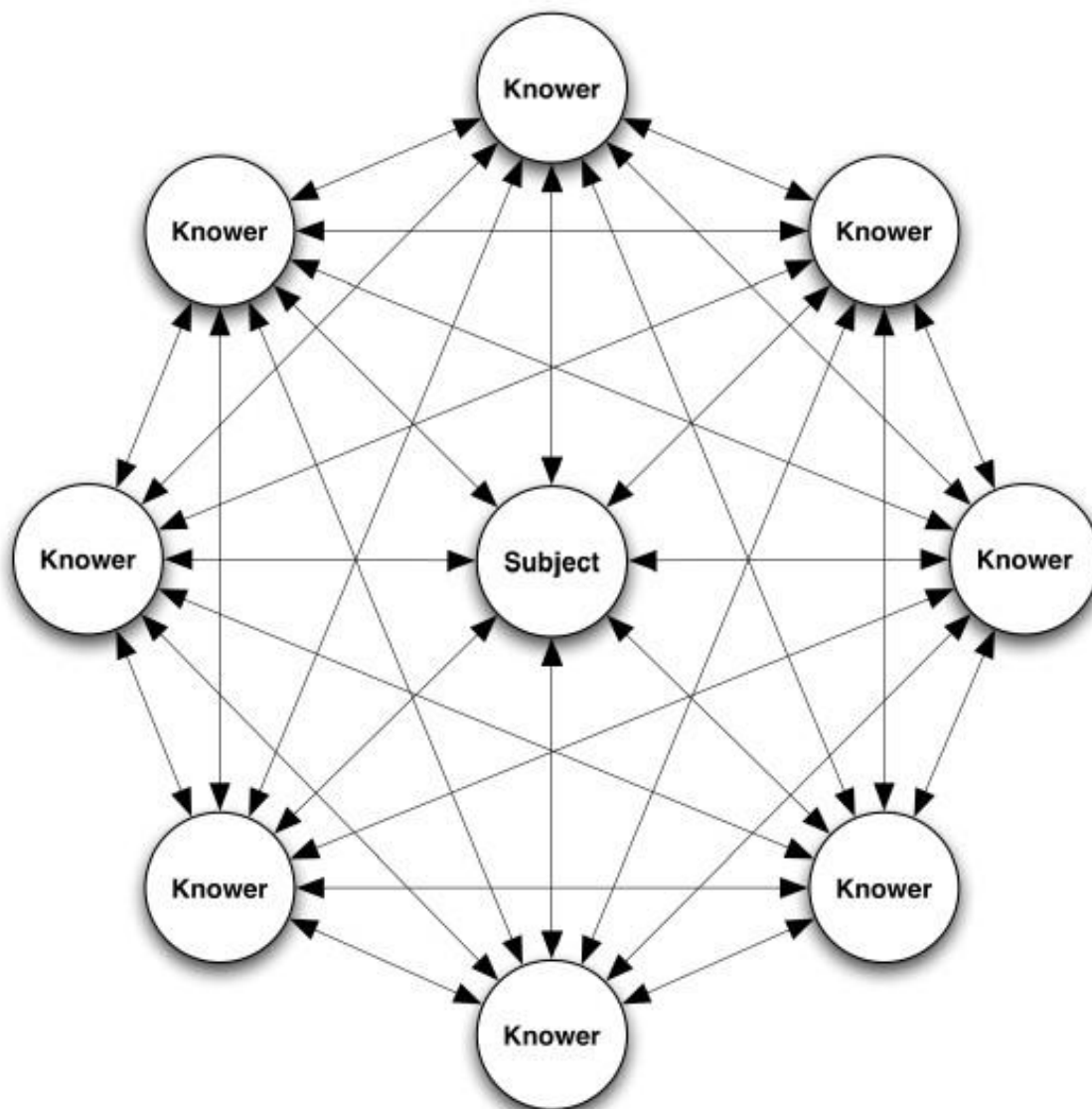
Figure 4. Subject-Centered Learning[10]

Palmer offers an alternative model—the subject-centered model—that dispels the

myth of objective knowledge and embraces postfoundationalist epistemology.[11] The

subject-centered model recognizes that any given topic is, what Palmer calls, the "great

thing" around which we gather. It is both an *object* and a *subject*. It is an *object* in that it

---

[10] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 102.

[11] Palmer does not necessarily identify it is *postfoundationalist*. This is a term that I will introduce below as my preferred moniker for our current post/late-modern cultural and epistemological milieu.

is separate from the learner and can be observed. However, it is also a *subject* in that the topic brings something to the learner that invites the learner into dialogue. The subject-centered model situates both the learner and the teacher into a more democratic space than the teacher-centered model. Hess suggests that the teacher, in this model, is someone who is simply a little further down the road than the others in the circle in regard to the "great thing" around which they are gathered. Someone who is new to the great thing might have something equally important to contribute.

> This model of teaching and learning suggests that knowledge is a dynamic, relational process, rather than a static, isolated quantity. It suggests that the "great thing" in the middle of the diagram might be a script for our participation in the construction of knowledge, as compared to the first model, where knowledge is something isolated from most people, and dimly transferred through the mediation of a teacher.[12]

This is not to deny the need for leadership, however, or the power differential that inherently exists between the teacher and the student. Palmer argues that teaching is the act of creating a space in which obedience to truth can be practiced.[13] The teacher must design a space that facilitates, or "holds" the possibility for subject-centered learning to occur.

It is important to note the language of figure 3. The students that form the circle around the subject are no longer labeled "amateur," nor are they labeled "student" or "learner." They are called "knower." This is significant for Palmer and has theological implications. Palmer asserts that education is a deeply spiritual process that goes far

---

[12] Mary E. Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind*, Communication, Culture, and Religion Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 7.

[13] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, 1st HarperCollins pbk ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

beyond the acquisition of knowledge, but is the process of knowing in the same way that we are known. We know in the context of relatedness, and ultimately, our relatedness exists in our relatedness to God. In essence, learning is a form of prayerful meditation in which we experience the other, and in so knowing, are more fully known.[14]

It was important for the DITB project that I adopt a subject-centered model for the RT. Given my position as a teaching pastor and a researcher, and given the dominance of teacher-centered methods in the church and the educational systems in which the RT was raised, it was only natural that the RT expected me to present the social Trinity in a lecture-style manner. I had to break this expectation. The "great thing" around which we gathered in the DITB project was the intersection of the Trinity, spiritual formation, and the suburban context. I, as the teacher, brought these topics into conversation and placed that conversation in the center of the group. The RT gathered around it and we entered into a multifaceted, relational interaction with it and with each other. I would argue that this became a "script"[15] for Trinitarian praxis in the construction of knowledge in this project.[16]

Robert Kegan and the Evolving Self

The methodologies chosen for the DITB project draw heavily upon Robert Kegan's theories of what it means to be human and how humans develop. The

---

[14] Ibid., 11.

[15] Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind*, 4ff.

[16] Another helpful model is *Communicative Theology* in which the experience of God happens in the communicative action between the I, IT, WE, and GLOBE. Matthias Hilberath Bernd Jochen Scharer, *The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York: Crossroad Pub. CO, 2008).

uniqueness of Kegan's theory is that it brings together existentialist psychology with developmental psychology and creates a third way that he calls a "constructive-developmental" tradition that attends to the development of the activity of meaning-constructing.[17] Kegan asserts that human beings are not "beings," but that the human being is an activity. He says, "It is not about the doing which a human does: it is about the doing that a human is."[18] The activity of being human is the process of making meaning out of experiential data in community. We are relational beings that continually interact in our physical and social environment and make meaning out of those interactions as we develop throughout the course of our lives.[19]

Kegan observes that neuro-typical humans have the potential to evolve through five basic orders of consciousness that alter the subject/object relationship as it pertains to making meaning. Each order is like a filter, or a set of lenses through which the individual makes sense out of—or "orders"—the experiential data. The filter is part of the subject/observer that influences how the object is perceived and understood. The filter is not perceived in itself, but is the ubiquitous lens that colors the data. As the individual evolves into the next order, she moves outside of the previous filter, and is able to observe the previous filter as a new object. This new order of consciousness is, in itself, a new filter that alters her positionality as a subject/observer and allows her to perceive the previous filter and make dramatically different forms of meaning than was previously

---

[17] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4.

[18] Ibid., 8.

[19] I created an animation to help visualize the evolution through the five orders. http://www.deepintheburbs.com/in-over-our-heads-by-robert-kegan/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

possible. The relationship between these five orders is like the relationship between a

point, a line, a plane, a sphere, and a tesseract. Each one is part of, but beyond the

previous order. Kegan has also observed that most neuro-typical humans reach the third

order of consciousness during adolescence and stay there for the rest of their lives.
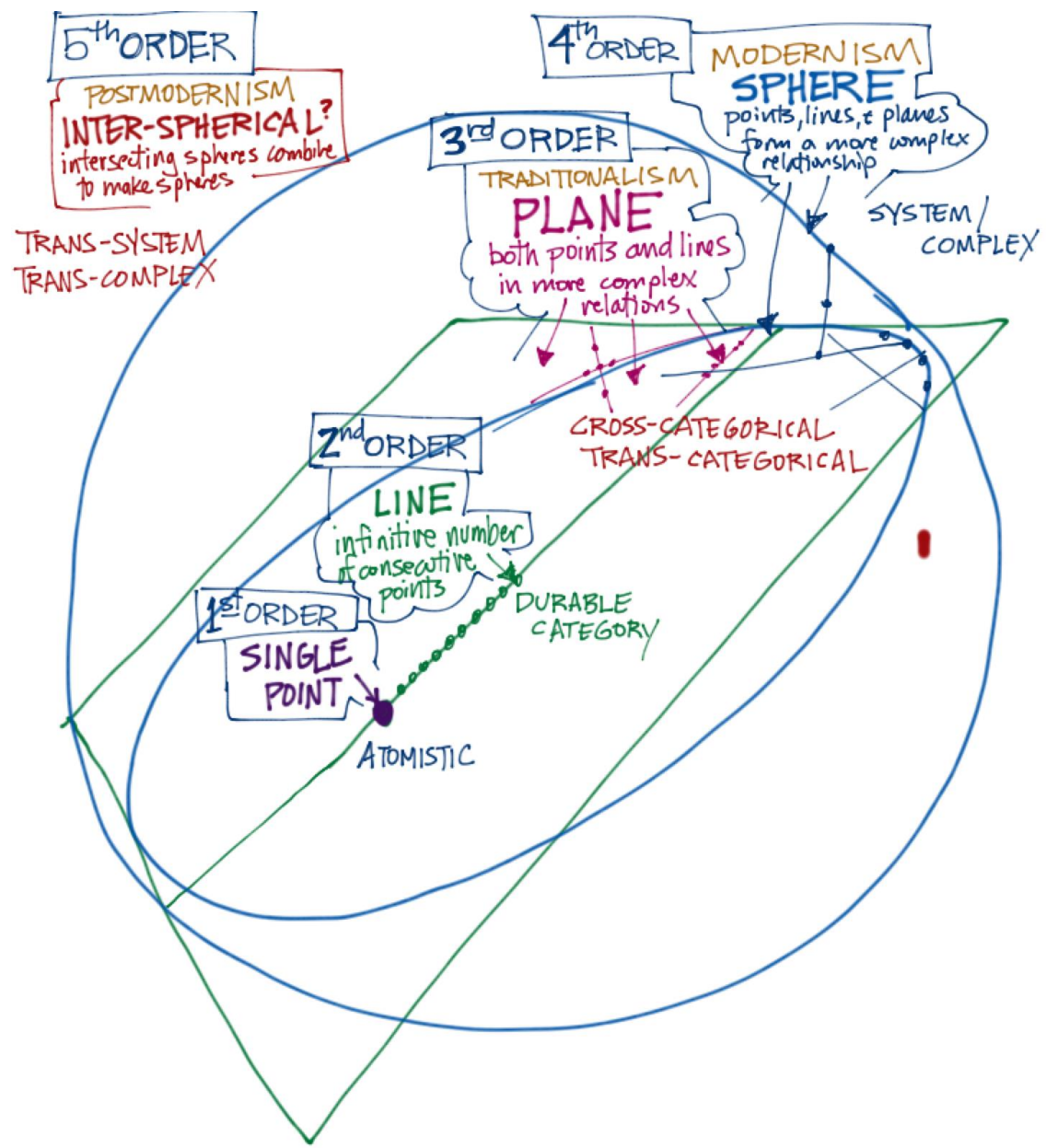
Figure 5. Kegan's Orders of Consciousness

It was commonly believed, prior to the 1980s, that all significant cognitive development ceased in late adolescence. In other words, a person's ability to change the way they think stops at the onset of adulthood. It was believed that the only type of change that an adult can expect to experience is *technical* change. They cannot change the *way* they learn or the *way* they perceive the world. Kegan's research seriously challenges this understanding of human development.

Kegan discovered two more orders of consciousness through which humans can move *as adults*. There is an important distinction between the first three orders and the last two orders. The first three orders evolve naturally in the neuro-typical child, and most neuro-typical humans begin adulthood functioning at a third order of consciousness. Unlike child development, however, not every adult will automatically progress to fourth and fifth order consciousness.

The following is a brief description of third, fourth, and fifth order consciousness. Kegan uses historical periods in Western history as a metaphor to describe these orders:
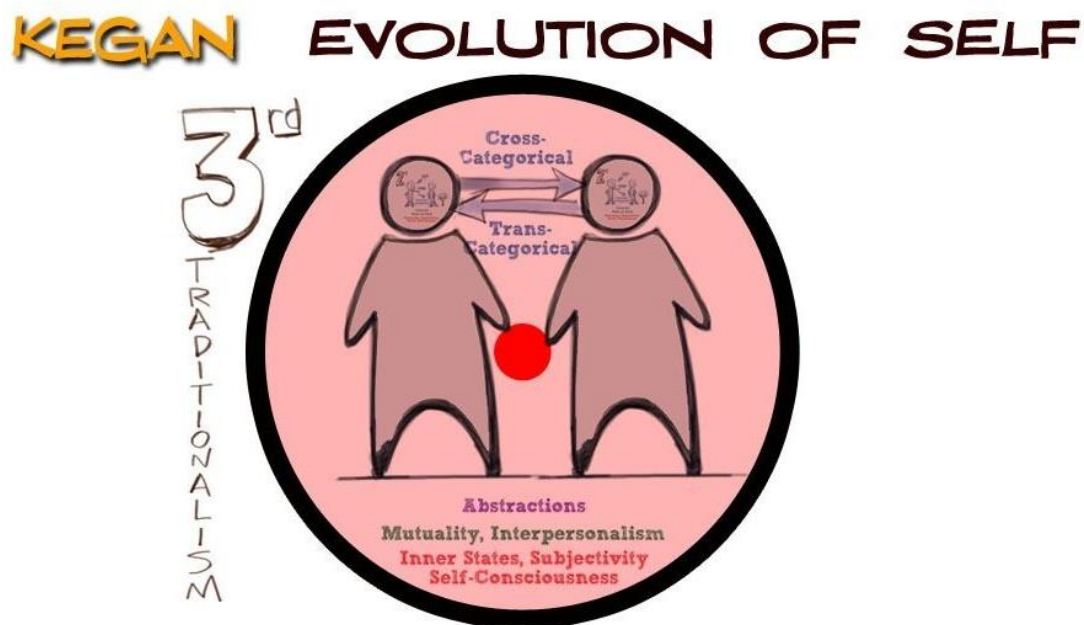
Figure 6. Third-Order Consciousness

Third Order. Kegan describes the third-order consciousness as *traditionalism*. It is like the time in medieval Europe when the average citizen was born, lived, and died within the same village. Each person knew his or her place in society and knew the rules of that society. The world was comprised of "right" and "wrong" and each person had the choice to either comply with society or to rebel against it. The distinctive feature of this order of consciousness is that the rules of society are the filter through which the individual perceives and makes meaning out of all reality. There are no other societal systems from which to choose, there is only "the way things are." The person operating from third-order consciousness views all other people through his or her own filter and judges them according to that system. It is important to note that this judgment is not born out of bigotry, but out of the intrinsic belief that there is actually only one way to view the world.
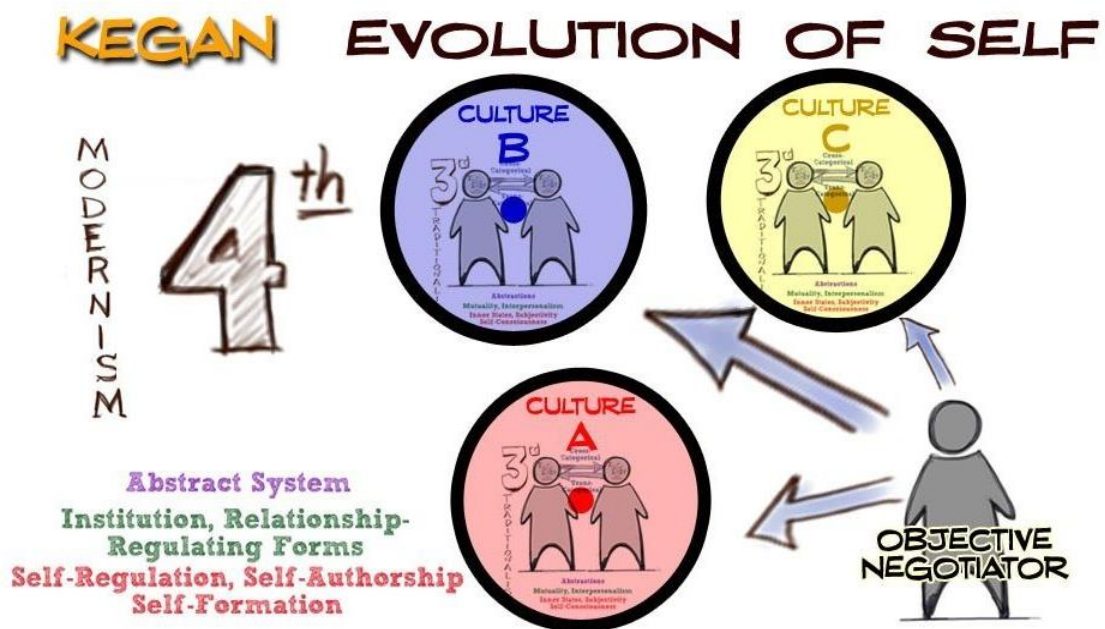
Figure 7. Fourth-Order Consciousness

Fourth Order. Kegan uses the *modern era* to describe fourth-order

consciousness. The twentieth century has brought the modern person into constant

contact with multiple cultures and a never-ending stream of data. This barrage of data has

caused us, in the modern era, to feel "In Over Our Heads"[20] and unable to cope with

competing cultural perspectives and the relationships which are constituted by those

competing cultural dynamics. The person in third-order consciousness, when faced with

another cultural system different from her own, naturally creates *us* and *them* boundaries,

declaring her *us* to be the correct way of perceiving the world and the other's *them* to be

wrong. These harsh boundaries have contributed to violence and bloodshed throughout

---

[20] Robert Kegan, *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

the centuries of cultural interaction. The individual who evolves into fourth-order

consciousness transcends the third-order filter and perceives that her system is one

system among many. She then becomes an objective observer of systems. She is a free

agent in the world, able to negotiate between systems, voluntarily interacting and valuing

other systems. This consciousness allows an individual to pursue peaceful transactions

with an "other" and to manage modern, plural, realities.
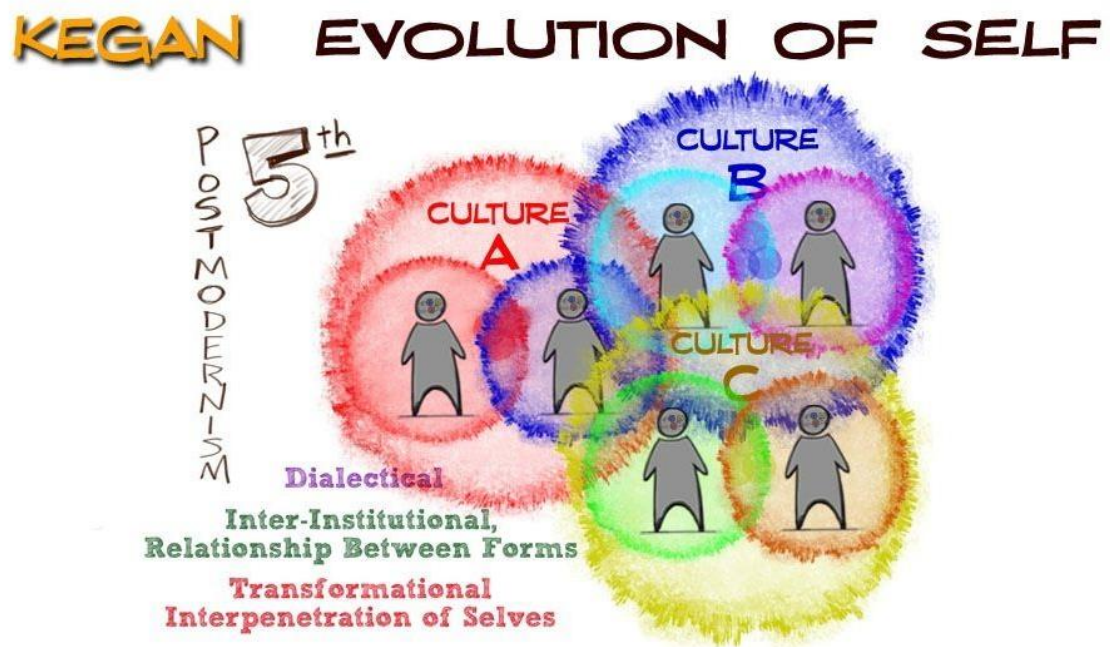
Figure 8. Fifth-Order Consciousness

Fifth Order. Kegan uses the emergence of Western culture into the *postmodern*

era as a way to describe fifth-order consciousness as it emerges from fourth-order

thinking. There is a blessing and a curse in fourth-order consciousness. The blessing is

that an individual is able to negotiate peaceful transactions between multiple systems.

The curse, however, is that an individual cannot see beyond isolation, atomism, a

monadist perspective on the world, where while it is possible to observe that there are multiple systems, it is not yet possible to see how they interpenetrate and "make each other up." This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and nihilism.

Fourth-order consciousness has inherent flaws. First of all, it is impossible for an individual to stand outside of her own system and observe it objectively. She is part of the system, and her part of the system is the lens through which she observes. Objectivity is a myth and—in Gadamerian terms—we all bring our own horizon to the exchange.[21] Secondly, not only is it impossible for the individual to stand outside her own system, it is also impossible to be completely whole as an atomistic monad. Fifth-order consciousness, in contrast to this isolationist tendency, begins to realize that the Other is not a completely separate monad with whom one can have voluntary interchange, but, rather, the relationship with the Other is necessary for constituting ones own self. All things in the universe are interwoven and mutually constitutive.[22] In other words, we need each other in order to survive. Kegan argues that it is only when humans reach fifth-order consciousness that we can begin to understand that there are viable, peaceful alternatives to violent conflicts when negotiating significant political and ideological differences between individuals and cultures. These peaceful alternatives to violence will be more likely to lead to the mutual survival of the species than the more combative tendencies of third and fourth-order thinkers.

---

[21] See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. I will explore this further in the next chapter.

[22] This is, in my opinion, a psychological expression of *relational ontology* that I will explore in chapter three.

Kegan argues that human beings can actually learn and develop, with support, into fourth and fifth-order consciousness.[23] He has discovered that, through reflective personal and communal critique, an individual can move past blind spots and begin to practice thinking differently, thus perceiving reality from a fourth or fifth order consciousness.

Kegan's theory is an important framework for the DITB project for three reasons. First, I would argue that Kegan's theory describes *relational ontology* and provides helpful language to support my critique of *substance ontology*.[24] His proposal that human being is the activity of making meaning in community aptly describes the social/relational/entangled Trinitarian essence of life that I will explore in the next chapter.

The second reason Kegan's theory is important for the DITB process has to do with *spiritual formation*. The process of moving from one order of consciousness to the next is a form of self-transcendence that correlates with Schneider's definition of spirituality and the purpose for spiritual formation that I will introduce in the next section.[25] Kegan suggests that, with proper support from a caring community, the

---

[23] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, Leadership for the Common Good (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

[24] Western Christianity has been dominated by the Platonic ideal of substance ontology, in which all things can be reduced to a simple, perfect form that has a fundamentally distinct substance from that which is different from it. e.g. human substance is distinct from animal substance which is distinct from divine substance. This creates an ontological gap between things that may or may not be passable. Relational ontology, on the other hand, begins with the relationality of all things as constitutive of individual particulates. I will expound upon this point in the next chapter.

[25] Here I understand the self to be the filter through which the individual makes meaning in any particular order. The filter is a socially constructed self that orders experiential data. It may be helpful—although beyond the scope of this paper—to discuss the relationship between the social *me* and the *I* that George Herbert Mead suggests. When the *I* becomes aware of the *me*—the filter of the order in which the self is operating—it can, through supportive, reflective, communicative action, transcend that self and

individual can overcome her immunity to change and progress to the next order of consciousness. Self-transcendence does not happen automatically and must begin with a form of "conversion" or "awareness" experience that is followed by intentionality.[26] This process is in step with the *Vision*, *Intention*, and *Means* of Dallas Willard that I will also introduce in the next section.

Kegan's discussion of the fifth-order of consciousness also offers practical reasons why it is necessary for the suburban Christian to be concerned with spiritual formation. Kegan argues that, unless more humans move into fifth-order consciousness, our current human condition of escalating violence at a global level will lead to self-annihilation. This motivation for spiritual formation may be more accessible to the typical suburbanite than mere personal piety, or the fear of Hell and the hope for Heaven in the afterlife.

The third reason Kegan's theory is important for the DITB project has to do with the purpose of the missional church. Kegan argues that the activity of human being is meaning-making. We are not empty vessels that come to church to be filled with knowledge from the teacher-centered ministry of the Word. We are not isolated, atomistic individual substances that randomly float through space in voluntary transactions. We are

---

become a "new self" that has a broader perspective. This is, I would suggest, spiritual formation. See George Herbert Mead and Charles W. Morris, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press, 1934).

[26] Walter Conn also bases his definition of conversion upon human developmental models. He says, "In turning life and love upside down, however, religious conversion does not destroy the authentic moral autonomy of personal responsibility. Indeed, the criterion of both religious conversion and the development of personal autonomy is self-transcendence. Justice, universalizing faith, generativity, and interindividual intimacy all insist on mutuality as the norm of authentic autonomy. Only the inauthentic notions of absolute autonomy and self-fulfillment are contradicted by the self-transcending love and surrender of religious conversion. Christian religious conversion is not the antithesis but the completion of personal development toward self-transcending autonomy." Walter E. Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 268.

humans-beings-making-meaning-together.[27] I would suggest that the missional leader is called to structure spaces in which humans can be together to be human. The act of engaging the research team in participatory, communicative action demonstrated the missional church's vocation to invite people into being fully human as we make sense out of the Trinitarian life together.

Stephen Brookfield and Critical Social Theory

Stephen Brookfield's pedagogical theories also form an important framework for the DITB project, and help to explain why I structured the project as a participatory action research team. Brookfield asserts that the facilitation of adult learning is not the smooth voyage along a storm-free river of self-actualization, but is a "transactional drama in which personalities, philosophies, and priorities of the facilitators and the participants interact continuously to influence the nature, direction, and form" of the learning process.[28] Brookfield critiques previous attempts at *andragogy*,[29] citing that it is based upon modernist notions of top-down models of learning. These older models are what Paulo Freire calls *banking* models in which the student is seen as an empty vessel and the

---

[27] Cf. Groome's *agent-subjects-in-relation*. Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 9.

[28] Stephen Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices*, 1st ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986), vii-viii.

[29] A term made popular by Malcolm Knowles. See Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 7th ed. (Boston: Elsevier, 2011).

teacher pours objective knowledge into the bank of the student's open mind.[30] The

andragogy model, Brookfield contends, supports oppressive systems that perpetuate the

hegemony of Imperial regimes.

Brookfield's pedagogical theory draws from four theoretical streams: *ideology*

critique, *psychoanalysis* and *psychotherapy*, *analytic philosophy* and *logic*, and

pragmatist constructivism. This fusion, which he calls *critical pragmatism*,

> is one that accepts the essential accuracy and usefulness of the reading of society
> embedded within ideology critique. It also allies itself with the struggle to create a
> world in which one's race, class, and gender do not frame the limits within which
> one can experience life. However, it is also skeptical of any claims to
> foundationalism or essentialism, that is, to the belief that there is one, and only
> one, way to conceive of and create such a society.[31]

He believes that adult learning should empower the student to become critically

reflective of the dominant culture, thus able to communicatively construct alternate

modes of being and doing that will strive for equity and justice. The adult learner brings

as much to the learning environment as the instructor. It is the instructor's job to structure

and structure environments in which the students can engage in communicative

rationality.

Brookfield's pedagogical methodologies are especially important for the

suburban context in which the DITB project took place. This may seem ironic at first,

since most of the theoretical underpinnings of his theory come from Marxist and/or

liberation-of-the-oppressed perspectives. His theory is important for this research on two

---

[30] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000). See also the previous discussion of Parker Palmer's model of teacher-centered vs. subject-centered learning. Figures 3 and 4.

[31] Stephen Brookfield, *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 16-17.

levels. First, the people in the RT are situated within the privileged, white, suburban class that benefits directly from capitalism. There is an intrinsic blindness to this social position that needs a pedagogical methodology that will not perpetuate the hegemony, but will unmask it as a destructive power. Brookfield says that,

> Critical teaching begins with developing students' powers of critical thinking so that they can critique the interlocking systems of oppression embedded in contemporary society. Informed by a critical theory perspective, students learn to see that capitalism, bureaucratic rationality, disciplinary power, automaton conformity, one-dimensional thought, and repressive tolerance all combine to exert a powerful ideological sway aimed to ensure the current system stays intact. Critical thinking in this vein is the educational implementation of ideology critique; the deliberate attempt to penetrate the ideological obfuscation that ensures that massive social inequality is accepted by the majority as the natural state of affairs. Adults who learn to conduct this kind of critique are exercising true reason, that is, reason applied to asking universal questions about how we should live.[32]

Is this not the same question that the missional leader desires to lead the church into asking? As Christians, we pray each week that God's kingdom may come, that God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. I invited the RT to come together to dream new dreams regarding spiritual formation in the suburbs. It was my desire to echo the questions that Brookfield suggests are the purpose of his theory:

> What kind of societal organization will help people treat each other fairly and compassionately? How can we redesign work so that it encourages the expression of human creativity?[33]

The second reason Brookfield's theory is important for the DITB project is his emphasis and implementation of *praxis*.

> [his pedagogical theory] centers on the need for educational activity to engage the learner in a continuous and alternating process of investigation and exploration, followed by action grounded in this exploration, followed by reflection on this

---

[32] Ibid., 350.

[33] Ibid.

action, followed by further investigation and exploration, followed by further action, and so on.[34]

The praxis cycle is at the heart of participatory action research. I structured the DITB project around the cycle, both at the macro and micro level. The macro level was organized around three phases. The first phase drew the RT together to interact, challenge their previous thinking, collaborate new ideas, and devise a plan of action. The second phase dispersed the team into the field to act out their plans. The third phase regrouped the team to make meaning out of the action. The desire was that this third phase would launch the team into further action, beyond the end of the project, based upon the reflective process. This macro process reflected the reflection-action-reflection praxis cycle.

The micro level also supported the praxis cycle. Each team session allowed space for communicative action in the form of structured dialogue in multiple forms; dyads, triads, and small groups; quiet space for personal journaling; and large group discussion. Furthermore, the RT was encouraged to interact on the website discussion forum throughout the full course of the project. The action and communicative reflection created the tension necessary for the praxis Brookfield suggests.

Mary Hess, Participatory Action Research, and Digital Media

Mary Hess's work with digital media and religious education provides a strong framework for both the use of digital media and the use of participatory action research methodology in the DITB research project. Digital media played a big part in the DITB

---

[34] Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices*, 15-16.

project. First, I established a private online discussion forum for the RT to interact with

each other at any time. Second, I created animated videos to communicate the initial

information regarding the social Trinity. I showed the videos to the RT during session

three, but the videos were also posted on YouTube and on the project website prior to the

meeting.[35] This allowed the RT unlimited access to the videos. Third, the RT members

were invited to create personal journals throughout the course of the project and either

post them to the discussion forum or email them directly to me. Finally, I continually

blogged about my ongoing research and invited the RT to interact with the blog via

comments, discussion forums, and/or personal emails.[36]

Hess argues that creating space for interactive digital media,[37] like I described

above, is reflective of the Trinitarian relationality that I have argued for in this project.[38]

Hess also argues that digital technologies help religious educators to: (1) provide a richer,

---

[35] View the videos at the *Deep in the Burbs* website, "The Trinity Frame." http://www.deepintheburbs.com/theoretical-frames/trinity/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

[36] It is interesting to note how one particular theological concept grew through the communicative action of blogging. I began the project by presenting the *social* Trinity. That was the language used for the animations that I created at the beginning of the project. However, as I progressed with my research I grew less comfortable with the language of *social* Trinity and more aligned with the language of *relational* Trinity or the *entangled* Trinity. I did not necessarily insert this shift into the RT sessions, but I wrote freely about it on the blog. Several of the RT members engaged me in constructive—and sometimes resistant— dialogue around this new language. It became evident in the final team sessions that the language of *entangled* Trinity had woven its way into the RT. See the commentary on Phil's story in chapter seven.

[37] I make an important distinctive in this statement: *interactive* digital media. Not all media is conducive to the type of collaborative space that Hess is lauding. There has been a dramatic shift in media technology during the twentieth century. Print, radio, and television are media that are more like the trucking industry that ships information one direction. This type of media has been used to perpetuate the teacher-centered model of learning. Hess argues that the interactive digital media of the Internet creates the communicative spaces needed for subject-centered learning, and, I would argue, for Trinitarian praxis. See Mary E. Hess, "Pedagogy and Theology in Cyberspace: All That We Cant Leave Behind," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002); Peter G. Horsfield, Mary E. Hess, and Adán M. Medrano, eds., *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

[38] Mary E. Hess, "What Difference Does It Make? E-Learning and Faith Community," *Word & World* 30, no. 3 (2010): 284. See also Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind*.

more multiply intelligent environment within which to learn; (2) provide more opportunities for real collaboration; (3) give pastoral leaders a better angle of vision on the challenges their congregations are facing and the specific assumptions with which they enter learning; (4) provide better access to primary-source materials, and (5) overcome constraints of geography and time.[39]

Hess has also provided the framework for why participatory action research was not simply a stylistic choice on my part for pursuing this academic project, but was inherently necessary for the proper pursuit of the question. Hess argues that all knowledge is situated, contextual, and communicatively constructed knowledge, and therefore, any attempt to research a question within the realm of religious education must be pursued within the context of a contextually situated people.[40] The purpose of this kind of research project is to "re" "search;" to search again and reexamine previously held beliefs and to collaboratively re-construct new meaning through the process of the communicative action that can best be structured within a participatory action research project.[41]

The DITB research question seeks to explore the impact of the social Trinity within suburban ELCA congregations. This question can only be asked and answered by suburban ELCA people. Some might argue that the limited scope of this project renders its findings unhelpful for the general use of the church at large. Hess argues that such

---

[39] Hess, "What Difference Does It Make? E-Learning and Faith Community," 289.

[40] See my discussion of postfoundationalism in chapter three.

[41] Mary E. Hess, "Collaborating with People to Study "the Popular": Implementing Participatory Action Research Strategies in Religious Education," *Religious Education* 96, no. 3 (2001): 284.

positivist notions of knowledge are not the only—and perhaps not even the best—way to

describe the universe. She further argues—drawing from feminist theology—that

> research methods that refused to 'own their partiality' would be actively
> discouraged. The pursuit of universal truths would become the pursuit of highly
> specific truths that yet have the ability to speak to myriad difference…It is
> precisely this kind of research, that actively owns its commitments and is
> explicitly situated within a specific community, that I believe is most useful for
> religious educators.[42]

The DITB project explored the suburban ELCA congregation. The majority of

people in the suburban context have access to the internet and various interactive digital

media.[43] A research project within the context of religious education for the purpose of

the missional church necessitates a space that promotes communicative rationality. Given

these facts, it was an obvious choice to structure the project as a participatory action

research project.

<center>Spirituality and Spiritual Formation: Defining Terms</center>

The DITB project is an exercise both about and of spiritual formation. It is

necessary, therefore, to clearly define this term. What is spiritual formation, and more

precisely, how do I use this term in the context of this research? In order to answer that

question, I must briefly address the relationship between the terms *spiritual formation*

and *spirituality*. Many people today are more comfortable with the term *spirituality*,

---

[42] Ibid., 279.

[43] It is important to note that, while most suburban citizens in the context of this project have access to interactive digital media, not all suburbanites embrace digital media. Some of the RT members were discouraged and intimidated by the use of digital media. I will discuss this further in the final chapter. Further, it is important to note the digital divide that exists between the socio-economic classes. Not everyone in society has free access to digital media. Therefore, digital media cannot be understood as the ultimate answer to democratic, emancipatory pedagogy. It is, within particular contexts, emancipatory and communicative, however, and must be embraced as such by religious educators.

because it has broader application than Christianity or any form of organized religion. I prefer the term *spiritual formation* because it implies movement and change. This is, admittedly, a personal preference and I will use the terms interchangeably throughout this paper.[44]

Schneiders makes a distinction between the definition of spirituality and the definition of Christian spirituality. Spirituality, she says, is "the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."[45] Christian spirituality "as an academic discipline is an attempt to realize, by bringing serious and personally transforming study to bear on the ultimate human value of union with God, what is arguably the most cited text in the Christian canon, Jesus' promise, 'if you remain in my word you will become my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free' (Jn. 8:31-33)."[46] She states that "the primary aim of the discipline of spirituality...is to understand the phenomena of the Christian spiritual life as experience...it is a function of interpretation (hermeneutics)."[47]

---

[44] I agree with Wuthnow that the spirituality needed today is beyond the sedimentary spirituality of *dwelling* common in the 1950s, and more grounded than the spirituality of *seeking* common in the 1960s-90s. Wuthnow proposes a *practiced* spirituality, akin to the Exercises of Ignatius Loyola or the Rules of Benedict. Some, in the Lutheran tradition, have resisted the term *spiritual formation* because it denotes a theology of glory or a works-based righteousness. I disagree. Yes, God has given us the gift of salvation and for this there is nothing we can do. However, God has also called us into relationship with God and others. All relationships require work. We are God's children and our relationship with God is one of ongoing development, not for earning love or grace, but for growing within the gift of grace as we relate to the others around us. See Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[45] Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," 6.

[46] Ibid., 22.

[47] Schneiders, "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality," 57.

Schneiders' perspective on spirituality gives further justification for the use of

participatory action research and constructivist methodologies. The act of the research

itself was a form of spiritual formation as the RT interacted with the social Trinity, each

other, and the neighbor.

Another important aspect of spirituality that frames this research is the idea that

spirituality is inherently a public practice, not only a private one. Philip Sheldrake is a

key voice in this perspective.[48] He says

> the mystical-contemplative dimension of spirituality—often described in terms of
> interiority—is a vital ingredient in our engagement with transformative practice in
> the outer, public world. Unfortunately, however, Western culture remains deeply
> polarized. The private sphere (inwardness, family, and close friends) is privileged
> as the backstage where the individual is truly him/herself, relaxing unobserved
> before putting on various personae which the self needs in order to play out
> different roles on the stage of social life. But, from a Christian point of view, is
> living in public a matter of a role that it is possible to shed or opt not to play…
> Human existence and Christian discipleship inherently embody a common task.
> "The public" is thus better thought of as a dimension of identity, an aspect of the
> individual self.[49]

Schneiders' and Sheldrakes' definition create an important focus for the issues to

which we must attend in this research project. Schneiders, in an attempt to create the

broadest definition of spirituality possible, indicates that spirituality is:[50]

---

[48] Philip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality*, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007); Philip Sheldrake, *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010); Philip Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Social Change: Rebuilding the Human City," *Spiritus* 9, no. 2 (2009); Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998); Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality*; Philip Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

[49] Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," 289.

[50] Schneiders, "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," 6.

A. Conscious involvement: Let us call this *intentionality*. Spirituality requires doing something. The individual has some agency.

B. Life-integration through self-transcendence: Let us call this the *means*. There is a process in which (1) all of life takes on integrated meaning—it has purpose, and (2) the means to get there is to get beyond one's self.

C. Toward the ultimate value one perceives: Let us call this *vision*. Spirituality requires a goal—a *telos*—that compels the individual to take action and move toward self-transcendence.[51]

These categories are like empty boxes allowing each individual, operating from his or her own lifeworld, to fill in the blanks. What unifies all spiritualities is that they have these boxes, but what distinguishes them is what they place inside the boxes.

This system correlates with Dallas Willard's proposal of VIM—*Vision*, *Intention*, *Means*.[52] I mention Dallas Willard in this context for the following reasons. First, it is my observation that there are two camps in the Spiritual Formation/Spirituality conversation in the academy today. The line seems to be drawn along similar contours of the classic fault line between Ecumenical Christians and Evangelical Christians that has characterized Western theology in the twentieth century.[53] Schneiders and Sheldrake represent the former and Willard and Foster[54] represent the latter. Second, Dallas Willard

---

[51] Schwartz provides an excellent discussion of *telos* as it relates to practical wisdom—which I associate with spirituality. Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom the Right Way to Do the Right Thing* (New York: Simon & Schuster Audio,), sound recording

[52] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 85-91.

[53] We can also label this the classic theologically *liberal* vs. *conservative* schism.

[54] See Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998); Richard J. Foster, "Spiritual Formation Agenda: Richard

was a significant part of my spiritual formation.[55] Third, I believe an important move for

the future of the missional church is for these two camps to begin cross-pollinating with

more frequency.[56] Fourth, I believe that one of the primary reasons for this division is the

ongoing debate between *transcendence* and *immanence*.[57]

The fourth point mentioned above is worth parsing out further. It gets at the heart

of what I am trying to discern through this research project. It is my assumption that the

model of the Trinity an individual operates within—either the *Transcendent Immanent*

Trinity or the *Immanent Economic Trinity*—is related to how she "fills in the blanks" of

Schneiders' boxes.

Allow me to draw a caricature of each lifeworld in order to demonstrate the

differences. On the one hand, the typical evangelical Christian functions within the

lifeworld of dualistic, substance ontology—the *Transcendent Immanent Trinity*. This

informs the *Vision*, *Intention*, and *Means* accordingly. The *vision* is to escape the physical

world so that the individual might be united with God in Heaven. The *intention* rests

solely on personal agency, fueled by radical individualism. The *means*, and definition of

self-transcendence, is to (a) pray to accept Jesus as Savior (this is dying to self), and (b)

work diligently to practice spiritual disciplines to promote personal holiness (read as

separateness from the fallen world) and to be empowered to share the Gospel with others

---

Foster Shares His Three Priorities for the Next 30 Years," *Christianity Today* 53, no. 1 (2009); Richard J. Foster and Julia L. Roller, *A Year with God: Living out the Spiritual Disciplines*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009).

[55] See appendix A.

[56] There is hopeful evidence of this happening in the membership of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality which is a sub-set of the American Academy of Religion.

[57] I will discuss this in the next chapter.

so that they might also escape the physical world. Self-Transcendence, then, is the ultimate, substantive transcendence to be with God in Heaven when you die, or when Jesus returns, whichever comes first.

On the other hand, the typical ecumenical Christian functions within the *immanence* lifeworld, in which there is only one substance—the physical universe—of which God is indistinguishable—the *Immanent Economic Trinity*. The vision is to either (a) bring about peace on earth through the eradication of war, poverty, hunger, and disease, or, (b) to find inner peace, tranquility, and to find resonance with the energy of the universe (God). The *intention* is pure individual agency. The *means* is through either (a) community participation—understanding that community is the voluntary association of individuals—getting everyone involved to work together toward the common good, or (b) spiritual practices like meditation and yoga that are intended to bring the physical body into alignment with the universe (God). The self-transcendence of the former is to put the good of the many over the good of the self. The self-transcendence of the latter is to release the illusion of the false-self—Ego—and connect to the true self that is one with the universe (God).[58]

These two Christian Spiritualities are radically different and form a seemingly irreconcilable duality. Ironically, they exist as two sides of the same modern dogma. They exist because of the dualisms prevalent in modernity—the Platonic dualism that divides God from creation, the Cartesian dualism that divides observer from object and

---

[58] The topic of self-transcendence is much more nuanced than the polarities that I am presenting in this argument, of course. I have engaged in the discussion of this apparent dichotomy to (a) further explore the dichotomies of my own lived experience between the *ecumenical* and *evangelical* perspectives, and (b) further demonstrate how the social Trinity provides an alternative "third way" that brings both extremes into constructive dialogue. For more on self-transcendence, see Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*.

spawns rationalism, and the Kantian dualism that divides perceiver from object, and spawns subjectivism. It is my proposal that a postfoundational theology—which is formed within the social Trinity—provides a third way that can reconcile these divergent Christian Spiritualities and invite the body of Christ to imagine new rhythms of spiritual formation that reform the church in a missional imagination to be prophetic public companions witnessing to the hope of God's preferred and promised future. It is my further proposition that both Schneiders/Sheldrake—on the ecumenical side—and Willard—on the Evangelical side—are already making those moves through a phenomenological understanding of knowledge and communicative action.[59]

<div align="center">Peter Block and the Structure of Community</div>

Block offers practical steps to create a truly collaborative space for participatory action research. He says,

> The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem solving, fear, and retribution. A new context acknowledges that we have all the capacity, expertise, and resources that an alternative future requires. Communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness. The conversations that build relatedness most often occur through associational life, where citizens show up by choice, and rarely in the context of system life, where citizens show up out of obligation. The small group is the unit of transformation and the container for the experience of belonging. Conversations that focus on stories about the past become a limitation to community; ones that are teaching parables and focus on the future restore community.[60]

---

[59] I am deeply indebted to Gary Black for helping me draw these lines of connection between Willard and phenomenology. Gary Black, *The Theology of Dallas Willard: Discovering Protoevangelical Faith* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

[60] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), loc. 504.

Block's methodology is an aggregate of many communicative practices. The basic methodology is similar to Palmer's in that it invites the facilitator to design a physical space—usually a room—that is inviting, egalitarian, and "holds" a space for communicative practice. There is life-promoting art on the walls, good music playing in the background, locally-produced food on the table, and the chairs are set in a circle. The facilitator presents provocative and inviting questions and leads the group through a three-step process. First, the individuals are invited to reflect on their own answer to the question and possibly write and answer down or create some form of artifact to represent their idea. Second, the individuals are randomly grouped into triads and invited to share each of their individual ideas and work together to synthesize their ideas into one statement. Third, the triads are randomly connected to one other triad, forming a group of six. This group listens to both triad statements and works together to synthesize the two statements into one. Finally, the groups gather together as one large group and the statements produced by the group of six are presented to the large group, followed by a large group discussion.

This methodology allows for maximum individual participation in the whole process. Each voice has a chance to be heard and know that it has contributed to the final outcome of the larger group. This methodology is similar to and draws from other organizational practices similar to and including *The Art of Hosting*.[61] This methodology allowed my research to take on real legs as it empowered the RT to interact in communicative action.

---

[61] The Art of Hosting, http://www.artofhosting.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Hostinginahurryversion1.5ChrisC.pdf (accessed July 27, 2014)

In his introduction, Block acknowledges the fragmentation, isolation, and overall absence of belonging in our world today. He believes that it is the purpose of community to overcome this fragmentation. This sort of community "offers the promise of belonging and calls for us to acknowledge our interdependence. To belong is to act as an investor, owner, and creator of this place. To be welcome, even if we are strangers. As if we came to the right place and are affirmed by that choice."[62] The distinct questions facing communities today are: How will we, together, create a future that is different from our past? How will we create a community where all citizens are connected to one another and know that their safety and success is dependent on the success of others? These questions get at the heart of the suburban situation in which our research project finds itself.

The Suburban Frame

The DITB research question has two basic parts. First, it asks the spiritual formation/adult education question: *How might an increased awareness of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation?* This part of the question has no particular demographic focus to it. It could be asked of anyone, anywhere. I have addressed my approach to this half of the question in the *Spiritual Formation* frame.

Now we must address the second half of the question: *How might this look in suburban ELCA congregations?* This phrase begs the question: *Why the suburban ELCA?* I have argued that knowledge is communally constructed. Further, I will argue in chapter three that a reasonably adequate Christian theology is done in, with, under,

---

[62] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 3.

against, and for the local congregation. Therefore, in order to address the research

question, it was necessary to engage a particular group of people from within particular

congregations within a particular geographical setting. I have also stated, in chapter one,

that I am a pastor in a suburban ELCA congregation, and have lived my entire life in the

suburban context. I chose this context because it is important to me to learn more about

the people within my own context so that I might be able to provide better leadership in

missional spiritual formation. I acknowledge that the research done in this project was

specific to the nineteen members of the RT. However, I will argue again, with Mary

Hess, that it is my hope that "the pursuit of universal truths would become the pursuit of

highly specific truths that yet have the ability to speak to myriad difference."[63] Therefore,

we must situate the RT within its particular socio-geographical location.

The DITB project is the story of nineteen people from three suburban ELCA

congregations in the upper Midwest United States.[64] Each individual member of the RT

has his or her own story and self-identity that has been shaped by the stories and

experiences that have preceded him or her in time. Each team member's story and self-

identity was situated within a particular congregation at the time of research. Those

particular congregations are living organisms that have their own particular self-identity

---

[63] Hess, "Collaborating with People to Study "the Popular": Implementing Participatory Action Research Strategies in Religious Education," 279.

[64] I have a commitment to the RT to maintain anonymity. Therefore, I have used pseudonyms for each team member and for each congregation. However, maintaining anonymity becomes difficult at this point in the narration, because the particular cities and congregations have unique locations and histories. I will attempt to be specific and vague at the same time. I will describe specific historical and geographical markers, but will not name specific people or places. I am fully aware that a moderately skilled investigator could easily discover the specific locations and names of the cities and congregations I am about to describe. However, I do not believe the discovery of the actual names and locations will jeopardize the anonymity of the RT members.

that has been shaped by its preceding stories and is currently being shaped by the

communicative action of the constituent members. Each particular congregation

represented on the team is similar to the others in that they each share in the larger story

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). While the ELCA affiliation

creates similarities among the three congregations, each of them differ from the others in

three significant ways. First, each congregation is situated in a particular municipality

that also has a self-identity that is shaped by its preceding stories and the current

communicative action of its citizens and organizations. Second, each congregation has a

very different set of leadership personalities and styles, both currently and historically.

Third, each congregation has slightly different responses and perspectives regarding

some of the significant cultural shifts experienced in the ELCA.[65]

The emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual member of the RT, the

congregations, and the municipalities raises an interesting question: Is it possible to

discuss a generalized framework regarding the suburbs? Is there such a thing a being

suburban, and if there is, how is it different than being *urban* or *rural*? More importantly,

do these questions have any relevance to the research question itself?

I must make an important point regarding the suburban context. There is no such

thing as "The Suburbs." The classification of *suburb* describes a municipality that is

adjacent to another municipality that surrounds and is adjacent to a large urban center. No

---

[65] I am referring specifically, but not exclusively, to the decisions on human sexuality in the ELCA. The ELCA decision in 2009 to allow homosexual clergy created a disturbance within the denomination that precipitated the exodus of some large congregations in the vicinity of the three congregations participating in the DITB project. Each congregation had its own experience of internal division. Most recently, the state legislature legalized same-sex marriage, thus placing every ELCA congregation with the choice to address the issue of performing same-sex marriages or not. Each DITB congregation has addressed the topic differently. I raise this issue because it does factor into the story of the DITB RT. This will be explained in chapter five.

two suburbs are exactly the same. Some are populated by the working poor; others by the extremely wealthy. Some suburbs are densely populated, racially diverse, and comprised of various forms of architecture and zoning. Other suburbs are sparsely populated, racially homogenous, and dominated by single-family residences. Each municipality has its own story and its own public DNA.

Given the particularities of the suburban context, I will not begin this section with generalized theories regarding suburban studies and the history of the ELCA. Instead, I will structure this section with the following progression. First, I will paint a portrait of each congregation represented on the RT by setting it within the context of its particular city. Second, I will address issues that may be considered universally suburban as they pertain to the particular congregations on the RT, and more importantly, to the specific question the team addressed. Finally, I will similarly address issues regarding the ELCA within the suburban context as it pertains to the RT and its endeavors.

The Story of Three Congregations

Calvary Lutheran Church

Calvary Lutheran Church was once the flagship congregation for this particular region of the metropolitan era. It was established in the county seat in the early 1900s as the first Lutheran church in the area. This was significant because the majority of European settlers in this area were Scandinavian and Lutheran. Calvary comes from a Norwegian Lutheran tradition and provided all the religious services that the first settlers expected in that small town, county seat context.

The city of which Calvary is a part has experienced the most dramatic changes of all three cities involved in the DITB project. The town sits at the conjunction of two

major rivers. This conjunction has served significant purposes for various civilizations over the centuries. It was the spot at which two warring native nations found peace. The tribes used the rivers to mark their territories and ceased their fighting. Later, it served as a logical site for trading between French trappers and the native people. Once the Europeans began to settle in the area, the confluence of rivers made it a logical spot to construct a logging and mill industry. The logs were floated from two regions up state and brought together and milled in this town. People settled in this town and constructed brick buildings along a main street in the late 1800s. The main street was surrounded by a grid-system of streets and avenues full of turn-of-the-century homes. This town, built around a centralized grid system, is similar to the plan found in both the inner city of most urban centers and in small towns in the rural context. The town, and Calvary Lutheran within it, maintained an autonomous, centralized, thriving socio-economic eco-system until the late 1950s.

The large urban center, thirty miles to the southeast, expanded during the 1940s and 50s, and the expansion engulfed the county seat, and Calvary Lutheran, by the mid 1960s. Large housing developments sprung up around the downtown area and the population increased exponentially each year. Two significant things happened to Calvary Lutheran during the late 1960s. First, it became part of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), thus setting it on a trajectory to become part of the ELCA in the 1980s. Second, the bishop asked the church to plant a new church in the next township to the north. That congregation was Ascension Lutheran, the third congregation involved in the RT.

Calvary Lutheran, and its host town, have experienced great cultural shifts over the past forty years. The urban sprawl brought prosperity to the town in the 1970s and 1980s, but the sprawl continued to expand in the 1990s and the race for larger lots and larger homes moved the upwardly-mobile population further away from the town and the church. This most recent outward expansion brought a significant demographic shift to the population. The city has both aged and become more ethnically diverse in the last fifteen years. The high school is now populated mostly by students from the next suburb over that has younger families, larger homes, and more money. Currently, the town is finding a resurgence in its vitality by capitalizing on its historic downtown and small town nostalgia.

Calvary has also experienced a recent history of dysfunction and scandal within its leadership. This has created uneasiness among its congregation and a decline in attendance among the younger families. Even with the decline, it is a large congregation with thousands of members and very traditional worship services.

I connected with Calvary through the associate pastor who was leading adult spiritual formation. She allowed me to visit various adult forums in order to present the research project. Many people seemed interested, but only four women committed to the project. Each of these women were long-time members of Calvary and had experienced the dramatic cultural shifts in the congregation and the town that I have described.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church

Bethlehem Lutheran Church was established by the American Lutheran Church (ALC) in the township directly east of Calvary Lutheran in the 1940s. The original township formed around the construction of a dam that was contracted by the federal

government in the late 1800s. A small, temporary village was constructed to house the

construction workers. A clay brick factory was also established on this location at the

same time. Neither industry was large enough to establish a permanent downtown like the

county seat, yet enough people remained in the area following the completion of the dam

to establish a township. There is also a lake in this town that became a popular cabin

community to which the central city dwellers would travel during the 1940s and 1950s.

The post-World War II urban sprawl engulfed this township in the early 1960s and

continued to expand in various waves up through the 1990s.

This city provides an interesting historical timeline of architecture that runs south

to north. The southern neighborhoods contain homes built in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s and

would now be considered high-density, at-risk neighborhoods.[66] At the northern end of

the city the neighborhoods were built during the housing boom of the late 1980s and

early 1990s and are considered middle-class, bedroom-developing neighborhoods. The

neighborhoods between these extremes span the decades and the socio-economic strata

between them. There is also a strip of large homes and the upper middle-class and

wealthy population along the river that runs along the city's western border. This city

also exemplifies the decentralized urban sprawl in which the zoning laws have separated

housing, shopping, education, and industry into disparate areas, thus requiring automobile

transportation for its citizens to utilize these services.[67]

---

[66] Myron Orfield identifies six distinct types of suburban communities: *at-risk segregated*, *at-risk older*, *at-risk low density*, *bedroom-developing*, *affluent job centers*, and *very affluent job centers*. These six types represent one of the greatest challenges of suburbia: the socio-economic stratification of the suburban population. Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution Press; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1997), 31-48.

[67] See Craig Van Gelder, "Effects of Auto-Mobility on Church Life and Culture," *Word & World* 28, no. 3 (2008).

Bethlehem Lutheran is situated one-quarter mile from the city high school and middle school and directly across the street from the dominant Roman Catholic Church in the area. During the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s, a majority of people in this city identified with either Bethlehem Lutheran or the Catholic Church as their place of worship. These churches provided the religious services and were the center of the religious institution for thousands of families in this town. Many families in this city migrated to the emerging suburb directly north of Bethlehem, but maintained their membership and participation at Bethlehem. While the host city has experienced a significant demographic shift over the past fifteen years, the Bethlehem congregation has not.

I connected with Bethlehem through the associate pastor that led the Children, Youth, and Family ministry, as well as the pastoral care ministries. He advertised the DITB project in various church communications, allowed me to make a presentation to a men's group, and personally invited specific people to join the RT. Four men joined the team from Bethlehem. Each of them were over the age of 50, had children and/or grandchildren, and had been long-time members of Bethlehem. They had seen much change in the area and in the congregation.

Ascension Lutheran Church

Ascension Lutheran Church has an interesting location and relationship to its host city, the other congregations, and the DITB project. I mentioned earlier that Calvary Lutheran planted Ascension in the late 1960s. The town in which it was planted had, at that time, a different name, a population of eight hundred people, and consisted mostly of farms, sandpits, and trash dumps. The city has since changed its name and has vastly expanded in the last twenty years. Its growth has spread north and east of Ascension's

location. The city is now comprised of mostly single-family residences and has a

population of over 40,000 predominantly white, middle to upper-middle class people.

Unlike Calvary and Bethlehem Lutheran, Ascension is not located in the center of its host

city's political and social activity. Instead, Ascension sits on the extreme southwestern

corner of its host city at a major intersection on the corner of four cities. The intersection

has a traffic flow of 40,000 cars per day. This location allows the congregation to be

accessible to a population that needs its food pantry services, day care, and the various

civic groups that use its physical space. However, the congregation also owns land closer

to the heart of the city and has wrestled over whether it should relocate to this land, plant

a new multi-site location there, or stay where it is. Ascension continually asks how it can

be truly missional in its space when the relatively short physical distance of the new

location would be a quantum leap in social location. Is the congregation called to minister

to the homogenous population of the host city, or is it called to stay on the more diverse

crossroads?

Ascension is not only uniquely related to the host city and the other

congregations, it also has a unique relationship to the DITB research project. It is the

congregation in which I serve as pastor of spiritual formation. Therefore, it makes sense

that ten members of the RT are from Ascension. These members had a history with me as

a pastor and teacher for the four years preceding the research project. My journey from

the conservative evangelical world, through the emerging church movement, and into the

ELCA is one that has colored my teaching at Ascension. The RT members have

journeyed with me as I transitioned into the ELCA. We have been asking the missional

questions as a congregation for a while. Much of the conversation in the research project

is a continuation of our shared journey. This familiarity created both awkwardness and a unique opportunity for the RT to welcome the stranger as we connected with the four members from Calvary and the four members from Bethlehem.

All of these stories—both those of the individual team members and of the three congregations—came together to form the Deep in the Burbs Research Team. Our combined stories and the interactions between team members constructed a new framework in which each team member was able to address the research question from a new perspective. This experience of our shared stories has changed each of us and, thus will change the DNA of Calvary, Bethlehem, and Ascension Lutheran.

<div align="center">The Suburbs</div>

I have taken the time to frame the specific location of each congregation because, the particularity of this team is important for the knowledge we constructed as a result of our shared research. Now, however, it may serve us well to take the specific locations of these three congregations and bring them into conversation with some meta-theory regarding the suburban ELCA context.

We must, at this point, restate an important reality regarding the suburban context. There is no such thing as *The Suburbs*. The brief description of these three suburbs should be ample evidence to note their unique qualities. However, there are some unifying factors that are characteristic of these three suburbs that resonate with the literature regarding suburban studies.

All three suburbs fall predominantly within the bedroom-developing (B/D) classification. The typical B/D suburbanite (again, if that is fair to say) is a member of a middle-class family where both parents (many of whom are divorced and now living in

two-house, shared family scenarios) work and the children are involved in multiple school and civic activities. They strive to gain a sense of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and the bourgeois ideal.[68] They spend a great deal of time driving between work, school, and social activities.[69] They have access to cable television and streaming Internet. Most members of the household have a personal digital device of some sort and often resort to texting as the preferred mode of communication.[70]

The dominant vision of the B/D suburb is: ownership of a detached single-family house; automobile ownership; low-rise workplaces; small communities with strong local governments; environment free from signs of poverty.[71] The modern dogma of fact/value, public/private dichotomy is the dominant vision. The local church is, if thought of at all, one component of the fragmented private world. Living a good life and keeping the family safe is the highest priority. The sociological factors that drive the B/D vision are radical individualism, self-sufficiency, autonomy, personal liberty and freedom, consumerism, and the commodification of goods, services, and people.[72] The research

---

[68] Fishman argues that the country estate in near proximity to the city has been a symbol of status that was once only available to the nobility. The rising bourgeois class aspired to acquire such garden spots just outside the city since the late middle ages. Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).

[69] This is a significant result of the automobile and zoning issues. Families live so far away from school, places of worship, and entertainment, that it is unrealistic for children to walk to most places. This forces the children to either rely on an adult to drive them to every place they need to go, or sit at home and seek self-entertainment. The fact that children travel great distances from many directions to attend school and/or church diminishes the likelihood that school and/or church friends will live within walking distance. These physical limitations have fostered the radical individualism and isolation experienced by many suburban youth.

[70] The ubiquitous nature of digital technology will become a matter of discussion for the RT. One of the pertinent issues is whether digital technology helps to bridge the isolation gap or enhance the sense of disconnection among suburbanites.

[71] Allan D. Wallis, "Filling the Governance Gap," *National Civic Review* 87, no. 1 (1998): 103.

[72] The suburban lifestyle is a picture of the buffered self that Taylor describes. The drive for radical individual freedom and space is what drives most suburban communities. Garreau discusses how

will reveal how the research team members: (a) recognized these factors within themselves, and (b) allowed the social Trinity to invite them into a new imagination.

The ELCA

The three congregations represented in the RT are unique, but they are also similar in that they are members of the ELCA. Let us now turn our attention to the ELCA and explore how the ELCA context both contributes to and hinders the communicative space created in the DITB project and projected for the future of the missional church. One of the greatest dangers that the church faces in the twenty-first century is the increasing polarization between various factions along various ideological lines and the violence that often accompanies the disagreements between them. I have already noted, in the previous section, that the pedagogical shift toward communicative action is necessary for a missional imagination for spiritual formation in the local congregation that will find a third way between these dichotomies. I will further argue in the next section that the move toward a postfoundational theology will help the church hold the tension between these extremes and find a third way that leads to the peace of God in the world. Here, I will argue that the ELCA is well positioned to embrace the paradoxical tension held in the communicative space between polar extremes.

The ELCA is well situated to handle these paradoxical tensions because the ELCA *is* a paradox that dwells in paradox. It is, on the one hand, ideally situated to offer a holding space for the type of communicative, missional imagination that I am arguing

---

these values have formed Edge Cities that have redefined the meaning of community based upon these individualistic and utilitarian values. Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

in this paper. It is also, on the other hand, significantly hindered in its ability to be that holding space. Let us explore the two sides of this paradox.

On the one hand, the ELCA is well suited to hold paradoxical tensions and communicative space for the missional church. This is true in three ways. First, the ELCA is a political paradox. It is a merger of formerly disparate Lutheran traditions, thus its DNA holds these differences in living tension. The ELCA was officially formed in 1988 by the merger of three Lutheran churches: LCA, ALC, and AELC. Each of those churches was the result of similar mergers in the 1960s. Calvary and Bethlehem experienced both waves of merger, and carry within their DNA the various pre-merger identities. Ascension was born from the LCA and experienced the merger of the ELCA and carries within it those various pre-merger and pre-church plant identities.

Second, Lutheran theology is essentially paradoxical, in that part of its DNA is to hold theological dichotomies in tension; e.g. *sinner* and *saint*; the God who is *hidden* and *revealed*; the *Kingdom on the right* and the *Kingdom on the left*; to name just a few. Lutheran theology does not try to prove a definitive "right" answer that disproves the "wrong" answer. Rather, it acknowledges the mystery of the Triune God and seeks to hold these alleged dichotomies in living tension. That is one of the main reasons why I have been drawn to this tribe and why I have framed the DITB research project in the ELCA context. This is also why I will draw heavily from Keifert and Simpson when I discuss the theological frames in the next chapter, since they, as Lutheran theologians, seek to navigate these tensions. Lutheran theology, I believe, is wonderfully situated to be a holding space for people to encounter the Triune God in communicative action in the context of the local congregation.

Third, the ELCA is well situated to hold the communicative space for the missional church because it has a stated vision to be missional. I make this claim based upon the language of the ELCA constitution. Article 4.01 states, "The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world." Article 4.02 states that to "participate in God's mission, the church shall...carry out Christ's Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all…working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs…to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world."[73]

However, the ELCA, on the other side, has some inherent elements of its DNA that can sometimes inhibit the freedom needed to structure communicative spaces. Three theological issues challenge the ELCA congregation and hinder its ability to move more fully into the missional imagination. They are: *ecclesial identity*, the *sacraments*, and *polity*.

The first theological challenge is that of *ecclesial identity*. Lutheranism was born under Christendom in Europe. The church was the center of society in that world. Everyone born within the political realm, of which the local church was the center, was

---

[73] ELCA, "Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Constitutions_of_the_ELCA_April_2015.pdf ?_ga=1.41172258.1839545692.1408805828 (accessed April 1, 2015).

considered Christian and a member of the parish. The ecclesial identity of the *parish church* is what immigrated to the United States. This worked in the first and second generations of immigrants since they tended to live near each other and established the church in the center of their dwellings. The parish mentality dominated the United States during one hundred fifty years of its existence, thus creating a churched culture. If people wanted to commune with God, they went to church. The trajectory of this identity is still very evident in the suburban context of the RT. There is a great deal of pressure put on parents by the grandparents to get their children baptized and confirmed. This traditionalism is incongruent with the increasing pluralism of the suburbs and creates great tension among the generations.

The second theological issue is that of the *sacrament*. Lutheran sacramental theology lays a strong emphasis on the belief that the real presence of the risen Christ is in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine. It also closely associates the presence of the Holy Spirit with the Word as it is proclaimed and with the water of baptism. This theology is beautiful and can have some important missional implications. However, it also raises two notable hazards. First, there is a tendency, for the Lutheran, to have a God-in-the-box theology. God is contained within the sacraments and the liturgy. If a human wishes to commune with God she must enter the church and participate in the liturgical structures in order to do so. The RT faced this issue as it explored the role of the Holy Spirit in the social Trinity as it stood in relation to the traditional Lutheran theology. The second hazard has to do with the administration of Word and Sacrament and leads into the third issue.

The third theological issue is that of *polity*. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession defines the church as "the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is *rightly taught* and the Sacraments are *rightly administered*."[74] It goes on in Articles XIV and XV to speak of *good order* regarding ecclesiastical usages and restricts the administration of the sacraments to those who have been called by the church. The ambiguity of the term *good order*, combined with the historical tradition of hierarchical power structures within certain episcopal-structured branches of the Lutheran tradition, has created a bureaucratic power structure within the national-synodical structure of the ELCA. The RT experienced this tension as it asked the questions of power and authority in the local congregation.

A Summary

The RT was a unique combination of stories that gathered in a particular frame of time and constructed a particular set of knowledge. However, the two dominant stories that brought this team together were those of the B/D suburb and the ELCA congregation existing within it. The generalized description of congregations similar to those of RT may read as follows:

The suburban ELCA congregation consists of older, ethnically oriented (Scandinavian) members mixed with younger, transient, middle-class families who have a vague cultural memory of religious commodities such as Sunday School and confirmation. It is connected to a hierarchical power structure of which it is the lowest of

---

[74] Philip Melancthon, *The Augsburg Confession*, ed. F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921). (italics mine)

three rungs.[75] It is situated in a brick-and-mortar building that was first established to house the religious commodities needed for the Lutheran constituents within the sprawling suburban region. The members travel a number of miles, past other, closer church buildings, from multiple residential communities to gather in the building for liturgical practices that are in keeping with the traditional Lutheran patterns of the proper administration of Word and Sacrament. In the suburban culture of increasing dislocation, the commodification of self, consumerism, and the hectic lifestyle of auto-mobility, social-networking, and self-indulgent consumer based entertainment, the local congregation is just one small commodity on a vast smorgasbord of viable options for the American consumer of religious goods and/or recreational, self-gratifying activities. The leader who seeks to structure missional spaces in ELCA suburban congregations must be aware of these dynamics and seek ways to fully embrace the paradoxical nature of Lutheran theology and help the ELCA creatively adapt to the ever-changing suburban environment.

---

[75] The ELCA claims that it is not a top-down bureaucracy, but is, rather, an interdependent partnership of three expressions of the church—the churchwide organization, the synod, and the local congregation. The reality is that, in the American culture which is dominated by neo-Weberian bureaucratic structures, it is difficult to function in any way other than a top-down command and control system.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FRAMES

Chapter two explored the theoretical frames for the Deep in the Burbs (DITB) project and why it was necessary to use participatory action research to explore the question. This chapter will explore the theological and Biblical frames that formed the heart of the project. The research team (RT) team asked: *How might an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?* It is my conviction, as I have stated earlier, that a reasonably adequate Christian theology is done *in*, *with*, *under*, *against*, and *for* the local congregation.[1] Therefore, the DITB project was deeply theological because it was communicative Trinitarian action done within the context of the suburban congregation.

This chapter has four movements. First, I will discuss the hermeneutical shift of the twentieth century and place the DITB project within a postfoundational theological framework. Second, I will explain that the DITB project flows *from* and *for* a missional imagination of the church. Third, I will define the term *social Trinity*; place it in the context of the larger Trinitarian conversation; discuss why it is important for the missional church; and how it is the essence of participatory action research. Finally, I will

---

[1] See chapter 1n3.

describe my theology of the Word of God and establish the basis for why the practice of *Dwelling in the Word* was an essential element of the research process.[2]

The Postfoundational Frame
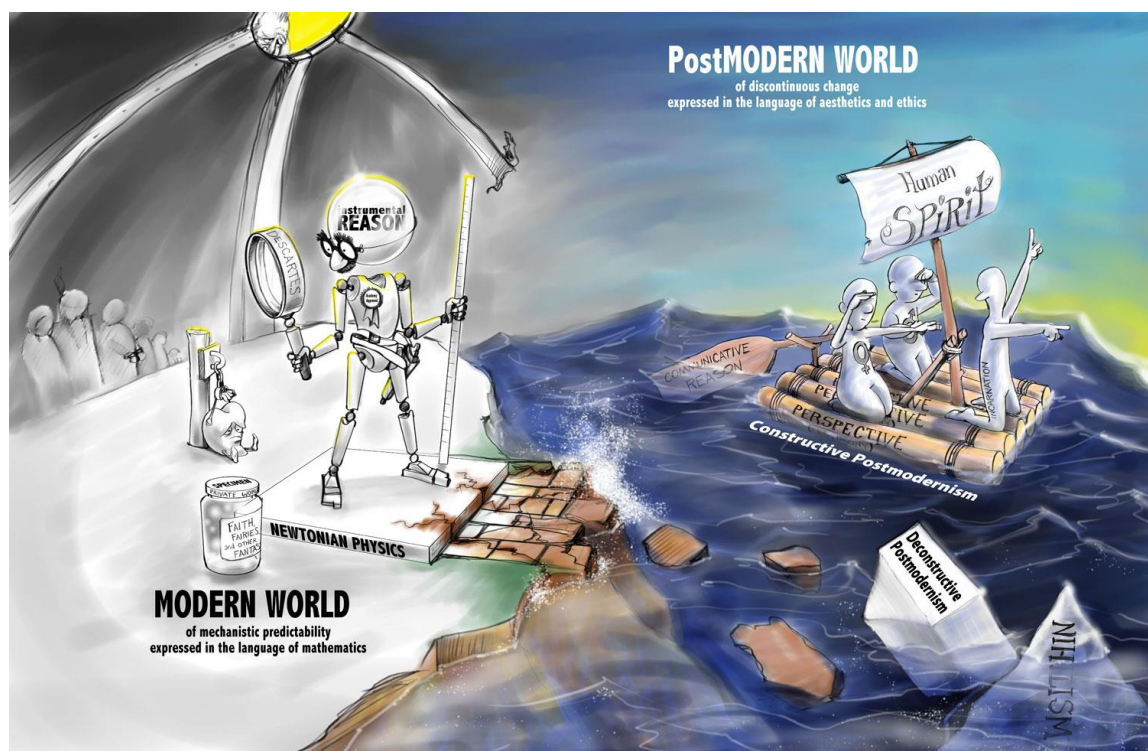
Figure 9. The Shift From Modern To Postmodern

The DITB project is a postmodern story about navigating the treacherous waters between two polar extremes. It is like the Scylla and Charybdis of Homer's Odyssey that stood as the gauntlet between which Odysseus had to sail in order to arrive safely home. The polar extremes we face are the Scylla of absolutism/positivism/foundationalism on one side, and the Charybdis of relativism/nihilism/deconstructivism on the other. It is my basic assumption that this dualism is a cause of much of our difficulty in the church today.

---

[2] See chapter four for a description of the *Dwelling in the Word* exercise.

A dualism is when you find two polar opposite options to a single question that both have evidence for being correct. This is true in theology. Is Jesus God or human? Is it predestination or free will? Is reality physical or spiritual? Is God three or one? The answer to these questions seems to be *yes* but then common sense tells us that you cannot say *yes* to both options.

These dualisms are not found only in the musings of theologians. They are everywhere in society. *Republicans* vs. *Democrats*. *Big Government* vs. *Free Enterprise*. *Conservatives* vs. *Liberals*. *American Military* vs. *Terrorists*. *I am right* vs. *you are wrong*. The tensions between party lines are real and the way we navigate these tensions has global implications. So, this project is not merely a mental exercise or a sociological experiment, but is motivated by seeking God's peace in the world.

This search for navigating the space between these dichotomies is what, I believe, has led me to Lutheran theology, especially as it is expressed in the ELCA. I have already noted that the DITB project is as much about my own theological odyssey as it is an academic exercise. I was raised in the predominantly dualistic world of conservative evangelicalism in which the theological imagination was constantly pitting one idea against another idea, seeking to prove one idea "correct" and the other "incorrect." I continually noticed that, in almost every circumstance, there was always a "correctness" on both sides of these alleged dichotomies. My search to find reconciliation between these dichotomies is what began my odyssey. I found a helpful Evangelical voice in the writing of Stanley Grenz. His work gave me language that constructed a bridge that made it possible for me to enter into Lutheran theology and find the theological space in which the critical mind can dwell in the paradox of God.

The following sections will pay homage to Grenz from a neo-Lutheran perspective. I will utilize the framework created by Grenz and Franke to engage the work of two Lutheran theologians—Patrick Keifert and Gary Simpson—and construct a postfoundational theological frame for the DITB.

What is Postmodern?

I use the term *postfoundational* and deliberately avoid the use of the term *postmodern*. Allow me to explain this choice. One of the biggest dualities we face in our culture today is the tension between the *modern* and the *postmodern* mindset. The term *postmodern* may not be the most helpful term for our discussion of spirituality in the missional suburban church. Many lay people in the church have associated the term *postmodern* with a negative, destructive attitude toward any form of tradition and have closed their ears to anything bearing the *postmodern* label. Therefore, it is important that we clarify our use of terms.

Post means *after*, so *post*modern—in its most direct definition—means something that comes after the modern era. This begs two questions: 1) what is the *modern* era, and 2) has the modern era actually ended so that something can be considered to have come after it?

Mary Hatch's language might prove helpful in refining these terms. Hatch provides labels for the two movements that come after the modern era.[3] The first she calls *interpretive/symbolic*. The second she calls *postmodern*. I agree with the two camps that

---

[3] Hatch discusses these terms within the context of organizational theory, but I think the clarification of terms is helpful in the broader conversation around the term *postmodern*. Mary Jo Hatch and Ann L. Cunliffe, *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-22.

she identifies, but I question her nomenclature. I would suggest that both of these movements are postmodern, in that they follow, chronologically, the modern era, and are concurrent.[4] I would like to propose that the two streams named by Hatch be reframed as *constructive postmodernism*—to replace interpretive/symbolic—and *deconstructive postmodernism*—to replace postmodern.

I would like to propose a further modification of the terms. Rather than modernism vs. postmodernism, it may be more helpful to discuss the hermeneutical shift in terms of foundationalism vs. postfoundationalism.[5] The modern dogma that dichotomized the Conservatives from the liberals was one of *foundations*. The modern assumption, stemming all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, was that there is a universal ideal that transcends the shadowy realm of the imperfect. Both sides of the divide were seeking a foundation. The Conservatives found their foundation on the authority of Scripture and/or Tradition.[6] The liberals found their foundation in human experience.

---

[4] One could argue that it is not helpful to speak of chronological sequence at all, but more of epistemological shift, since modern, interpretive/symbolic, and postmodern systems of thought are all currently functioning within organizations. It can also be argued that the term postmodern is incorrect. It denotes a definite, chronological break from one era to another. A better term might be late-modern, since most of the agendas of the so-called postmodern movements are still in reaction to the modern dogma and may or may not have yet created a new mode of being. Only time will tell when a new era has emerged.

[5] I was first introduced to these terms by LeRon Shults at Bethel Seminary. F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999). I have also found Grenz and Franke to be very helpful in this area. Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

[6] Protestants more on scripture, Roman Catholics more on tradition

A Postfoundational Theology

I believe there is a third way between the Scylla and Charybdis we face in the church today. It is a postfoundationalist theology for the missional church. The basis of the postfoundational theology is rooted in Keifert's proposal that a reasonably adequate Christian theology is done *in*, *with*, *under*, *against*, and *for* the church. Kelsey explains how the modern theological school, following Schleiermacher, bifurcated practical theology from systematic theology. Systematic theology pursued the abstract, universal construct mentioned above, while practical theology trained the pastor to perform the technical duties of the civic function endemic to the office. Kelsey and Keifert, flowing from the stream of Hegel and Tillich, but moving beyond it, propose that God cannot be known directly, but only through the secondary phenomena of the particularities of the local congregation. Kelsey proposes that the theological task is a crossroads hamlet between the dialectical tension of the Athens tradition—inner spiritual development (Plato)—and the Berlin tradition—technical training, implementation and actualization (Aristotle). If one is to understand God truly, then one must investigate the concrete particularities of how the Spirit of God is drawing people together for worship and service in particular places in the world. [7]

Simpson draws upon the work of Paul Tillich and Jürgen Habermas to propose that the local congregation is a *prophetic public companion*.[8] Tillich taught that God

---

[7] Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School*; Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006); Patrick R. Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009).

[8] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 144-145.

cannot be known directly as an object in the universe, because God is the ground of being from which objects exist. Therefore, God is known through the experience and interaction of all things at work in the universe. The church is a sign, symbol, and prophetic voice to the world of God's work toward peace in the world. Habermas, as briefly discussed above, saw society as constructed through communicative rationality. It is only through the church's prophetic companionship with society that the lifeworlds of every person can be liberated from the oppressive economic and political systems that have colonized the lifeworlds throughout the modern era.[9]

---

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 326; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

A Three-Way Conversation

Beyond Foundationalism
By John R. Franke and Stanley Grenz

"LIBERAL"
HUMAN EXPERIENCE
—SUBJECTIVISM—

MODERN DOGMA
SEARCH FOR
• UNIVERSAL TRUTH
• FOUNDATION

RATIONALIST METHODOLIGIES

"CONSERVATIVE" ERROR-FREE BIBLE
— OBJECTIVISM —

REVISIONISTS
common human experience (David Tracy)

POSTLIBERAL
contextualize modern world with STORIES, SYMBOLS, CATEGORIES of BIBLE (GEORGE LINDBECK)

POSTMODERN METHODOLOGY

REFORMISTS
CENTERED SET

TRADITIONALISTS
BOUNDED SET

SCRIPTURE
INSTRUMENTALITY of the SPIRIT

CONVERSATION

TRADITION
HERMEUTICAL TRAJECTORY

CULTURE
SPIRIT SPEAKS in PARTICULARITY

"CHASTENED RATIONALITY"

TRINITARIAN STRUCTURE

ESCHATOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

FOCAL MOTIFS

COMMUNITARIAN CHARACTER

Figure 10. Beyond Foundationalism

Grenz and Franke offer a helpful framework for exploring postfoundational theology. They frame it around a *conversation* and a *focus*.[10] The conversation is a three-way conversation between the Scripture, Tradition, and the Culture.[11] Here we are really

---

[10] Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*.

[11] It might be helpful, at this point, to pause and remember our previous discussion of frames in the beginning of chapter two. All knowledge is interpreted knowledge. It is framed within the perspective of the viewer. We each bring our frame to the "great thing" around which we gather in the DITB project. I bring my frames, the RT team members each brought their frames, and you, the reader, bring your frames. I must acknowledge the reason that I am drawn to Grenz and Franke's framing of postfoundationalism in order to help you connect to my argument. Grenz and Franke both come from an evangelical background that is similar to mine. They are scholars who are wrestling with the expansion of their frameworks in light of the hermeneutical turn of the twentieth century and the polarization between the evangelical and

talking about authority and meaning. Where is the basis for truth? Where is the authority? It does not lie on one solid foundation, but is in the ground of God, which cannot be ascertained directly. We can however, look through three frames to communicatively construct meaning.

The *Bible* is the first frame. Keifert suggests that *rhetorical rationality* replaces the modernist need for *logical rationality* when approaching the scripture. The Bible is not an object to be analyzed, but is a rhetorical device used to communicate with the original audience, and with the contemporary audience. Grenz and Franke suggest that the scripture is the instrumentality for the speaking of the Holy Spirit to the church. This is best exemplified in Keifert's call for the church to Dwell in the Word. Dwelling in the Word is an experience in which each participant is invited, as equals, to listen to God in the reading of the text and to listen to God as the participants listen each other into free speech.

Tradition forms the next frame. The local church does not exist in a vacuum. It is the product of the stories that have come before it. The historical tradition forms the identity of the church as much as the biblical narrative forms it. The church must engage fully with its tradition to both learn from it and be set on a future-oriented trajectory by it.

Culture forms the final frame. Open systems theory has shown us that the local congregation exists within a contextual environment. This is not the shadowy, evil place of Plato's dualistic universe. This is the creation of God, in which God works. The church is called by the Spirit of God to dwell in the world and discern what God is doing in the

---

ecumenical theological camps in Western Christianity. I bring Grenz and Franke into conversation with Keifert in order to wrestle with my own frame-expansion into the Lutheran tradition.

world and how the church should participate in God's movement. This is why it is imperative for the church to learn how to engage in liberative, generative, communicative and prophetic dialogue as it is a companion to the reasonably friendly looking person of peace in the neighborhood.[12]

<center>A Three-Foci Expression</center>

Grenz and Franke also talk about three distinctive *foci* that are important components of the missional, postfoundational church.

The first focus is the *Trinitarian Structure of the church*. The importance of the social Trinity cannot be underemphasized here. It is only through the relationality of God's three-in-oneness that the postfoundationalist theological conversation can exist. Without it, Kelsey and Keifert would remain constrained in the same historical reductionism that Hegel, Heideggar, and the Frankfurt school found itself. Simpson would also be trapped in Tillich's correlational reductionism and the ultimate relativism that Habermas' ethic perpetuates.[13] The Trinitarian God is at work in the world, calling the church to be gathered around the risen Jesus, to bring doxa to the Father.

The second focus is that of the church's *Communitarian expression*. Constituted by the community of God, the church is by nature a community of particularities in

---

[12] This is an allusion to Luke 10:6

[13] Arens helps us understand that the communicative praxis of the Father, Son, and the Spirit is that which allows the church to be the prophetic voice of God in the world, while not seeking to extract itself from the world. The church is a community of *communio* with God, itself, and the world. Edmund Arens, *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 156. Michael Welker also helps us see the polycentric and pluriform nature of the Holy Spirit that permeates, but is not equated with or lost among, the various cultures of the world. Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

relational, ontological interdependence, not a mechanistic organization created to produce a product to be consumed on the open market.

The third focus is the church's *Eschatological direction*. Both Keifert and Simpson argue that it is the present hope that is created by the vision of a preferred future that allows the church—thus the theological process—to move forward while holding dualistic tension within a frame provisional truth.[14] God is creating, not from the past toward the future, but as futurity—engulfed in promise—as the narrative evolves and God works in, with, under, against, and through the church to fulfill God's preferred and promised future.[15]

Hope in the Trinitarian Community

Postfoundational theology is a story of hope. Hope has a future orientation. It invites us to look forward with anticipation and imagination. Proverbs tells us that, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12). Spiritual formation in the missional church is a hopeful endeavor. The DITB project is one of a public prophetic imagination of hope in God's preferred and promised future.[16] This is a countercultural move. Taylor suggests that the modern, buffered self has lost this hope.[17] The modern schism between fact/value, public/private, and science/faith has

---

[14] I will explore this further in the next section.

[15] See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 1st HarperCollins paperback ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[16] This statement merges Simpson's prophetic public companion with Keifert's preferred and promised future.

[17] Taylor argues that pre-modern Western culture and most non-Western cultures understand the self to have porous boundaries. In other words, the human self understands that it is not an isolated,

collapsed our public sense of identity to radical individualism, the loss of meaning and

purpose, and the reduction of life to that of utilitarian transactions for the sole purpose of

individual survival. The modern self is left in isolation and with no ultimate hope.

The hope of the world rests in the Triune God. Keifert argues that the church has

lost hope because it has lost its connection to the life of God.[18] The Trinity *is* the life *of*

the world. The Triune God is the ground of being-in-time, moving the world in the past,

present, that is a hope of a preferred and promised future.[19] God is not a timeless,

transcendent being that is separate from the created universe. Nor is God the animating,

non-personal life energy that is completely synonymous with the universe. God is the

---

atomistic substance, separate from all other substances—human or otherwise—in the universe. Rather, the porous self recognizes that it is interconnected and interdependent with the world—both physical and spiritual, seen and unseen. Taylor calls this the enchanted world of the porous self. Taylor further argues that the rise of rationalism in the Enlightenment project of Western Europe in the sixteen and seventeenth centuries denounced the porous self and gave rise to the buffered self. The modern Western "enlightened" self functions within the perspective of Cartesian dualism and understands that the only acceptable form of knowledge comes from the acquisition of scientific information through the process of empirical observation. The only thing that actually exists is that which can be observed with human senses and explained by human reason. Anything else is ignored as superstition and relegated to the private sector or disregarded altogether. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[18] I will discuss this premise in the Epistemological Considerations section of the Adult Learning Frame. See Gary M. Simpson, "No Trinity, No Mission: The Apostolic Difference of Revisioning the Trinity," *Word & World* 18, no. 3 (1998); Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*; Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*; Patrick R. Keifert, "The Trinity and Congregational Planning: Between Historical Minimum and Eschatological Maximum," *Word & World* 18, no. 3 (1998); Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery*; Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*.

[19] I will explore this more fully in the Trinity Frame. For now I will acknowledge that this language of being-in-time and God-as-history draws upon Robert Jenson's understanding of the Trinity framed in Heideggarian and Hegelian thought. Keifert connects this to the life and hope of the congregation. Keifert, "The Trinity and Congregational Planning: Between Historical Minimum and Eschatological Maximum."

relationality of the Triune persons from which we realize that all people—and all things—are interdependently entangled.[20]

I will explore this more closely in the *Trinity Frame*. For now, it is enough to agree with Keifert that the church exists in the life of God and "is a being in communion within the history of God that is drawn into a promised future, coherent with, but not fully available to us, in the fate and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth."[21] The church is invited to dream God's dream and to live into the hope within it. Gorringe says, "that everything that we do as Christians, including our politics and our fashioning of the world, should be shaped by that hope."[22] This creative frame is not a subjective romanticism or the whimsy of the idealistic artist, but it is a public imagination. Simpson argues that

> As prophetic public companions, missional congregations acknowledge a conviction that they participate in God's ongoing creative work. In a communicative civil society, these congregations exhibit a compassionate commitment to other institutions and their moral predicaments and to contesting the systemic colonization of the lifeworld. In these two senses, congregations as communicatively prophetic public companions are thoroughly connected, both to God and to the social and natural world. This vocational conviction and commitment yields a critical and self-critical, and thus fully communicative, practice of prophetic engagement. Finally, as communicatively prophetic public companions, congregations participate with other institutions of communicative civil society to create, strengthen, and sustain the moral fabrics that fashion a life-giving and life-accountable world."[23]

---

[20] I define my use of the term entangled in the Trinity frame in chapter three.

[21] Keifert, "The Trinity and Congregational Planning: Between Historical Minimum and Eschatological Maximum," 288.

[22] Timothy Gorringe, "Living toward a Vision: Cities, the Common Good, and the Christian Imagination," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 4 (2009): 523-524.

[23] Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*, 144-145.

The *Deep in the Burbs* Research Team came together to dream. I invited them to be open to explore new ideas about God (the social Trinity) and imagine new ways of engaging in the practices of spiritual formation. Dreaming is a struggle and the team experienced the agony and ecstasy that always accompanies the process of renegotiating boundaries of identity to be able to welcome the other. The specific stories that I will share in chapter five will give granular texture to this rich story of a group of suburbanites who were willing to say, *what if?*

The Missional Frame

The DITB project flows *from* a missional ecclesiology and *for* a missional ecclesiology.[24] I am a suburban pastor who seeks to grow in a missional imagination for the church. My experience with the social Trinity helped me understand how essential the social Trinity is to a missional imagination and to spiritual formation. It was my hunch that an introduction to the social Trinity might act as a catalyst for reimagining the nature and activity of the church in a missional key.[25] It was my assumption that the average suburban ELCA congregation carries with it an inherited Christian-cultured[26]

---

[24] I boldly state my agenda and prejudice here because I believe it is impossible to observe something, or ask a question about something, and remain objective and detached from the object. I, as the observer, exist within my own frame and bring my own language and limitations of understanding—my own filter—to the process of observation. This is my horizon, as Gadamer would say it, or my lifeworld as Habermas would call it. I fully embrace my motivation to pursue this research question through the missional filter. By naming this fruitful prejudice I will hopefully (1) be more aware of the bias that I bring to the data, thus (2) able to critique my prejudices and bring contrasting views into the conversation in order to bring more warrant to my final arguments.

[25] It is a deeper assumption that it is the substance dualism of our cultural Neo-Platonism in the west that has precipitated and perpetuated this ecclesio-centric, detached culture.

[26] I here make a distinction between the term Christendom and Christian-cultured. Christendom was the condition of Europe in the Middle Ages and early Modern Era. The United States is no longer in Christendom, given the separation of church and state, but has experienced similar effects as a Christian-cultured society.

ecclesiology which is attractional, at best, and does not embody a missional imagination. It was also my assumption that, through the process of *participatory action research*, I might be surprised to find that these assumptions were ill formed and that the process of interacting with the social Trinity may lead to something entirely different.

Since I have framed this project in a missional imagination, it important that I define my use of the term *missional*. A *missional ecclesiology* is an understanding that the mission of the Triune God[27] (*missio Dei*) is to restore and recreate all things according to God's ongoing vision of peace and wholeness for the world.[28] The church is called to be a public prophetic companion with its neighbors, bearing witness to the hope found in God's preferred and promised future.

Missional ecclesiology has evolved from the conversation in the West around missiology and ecclesiology over the past one hundred years. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were dominated by a Christendom model in which the church sent missionaries into the world to convert heathen nations to Christianity. The intention of these missionaries was essentially pure, as they were carrying out the Great Commission

---

[27] I will discuss this in the Trinity Frame.

[28] See also Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, "Missiology after Bosch: Reverencing a Classic by Moving Beyond," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (2005); David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series no 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996); Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 1st ed., Leadership Network (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010); Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications 1989); Simpson, "No Trinity, No Mission: The Apostolic Difference of Revisioning the Trinity; Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000); Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007); Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*, The Missional Network (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

from within their own perspective. However, the subsequent effects of their missionary

endeavors often led to colonizing parts of the non-European world into Western

European culture and propagating oppression and marginalization of non-European

people and cultures in the name of Jesus. A missional ecclesiology recognizes the

Eurocentric and devastating effects the Christendom model of missions and ecclesiology

has had on the world.[29] It strives to reimagine the nature of the church as not *having* a

missions emphasis, or *sending* missionaries, but that the church *is* missional at its core.[30]

A missional church recognizes the *polycentric* and *pluriform* nature of the Holy

Spirit at work in the world.[31] The church, within this perspective, is the congregation of

those who are both gathered around the risen body of Jesus and sent into the world to find

and proclaim the reign of God in and among all cultures as the church forms an

interdependent relationship with all nations.[32] This missional activity is not uni-

directional, moving from one central place where God is located and correctly understood

to another place where God is completely absent. Rather, it is a polycentric, pluriform,

---

[29] See Jennings for a compelling argument for how the Western church's missionary impulse is complicit in racism. Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[30] This is an ontological issue. It requires a shift from substance ontology to relational ontology. See Jean Zizioulas and Paul McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006).

[31] See Welker, *God the Spirit*.

[32] See Bleise and Van Gelder for a particularly helpful image of the gathered and sent body in a Lutheran perspective. Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder, *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005).

multi-directional movement of God at work[33] in all cultures,[34] in diverse ways, bringing all cultures into generative conversation, in order to bring about peace and unity through the particular incarnation[35] of the risen Jesus of Nazareth and the diverse incarnations of the Spirit within diverse cultures.

The Trinity Frame

The Trinity lies at the heart of the DITB project. The research question asks: *How might an increased awareness of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?* It was my experience with the social Trinity that sparked the creation of this project. It is necessary, then, to define the term *social Trinity* in light of the larger theological conversation of the Triune God.

It might be easy to imagine the *social Trinity* as a doctrinal statement—a chunk of knowledge—that could be presented to the RT for objective evaluation and ultimate acceptance or rejection. This idea, however, is (a) not congruent with my pedagogy,[36] and (b) contrary to the nature of the Triune God. The research was conducted in the understanding that God is not an object that can be studied or a concept to be considered,

---

[33] This statement highlights the distinction between the hierarchical structures of power inherited from Medieval polities. It argues for a capillary, perichoretic, flow of power. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

[34] Tanner posits that it is the conversation between various cultures that is generative for the church and the world. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[35] Here I am alluding to two important points. First, the particularity of the incarnation as the means by which we can know God. See Newbigin on election. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 86-87. Second, I am speaking about the particularist perspective of theology proposed by Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School*.

[36] See chapter two.

but that God is the ground of being itself from which all life springs forth.[37] All human

speech about God is, at best, an analogy, metaphor, or simile. All theology is a human

construction of symbols—models—that point to the unknowable God, but can never

define or explain God.[38]

God is not an object to be studied, therefore, the DITB project raised a question

that wonders (a) whether the models of the Triune God that we have inherited from our

Western Theological predecessors are adequate and helpful for the current context in

which the church finds itself[39], and (b) if an alternate model of the Trinity might provide

more space for a missional imagination of spiritual formation in the local congregation. It

was my assumption that the RT would have a traditional, Western model of the Trinity as

their frame for understanding God as we began this project.

Reframing the Model

What then, is the alternate model that I proposed to the RT? I named this model

the *social Trinity* in the research question. It was my attempt to present a model that was

true to the contemporary conversation about the Trinity. Western theologians have

---

[37] David Kelsey posits that all knowledge of God is secondary knowledge, and that, to understand God truly, the researcher must observe the activities of the local congregation in its specific context. Thus, the participatory action research methodology used in this research is, in itself, a theological inquiry into the mystery of the Triune God.

[38] William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 40-41. See Peters on the use of the term *symbol*. Ted Peters, *God--the World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) and Grenz on the use of the term *model*. Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

[39] Here I am referring to the much-rehearsed history of Athanasius' victory over Arius at the Council of Nicea in which he demonstrated that God is three in person, but one in essence. His Immanent model of God as three-in-one within Godself has been reduced, over time, to monarchial modalism, at best, in Western, modern theology. The Immanent trinity, then, is the transcendent God of divine substance that is separated from the material world in the tradition of Platonic dualism.

wrestled with the Trinity question throughout the twentieth century. Stanley Grenz offers

a helpful schematic to map the landscape of this conversation. He articulates three major

types of Trinitarian thought in the twentieth century: (1) those emphasizing the *historicity*

and *futurity* of God—Moltmann, Pannenberg, Jenson; (2) those emphasizing the

relationality of God—Boff, LaCugna, Zizioulas; and, (3) those emphasizing the

transcendence, or *otherness* of God—Johnson, Urs von Balthasar, Torrance.[40]
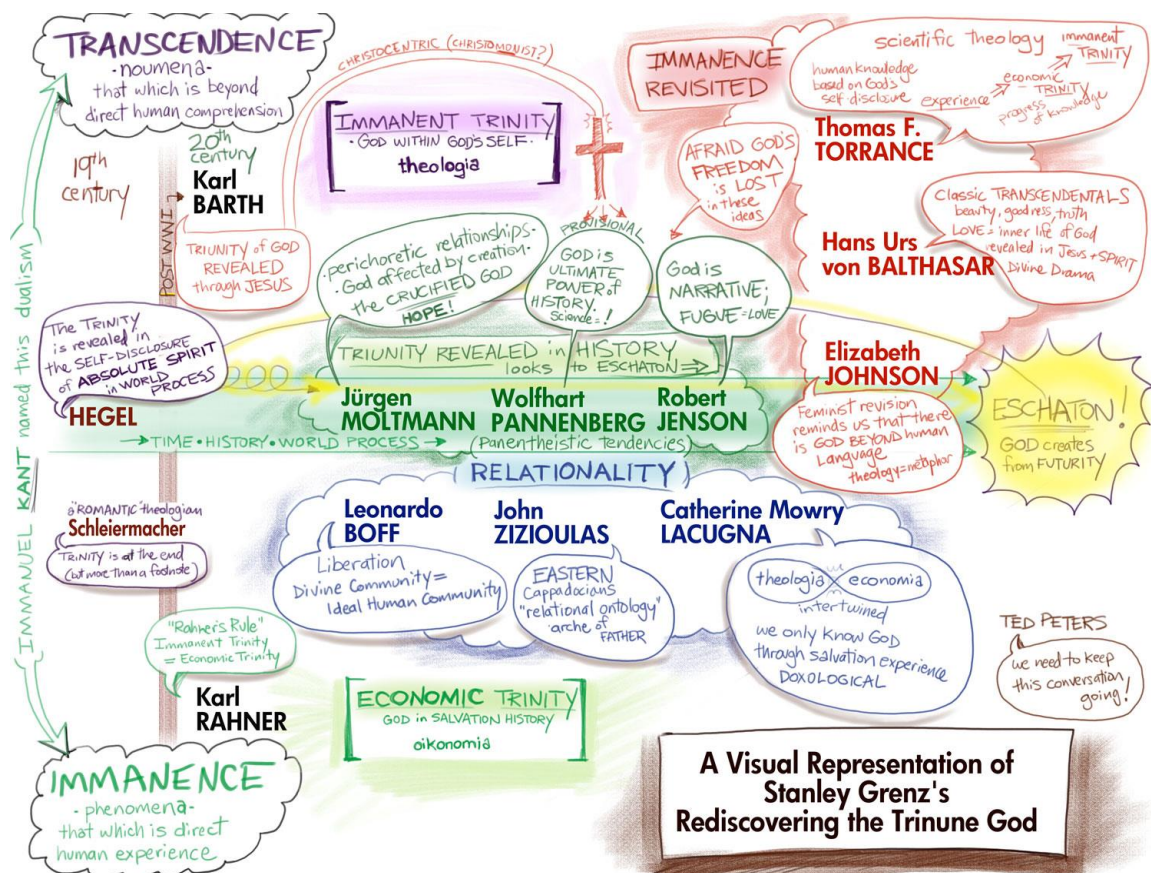
Figure 11. A Visual Representation of the Trinity Conversation

    Each of these theologians contributes important aspects to the conversation. The

term *social Trinity*, however, is most readily associated with Moltmann and Volf. I must

---

[40] Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

confess that my language has changed since the initial crafting of this research question. I

no longer find the term *social* to be the most helpful label for this model of the Trinity.

This became apparent to me early on in the research project. The first indication came

when I had the initial meetings with my pastoral contacts in the congregations. Whenever

I got to the term *social Trinity* I could tell that there was pensive hesitation. They shuffled

in their seats, and eventually asked the awkward question, "What do you mean by social

Trinity?" This was a helpful experience for two reasons. First, it affirmed my assumption

that the terminology was not commonplace, even among clergy. Second, upon further

conversation, I realized that the term *social* was a trigger associated with one of two

prejudices. One prejudice was the immediate association with the term *social Gospel* that

harkens back to the liberal/fundamentalist schism of the early twentieth century. The

other prejudice was the immediate association with the issue of *social justice* which

signals work projects and activist movements.

I found myself immediately using the terms *relational* and *relationships* in order

to explain the meaning of the *social Trinity*. One pastor suggested that I simply change

the question to read "the relational Trinity." This was a valid suggestion, but I opted to

leave the language as it is because it is associated with a certain body of theological

literature, whereas the term *relational Trinity* is not as widely used.

<center>A Brief Summary of the Social Trinity Conversation</center>

My use of social/relational draws most heavily on *relational ontolog*y as

presented by Zizioulas.[41] To summarize, Zizioulas proposes that humanity, both as

---

[41] Zizioulas and McPartlan, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*.

particulars and collectively, has the *imago dei* of the robust Trinity[42] imprinted on/in us ontologically. The image of the relational Trinity is this: God is three-in-one and one-in-three. God is transcendent, immanent, and relational. God's transcendence is the immanent Trinity that is constituted by relationality. This relational union is wholly other from its creation. God is also immanent in the economic Trinity. The Father is *arche*, the Son incarnate is the demonstration of God's love and the great victor over death.[43] The Spirit is the animator and mediator of life and relationality. God is also relationality that constitutes all being and out of which human particularity is formed. Humanity is created in the *imago dei*. We are homologues of the robust Trinity described above.[44] We are many-and-one and one-and-many. We are individual selves constituted by the relatedness to each other, to nature, and to God, the transcendent other.

Relational ontology connects to the theoretical lens of Robert Kegan's fifth order of consciousness.[45] The social/relational Trinity is connected, not only to theological

---

[42] I have introduced the term robust into the conversation. This is Shults' term to distinguish the relationality and futurity of God from the transcendent/Immanent Trinity.

[43] I will agree with Volf and not go so far as Zizioulas to warrant patriarchal authority in the church based upon the arche. Volf, bringing Moltmann into conversation with Zizioulas, calls for an egalitarian power structure based upon a flattened perichoretic power structure. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Sacra Doctrina (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[44] I am intentionally hinting at the Augustinian use of "vestiges of God." A fascinating sub-conversation within the larger Trinitarian conversation is that of Augustine's culpability for the demise of the Economic Trinity in the modern West. LaCugna blames him for the problem. Barnes disagrees and notes that LaCugna's argument is built upon a resurgence of de Regnon's claim in the 19th century, which, Barnes argues, is unfounded. I agree with Barnes and follow Sheldrake's assessment that Augustine understood *relational ontology* inherently, since he did not breath the air of Cartesian dualism. Michael R. Barnes, "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (1995); Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*, 75-83.

[45] See chapter two.

language, but to ideas about and formation of the human self-in-relation to the other.[46]

Zizioulas proposes that it is not only our eschatological hope that is connected to the

social Trinity, but it is our very essence, our ontological essence, that is constituted by the

relationality of the persons of the Godhead.[47] The use of communicative action as the

research methodology in this project assumes that the congregations might discover the

reality of their interdependence with the other, both within the congregation and within

the suburban and metropolitan community as a whole.

The Word of God Frame

Scripture played an important role in the DITB project. The RT practiced

Dwelling in the Word in three passages from the Gospel of John during every team

session. It is important to describe my theological perspective on scripture, its

relationship to the Word of God, and how this established a necessity for practicing

Dwelling in the Word as part of our increased awareness and understanding of the social

Trinity.

What is the Word of God? Not all Christians agree on the answer to this question.

To some, the Word of God is synonymous with sixty-six books that form the canon of

Christian scripture, thus leading them to a verbal dictation view of Biblical inspiration

---

[46] Both Groome and Farley emphasize this as essential to the practice of formation in the congregation and in any theological inquiry. Groome names the individual as *agent-subjects-in-relationship*. Farley names it as *being-together* in the reciprocity sphere. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*, 9; Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 68.

[47] Eschatological hope is central to the *historicity/futurity* grouping that Grenz noted: Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Jenson. Zizioulas does not deny this dimension, but simply emphasizes the ontological aspect of this Trinitarian conversation. Here, too, I argue that we must abandon substance dualism in light of *relationality* and *entanglement*.

and a fixation with word studies. To others, the Word of God is a vague notion of human reason being guided by the ethics presented through the mythical Jesus.

I believe the Word of God is the direct interaction between God and humanity.[48] It comes in many forms–as many forms as there are people and cultures.[49] God is present in creation and calls all people into an infinitely deepening relationship with God, each other, and all of creation. The Scripture of the Hebrew people and the 1st century Christians is an accurate, reliable, formational collection of documents that records the authentic interaction of a specific group of people, operating within a specific social/political/theological framework (a variety of these throughout the 1400 years of its internal history) with the infinite God. Christians study the scripture in order to (1) encounter the Word of God as God is present in the reading/listening process, (2) examine and learn from the model of how the various people in the text interpreted and assimilated their encounter with God within their own context, (3) have the only access to the incarnate Jesus Christ in his historical context,[50] (4) share a common narrative that

---

[48] The use of prepositions becomes precarious. By using the preposition *between* in this sentence it may seem to imply an ontological duality between God and creation. This is not my intention. I will argue throughout this paper for the necessity of God's otherness-in-relation to us. There could be no communication without the otherness of God's authorship of the Word. However, I will argue momentarily that God is present within both the Symbol and the Medium of the Word, and it is in this story*ing* that we are constituted.

[49] Here I am alluding to a particularist and nominalist leaning similar to that proposed by Kelsey and John Scotus Duns. God is not a universal abstract idea, but is the ground of being that is manifest in each particularity of the universe. I temper this with relationality and entanglement theory to say that these particularities are not isolated, but are unified in their constitutive interdependence with all other particularities. Thus, the universal essence of God is not a monolithic oneness, but is the beautiful tapestry of the entangled particularities.

[50] This statement opens up the Christological conversation. The incarnation of the Word had to be a particular incarnation in the person of one, singular human being. That is the only way to be fully human. Thus, Jesus had to be either male *or* female, Jew *or* one of the various Gentile ethnic groups, in the Roman Empire *or* any other part of History, etc. To say *yes* to the one particularity of the incarnation was to—in the sense of particularity—say no to all other options. This exclusion was not exclusivistic, but ontologically necessary for the particularity of incarnation. Without the particularity of the incarnation we do not have access to the Word of God embodied in it fullest human form. We do not have the *image of*

unifies and shapes each generation in continuity as the body of Christ, and (5) participate in the hope of the promised future in which, from which, and to which God calls us.

Two Biblical Models for Encountering the Word

What is the mission of the church and how does the Word of God relate to that mission? This is an important set of questions for the missional church. A dominant theme in the modern, American church has been one of strategic action. The scripture, according to this framework, is the guide/law book that provides a constitution-like set of principles for how to live life, and demonstrates the plan of salvation (the Gospel) through Jesus. The church is called to take the Gospel to the world by adopting marketing strategies and adopting culturally relevant modes of worship. The leadership style required for this mission is one of courageous vision and strategic action.[51]

I would like to propose that scripture itself offers a different model for the nature and calling of the church. This can be seen in, but not limited to, two examples that can serve as biblical models for our mission today.

The Children of Israel and the Pillar of Cloud and Fire

Moses did not have the written word of God. Moses encountered the Word of God from within the burning bush. God sent Moses to be a prophetic presence before

---

God the symbol of a life fully abiding with God the Father. Without this we ultimately have no access to the Trinity in relational terms. Without the exclusion of the incarnation we cannot embrace the differences of the various particularities that constitute the world. Further, without the incarnate Word of God emptying himself on the cross and showing us the way of the Father, we do not have the Gospel of Reconciliation and that which will harmonize the particularities into the symphony of God's Preferred and Promised future. See Newbigin on *election*. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 86-87.

[51] It is important to note that this strategic model is the dominant mode of American thinking and the opposite of the model proposed in the missional church conversation. Here I am offering a critique of the strategic action and proposing a listening-following model instead.

Pharaoh and simply declare, "Let my people go!" This was a declaration of freedom, not a strategic plan of action. Moses waited, listened for God's voice, then acted as directed, not knowing where it would end up. Eventually the Red Sea parted and the people walked into freedom. Then God led the people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God did not reveal the plan to Moses, rather God invited Moses and the people to follow.

The key element that propelled the people was the promise that God had made to Abraham centuries before. God had committed to being faithful to this promise and invited the people to follow and trust. Moses' leadership was one of expectant listening, discerning, facilitating the needs of the people, and being ready to move whenever the cloud lifted.

The Apostle Paul and the Leading of the Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul did have the Scriptures—The Law and the Prophets. Yet, he encountered the Word of God in the person of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. This encounter began a two-fold process of Paul's interaction with the Word. On one hand, he was challenged to reframe the written word as the Holy Spirit was recontextualizing the Law of Moses and expanding the boundaries of God's people to include the uncircumcised Jew.[52] On the other hand, Paul encountered the word of God in the direct leading of the Holy Spirit to do and say things that contradicted his received understanding of the written word of God and most-likely contradicted his own plan. This

---

[52] David Lose, during a dinner conversation, proposed a compelling thought about Jesus' use of scripture in his teaching. First of all, Jesus rarely preached from scripture. Secondly, when Jesus did refer to scripture, he almost always challenged it and reframed it. "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you…" David Lose in a group discussion with the author, July 2014.

is best exemplified in Acts 16:6-10 when Paul planned to travel to Ephesus but was kept from going there by the Holy Spirit. He traveled, instead, to Troas where he received a vision in a dream to expand his boundaries and go to Macedonia.

Paul was constantly wrestling with the Holy Spirit. He prayed that the thorn would be removed from his side. He was relentlessly pursued by his enemies and often beaten and left for dead. He struggled with his own pride, as demonstrated in his schism with Barnabas. Yet, I believe, this brokenness was necessary for Paul to be able to listen to the Word of God as Paul was invited to listen, discern, facilitate the needs of the people around him, and be ready to move when the Spirit prompted.

<div align="center">The Church is Invited to Listen, Discern, and Follow</div>

It is with these two models in mind that I would like to propose what a missional engagement with the Word of God might be. We encounter the Word of God in three ways: in scripture, in communication, and in the world. We are then invited to listen to this word, discern the voice of God from the voices that move contrary to God, tend to the community, and be ready to move when the Spirit moves.

The three forms in which the Word of God speaks are not distinctive, separate modes, but are interdependent media that are at once separate and definable while also entangled and interdependent.[53] It is helpful, albeit somewhat artificial, to address them

---

[53] I introduce the term *entangled* here as a foreshadowing for a central theme that I will develop more fully in the Trinity Frame. For now, understand *entangled* as a metaphor borrowed from Quantum Physics. Ernest L. Simmons, *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014); J. C. Polkinghorne, *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010).

separately. We are called to dwell[54] in the *Scripture*, to dwell in the *community*, and to dwell in the *world*.[55]

Dwelling in the Scripture

I have already stated that the canon of scripture is the accurate and honest record of particular people making sense out of their particular encounters with the presence and movements of God within their own context. These stories, as they are retold throughout the generations, are formative and unitive for the gathered body of believers. The biblical narrative displays a panorama of God's creative and liberative promise as it moves from the incarnation of the Word in the symbol of the Exodus story to the incarnation of the Word in the symbol of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This panorama creates a substantive pattern of God's creative, liberative movement throughout history. Each generation since the closing of the canon is invited to engage the narrative, meet the Word of God behind the text, in front of the text, within the text, and through the text, to discern and appropriate the Word and movement of the Spirit in its own context.

Dwelling in the Community

I am playing with the word community. I mean it in three senses. First, it is the gathered body of believers that we call the church. Secondly, it is the broader community—the physical neighborhood and the relational networks that include all people with which the church is engaged in everyday life—in which the church finds

---

[54] I am intentionally borrowing the term *dwelling* from the practice of Dwelling in the Word used by Church Innovations. See Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*; Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word* (St. Paul: Church Innovations Institute, 2011).

[55] See the distinction of *community* and *world* below.

itself. Third, I mean it in the philosophical sense of the communicative process itself. The

Word of God is experienced in the communication of human beings with one another.

Human communication is a difficult process wrought with equal parts intimacy and

agony. The important point here is to, perhaps, expand the typical understanding of the

church's relationship to the Word. We often imagine that the Word of God only exists

within the church and within certain "holy" forms of communication, e.g. liturgy,

catechesis, the eucharist, etc. It is important for the missional church to imagine that the

Author speaks everywhere, at all times, and that through the physical media of the

Community (in the tri-fold meaning that I have presented) the Spirit can help to

illuminate God's Word in this medium.

Dwelling in the World

I have nuanced the use of the term *World* from *Community*. Some may argue that

to dwell in the Community, as I expressed above, is the same as dwelling in the World.

The World, they would argue, is simply the sum of all human Community.[56] This is true,

but my point for distinguishing the *World* from the *Community* has to do with power

structures. It is one thing to have embodied communication with other human beings in

the adjacent community. It is another thing to have a relationship with the powerful

movements of sociological structures like *economics* and *politics*. We, as individuals and

small communities, often watch in helpless awe as the events of the world unfold like

gods and demigods wrestling in the cosmos. The power structures that rule this world—

---

[56] See Scharer/Hilberath's discussion of *We* and the *Globe*. The group has its own culture, but the group also exists in the larger culture that shapes it. Scharer, *The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture*.

what the apostle Paul called the *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians

6:12)—are spiritual forces that can either move with or against the movements of God. It

is important for the church to be able to discern, through the illumination of the Spirit,

what is from the Author and through the Medium and what is contrary to the rhythm of

the Trinity.[57] It is also important for the church to remember the apostle Paul's words that

these power struggles are not against flesh and blood. When we dwell in the community,

we dwell with people. We love people and find the person of peace to listen and receive.

When we dwell in the world we stand in solidarity with those being oppressed by the evil

power structures that threaten the peaceful rhythm of God.[58]

<p align="center">Our Story of Dwelling in the Word</p>

The Word of God, as I have described it, and dwelling in every aspect of the

Word, was central to the DITB project. Each of the first six RT meetings began with a

Dwelling in the Word exercise.[59] We dwelt in John 14:15-24 for the first three sessions,

and then dwelt in John 15:1-17 for the last three sessions. One male and one female

would read the passage out loud and then we would break into dyads to discuss what we

heard in the text. After that we would gather as a large group and everyone would report

---

[57] John encouraged his readers to "test the spirits" to discern which ones are from God (1 John 4:1).

[58] This is a bold statement that implies a certain flavor of liberation theology. The liberation hermeneutic reads all contexts through the assumption that God always stands with the oppressed in order to defy the destructive forces of the oppressor. The face of the Oppressor and the Oppressed changes with each context and each generation. Ironically, the face of the Oppressor in one generation can be the Oppressed in the next, or—even more complex—the face of the Oppressed in one context may be the face of the Oppressor in another cotemporal context.

[59] Dwelling in the Word is a specific exercise developed and utilized by Church Innovations. I will describe it more fully in the next section. See Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*; Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*.

to the large group what their conversation partner had said. Finally, we would have a large group discussion about what we had heard. This process took at least forty-five minutes of our two-hour session. It was a struggle for some of the team members to see the relevance of the exercise, because (1) it took up almost half of our meeting time, and (2) it did not explicitly contribute anything tangible to the described goals of the group. This was part of our learning process and I will report on that in later sections.

Chapters two and three have provided a theoretical and theological framework for the DITB project. It has become evident that participatory action research was a necessary methodology to pursue the question of how an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity might impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations. I will now turn my attention, in the next chapter, to the specific methodology and design of this project.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Chapters two and three established the theoretical and theological framework for the Deep in the Burbs (DITB) project. This chapter will describe *participatory action research* and explain why it was a necessary choice to authentically explore the research question. The chapter will also provide a detailed description of the project design.

Using Participatory Action Research

The DITB research question emerged because I had an experience that led to a hunch. My experience of the social Trinity had a profound impact on how I approached spiritual formation. I had a hunch that other people might have a similar experience to mine. I had no way of knowing if this were true unless I created a space in which I could gather people together, expose them to an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity, and then see how it impacted their ideation and praxis of spiritual formation.

The research question states: *How might an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?*

The question raised the issue of methodology. How would I go about creating a space in which this process could happen? Who would I invite to this space? How would I increase their awareness and understanding? How would I guard against using

99

instrumental reason and manipulating the experience so that people would reach the same experience that I had? How could I facilitate a learning environment that cultivated—as much as possible—a safe, communicative, free space where people could engage the social Trinity in their own way and have authentic responses? How could I discern any type of impact, if there were to be any?

I must confess my own prejudices, epistemological heritage, and personal evolution at this point in the narration, in the spirit of full transparency. I was raised in a Baptist culture that was steeped in objectivist epistemology, dualistic theism, and rationalism. I was also trained in pedagogical methodology that exalted the teacher/preacher as the expert who dispensed objective knowledge into the empty mind of the receptive student. I have been evolving over the last decade. This evolutionary process has led me out of conservative evangelicalism, through the emerging church movement, and into the ELCA. The DITB project has been a part of this evolutionary process, thus it has impacted me as much—if not more—than the members of the RT.

One example of my evolution can be seen in the process of choosing a methodology for the research question. One mentor first suggested that I use Action Research methodology because it is often used in the educational setting. Action Research, as it was described to me initially, follows this pattern: First, the researcher gathers a group of people and establishes a base-line measurement for the group around a particular set of data. Second, the researcher introduces something new to the system through various means. Third, the group processes the new thing for a period of time. Fourth, the researcher measures the group with the same instrument used for the base-line assessment. Fifth, the researcher compares the pre-measurement data to the post-

measurement data to determine if there was any significant change to the system. Action Research would place me outside the RT, as an objective observer, using instrumental reason to evoke change in the group.[1]

My experience and predilection to objectivist pedagogy made this a logical choice at first. I even developed instruments, early in the planning stages, to measure an individual's ideation and praxis of spiritual formation so that I could quantitatively and statistically determine if and how an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity would impact the individual. However, the more I researched this methodology, and the more I researched and experienced the social Trinity and constructivist pedagogical models, the more I realized that Action Research, as I understood it, embodied the exact opposite of the thing I was trying to introduce to the RT. It will become apparent throughout the narrative of this dissertation that I continually struggled throughout the course of the project with my tendencies toward instrumental reason and my need to "prove a point" or measure some sort of change in the RT.

I had to continually return to my initial experience of the social Trinity in order to counteract my instrumental tendencies throughout the course of the research project. The social Trinity deconstructs dualistic theism, substantive ontology, and instrumental pedagogical methodologies.[2] That deconstruction within my own understanding is the very thing that I wanted to introduce to the RT. It was necessary, therefore, to establish a

---

[1] There is a debate among action researchers as to the nature and purpose of action research and participatory action research. See David Deshler and Merrill Ewert, "Participatory Action Research: Traditions and Major Assumptions," http://actmad.net/madness_library/POV/DESHLER.PAR (accessed March 20, 2015).

[2] See the Trinity Frame in chapter three.

methodology that embodied relational ontology and constructivist pedagogy. The most

logical choice of methodology was *participatory action research* (PAR).

What is PAR?

PAR has its roots in the work of Paulo Freire and the *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed.[3] It "originated as a challenge to positivist research paradigms."[4] It is also

built upon the *Critical Social Theory* and *communicative rationality* taught by Jürgen

Habermas.[5]

> PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. At its heart is collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships. The process of PAR should be empowering and lead to people having increased control over their lives.[6]

There is a certain irony that I would choose PAR to work with a group of white,

middle-class, suburbanites. Hall notes that the first point of PAR is that it "involves a

whole range of powerless groups of people—exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the

---

[3] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

[4] Budd L. Hall, "In from the Cold? Reflections on Participatory Research from 1970-2005," *Convergence* 38, no. 1 (2005): 18.

[5] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*; Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*.

[6] Fran Baum, Colin MacDougall, and Danielle Smith, "Participatory Action Research," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60, no. 10 (2006). See also ibid; Marlyn Bennett, "A Review of the Literature on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Participatory Action Research," *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 1 (2004); Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006); Deshler and Ewert, "Participatory Action Research: Traditions and Major Assumptions; Hall, "In from the Cold? Reflections on Participatory Research from 1970-2005; Hess, "Collaborating with People to Study "the Popular": Implementing Participatory Action Research Strategies in Religious Education; Christine Lynn Norton et al., "Reflective Teaching in Social Work Education: Findings from a Participatory Action Research Study," *Social Work Education* 30, no. 4 (2011).

marginal."[7] The members of the RT were anything but poor, powerless, or marginalized. Why then, did I choose PAR to pursue this research question? Herein lies a theological prejudice on my part. It is my argument that the churched-culture of the suburban ELCA congregational context is one that has inherited hegemonic tendencies in the area of theology and practice. The inherited church hierarchy and pedagogical methodologies have fostered a pastor-centered ecclesiology that, I would argue, has oppressive tendencies for the congregational members. While the RT members were not oppressed in a socio-economic perspective, they have been oppressed ideologically through ecclesiastical structures. PAR allowed me, as a representative of that hierarchical power structure, to facilitate an emancipatory space that offered the RT the opportunity to experience liberative thought in theological and ecclesial matters. This, I would argue, is a necessary process for the missional imagination to take root in the suburban ELCA congregation.[8]

<center>How Does PAR Work?</center>

PAR is *participatory*, it is *action*, and it is *research*. PAR is *participatory* in that the lead researcher is an active member of the group, participating fully in the process of collaborative meaning-making. It is *action* in the sense that the methodology is built upon the praxis cycle of action-reflection-action. The group discusses a relevant issue, dreams new dreams around the issue, takes action based upon new ideas, reflects upon the action and the implications of the action, reconfigures the ideas based upon the reflection,

---

[7] Hall, "In from the Cold? Reflections on Participatory Research from 1970-2005," 12.

[8] See Schüssler-Fiorenza's discussion of kyriarchical power structures as it relates to Biblical interpretation. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space*.

engages in new forms of action, reflects again, and so on. It is *research* in the sense that

the team reflects upon the process in light of the larger conversation of scholarship

around the issues and articulates the newly constructed knowledge through scholarly

media for the benefit of the larger academic community.[9]

PAR was especially appropriate for my research question because of its

pedagogical implications. My evolution away from a modern, objectivist, teacher-

centered pedagogical model made it important that I did not use an "expert," lecture-style

teaching method to present the social Trinity to the group.[10] There was a time in my life

when that would have been my default mode of approaching this task. However, part of

the way in which my encounter with social Trinity impacted my ideation and praxis of

spiritual formation (and pedagogical methodology) was to realize that the process of

human knowing and formation is a communicative act that flows within relational

ontology. Therefore, the methodology itself was, in my opinion, an experience of the

relationality of the Triune God, humanity, and all creation.

My desire to dissuade my propensity to instrumental reason, and to embody the

relationality of the social Trinity made it necessary, therefore, to construct a

methodological design around the pedagogical models of Parker Palmer, Stephen

Brookfield, and Mary Hess; the cognitive-developmental model of Robert Kegan; and the

---

[9] See Hess, "Collaborating with People to Study "the Popular": Implementing Participatory Action Research Strategies in Religious Education." Stoecker argues that the researcher must take on a different role based upon the needs and composition of the research team. Randy Stoecker, "Are Academics Irrelevant? Roles for Scholars in Participatory Research," in *American Sociol'gcial Society Annual Meeting* (1997).

[10] Bennett argues that some researchers have used PAR as a "tool" to get participants to agree with or adopt a particular position or policy. This is a danger that the researcher must avoid. Bennett, "A Review of the Literature on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Participatory Action Research," 26.

community-building model of Peter Block. I had to design a space in which members of

the RT could feel safe and welcome, and in which they could feel the freedom to process

ideas and issues without fear of judgment. I also had to design a way to observe the data

generated by the RT to discern the type of impact that the project had on the team.

The Design
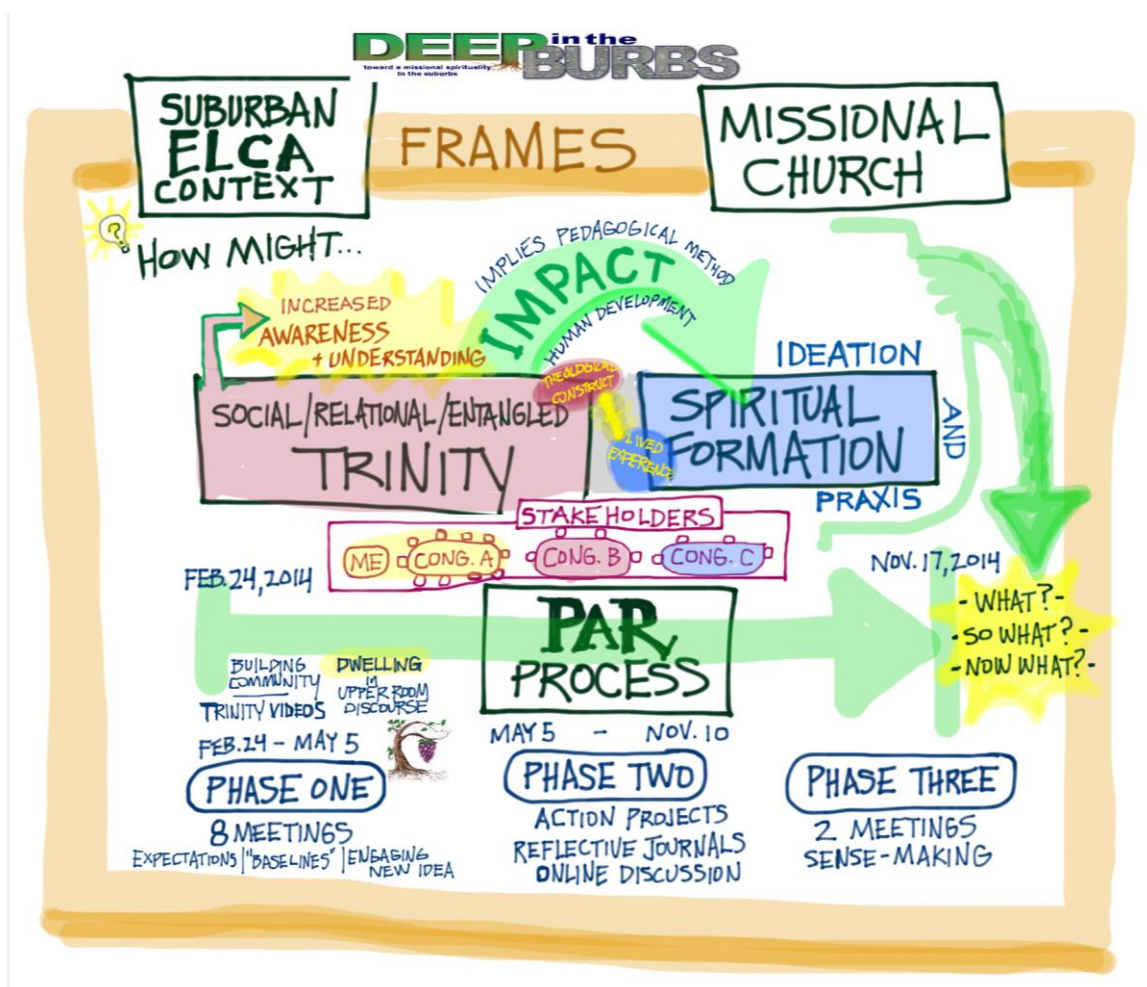
Figure 12. The Project Design

I designed the project around three phases. The first phase would consist of six

large group meetings. The group would meet for two hours on six consecutive Monday

evenings, starting on February 24, 2014 and ending on March 24, 2014. The second

phase would run from April - October, 2014. The RT members would carry out action

plans of their own creation during this period and reflect on their experience in these

projects through journaling. The journals would be sent to me via email and/or posted in

the online discussion forum on the project website. The third phase would consist of two

meetings in November, 2014 in which the RT would come together to communicatively

make sense out of their experience in the project.

<div align="center">Phase One</div>

Phase 1.1

Phase one was further sub-divided into three groups of two meetings each. We

will call these Phases 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3. Phase 1.1 would consist of two meetings. These

meetings were structured around three topics: Spiritual Formation, the Trinity, and

Suburban Issues. I would ask the group open-ended questions that would invite them to

describe their previous experience with spiritual formation, the Trinity, and the suburbs.

They would also define their understanding of spiritual formation and describe their

current practices of spiritual formation. Finally, they would name their hopes and fears

for the church in regard to spiritual formation in the context of the suburbs.

I must, again, confess my own evolution throughout the course of this project. My

original intention for Phase 1.1 was to establish a type of "base-line" in the topics of

Spiritual Formation, the Trinity, and Suburban Issues. I entered the project with the

expectation and assumption that the RT members would indicate a particular way of

discussing these three topics that was similar to my paradigm prior to my experience with

the social Trinity. I even entered the project with predetermined categories of *inward-focused spirituality* and *communal-focused spirituality*, anticipating that most of the RT

would be more inwardly focused coming into the project. I was aware, theoretically, that I must guard against instrumental reason, but my lack of experience in PAR, combined with my previous tendencies, made this an internal battle throughout the project. I will discuss my surprise and continued evolution in chapter five. For now, let it be known that my initial design was flawed and colored by my lack of understanding regarding the true nature of PAR and the open-mindedness necessary for good PAR to happen. It is by the grace of God that the methodology itself allowed for good data collection throughout the process. This allowed me to learn and process the data according to PAR methodology.

Phase 1.2

The middle two sessions were designed to introduce the RT to the social Trinity. I chose to utilize my skills as an animator to create four short animated videos that presented the social Trinity.[11] I would post these videos on the project website and make them available to the RT to watch at any time, and as often as desired. We would spend two sessions processing the information presented in these videos and relating it to spiritual formation in the suburban context.

Phase 1.3

The final two sessions were designed to allow the RT space to create action projects that would be carried out in their own congregations and/or neighborhoods/spheres of influence during Phase Two of the project. The creation and implementation of action projects invited participants to imagine practical ways that the

---

[11] See appendix A for a full transcript of each video. The videos can be viewed at http://www.deepintheburbs.com/theoretical-frames/trinity/ (accessed March 20, 2015)

engagement with social Trinity impacted the RT members' ideation and praxis of social Trinity. I would provide one example of a possible action project to prime the pump of their imagination, but, other than that, the RT was free to create any project that they wanted to pursue.[12]

Phase Two

Phase Two was planned to run from April 1, 2014 to November 9, 2014. The RT members would be invited to engage in their chosen action projects and provide data in two ways. First, they would journal and email the journal to me directly. Second, they were encouraged to participate in the discussion forum on the project website.

Phase Three

Phase Three would consist of two large group meetings in November, 2014. The purpose of these meetings was to regroup after having completed the action projects and communicatively make sense out of what happened. These two meetings would serve, not only to debrief the group, but also, hopefully, to launch the RT on further plans of action that would take them beyond the limits of the research project.

I must revisit my earlier confession regarding the evolution of my understanding of PAR methodology. It was my continual struggle to resist trying to either manipulate the RT to have the same experience that I had with the social Trinity, or to "prove" something about the relationship between the social Trinity and spiritual formation with the project. It was crucial to the integrity of the project that I facilitate a space in the final

---

[12] I offered a sample of action projects practiced by the group at Re-Imagine San Fransisco. Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011).

phase in which the RT felt completely free to critique the project, question the methodology, and create their own meaning out of the experience. I would craft a list of open-ended questions to facilitate this type of conversation.

Dwelling in the Word

One way in which I attempted to cultivate a safe, communicative space for the RT—and to increase their awareness and understanding of the social Trinity—was to begin each large group session with a *Dwelling in the Word* exercise.[13] I planned to dwell in John 14:15-24 for the first three sessions, and then dwell in John 15:1-17 for the last three sessions. The process would run as follows: I would frame the exercise by asking the group to either (a) pay attention to where their imagination was captured during the reading of the text, or (b) think of a question that they would like to ask a Bible scholar regarding what they heard in the text. Next, one male and one female would read the passage out loud, allowing time in between each reading for silent reflection. Then the group would break into dyads, connecting to a "reasonably friendly looking stranger," to discuss what we heard in the text and "listen each other into free speech."[14] We would, then, gather as a large group and each person would report to the large group what his or her conversation partner had said. Finally, we would have a large group discussion about what we had heard as we listened to each report.

---

[13] Dwelling in the Word is a specific exercise developed and utilized by Church Innovations. See Keifert, *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*; Ellison and Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word*.

[14] I place these two phrases in quotation marks because they are important aspects of the Dwelling in the Word process. I made it a point to speak these words each time I facilitated the Dwelling exercise at the beginning of each session.

Why Dwelling in the Word?

Dwelling in the Word has a two-fold purpose that offers a corrective for the Western church and fit nicely with PAR methodology. First, it is designed to deconstruct the Modern Western fixation with talking. It retrains us to *listen* to another person, no matter who that person may be.[15] *Listening,* I would argue, is a key component to the missional church and a necessary aspect of PAR.[16] The second purpose is connected to the phrase "a reasonably friendly looking stranger." *Dwelling in the Word* demonstrates that theology is a *public* act and anybody can do it. Everyone can hear a text and have either their imagination captured or have a question about it. This kind of conversation can happen with a stranger on a bus or in a coffee shop. This lesson attempts to break down the public/private schism in the West in which faith—and any conversation about God—has been relegated to the private enclave.[17] The church, in its gathered worship, is called to imagine itself, not as a private gathering of family members, but as a public forum in which strangers are welcome.[18] PAR is a public gathering of reasonably friendly

---

[15] The modern Western anthropology is based on a narcissistic, atomist, radical, buffered self. We are trained, in the West, to understand ourselves as radical free agents in the universe whose primary goal is self-sufficiency and survival. This *buffered self*, as Charles Taylor calls it, cannot afford to listen to the other, unless listening to the other can provide an angle to oppress the other for selfish gain. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 170-171.

[16] Simpson proposes that the church is called to be a prophetic public companion with the world. Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*. Hunter makes a similar argument that, if the church wants to make significant cultural changes, perhaps it should take a generation to stop talking so much and start listening and engaging with the stranger. James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 281.

[17] Newbigin frames this as a plausibility structure of the modern world in which only reason and empirical science are submissible as public discourse. Faith and theology are quarantined along with fantasy and fairy tales, appropriate only for the weaker minded in society. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 35.

[18] Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*, 96.

strangers to discuss important topics. In our case, the topic was biblical and theological, thus the Dwelling exercise was a perfect fit.

Since the purposes of *Dwelling in the Word* matched so closely to PAR and the nature of the DITB research project, I chose to begin each session with it for three reasons. First, it would open up communicative space for people to engage the Word of God in the text and in each other.[19] Second, it would implicitly create a biblical foundation for the social Trinity rather than an explicit imposition of this idea onto the group. In other words, I chose texts in which the three persons of the Trinity are named in relation to each other, thus confronting the RT with the biblical paradox of three-in-one implicitly rather than explicitly stating the issue. Third, the exercise would cultivate a space in which the RT members could get to know each other throughout the course of the project in ways that may or may not have happened spontaneously.

Why the Upper Room Discourse?

Most Dwelling in the Word exercises focus on Luke 10 and the story of Jesus sending out the seventy disciples. I chose to focus on the Upper Room Discourse found in John 13-17. I made this choice because I believe this passage presents relational ontology through the perichoretic relationship of the Triune God with the world. However, this is a large passage and it was difficult to determine which specific section in which to dwell. I decided to run an experiment in the months leading up to the launch of the project to explore this dilemma.

---

[19] See my comments on encountering the Word of God in chapter three.

I called the experiment *Dinner with Jesus* and offered it as part of the adult formation opportunity in my local congregation in the Fall of 2013. The idea was to create a space in which adults would gather to experience the Dwelling in the Word process in the Upper Room Discourse. I simply facilitated the process and took notes on what everyone shared in the large group sessions. This was a type of pilot group experimentation for the Deep in the Burbs Research Project.[20]

Lessons from the Experiment

I learned three important things through the *Dinner with Jesus* experience. First, on a practical level, I learned that the dwelling is most effective when a single passage is dwelt in for a minimum of three sessions. My original design was to dwell in the entire Upper Room Discourse, so I divided all five chapters into 8 readings and planned to dwell in one per night. After the first three sessions I realized that this was ineffective because people were only scratching the surface of the passage in the first session and then moving past it. After the third session I modified my plan and spent the remaining sessions dwelling in two passages for three weeks each. This made a dramatic difference in the level of insight and conversation the people experienced. This helped to reinforce, for me, the true purpose of Dwelling in the Word. The process has one of its greatest impacts when people realize that every time you dwell in a particular passage you see a

---

[20] I expanded the opportunity and advertised that I would also offer the Dinner with Jesus experience on Monday evenings at 7:00pm, Tuesday mornings at 6:00am, and Wednesday afternoons at 2:00pm so that more people might be able to access it. Forty people came to the Sunday evening forum, a small group of women that was already meeting used this opportunity as their study on Monday nights, no one came to Tuesday morning, and a handful of retired women attended the Wednesday afternoon session. I was inspired to offer these alternate times after I heard a presentation from Jannie Swart at a *Dwelling in the Word* conference in the Spring of 2013. He said that he used this method with a church when he first came to be the pastor as a way to open up the communicative space of the Word for the congregation.

new dimension of God's Word at work. This reinforces the power of slow reading and the fact that Dwelling in the Word is a form of *lectio divina*. It deconstructs our Western compulsion to conquer and acquire the text as mere factual data and invites us to slow down and encounter the Word of God that is present in the scripture and in the community, and then bring it into a process of discernment in dialogue with the World.

The second thing I learned is also practical and connected to the first. I needed to focus my choice of texts for the RT to two passages so that we could dwell in each of them for three weeks per text. This was a difficult task. How could I decide? I chose John 14:15-24 and John 15:1-17. The purpose for dwelling in these texts was to provide a way for the RT to engage with the scriptural witness to the three persons of the Trinity naturally, rather than having me present the idea directly. John 15 focuses on the indwelling of the Father, the Son, and the disciple. However, John 15 does not explicitly name the person of the Holy Spirit. That is why I chose John 14:15-24. It names the Holy Spirit and describes the functions of the Spirit. I thought that, between these two texts, the team would have ample opportunity to have "an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity" while safeguarding against my use of instrumental reason and power.[21]

The third thing I learned is that I was wrong about how people learn about the Trinity. I was amazed to discover throughout the *Dinner with Jesus* experiment and the RT Sessions, that people did not find the language of the three persons of God perplexing. I expected people to immediately have their imagination captured and their

---

[21] It could be argued, of course, that I am demonstrating power in the simple fact that I chose the passages in which we would dwell. This highlights the necessity and reality of power and leadership issues in spiritual formation.

questions framed around the obvious problem with the fact that Jesus talks to the Father

and the Father sends the Son. I expected them to exclaim, *"How can this be?"* in rational

disbelief. They rarely did. Their imagination was captured in so many other, much more

tangible and everyday ways. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

<p style="text-align: center">The Use of Digital Media</p>

Another way that I attempted to cultivate communicative and participatory spaces

in the project was through the use of digital media. There are three ways in which I used

digital media in this project. First, I created the *deepintheburbs.com* website. This site

served several purposes. One purpose it served was to create a safe, private space in

which the RT could communicate when they were not physically present. [22] Another

purpose it served was to allow me a public outlet for my scholarship. I structured the

website to be a public, interactive expression of my dissertation as I was creating it. I

shared my research journal entries as blog posts. I also posted an illustrated and annotated

book review of over one hundred books and articles that related to the project. These

posts and pages were shared via Facebook, Twitter, and Linked In. It was my hope to

engage with a larger audience of scholars, congregational leaders, and community

members along the course of the project.[23] The website also served as a time-based

chronicle of my research progress that would both demonstrate my work, and also

safeguard any proprietary issues that might arise in the future.

---

[22] I used the Membership and BuddyPress plugins for Wordpress. Membership Plugin https://wordpress.org/plugins/membership/ (accessed March 20, 2015); BuddyPress plugin https://wordpress.org/plugins/buddypress/ (accessed March 20, 2015)

[23] The site was created in November, 2012. It has 342 posts, 43 pages, 322 comments, and has received 17,669 visitors and 46,782 views as of April 24, 2015.

The second way I used digital media in this project was through illustration and animation. I have been a professional illustrator/animator since 1990 and have produced digital art since 2002. I created four animated videos for the purpose of introducing the RT to the social Trinity. The website is full of other animations that seek to visualize complex ideas and/or articulate the arguments of specific books or authors. These animations are posted both in the website and also on the corollary YouTube channel, where they have engaged thousands of people.[24] I have also created illustrations and visual maps of nearly every book that I have reviewed on the website. I am a visual thinker and must process concepts this way in order to make sense out of them. The RT had access to all this information and often interacted with it of their own volition.

The third way that I used digital media was through Prezi.[25] I created visual, interactive bibliographies that go beyond the interactivity of hypertext technology and allow the viewer to pan and zoom through images and animations that illustrate the bibliographic material of particular topics.[26] For example, I would show the image of the front cover of a book, and embedded within the book cover are my illustrations of the book, an author biography, key quotes, and a hyperlink to my review of the book on the

---

[24] One example is an animation I created to explain Kegan's theory of the five orders of consciousness. I posted it on the deepintheburbs.com site on October 17, 2012. It has received 9,948 views as of April 24, 2015 and has been cited in one PhD dissertation and one Masters Paper, to my knowledge. It has also received many comments as to its helpfulness in understanding this theory. Steven P. Thomason, "Thketch of Kegan's Five Orders," https://youtu.be/mW4LTqRJDW8 (accessed March 20).

[25] Prezi is a web-based software application that allows the user to create interactive presentations in which the user can pan and zoom freely, or follow a scripted path. It takes the presentational power of PowerPoint or Keynote to the next level of visual and interactive dynamics. See the Prezi website. http://www.prezi.com (accessed March 20, 2015)

[26] See the *Visual, Interactive Bibliography*. http://www.deepintheburbs.com/prezi-helps-me-study-for-comprehensive-exams/ (accessed March 20, 2015)

website. These Prezis exist on the website, but also on exist on the Prezi.com site and are searchable by anyone. They can be downloaded and used by anyone for any purpose.

It was my assumption and intention that these digital media would embody the relationality of the social Trinity and spiritual formation that the research question attempts to explore. It was my desire to experiment with these media as a means to explore community building in the ever-flattening digital world of the twenty-first century. This, I believe, has important implications for both the academy and the missional imagination of the church.

<div align="center">Data Collection and Analysis</div>

The data generated through the project would be collected in four types. The first type would be audio transcripts from each large group session. I would record the sessions using a Zoom flash recorder, transfer the audio file into Express Scribe[27] on my Mac, and transcribe the audio into a document in Scrivener.[28] The second type of data would be collected via personal notebooks. I would assign a small 8.5x5.5” notebook of ruled paper to each RT member and ask him or her to write in them in response to various prompts throughout the large group sessions. I would collect the notebooks at the end of each session and either type them into Scrivener, or take a digital photo of each page and store it in Evernote.[29] The third type of data would be gathered through online discussion

---

[27] Express Scribe Transcription Software by NCH Software. http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/ (accessed March 20, 2015)

[28] Scrivener is a writing software produced by Literature and Latte. http://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php (accessed March 20, 2015)

[29] Evernote is a cross-platform application that allows the user to write, collect data through photos, web capture, image import, and pdf annotation. The app allows the user to organize the data chronologically (like a blog), in folders and subfolders, and with the use of meta tags. I have been using an

forums on the deepintheburbs.com website.[30] The fourth type of data would be collected

via direct email to me. Each RT member would have the option to send his or her

journals directly to me if s/he did not want them to be read publicly.

     I planned to take all four types of data and enter them all into NVivo for Mac to

be organized and coded. The data types would be placed in large folders under the

headings "Phase One," "Phase Two," and "Phase Three." Further subfolders would be

created under each of these folders to sort out the session transcripts, personal notebooks,

discussion comments, and emails. I would follow the basic qualitative coding

methodology outlined in Charmaz to detect dominant themes that might emerge across

the various data.[31]

Evernote Premium account throughout the course of this dissection to collect and organize my resources. https://evernote.com/ (accessed March 20, 2015)

[30] The Research Team members were given personal accounts and access to a private discussion forum that I created using Membership and Buddypress plugins on the Wordpress platform.

[31] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA AND FINDINGS

The previous chapter explained my methodology and articulated the design of the

project. I argued that participatory action research was the best methodology to address

my research question. The question is: *How might an increased awareness and*

understanding of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation

in suburban ELCA congregations. This chapter will provide a thick description of the

lived experience during the project and bring the data into conversation with the thematic

frames in order to determine the essential findings of the Research Team (RT).

The Deep in the Burbs project (DITB) generated over a thousand pages of

qualitative data. I will report specific findings from the data in four steps. First, I will

provide a brief overview of the data to build a narrative framework. Second, I will

describe my coding process that led to the major themes and findings of the project.

Third, I will recount the narrative of the project, stopping to highlight pertinent data along

the way. Finally, I will reflect upon the findings and offer provisional interpretation as to

how they fit into the larger story and themes of the project.

A Brief Overview of the Data
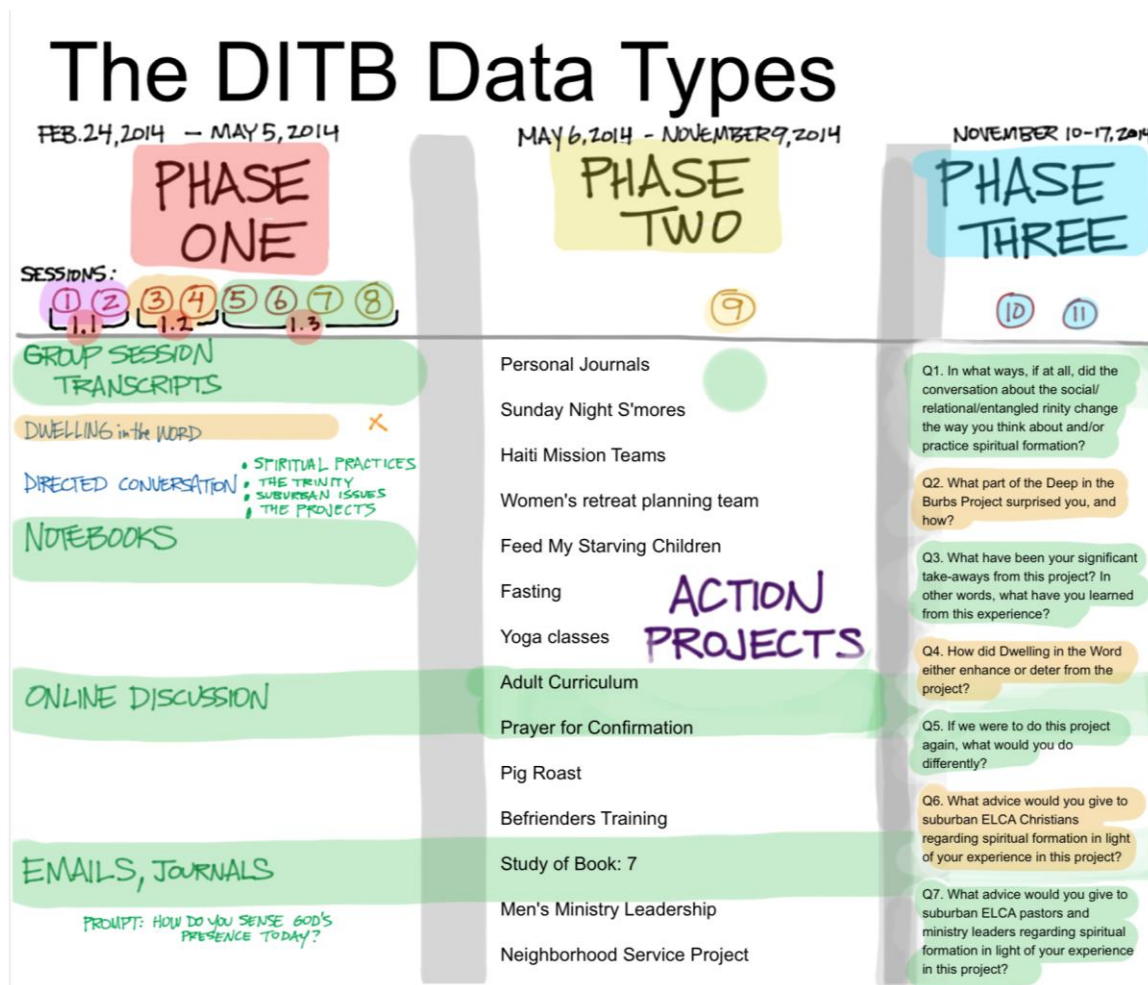
Figure 13. Types of Data

The RT consisted of eighteen people: four women from Calvary Lutheran, four

men from Bethlehem Lutheran, and ten people from Ascension Lutheran—seven women

and three men. The team members share several characteristics. First, they are all white,

middle-class, and have at least some college education. Most of them are college

graduates. The majority of the team started life in a rural context and moved to the

suburban context; either in adolescence or early adulthood. Most of them report that they

had a small town and small church experience as a child and have found the suburban

context to be a big change. They are all either gainfully employed, a homemaker in an

economically stable household, or are retired from a successful career and are financially

stable in their retirement. Many of them have been Lutheran their entire life. Some of the

group began life in either a different Christian tradition (Catholic, Baptist, and

Methodist), or had no church upbringing. Each of them currently actively participate in

one of the three congregations represented in the project.

Table 1. Demographics of Research Team

Ascension Lutheran	Bethlehem Lutheran	Calvary Lutheran	Combined Team
• 10 members: 7 women, 3 men. • 1 member age 30-40 • 5 members age 40-50 • 4 members age 50+	• 4 members: 4 men. • 4 members age 50+	• 4 members: 4 women. • 4 members age 50+	• 18 members: 11 women. 7 men. • 1 member age 30-40 • 5 members age 40-50 • 12 members age 50+

The project ran from February 24, 2014 - November 17, 2014 and spanned three

phases. Phase One began on February 24, 2014 and ended on May 4, 2014.[1] It included

eight meetings, each two hours in length. I audio recorded each meeting with a digital

flash recorder, transcribed the recording using Express Scribe, and typed it into a

Scrivener document. I distributed a PDF copy of the transcription to each team member

via email so that they would have access to the data and review them as desired. During

these meetings we discussed the topics of Spiritual Formation, the dynamics of suburban

life, and the Trinity. The goal of these meetings was to imagine projects/activities that the

team members could do from May - October that would serve to embody a reimagined

---

[1] This was a change from the original design. The RT chose to meet two additional times. This extended phase one into the beginning of May.

spiritual formation in the suburbs in light of an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity.[2]

Phase Two began on May 5, 2014 and ended on November 9, 2014. The team members engaged in various projects of their own design and produced qualitative data through the following media. First, they journaled and either posted their journal entries on the team forum on our website, or they emailed their journals directly to me. Second, they interacted with each other via the online discussion forum on the project website. Third, we held one meeting on August 24, 2014 to provide a check-in and an opportunity to update the team on each member's individual progress. This meeting was audio recorded, transcribed, and distributed to the team in a PDF document via email.

Phase Three consisted of two final meetings and some emails sent among members between the meetings. The first meeting was on November 10, 2014 and the second was on November 17, 2014. The group discussed its final reflections on the project. The conversation was guided by seven questions that I distributed to the team prior to session 10. We tried to discern what God was doing in the midst of the project and what we think the next steps should be for each congregation.

I received and compiled the data throughout the course of the project and initially entered it into Scrivener. In August, 2014, I purchased a twelve-month license for *NVivo for Mac* and transferred all the documents into this program and organized them into the following folder structure. The main folders were: Phase 1.1, Phase 1.2, Phase 1.3, Phase

---

[2] It is important to note that the four women of Calvary Lutheran dropped out of the project at this point. One simply disappeared with no explanation. Two encountered health issues and felt they could not continue. One was intimidated by the online discussion forum and felt discouraged by the direction of the action projects. I will discuss this dynamic later.

2, and Phase 3. Each of these major folders contained subfolders. Each session had a list

of subfolders that contained the correlating session transcripts and personal notebooks.

There was also a separate subfolder for the discussion thread comments and the emails

that occurred during the time frame of the corresponding Phase. I spent September, 2014-

March, 2015 carefully reading all the data and following the qualitative coding guidelines

in Charmaz,[3] looking for themes that might emerge from the data.[4]

My Coding Process

The following is a step-by-step description of how I coded the data. Please note

that NVivo uses the term *node* rather than *code*. I will use the terms interchangeably from

here forward.

Step One

I coded each document—audio transcript, email, notebook, and online post with

either the node name "Phase One," "Phase Two," or "Phase Three" in order to create

comparisons over time. I then subdivided Phase One into three sub nodes that represented

the three types of meetings and their purposes. Phase 1.1 represented the first two

meetings in which we had initial "base-line" discovery conversations to establish a

general sense of where the RT was in their perspectives on the topics of Spiritual

Formation, the Trinity, and Suburban Issues. Phase 1.2 represented the third and fourth

---

[3] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*.

[4] The eleven two-hour meetings produced 470 pages of typed transcript. The emails and online discussion forums produced over one thousand pages of data.

session in which I introduced the social Trinity to the RT. Phase 1.3 represented the final

four meetings of Phase One in which the RT planned their action projects for Phase Two.

Step Two

I went through each of the eleven audio transcripts and highlighted every place

where each team member spoke and coded it with that team member's name. I also coded

all the emails, notebooks, and online posts with the individual team member's name. This

allowed me to analyze each team member's responses over time: e.g. How did Phil talk

about spiritual practices in phase one compared to his responses in phase three?

Step Three

I created a node for each of the major topics discussed throughout the project:

Dwelling in the Word, *Spiritual Formation*, *Suburban Issues*, and *The Trinity*. I went

through each session transcript and highlighted the major sections of the meetings that

were dominated by these major themes and attached the corresponding node. These codes

allowed me to narrow my queries to examine how the group, and individuals, referred to

each topic over time.

Step Four

The first three steps were codes from the "known." I knew the topics that had

organized the discussions, I knew the phases of the project and the intentions of each

phase, and I knew the names of each team member. Now I was ready to listen and note

topics that emerged from the data. I read through each transcript, email, notebook, and

online post and coded topics that seemed to be important to the individual as I read. The

hope was to observe a recurring theme in his or her data.

Here I must confess. This process became overwhelming with the amount of themes and sub-themes that each individual covered over nine months. I found myself drowning in seemingly irrelevant codes.[5] I had generated a long list of codes that had only one or two occurrences. This seemed to be a counter-productive process, so I decided to try a different approach.

Step Five

The long list of nodes was cumbersome and overwhelming. I had to find a way to sort through the data and organize it in such a way that it would be easier to discern obvious patterns that addressed the research question. First, I created sub-folders under the *Nodes* folder based upon obvious categories. The subfolders were: *Discussion of Projects*, *Final Questions*, *Format* (email, notebook, transcript, etc.), *Phases*, *Potpourri Basket* (the list of random codes from step four), *Prescribed Topics* (Spiritual Formation, The Trinity, The Suburbs, Dwelling in the Word), *Session*, and *Team Members*.[6]

I then narrowed my searches to focus specifically on the topics of the research question. I was interested to note if the *increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity had any impact on the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation* in the team members. Therefore, I focused on each individual within the following specific parameters.

---

[5] That is not to say that they were unimportant topics. They were irrelevant in the sense that they did not contribute to a dominant theme or to the main idea of the research project. I must note that the data created by the RT was rich and wonderful in its own right. Some of the journaling that was created fed me spiritually and I feel privileged to have read such intimate thoughts. While the specific data may not make its way into the dissertation, the process of having generated the data is the rich soil from which the findings were grown.

[6] These folders are organized alphabetically, not in order of frequency or importance.

First, I analyzed the individual's statements regarding spiritual formation and spiritual practices from sessions One and Two. I listed his or her stated practices and comments and coded them in one of three possible categories: (1) internally-personally focused; (2) externally-communally focused; (3) blended personally-communally focused.

Second, I noted the choice of action project that each team member created for Phase Two. I also coded the individual's personal data throughout the course of phase two to detect emerging themes.[7]

Third, I analyzed each individual's response to the final questions in phase Three, specifically related to the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation and how, if at all, the social Trinity impacted them throughout the course of the project.[8] I noted three categories of responses to this question: (1) no significant change in either ideas about the Trinity or in spiritual formation; (2) moderate change in awareness, but a sense of confusion and a desire to pursue the topics further; (3) a significant change from a sense of internal-personal spirituality to that of communal-relationship based spirituality. I further nuanced these data into a continuum of responses. No two RT members had the same response. Rather, they spread across the continuum where there were some on one end of the spectrum who felt no change and questioned the integrity of the research methodology, to others on the other end who felt significant change and a sense of liberation because of the experience.

---

[7] These codes went into the potpourri basket and made it possible to find emerging themes later in the analysis.

[8] See table 7 for the list of questions.

Step Six

I realized that there was a parallel question/theme taking place within this project that did not necessarily relate directly to the interface between social Trinity and spiritual formation. It is the topic of *suburbia*. I analyzed the sections of data in which the RT discussed suburban issues and looked for ways in which the team believed that living in the suburbs was *helpful* to spiritual formation and ways in which it was a *hindrance* to spiritual formation. The team indicated a list in both categories. Their answers correspond to the meta-theory of radical individualism, isolation, and the demands and pressure on time and allegiances. However, they also noted the benefits of suburban living and the affluence, freedom, and privilege that it brings. These are assets that can be leveraged to help those who do not have these same privileges.[9]

Step Seven

It occurred to me that the codes noted in step three—*Dwelling in the Word*, *spiritual formation*, *suburban issues*, and *the Trinity*—revealed an important factor. Three of those topics—*spiritual formation*, *suburban issues*, and *the Trinity*—were similar in that I predetermined them as team leader. However, *Dwelling in the Word* was of a very different species. I did frame the Dwelling by choosing the text, but, because of the nature of the exercise, I was not able to direct what topics the team members would discuss. We spent 45-55 minutes out of each two-hour session practicing the Dwelling exercise, therefore, this specific data comprised a large portion of the overall data. The open-ended nature of these discussions, and the themes that emerged from these data,

---

[9] See table 9.

served to open the imagination of the RT to experience the indwelling of the Trinity

without an overt, instrumental move on my part as the leader.

I was curious to know how the RT felt about the practice of Dwelling in the

Word, so I asked for their reaction to the practice on three occasions during the course of

the project. I noted their responses and gathered three major themes. The Dwelling

exercise: (1) Helped the team to connect with strangers and learn the art of listening; (2)

Gave everyone a chance to be heard; and (3) Helped the team to center and focus on the

topic at hand.

Step Eight

It became evident to me that the most helpful data to make sense out of the project

were the responses to the list of final questions. These questions created open space for

the team members to address the research question itself.[10] I did a data analysis of the

responses to these questions for frequently occurring words and noticed three dominant

themes throughout the conversations. The first was centered on the word *relationship*.

The data indicate that the RT focused on the importance of relationships between the

persons of God, the individual with God, and the individual in relationship with the

neighbor. The second recurring theme was *reflection*. The RT noted that the introduction

of the praxis cycle was helpful for them to understand the importance of reflective

thinking, journaling, and intentional conversation—both in the group and with friends—

for spiritual formation.[11] The third recurring theme was that the RT noticed an increased

---

[10] See table 7.

[11] The praxis cycle was introduced both explicitly and implicitly. I explained the definition and implications of praxis at different points throughout the project. This was the explicit introduction. The

awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. They indicated that the process of experiencing this project gave them new language to articulate their experience of the Holy Spirit.
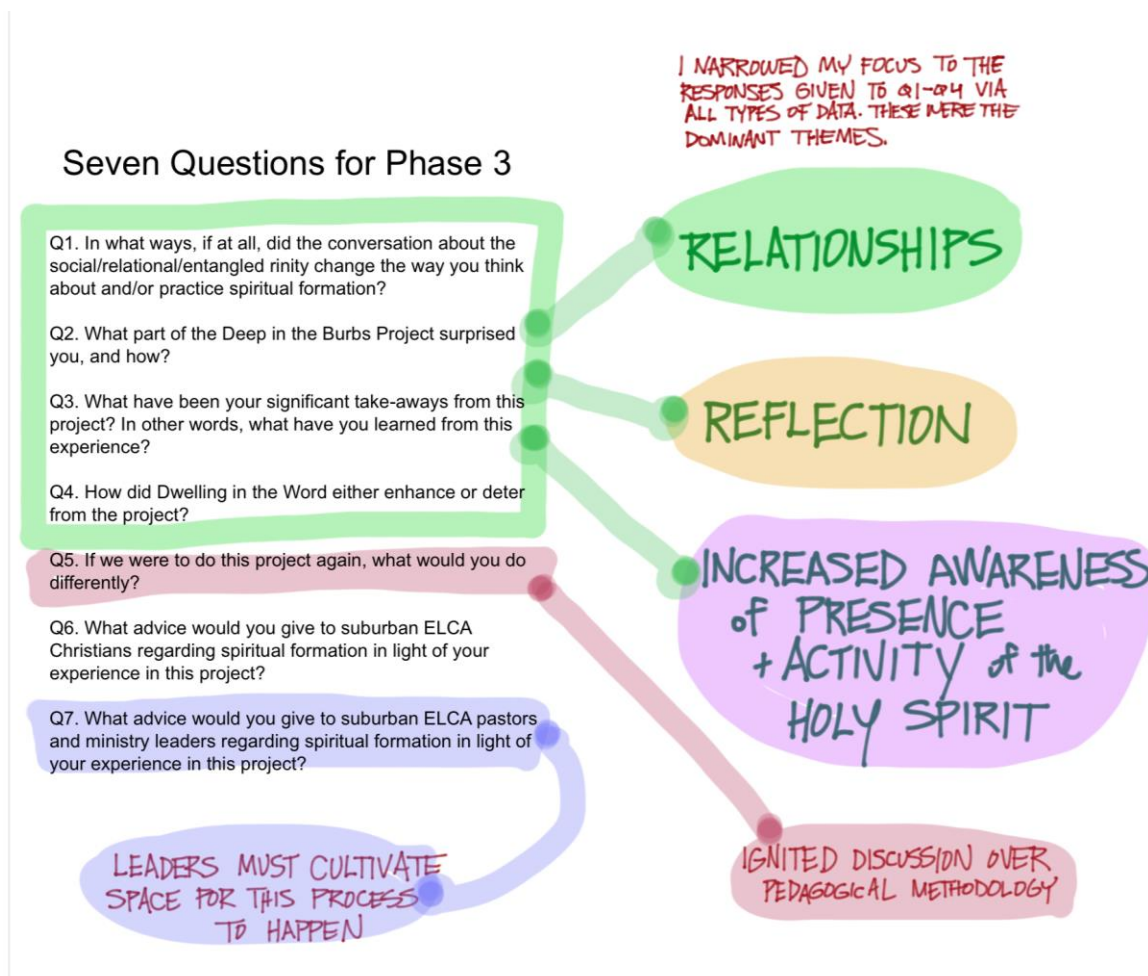
Figure 14. Major Themes from Data

---

team implicitly learned praxis through the action of the project itself. They recognized this as they reflected on the experience.

Table 2. Final Questions

1.	In what ways, if at all, did the conversation about the social/relational/entangled Trinity change the way you think about and/or practice spiritual formation?
2.	What part of the Deep in the Burbs Project surprised you, and how?
3.	What have been your significant take-aways from this project? In other words, what have you learned from this experience?
4.	How did Dwelling in the Word either enhance or deter from the project?
5.	If we were to do this project again, what would you do differently?
6.	What advice would you give to suburban ELCA Christians regarding spiritual formation in light of your experience in this project?
7.	What advice would you give to suburban ELCA pastors and ministry leaders regarding spiritual formation in light of your experience in this project?
8.	What questions do you think should be asked about the project that have not been asked in questions 1-7?

Project Narrative

Now that I have described my coding process and named some preliminary findings, it will be helpful to place them in the context of the project. I will use this section to provide a brief narrative of the project and pause to reflect on the findings in their narrative context.

Phase One

Phase 1.1: Sessions 01-02—February 24 and March 3, 2014

The first two team meetings were held at Bethlehem Lutheran. I will take a moment to describe the room set-up in detail, because it was important that the physical set-up of the room be conducive to communicative action. I organized the room and

facilitated the opening questions according Peter Block's advice.[12] I placed three tables in

the corners opposite the main door. A circle of 18 chairs sat in the center of the room. We

always held our large group discussions in a circle, because everyone is equal in this

configuration. There was a small table against the wall, next to the entrance, which had

an assortment of snacks: a veggie tray, pita chips with hummus, fresh-baked chocolate

chip cookies, and enough mini-water bottles for everyone to have two bottles.[13] I also

placed an assortment of colorful markers, post-it notes, and a large piece of paper on each

of the tables. This added pops of color to the room. Finally, I stuck three pieces of paper

to the wall, opposite the entrance, upon which was written: "Spiritual Formation" on the

first, "The Trinity" on the second, and "The Suburbs" on the third. This created a visual

reminder of the purpose of our gathering.

I opened the meeting with this question: *What led you to accept the invitation to*

this team?[14] Each person—including me—had the opportunity to say whatever he or she

wanted to say. The responses to this question were fascinating and can be categorized

into two types. First, many in the group were intrigued and drawn to the group because it

was an opportunity to work with other congregations. Many of the team members

expressed a sense of separation, and even unhealthy competitiveness, between sister

congregations. They thought this project might work toward building unity in the

suburban context. The second type of response had a general sense of dismay at how the

---

[12] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*.

[13] My wife was kind enough to provide the snacks for the first two meetings. The women from Calvary volunteered to provide the snacks for sessions 03 and 04. This was a positive sign that they were investing in the process.

[14] This is a question from Block's process of building community.

suburban context made it very difficult to experience health and growth in spiritual formation.

Pat beautifully exemplifies the second type of response. Her words also reflect many of the assumptions that I brought to this research. She said,

> I grew up in a small town. Very unlike the suburban atmosphere. Church was central to life where I was from. It is very disconnected here. I really don't have any family close by to depend on. When I look at my neighbors, they all seem to be very disconnected, too. I look at my kids and my kids' friends, the people they associate with. My kids grew up in sports; a lot of baseball, soccer, football, hockey, golf, whatever, they played it. There was a lot of contention with practices on Sunday mornings, practices on Wednesday nights. A lot of decisions about what do you forego. Is the choir concert more important than the game tonight? You know, decisions that need to be made. People make those decisions differently? It's very different in the suburbs than it is in a small community where you have that core that everything is built around. In the suburbs there are so many choices and so many alternatives. So many pressures being put on, especially, young people; as to what they should do, what they should pursue, the amount of time they should spend doing what. And the fear on the part of the parents. I remember—[directed to Tiffany]—you've got young kids—you're going to be making choices about how much time you're going to let your kid play hockey, golf, soccer. Are they going to play all year? How much time are you going to dedicate to that? Are they going to miss church, or miss Sunday school? It's all those hard choices that people have to make. At the time it's going to seem like a life or death decision to you. Which it really isn't, but at the time it seems like it, because everyone is afraid that if you miss a season you can't play any more. You're going to be out, you'll be cut. I think it's mostly the young people that drew to, because it's those people that you know. Even those kids that grow up in the church—they get baptized, they get confirmed—once they get baptized and confirmed, they're gone. You may never see them again, until maybe they have a kid that has to be baptized. We need some way to connect to them and get them to stay. Even adults, their parents, there's so much pressure, so many different things to be involved in to do, and so much juggling. It's really hard for people to get their priorities and to get them straight.

We practiced *Dwelling in the Word* in John 14:15-24 for both sessions. Some of the team members had never experienced this exercise. Many of the members from Ascension had experienced it previously with me in different contexts. The members at Bethlehem had practiced Dwelling in their congregation as well. None of the Calvary

women had experienced it before. All of the team members reported that the experience was very helpful for them to feel connected to the group.

These sessions were designed to allow the team space to construct responses to three specific questions. *What are your personal practices of spiritual formation? What are your hopes and fears for spiritual formation in the suburbs? What is your definition of spiritual formation?* I followed a similar pattern in both sessions. First, I invited the team members to assemble at the tables, and asked them to write their own response to the question in their notebook. Then I asked them to gather into groups of three and synthesize their responses into one response. Finally, I asked the groups of three to gather into groups of six and synthesize the two responses into one. Each group of six shared its synthesized response with the entire team.[15] Everyone turned in his or her personal journals at the end of the meeting. I captured each page in a separate Evernote note for each person and kept a digital record of all the hand-written documents produced during the meetings.[16]

Table 3 demonstrates the team's collective feelings regarding the suburban context as it relates to spiritual formation. These data indicate a general sense of busyness, isolation, and a longing for community.

---

[15] Here I utilized Block's method of collaboratively constructing ideas. He suggests to have each individual craft a response to the question. Then the individuals meet in groups of three and synthesize their answers into one. Then the groups of three meet in groups of six and synthesize the two answers into one. This process proved to be very effective in allowing each member of the team to feel that they had a voice in the construction of ideas.

[16] It struck me that I was exerting a great deal of leadership in this group. Was this contrary to a democratic, communicative process? Block says that leadership is *convening*. Palmer, Brookfield, and Hess call these "holding spaces." It requires a great amount of leadership, planning, and coordination to make a meeting like this happen. However, my leadership is not *telling* them *what* to think or *how* to behave. Rather, I am facilitating optimal spaces in which they can have constructive conversations.

Table 3. Hopes and Fears for the Suburban Context

	Hopes	Fears
Community	• That more are saved. • Bringing people to Christ. • Less greed in our community. • Support for the lonely and those in need. • Churches of all denominations united. • All united. • All welcome. • More service—hands and feet idea. • More resources put to work for kingdom purposes.	• Judgment • Denominational finger pointing • Pressures on our time, especially on big church days like Sunday and Wednesdays. • Garage doors and fences. • Lack of interaction with the community. • Bad PR from our own flock • Bad past experiences within the church • Put me in a box. • Bad media image of church and religion • Busy schedules.
Personal	• Be a role model • Walk the walk • Openness and honesty • God is our strong tower, not the imaginary ones we build in our mind. • Being the hands and feet of Jesus. • Building a role model • Deeper intimacy with Christ • Knowing the Word of God from Old Testament to New	• Busy schedules • Life challenges too much • Giving up other things the world says are important. • What kind of sacrifices will I be asked to make. • Self-doubt • Not worthy • Guilt • Family and friend opposition • I don't want to be counter-cultural

Table 4 reports the definitions created by the triads during session 02. My initial assessment of these definitions is that the team members generally understood spiritual formation to be a process in which their personal relationships with God were the priority. The social aspect of spiritual formation was either a secondary product of the primary relationship with God, or was derivative of that relationship. This observation is noted so that it can be used in comparison to the data of Phase Three. I must confess that

I was surprised as to how much social interaction was indicated in these initial definitions. I had assumed that the team members would lean more heavily toward a radical individualistic approach to spiritual formation. However, their definitions and their personal practices indicate that, while individual practices did dominate the narratives, there was a definite acknowledgement that some form of communal activity was a necessary part of spiritual formation.

Table 4. Initial Definitions of Spiritual Formation

1. Spiritual formation is to form my life, my daily thoughts and actions, always at least trying to be aware of the Holy Spirit and ever-present Father. Not just when I'm doing church things, but in my thoughts, words, and actions so that one day it will be me and part of me without needing to think of it, forming my very being by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
2. A development of an intimate, personal relationship with God as demonstrated in our everyday lives.
3. A practice to develop a foundation to understand a power greater than ourselves that shapes our core beliefs.
4. How the Spirit manifests itself within me, and then presents itself from me to the world through action and word. It's not a command to do that, but that it's built up inside us so much that we just have to let it out. Because, we want the world to have what we have.
5. It's a process and a journey of spiritual growth and maturity in our relationship with the Trinity, and with our walk with the Lord, that results in a discerning of God's call for us, and answering God's call for commitment of action.
6. The process of maturing in our faith through an ever-increasing awareness of our own spiritual relationship with God in conjunction with our relationships with people around us.
7. A process and journey of growing and maturing in our relationship with the Triune God and with those around us that results in a discerning of God's call through commitment and action.
8. An initial recognition that we need God to fill the void in our spirit and a continual surrendering to God which leads to a manifestation within us, and presents itself from us, to the world through action and word.
9. The development of an intimate, personal relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as demonstrated in my thoughts, words, and actions so this relationship will become an integral part of me.

Phase 1.2: Session 03-04—March 10 and March 17, 2014

Phase 1.2 was designed to intentionally increase the RT's awareness and

understanding of the social Trinity through an educational process. We changed gears in

three ways during these sessions. First, we met at Ascension Lutheran, which changed the

physical dynamic of the meeting. Second, I presented four videos to the group as a means

of introducing them to the *social Trinity*, thus shifting the nature of the group dynamic

from a fully collaborative space to a more presentational space.[17] Third, we switched

texts for the *Dwelling in the Word* exercise between sessions three and four. We dwelt in

John 14:15-24 for the third time in session three and then dwelt in John 15:1-17 at the

beginning of session four. These three changes provoked surprising responses from the

team.

I posted the videos on the website during the week leading up to session three and

invited the RT to view them as often as possible prior to the meeting.[18] We spent session

03, after the initial *Dwelling in the Word*, in the following pattern: (1) watch video; (2)

personal reflection in notebooks; (3) large group discussion. We repeated this cycle four

times, completed all four videos, and ended the session on time. I told the RT that this

---

[17] The videos can be viewed at http://www.deepintheburbs.com/theoretical-frames/trinity/ (accessed March 24, 2015). Please see appendix B to read the full transcript of the videos. I chose this style of teaching for three reasons. First, I was trying to utilize my skills as an animator to create an interesting form of communication that would engage them in a unique manner. Second, by creating videos that could be posted online I was allowing the content to have a shelf-life that lasted beyond the scope of a traditional lecture/discussion forum. The online presence also contributed to my ulterior motives of creating communicative space with the team and the world through digital media and the internet. Third, I wanted to be as clear and concise as I could with the content so that we did not get distracted or derailed in a discussion forum, and thus lose precious time for conversation in our meetings.

[18] *A Short, Animated Introduction to the Social Trinity*, http://www.deepintheburbs.com/theoretical-frames/trinity/ (accessed March 26, 2015)

would be the only time we would watch the videos together, but that they have access to them on the website any time and are encouraged to watch them repeatedly.

I found the dynamic of this session to be very different from Phase 1.1. In those sessions we began with intimate conversations in dyads and triads that evolved into the large group discussion. Everyone had a chance to speak from the beginning of the meeting. This session led people from passive watching, to personal reflection, and then immediately into a large group discussion. The nature of the interaction made it seem like a different group of people. They were very reluctant to talk. A few people dominated the discussion while some people didn't speak. This experience helped reinforce to me the importance of Block's 1-3-6 principle and Parker Palmer's suggestion that subject-centered methodology is preferred to teacher-centered methodology when facilitating adult learning. My voice in the video served as "the expert" voice, against which it is intimidating for the average adult to respond. Many team members later reflected that they felt overwhelmed and even ignorant when they were first confronted with the information in the videos.

The people who did speak during the large group conversation fell into three categories. The first category consisted of Stephanie, Tiffany, and John. They embraced the message of social Trinity as expressed in the videos. They acknowledged the damaging effects of the hierarchies that emerged from the dualist universe and longed for the relationality of the fusion of horizons. Phil represented the second category. He questioned the validity of theology as opposed to scripture. Is not, he argued, theology just the words of humans? Christian theology, he said, is the revealed word of God and the continual processing of the Holy Spirit. Emilee and Eleanor represented the third

category. Emilee said, "Can't we just embrace the mystery?" Eleanor also said that she

really liked it when she was younger and everything was black and white. Now

everything is gray and the option of multiple interpretations of doctrine is often

disconcerting to her.

I was perplexed after session four. I posted some thoughts on the discussion

forum and notified the team, via email, encouraging them to read it. I wrote:

> I wonder if throwing that much information at a group of people who have not
> passed through the same slow, painful journey that I have in order to have these
> ideas, is more helpful or harmful. I realize that we are all mature adults, each
> bringing our own life experience to the experience of watching these videos, and
> that is a positive experience in itself. However, I think I am simply struggling
> with the messiness of the PAR process. This, once again, betrays my inherent
> positivistic bias and the instrumentalist reason that has dominated my
> conservative upbringing. I need to take a deep breath and let the process unfold.
>   Still, I am stuck as to where this should go from here. We've talked about
> spiritual formation for two weeks. Then we spent one session watching the
> videos—a bit like drinking from a fire hydrant. Now, we have three weeks left to
> "do" something with it. But what? How do I frame the questions in order to
> empower the group to co-create a new possibility?
>   Are we trying to reimagine the practices of spiritual formation in the suburbs?
> Are we trying to reimagine what church could be like in the suburbs? Are we
> wrestling with an abstract theological question and asking if it has any "practical"
> application in the suburban context?
>   What are some possible projects that they could do?

I received two responses to this post that changed the shape of the project. First,

John felt the post was very negative. He also felt that session Three took a turn that was

very different from the first two meetings. The first two meetings were all about the

group constructing something together. This last one, he said, "you slipped back into your

teacher mode." His feedback further supports Palmer's theory.

The second response came from Phil via the discussion forum. He said:

> I think that your methodology of team formation for future visioning and action is
> spot on correct. However, I also think that your attempts to motivate the team
> through doctrine of social Trinity (my own doctrinal misgivings to your presented

view aside) are problematic at best. Doctrine doesn't really ever motivate very well.

In both NT and OT times the people of God were motivated not by doctrine but rather by narrative…What you need to do is tell a compelling story of what God has done and is still doing and invite the people to join in. If you tell the story well enough then the people of God will be delighted to join in and in that way become part of the narrative that God is telling in history.

I took Phil's words to heart and posted my story on the website for the RT to read between session three and session four.[19] I then presented a live version of my story during session four by mapping it out on the black board and describing the evolution of my understanding of the Trinity.[20] People seemed to resonate with my story. John, Tiffany, and Quaid told me afterward that people lean in to listen when things are presented like I did it. Phil's words reminded me that people are motivated by narrative, not abstract ideas. Stories captivate the imagination. Perhaps that is why Jesus told them so often.

This narrative presentation also opened up a lively conversation about the nature and role of the Holy Spirit in the world today. I make special note of this because one of the key findings from the project data is that most members of the RT sensed an increased awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the world today. I believe this conversation was a key contributor to those data. I had not planned this presentation in the original design, and, had Phil and John not gently rebuked my methodology, it might not have happened. This is, I would argue, evidence of how the

---

[19] See appendix A to read this post. See the post as it was presented to the RT at http://www.deepintheburbs.com/the-importance-of-storytelling-the-story-behind-the-research-question/ (accessed March 24, 2015)

[20] This was the one and only time throughout the project that I ever made a lecture-style presentation.

Holy Spirit works through the participatory action process to encounter people with the Word of God.

We ended session Four with an abrupt change of gears and began preliminary conversations regarding taking action in our suburban context. This was designed to prepare the RT for Phase 1.3. I asked the following question and invited the team to write responses in their personal notebooks: *What is it about living in the suburbs that helps our spiritual formation? And also, hinders our spiritual formation….in the context of this conversation today?* We also held a large group conversation regarding possible projects that we might do to engage in spiritual formation in the suburbs. I handed out a copy of two chapters from *Practicing the Way of Jesus*.[21] I offered this suggestion simply to prime the pump of a type of project they might consider.

These activities generated the data in table 5. The data indicate that the RT has mixed feelings about the suburban context in relation to spiritual formation. While the suburban context does make it difficult to connect in community, the privilege of middle-class life empowers Christians to make a difference in the world with their resources.

---

[21] Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*.

Table 5. Helps and Hindrances of the Suburban Context[22]

Helps	Hindrances
• Social status and financial security creates freedom to choose to pursue faith if desired. • Large variety of suburban churches from which to choose. • Homogeneity creates space for community and connection around common interests.	• Distance from work/school creates long commutes and hinders family/social interaction. • Individualism/self-sufficiency. • Materialism. • Financial security (including focus on material possessions, single family homes, emphasis on homogenous "safe" neighborhoods) creates isolation and ignorance of social needs in the world.

Phase 1.3: Sessions 05-08—March 24, March 31, April 21, May 5, 2014

Phase 1.3 was designed to create a space in which each member of the RT could create an action project that would be carried out during Phase Two. The project was supposed to reflect his or her experience with the social Trinity and spiritual formation in Phase One. The original plan was to meet two times at Calvary Lutheran for sessions Five and Six at the end of March, 2014. The team did meet as scheduled, but it struggled to make a decision regarding the projects that would be carried out. The team elected to meet again. One member of the team had connections at the City Hall in the home suburb of Ascension Lutheran, so the team met in the lunch room of City Hall on April 21, 2014. The team, once again, was not able to make a final decision at this meeting. The team agreed to meet one more time in the lunch room of City Hall on May 5, 2015 and left that meeting with a sense of closure and direction for Phase Two.

---

[22] See appendix C for the exhaustive data from this question.

Each session of Phase 1.3 followed a similar pattern to the first four sessions in the previous phases. We began the session with *Dwelling in the Word*. I have already mentioned that we switched to the second Dwelling text in session Four. So, we dwelt in John 15:1-17 for sessions Five and Six. However, the extra meetings allowed us the opportunity to add a third text to the list. We dwelt in John 16:5-15 at the beginning of session Seven. We did not, however, practice dwelling in the Word at the beginning of session Eight, since the team felt that the exercise often took up so much of the meeting time that we were not able to "get down to business" and make the decisions that needed to be made.[23]

There are three ways in which I would like to reflect on Phase 1.3. First, I will reflect on the process of decision-making as it relates to communicative action and leadership. Second, I will reflect on the Dwelling in the Word exercise and how it both enhanced the project and deterred from the project. Finally, I will mention an event that happened corollary to the DITB project that had a direct impact on my life, the members of Ascension Lutheran, and the data of the project.

Decision-Making and Leadership Issues

The first reflection will focus on the difficulty that the RT experienced in making a group decision. There was confusion as to whether the group was supposed to work together during Phase Two, or whether each person was supposed to do his or her own project. Many of the team members were initially drawn to participate in the project with

---

[23] This indicates a running theme. The team felt some tension between the action/task oriented members and the relational/being oriented members. I believe this demonstrates the further conversation regarding the objectivist tendencies of modernity and their impact on spiritual practices.

the hope that bridges could be built between the congregations. That expectation was set early on in session One. Others in the group quietly resisted that idea, but did not voice their own perspective until the end. I neither encouraged nor discouraged any idea, but attempted to facilitate and foster the ongoing conversation.

I led the group through two sessions in which we followed the same collaborative processes that we practiced in previous sessions, but when it came time to make final decisions, no one was willing to make a definitive stance. I struggled to control my desire to assert leadership and tell the group what to do. It was very difficult to watch the team get to the end of Phase One and sense such obvious frustration with the process. This felt like a failure to many of the team members. The team decided that it couldn't leave things hanging and it had to meet again. I took this as a positive sign that the members were still invested in the process.

I sent an email to the team the day after session Six. I asked them to journal about their feelings immediately following the meeting. Then, after they had processed those feelings, I asked them to read the transcript of the meeting and journal again, reflecting on how their thoughts and/or feelings may have changed after reading the transcript. The email precipitated a great flourish of very long, thoughtful, and perplexed emails.

This is the general summary of the RT's feedback expressed in these emails. First, everyone felt some level of frustration at the lack of unity and clarity at the end of the session. Second, many people felt that there was actual division amongst the group over two specific topics. First, there was apparent division between those who are more prone to *being* activities (prayer, specifically) and those who are more *action* oriented. Many RT members named this as the *be-ers* vs. *do-ers*. Second, there was segregation between

the congregations. Several team members noted that there was not enough time to develop relationships that would hold the group together beyond the DITB project. When it came time to making decisions, congregational allegiance and familiarity won over research team cohesion.

There was a marked difference between how people thought and felt about the meeting before they read the transcript and after they read it. This is important to note because I think it indicates how powerful emotions are in the memory of an event. The team members left with a feeling of frustration, and found that this feeling clouded their ability to remember the many thoughts and options that were presented in the meeting. Eleanor said, "What an amazing difference of feeling!! Thanks for this valuable suggestion [to reflect before and after reading the transcript]. I feel much more encouraged and positive after reading the transcript and/or the passage of time." This is an important observation because one key finding from the project data, which I will report shortly, is the importance of *reflection* in the practice of spiritual formation. I would argue that this type of reflection—in which potentially hostile or volatile participants are invited to journal and re-evaluate the data—is an important part of communicative action. This reflects the communicative rationality that Habermas suggests is vital for constructing a preferred future.

The team regrouped two more times and eventually came to an agreement. They decided that it was never the original intention of the project to form one inter-congregational community project. Several of the team members indicated that they were committed to doing specific projects, but did not have time to work with a larger group project that would require more time. See table 6 for the final list of intended projects.

This experience of group tension, post-session reflection, and regrouping demonstrates the necessity and purpose for leadership. I was tempted to exert instrumental leadership during session Six, in which I swept in as a hero-leader and fixed everyone's problems. By the grace of God, I did not do this. Rather, I facilitated a cognitive space in which the team members were invited to reflect—to meditate—on the data and find a third way. This is—I would argue—an example of the way power can be used to facilitate communicative spaces. It is also an experience of how the Holy Spirit mediates between polarized dualities to find the way of peace in community. Here, again, the research team was able to experience an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity by the process of participatory action.

It is important to note that we lost the women of Calvary at this point of the project. Pat disappeared half way through Phase One. No one knew where she went. Eleanor and Christy both had health issues that complicated their ability to continue. Emilee had a passion for being part of a prayer group, but when the multi-church prayer project died, she decided that she would rather focus on her involvement in her own congregation. She also expressed to me that the digital media component of the project was intimidating to her. It had intimidated her from the beginning, but she thoroughly enjoyed the sessions of Phase One. The thought of journaling electronically convinced her to drop out of the project completely. Christy, Eleanor, and Emilee wished us all well for the remainder of the project.

Reflections on Dwelling in the Word

The second reflection from Phase 1.3 has to do with the Dwelling in the Word exercise and the role it played in the project. I entered into session Seven knowing that

the team was struggling with tension over the purpose of the projects and their inability to make a group decision. I had to make a decision as the facilitator of the meeting. Do we practice Dwelling together, which takes at least 45 minutes, or do we skip it in order to get straight to business? I chose to facilitate a modified Dwelling exercise. We would dwell in John 16:5-15, but only invite two dyads to share. This would shorten the process and allow more time for decision-making. When the first two dyads were sharing, however, I got the strong impression that we needed to hear from everyone. So, we did. The problem is that our subsequent conversations regarding the Dwelling exercise took up most of the meeting session and left us short on time for the stated intention of the meeting. We did not make a decision and felt forced to meet, yet again.

Why did I make the decision to take so much precious time to Dwell in the word…again? Some of the team members had expressed in their journals that they did not particularly like the Dwelling exercise because they are more action-oriented people. I felt their frustration during this session in particular. I honestly struggled with feelings of self-doubt after this meeting, because I had "failed" to accomplish the stated objective. Then I realized that this was exactly the type of thinking that my experience with social Trinity and my study of Kegan's orders of consciousness was challenging. The Modern, Western—and particularly suburban—mindset is time-bound and fixated on goal-setting and achievement. I have learned that it is necessary to stop the tyranny of the urgent and practice slowing exercises, such as this particular moment of Dwelling, in order to counteract these tendencies.

I was very glad that we practiced Dwelling that night, and that I felt the prompting of the Spirit in that moment. I was especially moved by Kelly and Stephanie's insights.

Kelly had just received a letter of condemnation that was written to her regarding the

Holy Conversations.[24] She was in a difficult position as the board president during this

landmark decision-making process. Jesus' words to the disciples, found in our Dwelling

text, brought her great comfort. Kelly came up to me after the meeting and told me that

she thought she wouldn't come that night. She decided to come, and the scripture was

exactly what she needed to hear. Something good did from the meeting, even if it wasn't

the something that we had planned it to be.

An Outside Event that Impacted the Project

The third reflection on Phase 1.3 is related to the *Holy Conversations* mentioned

in the previous section. The *Holy Conversations* was a series of meetings of the

Ascension Lutheran congregation designed to create space for the congregation to discuss

the issue of allowing same-sex marriages at the church. The State had legalized same-sex

marriages the previous summer and, since the senior pastor had been asked, on more than

one occasion, to perform such a ceremony, and the fact that there were actively

participating same-sex couples involved in the congregation, the church leadership felt it

was appropriate to travel this path of discernment. The process spanned the school year

of September 2013-May 2014, therefore it overlapped with the DITB project. The

Ascension leadership team decided, in May, to permit same-sex marriages. Several

members of the RT were closely involved in the process and some of them fell on

opposite sides of the issue.

---

[24] This was the nine-month conversation happening at Ascension Lutheran about whether the church would perform same-sex marriages.

The decision to perform same-sex marriages did not only impact the inter-team dynamic, it also impacted my own life and ministry. I had been receiving financial aid from a single benefactor during my doctoral studies. This support made it possible for me to reduce my work load at the church to three-quarter time so that I could have freedom to work on the DITB project. My benefactor lived in another state and was a contact from my previous ministry. The decision to support and perform same-sex marriage was not acceptable to the benefactor, and my support was discontinued. I learned of this decision in the time between Session 06 and Session 07. Not only did I lose my financial support, but my wife also decided that she could no longer be part of this church, so she left. She did not leave me, but, her leaving the church in which I serve placed a great deal of stress on me. These events sent me into a brief period of panic. How could I continue without that financial support? What would happen to the DITB project? How can I be a pastor at a church my wife no longer supports when ministry has been at the center of our twenty-five year marriage? The congregation rallied and a group of anonymous donors pledged to cover the support that I lost. My wife and I came to an understanding that allowed us to disagree on this topic and each be OK with our decisions to stay and to leave the church. We have reached equilibrium in a third way that leads to peace.

I choose to reflect on this topic for two reasons. First, the conversation around the decision, both leading up to it and the fallout after it, wove its way into the narrative of the data. Second, one running theme throughout the narrative is the constant encounter with apparent *dualisms*. There always seems to be two opposing positions on everything and people spend a great deal of time choosing sides. One of the things we learned

through this process is that the conversations about the *social Trinity* reframed our

imagination to believe that there is a third way between these apparent dualistic poles.

Phase Two

The purpose of Phase two was to allow the RT members to engage in the action

projects that they created in Phase one. Table 6 shows the list of projects that the

members intended to carry out. Not every project was completed, however the majority

of the team members were very diligent in their pursuit of these projects.

Table 6. Action Projects

1. A prayer group for families of confirmation students - Emilee, Eleanor, Christy, Sharon
2. A community pig roast - Phil, Rhet, Roger
3. Trained in a befrienders ministry – Roger
4. A reconceptualizing, or reconfiguring, of the whole adult formation curriculum that was based around Trinity. – Phil
5. Sunday s'mores - Rob, Kelly, Tiffany
6. Building a Haiti Mission team – Rob
7. Study of the book 7 – Stephanie
8. Engagement in Men's ministry leadership – Jarod
9. Connecting with neighborhood around service projects and issues - Jarod
10. Group from outside of church regularly serving at Feed My Starving Children - John, Mary
11. Journaling (as intentional project) - Heather, John
12. Planning of the women's retreat as a project to process these questions – Heather
13. The Daniel fast – Heather
14. Leading yoga classes - Phyllis

What Do S'mores Have to Do with Anything?

I must confess that I was surprised by the nature of the action projects the RT created. It was my assumption that the team would create projects that would somehow reflect the process that we experienced in the sessions during Phase One. I imagined that they would gather friends, family, or neighbors to engage in Dwelling in the John passages, perhaps watch the videos, engage in conversations, and report a change in people's ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. Fortunately, nothing like this happened.

I attended a dinner one evening, during the summer while the team was in Phase Two, at which several pastors and church leaders from around North America were gathered. The topic of the DITB project came up and I was asked to give examples of the types of projects the team created. I described some of the projects, including the Sunday Evening S'mores.[25] One of the pastors seemed uncomfortable with my research and asked me directly, "What do S'mores have to do with the Trinity? How can you demonstrate that any of this is connected to your theological proposal and not to something else, like intercessory prayer, or any number of things?" I was stunned at the moment and did not know exactly how to answer, but the question haunted me for the next few weeks.

I brought the question to the team during session Nine. "Help me connect these projects to the Trinity," I asked. The team pondered this question and concluded that it was the experience of the relationality of God in the process of the DITB project that

---

[25] See the description of this project below.

allowed them to imagine that these projects were a spiritual practice that embodied their emerging awareness.

We are not alone in this discovery. A growing body of research indicates that action research itself is a generative, Trinitarian, spiritual practice for the congregation.[26] Martin says,

> Action research works well in a congregational setting by being deliberately transformative. Change is an essential component of action research.…[it] provides an approach to implement substantial organisational change through collaborative reflection and dialogue. The community-building, empowering nature of action research gives people a 'voice' and a say in the change process. Change is not imposed by either the pastor or an elite leadership team, but through collaboration and negotiation. In volunteer organisations, like churches, such a collaborative approach to organisational transformation is not only very appropriate, but virtually essential for authentic change to be initiated and sustained."[27]

The data indicate that the increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impacted the RT in a way that was far different, unexpected, and better than I had imagined it would. The team all agreed that the biggest take-away from the experience was their increased awareness of the importance and *primacy of relationships*. The types of relationships in which they engage, and the understanding of relationship itself, shifted for them. Previously, they thought of relationships as a transaction between two autonomous beings. They might have said that we need to build relationships in order to get people to either come to church or accept the Gospel. Now, however, it seems like the team understands that relationships are not an option in life, but are the primary essence

---

[26] See the work being pursued at Heythrop College. Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, and Catherine Duce, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

[27] Bruce Martin, "Transforming a Local Church Congregation through Action Research," *Educational Action Research* 9, no. 2 (2001): 264.

of our being. We must begin with relationships and see what God is doing in those relationships by engaging the neighbor and listening first.

The Action Projects

I will now look at each project that was successfully completed and seek to understand what happened, what was learned, and how it fits into the overall scope of the DITB project.

Sunday night s'mores

Rob, Kelly, and Tiffany held an event each Sunday evening during the Summer months. The event took place in the parking lot of Ascension Lutheran. They used a portable grill to create a fire, provided the materials needed to make s'mores, and created a space in which anyone could stop by, make and eat s'mores, and connect. The idea came from the fact that many suburbanites spend the weekend at the cabin, thus miss the fellowship and connection of their local congregation. The Sunday S'mores event would allow those who had been disconnected to stop by the parking lot on their way back from the cabin and reconnect with a God-centered community before entering into the regular flow of the work week. Since the event was outside in a parking lot, it did not matter how a person was dressed, or whether they were dirty and grungy from the lake or camping. It was simply a safe place.

The original intention was to advertise the event in two ways. The first was through natural connections from the team via personal communication, a Facebook event page, and announcements in the weekly worship services at Ascension. The second was to prayerfully canvas the adjacent neighborhood and inform the neighbors of the

event and invite them to participate. The team reports that they were successful in the first way, but never made the time to connect to the neighborhood.

The team followed through with the project and met every Sunday night in the summer. The attendance was very good. However, they noted that the attendees varied greatly throughout the weeks. Rob laments the failure to connect to the neighborhood, since he felt this was the heart of the missional piece of the event. However, he recognized that a seed was planted for a missional space. They intend to do it again next year and connect with the neighborhood at that time.

Regular participation at Feed My Starving Children

John and Mary chose to commit to serve at Feed My Starving Children[28] on one shift per week. They intentionally invited people from their workplace who were not involved in a church. They followed through with this commitment and plan to continue doing it. They made two observations about this experience. First, it felt very natural and was not a forced sense of sharing their faith. Second, the fact that they placed an open invitation to join the event on the bulletin board in their workplace opened up spaces for faith conversations that would have never otherwise opened up in the work environment. Many workmates joined their regular FMSC team and constructive faith conversations naturally emerged.

---

[28] Feed My Starving Children is a non-profit organization that gathers volunteers to combine dry food goods into "manna packs" for distribution to hunger relief organizations around the world. There is a packing station in one of the suburbs in which the DITB congregations dwell. See the Feed My Starving Children website. https://www.fmsc.org/ (accessed April 24, 2015).

Participating in the planning of Women's Retreat

Heather was invited to be on the Women's Retreat Planning Team at Ascension. The retreat took place at the beginning of November, just before the DITB project officially ended. She had been thinking deeply about the social Trinity throughout the course of the DITB project and decided to bring the social Trinity into the planning and teaching of the Women's retreat. She wrote this introduction for the retreat:

> Within the acorn is the potential for a towering oak tree, strong and rooted, able to weather any storm. God the creator made it so. There is a profound mystery in a seed. In fact Juliann of Norwich once held a hazel nut in her hand and she had the revelation of a deep truth about all of life. Basically, what she heard was this in relation to the seed: God created it. God loves it. God sustains it. One of the things this acorn must do before it can accomplish its purpose is to stop. Stop moving. Stop rolling around the yard. It needs to pause and basically come to a still spot, and then God can start unfolding the miracle that is in the seed. The seed needs to rest in the creator before the sprouts come out or the roots start developing. When the acorn finally comes to stop, and even is buried in a way, when it dies to itself as an acorn, it is then that God can provide nurture and support, and then the acorn will be transformed and will begin its purpose of becoming a mighty oak. This seed can be like our calm in the chaos of life. Before we develop that sense of deep calm and trust, we too, have to basically stop running. We too have to die to ourselves in a way so that our Creator can transform us in the same way he transforms an acorn into an oak tree. Not that we have to stop doing all the things that are out there for us to do. So much of what keeps us busy is the very vocation that God has called us to do. But God has called us to our work to be an extension of God's grace and love in this world. If we push on too strong, if we never stop to just be in the presence of our creator, if we do not allow ourselves to be buried in a way and then nurtured, we don't really know where God wants us to send our branches. So again, today is a day about stopping, in order to be nurtured, in order for God to help us grow our roots a little bit.

Designing of adult formation plan

Phil is a retired Lutheran pastor and has a penchant for theology and teaching. He proved to be a healthy interlocutor throughout the project and often sparred with me on the website chat forums. He was openly resistant to the idea of the social Trinity at the beginning of the project, but consistently expressed his disagreement with a spirit of

grace and constructive critique. His openness to entertain the ideas and wrestle with them throughout the course of the project was encouraging to the other RT team members and humbling to me as a pastor and scholar.

Something clicked for Phil along the way. He found my addition of the *relational* and *entanglement* language to be a helpful corrective to the *social* language.[29] Phil began to see that the relational/entangled Trinity was the dynamic structure of the universe and he imagined an entire Adult Formation Curriculum and System constructed around the Trinity, the images of Trinity within our own human nature, and the relationality of our existence with God in the world. He was prolific throughout the months of the project and generated hundreds of pages of ideas and course outlines based on his newly revised understanding of the Trinity as it relates to spiritual formation.

Phil's language demonstrates, in my opinion, the strongest shift from the dualistic thinking of the traditional Western Trinitarian model to the relationality model we discussed in the DITB project. He stated on the first night that he was interested to see how the Trinity, which is "up here" (said while holding one hand above his head), connects to spiritual formation, which is "down here" (said while holding his hand below his waist). He could not see how they connected. Then, after the weeks and months of wrestling with Trinitarian praxis, he reported that his understanding of spiritual formation had changed.

---

[29] I continued to grow in my understanding of the social Trinity during Phase two of the project and progressively blogged about my research. One particular discovery helped me to use the metaphor of Quantum Entanglement to discuss the social/relational Trinity. I will explore the impact of this exploration—specifically with Phil's interaction with my blogs—more fully in the final chapter. See Simmons, *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology*.

Reflection on the leading of Yoga classes

Phyllis is a yoga instructor. She teaches a daytime yoga class for preschoolers a few times during the week and an evening class for adults. She intentionally creates a time for *Dwelling in the Word* as part of the meditation process. She reports that the majority of the members of her class are not from the ELCA. They enjoy the yoga classes because she included a time of *Dwelling in the Word*. They would tell her, "I'm so glad you do that, because we don't have that ability any place else where we 'exercise' where we can incorporate our faith."

Intentional journaling

Heather, Sharon, and John each regularly journaled throughout the months of the project and emailed their journals to me. Each of their journals was unique to their personality and place in life, yet each of them, in their own way, reflected a genuine interaction with the social Trinity, spiritual formation, and their everyday lives. Heather's journals included lengthy, well-written, reflective narratives that integrated her own life experience as a missionary, a health care provider, and a mother into her reflection on the Trinity, the use of gender to imagine God, and the relationality of life.

Sharon is a local politician. She reflected on her interactions with suburbanites as she knocked on over four thousand doors during the months of the project. She saw the multiplicity of stories, the loneliness, and the need for connection among the people. She felt the presence of the Holy Spirit working in, with, and through her as she simply listened to people.

John had never journaled before. He began his journaling by keying in one simple sentence a day on his iPhone and emailing me the weekly "Urinals"—as he called

them—to me. His thoughts and observations expanded and deepened as the months progressed. By the end of the project his Urinals contained thick, deeply philosophical and theological paragraphs for each day. His sense of God's presence in everything deepened as the journaling exercise encouraged him to be more observant of how God was present throughout the ordinary flow of life.

Session 09 – August 25, 2014

The RT team met one time at Ascension at the end of August in order to have an opportunity to check in with each other. This meeting was not part of the original design, but I felt it would be helpful to keep the RT connected. Suburbanites in the upper Mid-west tend to scatter during the summer. Many people travel to lake cabins on the weekends. Some take vacations and try to be outside as much as possible. I felt it was necessary to reconnect as a team before we re-entered the school year and the last leg of our project. We spent the entire session in one large group discussion that I facilitated by asking specific questions.

The first question I asked attempted to connect to the root of the research question. I asked the team to think about themselves prior to our first meeting in February. What were their thoughts about the Trinity at that time? Now, has anything changed in their ideas about the Trinity and how it might relate to spiritual formation? We had a richly textured conversation. Everyone reported that they have experienced significant shifts in their thinking about both the Trinity and spiritual formation. In both cases the shift moved toward a heightened importance placed on *relationships* and *listening* to the other.

The second part of the conversation centered around the projects. I opened up space for anyone to share specific ways in which the action projects had connected to our research question. I told the team that I had a conversation with a pastor at a conference regarding our project, as I mentioned in the previous section. The pastor asked me to explain to him how a Sunday S'mores project connected to the social Trinity or spiritual formation. I pushed that question to the group. Again, the projects emphasized the priority of *relationships* in spiritual formation.

I spent time, during session Nine, talking about how the social Trinity attacks our radical individuality. I argued that the three persons of the Trinity could not be persons in the radically atomized way that we tend to understand the individual person; otherwise they would be three distinct gods. I attempted to reconnect the group to the *relationality* of God. Phyllis commented that the relationality picture of God would be scary to people. Rob retorted and said that it might be scary to Christians who were raised on classical Western Trinitarian teaching, but to the general population—who is increasingly spiritual but not religious—it may resonate better with their ideas of "The Force."[30]

Heather responded to my statements with a helpful corrective. She suggested that my model is based on a critique from a masculine perspective. She said,

> We've lacked part of the femininity of God. I am wrapped up in relationships. Totally. So much so that it is almost a detriment. A woman is born a little bit more with this idea of who we are in relationship to everybody. I'm so and so's daughter. And that was how I was defined for many, many years. I was even "Lyle's sister" in high school. That's what people called me. That was just a joke. But then, all those years as a single person. Because, I was too old to be my father's daughter, but nobody's wife, you know what I mean? I had to wrestle with this idea. I saw it in my woman friends who were so wrapped up in their relationships. They would even call their children their "reason to live." That would make me think: *What's my reason to live? I don't have children.*

---

[30] He was referring to the universal power that animated life in the movie series *Star Wars*.

That's part of the feminine side of humanity. And something that culturally, and our faith, has been so masculine. God has been so masculine, that now, when you were describing that. I thought, *Oh, that's exactly the part—the feminine part of God—that God is wrapped up in this relationship.*

Phase Three: Sessions 10-11—November 10 and 17, 2014

The third phase of the DITB project consisted of two RT meetings. The meetings were intended to debrief Phases One and Two and attempt to make sense out of what happened. We wanted to determine, as a team, what God was up to in this process. I decided to facilitate these discussions by drafting a list of questions. I emailed them to the team ten days prior to the first meeting and invited them to respond via email prior to the meeting.

Table 7. Final Questions

1. In what ways, if at all, did the conversation about the social/relational/entangled Trinity change the way you think about and/or practice spiritual formation?
2. What part of the Deep in the Burbs Project surprised you, and how?
3. What have been your significant take-aways from this project? In other words, what have you learned from this experience?
4. How did Dwelling in the Word either enhance or deter from the project?
5. If we were to do this project again, what would you do differently?
6. What advice would you give to suburban ELCA Christians regarding spiritual formation in light of your experience in this project?
7. What advice would you give to suburban ELCA pastors and ministry leaders regarding spiritual formation in light of your experience in this project?
8. What questions do you think should be asked about the project that have not been asked in questions 1-7?

The RT met at Ascension once again for the final sessions. Ten team members were present at each meeting, with a total of thirteen team members in attendance to at least one of the final sessions. Only four team members completely dropped out of the

project, all of whom were from Calvary Lutheran. The final attendance was remarkable, especially for session 10, since the first storm of the season decided to dump ten inches of snow on us that day. These final sessions were structured around the seven questions. I simply walked through the questions I had emailed to the RT earlier that week.

The data from these sessions became the primary focus of my final coding process, as I described in Step Nine above. I coded these transcripts for dominant themes, ran a word occurrence analysis, and cross-referenced the results with a similar analysis of the potpourri basket node. The result of this analysis revealed three major themes and two topics for reflection.[31] The themes are: (1) The primacy of relationships; (2) The necessity of reflection; (3) The increased awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. The two topics for reflection are: (1) Pedagogical Issues, and (2) Leadership Issues. I will address these findings in the next section.

---

[31] See figure 16.

CHAPTER SIX

INITIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

This section will provide provisional interpretation and reflection on specific findings from the data. I said, in chapter three, that this research was done *from* and *for* a missional imagination of the church. It is with this perspective in mind that we frame our findings. More specifically, it is with the leadership of the local congregation in mind— both clergy and lay leaders—that we name our findings.

Our specific research question was: *How might an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?* Therefore, we must first address the obvious question. Did the increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity have any impact at all on the team's ideation and praxis of spiritual formation? Then we can address the second, and more complicated question. If it did have an impact, *how* was it impacted?

Increased Awareness and Understanding

The first question is easy to answer. Yes. Every member of the team reported that they felt changed as a result of the project. This is an expected result. It would be highly unlikely for a group of people who spent twenty-two hours in large group conversation and nine months engaged in action projects to experience no change at all. So, it is not surprising that the process impacted the team.

However, before we move to the question of *how* the team was impacted, we must first pause and look more closely at the nature of the increased *awareness* and *understanding* itself. It is one thing to be *aware* of something. It is an entirely different thing to *understand* that thing. We asked how an increased *awareness* and *understanding* of the social Trinity might impact the team. One thing that the team agreed on was that the project definitely increased their *awareness* of the social Trinity. None of the team members had previously heard the terms *social Trinity*, *relational Trinity*, or *entangled Trinity*. Therefore, the fact that they watched the videos and engaged in the subsequent discussion automatically raised their *awareness*. This was a success. However, it became painfully obvious that our success in *understanding* the social Trinity was questionable.

Many team members expressed a sense of confusion, and sometimes frustration, over their struggle to understand the idea of the social Trinity. Sharon's statement was the strongest critique and serves as a representative of some team member's thoughts. She said,

> I think the instruction suffered. I felt like we needed more instruction to understand the basis, the project, the terminology…There wasn't a good grasp of social Trinity. I don't know that everybody was on the same level with what is the Trinity, who is the Holy Spirit, what is that? So, I felt, more instruction, using Bible verses on what is the Holy Spirit. What was his role with the apostles? What were some examples of the Holy Spirit at work after Jesus left the earth, would have been a better foundation to go to the next step.

A critique like this has an initial sting for the teacher. Did we fail? One could argue that the research was not valid because the team did not actually *understand* the social Trinity. Some of the team felt confused and frustrated by the vagueness of the question and the intention of the project. I must acknowledge the possibility that my chosen method of introducing the social Trinity was inadequate to the task.

I presented the social Trinity in three ways.[1] First, I engaged the team in Dwelling in the Word that was focused on the Upper Room Discourse in the Gospel of John. Second, I created four animated videos which we viewed during session four and to which the team had unlimited access on the website. Third, I presented a narrative during session four of how my encounter with the social Trinity impacted my understanding of spiritual formation. This narrative was followed by a group discussion. I did not choose to present a traditional lecture-style lesson or assign heavy reading to the group. However, the team was aware of the DITB blog and some engaged in my ongoing conversation and writing about the Trinity on their own initiative. I must be open to the possibility that these methods did not help the team increase in its understanding.

However, one could also argue that the fact that the team experienced confusion and frustration was not as much due to the methods I chose to present the social Trinity, but is due to three other factors. The first factor has to do with teaching methods. I stated in chapter two, that I draw upon the theories and methods of Parker Palmer and Stephen Brookfield. Palmer contrasts the expert-teacher-centered model with the subject-centered relational model. The object of study, in the first model, is observed by the expert and is separated from the learners. The expert then turns around and inputs the knowledge of the object to the students, filling them up like empty vessels. The second model that Parker presents is the subject-centered model. Here the topic is not the distant object of observation but is the subject that sits as a conversation partner in the center of the circle

---

[1] I will explore these methods further in the next section.

of learners. The teacher, in this model, sits among the circle as a participant learner and simply facilitates the dialogical process of interacting with the subject.[2]

Brookfield's methodology similarly calls for communicative action in the learning environment in which adult learners are allowed the freedom to engage with the subject on their own terms.[3] Perhaps the RT expected the teacher-centered model and equated that model with "further instruction" based upon their experience in modern educational systems. My use of the latter methodologies, and their foreignness to some of the team members, may have contributed to the feelings of fuzziness and frustration.

The second factor that may have contributed to the sense of frustration is related to the topic itself. How can a finite human *understand* the Trinity? One might argue that we should be more worried about the instructional methods if there was *not* confusion and frustration. If the team members felt a full confidence that they completely understood the Trinity then that might be evidence that my presentations did not educate the team, but indoctrinated the team by colonizing them with a particular understanding of the Trinity. In other words, an authentic encounter with the Trinity should always leave the student with a certain level of confusion and frustration. This is true regardless of teaching style or the level of education—from catechism lesson to doctoral seminar. We simply cannot fully understand the mystery of Trinity.

The third factor that led to the sense of frustration may be related to the term *understanding* itself. Is it possible to measure *understanding*? Perhaps this speaks to the

---

[2] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*.

[3] Brookfield, *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices*; Stephen Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 1st ed., The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995); Brookfield, *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching*.

difference between the terms *understanding* and *explanation*. The modern mind has a desire for clarity.[4] It seeks to explain things through scientific language. However, there is a distinct, and theological, difference between *understanding* and *explanation*. To explain something is to approach the object with a sense of superiority and complete knowledge of the object. To understand something is to approach it as a subject, like another person, whose complexity defies explanation. To understand something is to come into relationship with it and to engage in an ever deepening, experiential knowledge of it. Parker Palmer says that the goal of the educational process is to know as we are known.[5] God knows us, not as an object to be summarized and explained, but as a person to be loved. Perhaps Sharon's desire for more instruction was more reflective of the modern desire for explanation, than a true critique of our understanding. We, as finite humans, can never explain the Trinity. Her critique begs the question: How much further instruction would have been enough to reach an adequate level of increased understanding? There will always be fuzziness, vagueness, and a frustrating sense of mystery in the study of Trinity.

Heather offered a helpful perspective that brought balance to this question. She said:

> In those first weeks, you presented the ideas, and then, whether we examined ourselves, or not, that had to be up to us. You couldn't have made any of us examine ourselves. And, just by presenting the material, the only logical place to go is to examine your own thoughts to see where it fits. So, I think you presented complex ideas and presented them well, and then, going into projects and things…there was…I'm not exactly sure how to say it…there was a vagueness to that. And I don't know if you could have done anything different about it. But,

---

[4] Read Descartes' desire to dissect the object to its basic components and, thus explain it with the clarity of looking through the optics of the microscope.

[5] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*.

sometimes it kind of felt floundering. And if you intersected, then that means we're not letting the Holy Spirit, do it. In some ways it would have been nice to have more direction, but in other ways…maybe its better if you're not the one telling us what to do.

Was there an adequate increase in awareness and understanding of the social Trinity for the team to experience an impact on their ideation and praxis of spiritual formation? The completely honest answer is that there is no way to know. However, the data seem to indicate that the RT authentically engaged with the difficult subject of the social/relational/entangled Trinity to the point that it affected the way they think about and approach the practice of spiritual formation.

There is one saving grace in the way the question was presented. We did not set out to gain a *complete* understanding of the social Trinity. That, as we have already discussed, is impossible. We simply set out to *increase* the awareness and understanding of the social Trinity. Given the discussion above, it is safe to say that the RT did experience an increase in both awareness and understanding of the social Trinity that led to a change in the way they think about and approach the practice of spiritual formation.

How was the Team Impacted?

So far we have established that there was an adequate increase in awareness and understanding (in various degrees) of the social Trinity. We have also determined that the process of increasing the awareness and understanding did have some impact on the RT's ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. Now we must ask the more complex question. *How* was the RT's ideation and praxis impacted?

The answer to this question is complex. The RT consisted of nineteen individuals, including me. Each of us came into this project with a lifetime of stories and relationships that have shaped who we are and, specific to this project, how we think about the Trinity,

spiritual formation, and the suburban context. Each one of us engaged in this project at various levels of intentionality as we juggled the rich textures of our daily lives in the frenetically busy suburban context. How can I possibly represent the impact that happened in each team member's life in the confines of this limited dissertation? I wrestle with the balance between, on the one hand, writing a paper that expresses my own perspective, in my own voice, about what I perceive happened to the team members, or, on the other hand, allowing the voices of the team members to speak without filling reams of paper with their words in verbatim.

Ultimately, this is my paper and I can only ever understand from my perspective and speak in my voice. So, I must acknowledge that the findings and implications for leadership that I will share in the next chapter are primarily my own synthesis of the total research experience. However, I think it is appropriate that I allow space for each team member to summarize their findings in their own words. Therefore, I have included an extended summary of each team member's journey in appendix D. This appendix cites extended verbatims of each team member at the beginning of the session, notes the specific projects in which they were involved, and highlights his or her own summary of how s/he was impacted by the project.[6]

A Directional Shift

I cannot articulate each individual's journey within the confines of this dissertation. Therefore, I will attempt a simple synthesis of what the research revealed in

---

[6] I must acknowledge, however, that I am the editor of these statements. I read through all the data from each individual and made a choice about what I thought best captured their experience of transformation as a result of the project. Yes, these are the quotes from the individuals, but I, as the author, have set the frame. Thus is the nature of all knowledge and communication. It is framed, limited, and open to interpretation.

direct relation to the research question itself. The data seem to indicate that an increased

awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impacted the ideation and praxis of

spiritual formation in the RT members in two primary ways.

Vertical-Personal Spirituality

First, it provided new language and attentiveness to the active presence of the

Holy Spirit in the world. Each team member entered the project with some awareness of

the presence of the Holy Spirit. The team members most able to express the presence and

activity of the Holy Spirit, at the beginning of the project, did so in such a way that the

Spirit was the presence of God that helped guide the individual in either (a) personal

devotion and relationship with God, or (b) the process of making life decisions. The

ideation of the Holy Spirit, prior to the DITB project, seemed to reflect one of an *internal*

and *personal* relationship with God. Let's call this a *vertical-personal* spirituality in

which God is perceived as being *up there* and the Holy Spirit is *in here*, within the

individual. The role of the Holy Spirit, they reported, is to help the individual look *up* to

God and grow spiritually in an *internal* manner. This *vertical-personal* relationship does

not negate the horizontal, social relationships that individuals have with others. In fact,

many team members indicated that small group involvement and corporate worship were

important parts of their spiritual practices prior to the DITB project. However, the

important dimension of the *vertical-personal* spirituality is that the horizontal

relationships with others are not necessary to spiritual formation. In other words, it is

possible, in the *vertical-personal* spirituality, to have a relationship with God through the

Holy Spirit apart from social interaction with other people. This, I would argue, reflects

the typical, modern, Western individualism that is especially expressed in the suburban

context.
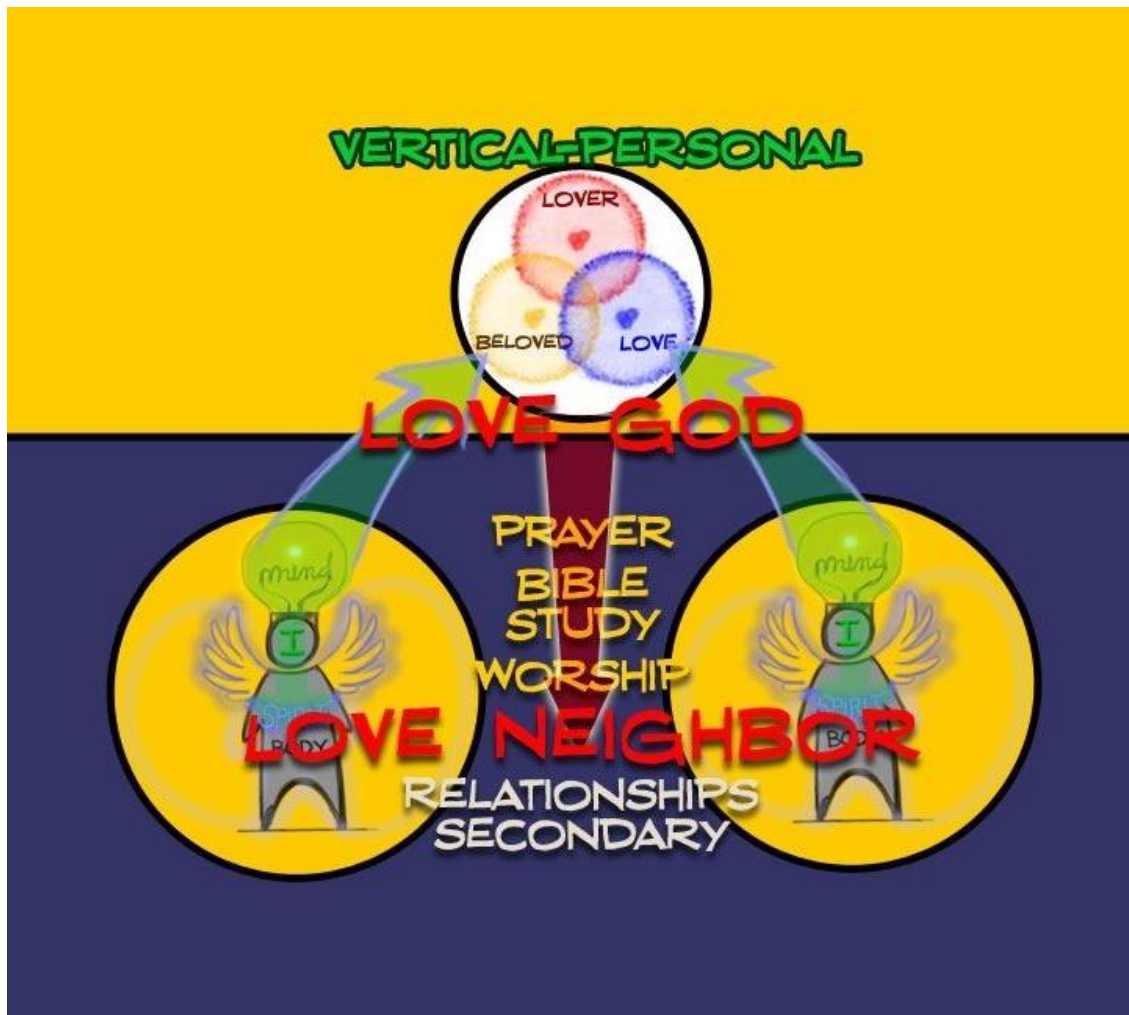
Figure 15. Vertical-Personal Spirituality

Horizontal-Communal Spirituality

The DITB project provided the RT with new language and a new awareness of the

presence and activity of the Holy Spirit and, in my interpretation, helped them shift from

a *vertical-personal* spirituality to a *horizontal-communal* spirituality. The *horizontal-*

communal spirituality does not diminish the *vertical-personal* relationship of the

individual with God, but expands the horizon of that relationship to become multi-

dimensional. The RT team members expressed their increased awareness of how important, and even essential, relationships are to spirituality. The RT related that, when they began to use the language of *relationality* and *entanglement* to discuss the essence of God, and the possibility that it is the relationships of the three persons of the Triune God that creates and sustains life, it helped them to imagine how the Holy Spirit could be actively at work in the world apart from their own individual lives and even apart from the church. God's presence was expressed in terms like air, wind, fire, and energy swirling around, in, and through us. The horizontal relationships that each of us, as individuals, has with everything and everyone around us is not only reflective of, but also essential to the essence of God. This kind of language was new, exciting, somewhat confusing, but also liberating to the majority of the RT.

Figure 16. Horizontal-Communal Spirituality

A Wholistic Umbrella

The second way that the social Trinity impacted the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in the RT team is that it helped the team realize that all activity in life can be included under the wholistic umbrella of *spiritual formation*. This second point greatly overlaps with the first point. The shift from *vertical-personal* spirituality to *horizontal-communal* spirituality opened up the RT's awareness that being attentive to the neighbor and to the environment is as much a part of spiritual formation as the classic

disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and meditation. This is a subtle, but important shift for similar reasons to those stated in the first point. A *vertical-personal* spirituality views the horizontal relationships as secondary and/or derivative to the primary relationship of the individual and God. In other words, the individual disciple must first cultivate the personal relationship with God and then the fruit of the Spirit will overflow into the horizontal relationships with others. The shift to a *horizontal-communal* spirituality places the horizontal relationships on an equal level with the *vertical-personal* relationship and disrupts the linear progression of God-individual-other. A *horizontal-communal* spirituality recognizes that it is only through loving in the horizontal relationships—family, neighbor, enemy, environment, etc.—that we can actually love God in the vertical relationship.

We must pause and acknowledge the limitation of the terms *vertical* and *horizontal*. These terms may be helpful in one way to describe the difference between God and creation, but it is equally problematic because it creates a false dichotomy between the two. The encounter with the social Trinity offered the RT language to understand how the love of neighbor is both different from loving God and the same as loving God. We love God *by* loving the other, and we can only love the other when we are connected to the love of God. This is not a linear, top-down flow of God's love and power, but is a multi-directional, capillary, perichoretic flow of God's love and God's power in the world.

The evidence for the shift to a more wholistic umbrella of spiritual formation is found in the nature of the action projects that the RT chose to pursue. One would think that, if a group was heavily dominated by *vertical-personal* spirituality, it would have

created projects that emphasized the more classic internal spiritual disciplines. Further, one would think that if the RT engaged in the social Trinity purely as an abstract idea—as an *object* of study—that they would have created projects that would have engaged others in the pursuit of studying the object of the social Trinity. The opposite was true. The majority of the action projects involved the RT engaging in relationship with other people for the purpose of creating community and/or providing service. Granted, some of the projects were a form of personal journaling. However, the content of the journal reflections revolved around the idea that God is actively involved in every aspect of life, not just those activities that have been traditionally considered sacred or spiritual.

Conclusion

The key findings from the data report that the RT noted the importance of *relationships*, *reflection*, and an *increased awareness of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the World*. This chapter attempted to analyze the "successfulness" of the project and synthesize these findings into a simplistic structure. The next chapter will turn toward theological reflection and implications of these findings for the academy and missional church leadership.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND IMPLICATIONS

I began this dissertation by stating that I am a suburban pastor who loves the suburban context and seeks to help lead the ELCA into a missional spirituality for the suburbs. The *Deep in the Burbs* (DITB) project was an exercise in structuring space for busy suburbanites to experience the *social Trinity* and dream new dreams for spiritual formation in the ELCA suburban context. The previous chapter focused on the raw data and attempted to articulate the findings from the research. We saw that the increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity did have an impact on the research team's (RT) ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. In this chapter I will ask the more direct questions: *how*? and *so what*? What implications might these findings have for the academy and the missional leader?

Framing the Findings

I will reflect theologically on the DITB project by bringing the three primary themes from the data into conversation with the three types of frames that I mentioned at the beginning of chapter two. I make this move because a key assumption that I brought into this project—and one that has only been deepened as a result of it—is that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge. Human being, as Kegan notes, is the action of constructing meaning from experienced data that is received through one's filter. As the

individual human moves through time and space, in communal relationships, both the individual and society evolves.

Table 8. Intersection of Findings and Frames

		Major Findings from DITB Data		
		Relationships	**Reflection**	**Awareness of Spirit**
Types of Frames	**Shifting Time**	Relationships in Time	Reflection in Time	The Spirit and Time
	Shifting Structure	A Shift to Relationality	Transcending One's Own Frames	The Structure of the Spirit
	Shifting Horizon	An Expanded Definition of Neighbor	Reflecting on the Frame	Expanding the Horizon of the Spirit

I came into this project with my own set of frames, assumptions, and prejudices, as did each individual member of the RT. I placed the social Trinity, spiritual formation, and the suburban context into conversation and then set that conversation as the "great thing" around which the team gathered.[1] We engaged in communicative action around this subject and generated a great amount of qualitative data. I reflected upon these data and determined that the three major themes that were significant for the RT team were *relationships*, *reflection*, and *an increased awareness of the Holy Spirit*.

I will reflect on each of these themes by bringing them into conversation with the three types of frames that I mentioned in chapter two. The first frame is the *motion picture frame*, which captures a moment in time. I will take each theme and discuss how these themes changed over the time period of the DITB project. The second type of frame is the *internal structure of a building*, or the *operating system of a computer*. Both of these metaphors point to the conceptual structure and prejudices—e.g. personal narrative,

---

[1] See my discussion of Palmer and Hess in chapter two.

socio-economic position, language, etc.—that one brings to any topic that shape the way one perceives new data. I will discuss how each theme was shaped by and impacted the RT's cognitive frame. The third type of frame is *the picture frame* in which an artist/photographer chooses which part of the landscape/environment to include in the frame and which part to leave out. I will discuss each theme in light of how the RT's horizon shifted and/or expanded to include new things, and which things may still be left out of the picture.

Shifting Frames
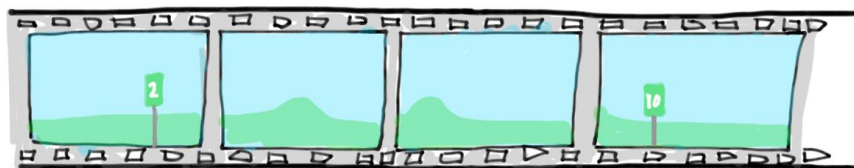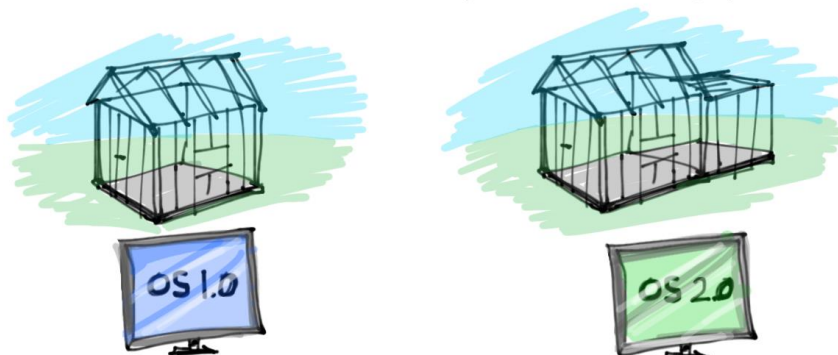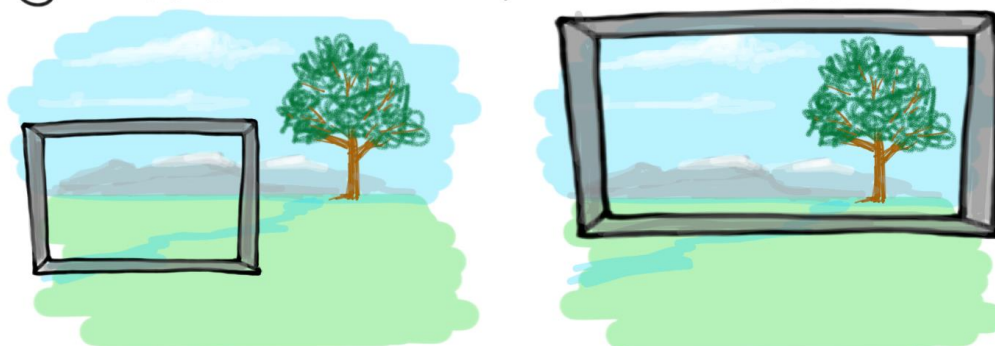
Figure 17. Shifting Frames

Finding One: Relationships

The first key theme that emerged from the data was that the RT became increasingly aware of the importance of *relationships* in spiritual formation. Most people seek to find authentic and mutually beneficial relationships that will "stand the test of time." The RT entered the project with a mixture of relationships. The members of each congregation had varying levels of relationships with those team members from their own

congregation. The Calvary women knew each other well. The Bethlehem men knew each other well. The group from Ascension had varying levels of prior knowledge and comfort with each other. None of the members knew members from the other congregations (with the exception of Sharon and Quaid). Therefore, the RT was comprised of relationships that ranged from stranger to close friend. Analyzing the theme of relationships within the context of each type of frame will reveal different aspects of what the RT learned regarding the importance of relationships in conjunction with spiritual formation in the suburban context.

Frame One: Relationships in Time

The first type of frame is the motion picture frame. It is the analysis of snapshots taken over time. Relationships take time. They require vulnerability and the time and space to demonstrate trust. The RT was only together for nine months, therefore may not have had enough time and interaction to form good relationships. However, the relationships did change over the nine-month period. Initially, many of the team members were drawn to the group in the expectation that inter-congregational relationships could be formed and followed by subsequent partnerships in the community. This did not prove to be the case. The women from Calvary completely withdrew from the group for various reasons. Three men from Bethlehem stayed engaged in the RT meetings until the end, but never connected with the other congregations. Quaid withdrew from the RT, but stayed connected with me personally through emails and coffee meetings throughout the course of the project.

The members from Ascension had varying degrees of relationship development. The S'mores team indicated that they experienced a significant deepening of their

friendships with each other and other members of the congregation simply by meeting together weekly throughout the summer to cook s'mores in the church parking lot. John and Mary deepened their relationships with each other and with co-workers by committing to regular participation in Feed My Starving Children. Sharon focused much of her relational energy into the hard work of visiting door-to-door in her political campaign. She reported the value of reaching out to make these relationships as connected to her own spiritual formation. Heather reported that her connection with her sons and with one particular friend evolved over the course of the project in such as way that it revealed deeper insights into the process of spiritual formation.

Frame Two: A Shift to Relationality

The second type of frame is the internal structure of a house, or the operating system of a computer. The RT did not only experience a fairly natural evolution of relationships as a result of the passage of time, but they also indicated a significant shift in their understanding of relationship itself. The RT members each represent the typical white, middle-class suburbanite who has been shaped by the framework of the modern ideal of radical individualism. Relationships, in this framework, are primarily voluntary transactions that take place between autonomous selves. This voluntary type of relationship is also true of one's connection to God. The typical modern Western Christian imagines a personal, voluntary connection to God as well as to others.

The increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity, through the communicative action of the DITB project, invited the members of the RT to rethink the nature of relationship itself. The more they discussed and contemplated a relational ontology in contrast to substance ontology, the more they indicated an awareness of the

essential nature of relationships. They began to see that relationships were not a means to an end, but were constitutive of human being together.

Here I must further nuance the conversation. First, I must acknowledge my own journey in this regard. I am making the movement from conservative evangelicalism into a missional expression of the ELCA. Conservative evangelicalism is thoroughly shaped by modernity and the radical, buffered self. My earliest imagination of relationship with God was one of a personal decision that I had to make in order to bridge the ontological gap caused by sin and be reunited to God through Christ's work on the cross. My imagination of having a relationship with God was shaped by decisional soteriology. My encounter with the social Trinity and relational ontology was one of the most significant points of impact for my theological shift. I began to imagine the relationality of the persons of the Trinity as constitutive of my own existence, and the relationality of all things as essential to the universe. There is no doubt that I brought that experience as a framework into the DITB project and expected that others would have the same experience. I was surprised to discover that no one had that same type of impact that I did when exposed to the social Trinity.

I believe the main reason the RT did not have the same experience of shift was because the majority of the RT had been raised in an ecumenical tradition rather than an evangelical tradition. The ecumenical tradition has been equally impacted by modernity, resulting in a buffered self, but it has been manifest in different ways than that of evangelicalism. Traditionally, the ecumenical Christian traditions have been more in tune with the connectedness of humanity and the need for social justice, whereas the

evangelical tradition has been more focused on the individual relationship with God and personal salvation for the afterlife.

This reversal both surprised me and encouraged my intuition for the importance of this conversation. It surprised me because, as I have already mentioned, it was the exact opposite of my journey. It encouraged me because it reinforces the need to move between the polarized camps of the evangelical and the ecumenical. The conversation around the relational ontology of the social Trinity can bring people into a dynamic shift in how they think about the nature and purpose of relationship itself. [2] This is further reflective of both the constructivist epistemological framework and the communicative action that undergirds the pedagogical framework of Palmer, Brookfield, Hess, and Kegan.

Heather also noted another possible explanation for this shift toward relationality. She said that much of the need for this shift to relational ontology was not because of the decisional theology that was my framework, but because of the masculinist dominance in Western Christianity, both in the evangelical and ecumenical traditions. Women, she said, are more inherently in tune with relationality, almost to the point of becoming lost in their relational identities over against their individual identity. Ironically, many members of the team felt the opposite impact from the discussion of relational ontology than I did. They indicated an increased awareness of a relationship with God and with their own identity in God. In other words, they moved from feeling enmeshed in society,

---

[2] Coakley notes this distinction by naming Ernst Troelsch's three types of Christian congregation: *church*, *sect*, and *mystic*. The *church* is the ecumenical type that is focused on institutional structures that hold society together. The *sect* is the type that is focused on doctrinal distinctives, the purification of society, and eschatology. Coakley argues that the *mystic* type might provide a third way that is suggestive of the Holy Spirit's movement in and between these two types. See Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'on the Trinity'* (2013).

with a vague sense of God's agency, to feeling a more keen awareness of God's relational

presence in the world.

Frame Three: An Expanded Definition of Neighbor

The third type of frame is the picture frame that selectively includes and excludes

elements of the environment. A shift in this type of frame either moves the frame to a

different location on the landscape, expands the size of the frame to include more things,

or a combination of both of these movements. The RT experienced a shift in their frame

regarding relationships. I have already noted that the nature of the relationship shifted

from a vertical-personal relationship to a horizontal-communal relationship.[3] This is,

indeed, a shift in the framing of the picture. However, another, and equally important

shift became evident in the scope of relationships.

The RT experienced a shift in regard to the relationship with the neighbor that is

outside the church. Sharon experienced a deep sense of connection as she shared her

story and listened to the stories of thousands of people in the community. Her

intentionality in framing her political canvasing in the awareness of the DITB project

invited her to see the necessity of listening to the neighbor, no matter who they are, or

what their religious/political views may be. John journaled extensively about his

increased awareness of God's presence in every person with whom he had contact. This

expanded his frame to be able to see God present in the neighborhood, rather than

confined in the church or the body of confessing believers. The s'mores team recognized

the need to connect with the neighborhood immediately surrounding the church property

---

[3] See chapter five.

in order to fully embrace the purpose of their project. Heather connected deeply with a woman from a radically different Christian tradition and racial background and found her framework expanded.

The discussion of neighbor and who is inside the frame came to an acute focus during the Holy Conversations held at Ascension Lutheran.[4] This congregation deliberated over whether same-sex couples should be married in the church. Essentially the congregation was asking whether God sanctioned these unions and if same-sex couples should be considered a neighbor in the same way as every other member of the congregation. When the decision was made to perform same-sex marriages, the relational frame shifted across the horizon. New people were included in the frame, but some people were either left out or chose to step outside of the frame.

The question that I am left with after the DITB project, regarding the shifting frame of relationships, has to do with who is still left out of the frame. The RT was comprised of white, middle-class, middle-aged Christians. Where are the people of color? Where are the poor, the homeless, the physically and mentally challenged? Where are the Millenials?[5] These people live in the same suburbs in which these congregations dwell. Why are they not as represented in the congregations as they are in the community?

I interjected the issue of race into the online conversation in August, 2014. The topic had not come up naturally within the RT, so I exerted my leadership power and placed the question on the table. It sparked a short flurry of conversation, but then the

---

[4] See an explanation of the Holy Conversations under Phase 1.3 in chapter five.

[5] I wrote a large section regarding the aging suburbs and the age gap within congregations in an early draft of this paper. I removed it from the final draft because it no longer fit with the flow of the argument. However, I believe it is a vital issue for the missional congregation in the suburbs, so I have preserved it as Appendix E.

discussion died down. The data from this project does not address the topics of race and social justice regarding socio-economic disparity, so I cannot address them. They are topics, however, that must be included in the frame and should be another "great thing" around which the suburban congregation gathers.

Finding Two: Reflection

Socrates said the unexamined life is not worth living. The RT echoed this idea in that the second major theme that emerged from the data is the necessity of *reflection*—the discipline of slowing down, taking time, and thinking critically on the actions previously taken. Several members of the RT explicitly indicated that it was the continual prompting to reflect on our action in the project that made a significant impact on their spiritual formation. All of the RT members implicitly indicated that the reflective process inherent in the project methodology impacted his or her thinking in regard to spiritual formation. The RT engaged in a reflective process in the following ways: (1) instructed pauses for written reflection in personal notebooks during the large group sessions; (2) personal journals throughout the entire project; (3) specific questions during the large group questions; (4) the reflective process inherent in Dwelling in the Word.

Frame One: Reflection in Time

The first frame through which we will evaluate the theme of reflection is that of the motion picture frame. Things change over time, and often the changes go unnoticed unless we stop and reflect on them. One simple change that happened during the time of the research project was the changing of seasons. We began in the bitter cold of February, finished Phase One in the emerging warmth of May, engaged in action projects during

the summer and ended them as the leaves changed color and fell from the trees. Finally, we met for the last sessions as the first snow of the season fell.

I think it is significant that we moved through all four seasons of the Upper-Midwest region. The changing of the seasons is a huge factor in the white, middle-class, suburban context. Many people in this context take on radically different attitudes toward work and space based upon the season. The cold winter months are the times when people settle into the pressing rhythm of work, school, and civic involvement. This is especially true for those who have children in school. Their lives are dictated by work, school, and church schedules. Much of their time is spent racing from one activity to the next. The winter is bitter, dark, and cold, and the frenetic pace may help alleviate the darkness. Then, when the summer comes and school is out of session, people switch into a different mode where being outside and away from the rigorous schedules takes precedence over everything. The typical suburban congregation experiences a significant drop in weekly worship attendance during the summer because many people spend the weekends at a cabin or on vacation.

The leader who is not in tune with this seasonal rhythm may become discouraged and find herself fighting against a false idea of apathy in the congregation. The acknowledgment of this rhythm and the desire to enter into missional spaces in the suburban lifestyle was the primary impetus behind the s'mores project. Rob, Kelly, and Stephanie saw this weekend pattern, not as a negative, but as a natural part of the suburban summer rhythm and sought ways to engage the community within that rhythm by allowing people to gather on Sunday Evening in a space that lets them come as they are with no judgment. They reported that this experiment enhanced the sense of

communal belonging amongst the congregation. This may serve as a clue to the missional leader to continually listen to the normal rhythms of suburban life and seek to meet people in those spaces, rather than expect suburban people to conform to rhythms that may have been carried over from a rural and/or pre-digital time.

I experienced reflection in time through a very different means. I engaged in a personal action project during the DITB project that may seem insignificant to some, but had deep meaning for me. I have a regular habit of walking at least three times a week along the same path. One leg of my walk takes me along a series of man-made ponds that line the edge of a shopping center. I have been walking along this route for several years and have always noticed that many Canada Geese live in these ponds. When the geese returned in the Spring, during Phase one of the project, it struck me how delicately human society and animals live together in the suburban context. I decided to reflect on the geese and began to blog about them on the deepintheburbs.com site under the tag "suburban geese." I watched the geese pair up and protect their nests. I greeted the first gaggle of goslings as they emerged from the cattails. I watched the goslings grow over the summer and don their sleek coats. Eventually they became indistinguishable from their parents. As the final leaves fell from the trees, I said goodbye to them as they flew away for the winter.

My reflection on the geese did two things for me. First, it marked time in a way that I had not previously done. I felt my own process through the DITB project become enmeshed with the development of these birds. The project matured just as they did. Second, it caused me to reframe my perception of the suburban neighborhood in which I live. No longer was this the asphalt and brick dwelling space owned by humans. I

imagined this land long before the European settlers arrived. I imagined the ancestors of these majestic birds flying above the native people as they migrated through the area, living in tune with the land in a way that I could never imagine. My reflection on the geese connected me to time in way that my normal suburban lifestyle seldom affords.

Frame Two: Transcending One's Own Frames

The second type of frame is that of the building or the operating system. This is the shape of how data is processed and meaning is made. Each member of the RT entered into the DITB project with a unique cognitive framework, or filter, that has been shaped over time. I would argue that the reflective process of the DITB project helped to reshape the cognitive structure of the RT: to give them a "system upgrade" in their theological imagination. To argue this point, I will step up on the balcony[6] and look through the lens of meta-theory to reflect on how the theme of reflection worked in the DITB project.

First, I would argue that the DITB methodology helped the RT reflect upon and become aware of their frames because it was built upon the pedagogical framework of Brookfield, Palmer, and Hess, as well as the cognitive-developmental theory of Kegan. Kegan argues that the typical adult functions in third-order thinking. This is the frame s/he brings to interpret the data of life experience. The key characteristic of the third-order thinking is that the individual is generally blind to the fact that s/he makes meaning through a particular filter. This "filter blindness" creates an immunity to change that can make life difficult in an environment of discontinuous change. "A way of knowing,"

---

[6] Heifetz suggests that a leader needs to step onto the balcony to get a larger perspective of the organizational "dance floor." I, as the leader of the RT, need to take this perspective to make sense out of the project from my own perspective. See Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

Kegan argues, "becomes more complex when it is able to look at what before it could only look through."[7] Kegan and Lahey suggest that it is possible to help people to become aware of their filters and evolve into fourth and fifth-order consciousness through a series of intentional reflective actions, or *praxis*. The DITB methodology—PAR, Dwelling in the Word, and action projects—is praxis that helped the RT members to become more aware of their own filters.

Second, I would argue that the DITB methodology helped the RT reflect upon and become aware of their frames because of its connection to and the inherent nature of spirituality/spiritual formation. Schneiders defined spirituality as *self-transcendence*.[8] I would argue that self-transcendence is congruent with what Kegan calls *transcategorical interaction*, which is only possible if the self is porous[9] and has the ability to empathize with others, see from another's perspective (as much as possible), and be open to the unseen, unexplainable, and/or spiritual dimension of the universe. I have noted earlier that Kegan's argument for transcategorical interaction is also congruent with *relational ontology*, which is essential to the social Trinity.[10] Therefore, I would argue that PAR methodology—as experienced in the DITB project—is, not only praxis, but is *Trinitarian praxis*.

Further, I would argue that the DITB methodology helped the RT members become aware of their frames because the data indicate that the Dwelling in the Word

---

[7] Kegan and Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, 51.

[8] See chapter two.

[9] Here I am borrowing language from Charles Taylor. See chapter 1n84.

[10] See my argument for this in chapter three.

exercise helped the RT to engage in reflective action, or Trinitarian praxis. The Dwelling exercise forced the RT to do two forms of reflection that are contrary to the normal suburban lifestyle. First, it invited them to *slow down*. They were, at first, frustrated with the fact that we dwelt in the same text for three sessions. The modern, suburban mind is used to taking in data in short bursts and then moving on to the next thing. The slow process of dwelling in the same text was foreign to the team. Additionally, the text was read twice during each session. The slowness of the process, according to their reports, opened up pathways of awareness that they had not experienced before. They said that the slowing effects of the exercise allowed them to be more focused on the task of the discussion of the project once we got to that portion of the meeting. Without the discipline of slowing, they said, they may not have been able to get the fullness of the DITB project.

The second thing the Dwelling forced them to do that is contrary to the suburban lifestyle is to *listen*. The typical white, middle-class, suburbanite is used to being in a place of power and privilege in society. This is true of the RT. Each of them are leaders in their own way, whether it be in work, church, or the fact that they all are parents. People who experience agency in society tend to speak at others and share their own opinion, rather than stop to listen to the other. The Dwelling in the Word exercise invited the RT into the uncomfortable, and unfamiliar space of listening intently to the other. The fact that each person was invited to represent his or her conversation partner's thoughts and words to the large group compelled the individual to listen in a way that all of them confessed was unnatural for them.

The Trinitarian praxis experienced in the DITB project created spaces in which the RT could reflect. This reflection allowed them to become more aware of the filters (the structural frame or operating system) through which they were previously making sense out of their experiences. The reflective action further allowed them to reframe how they approached the questions that we were asking throughout the project.

Frame Three: Reflecting on the Frame

The third type of frame is the picture frame. The RT indicated that the invitation to reflection was crucial to the expansion of their theological imagination: the frame through which they view God. Reflective action made them aware of their frames and the limited and limiting nature of those frames. I have already mentioned that the RT became more aware of an expanded definition of neighbor. In that section I focused on who is in the frame and who is still left out of the frame of relationships. Here I will focus my attention on the power of reflection to expand one's frame. Again, Kegan and Lahey argue that it is possible to help people to become aware of their frames, expand them, and, not only take on new perspectives, but actually change the way we make sense out of the world.

I would argue that this is a leadership issue. The role of the teacher/leader is to structure and cultivate holding spaces in which individuals can engage in communicative action—or Trinitarian praxis—through which they will have more opportunity to become aware of the frames, and then learn how to shift and expand them. One of the biggest lessons that the RT said they will take away from the DITB project is the need to engage in this process as a regular part of congregational life. That will not happen automatically. It requires the gentle invitation and modeling of congregational leaders to engage the

congregation in the necessary Trinitarian praxis of reflection in order for more people to become aware of their frames in order to shift and expand them.

<div align="center">Finding Three: Awareness of the Holy Spirit</div>

The data indicate that the DITB project, and specifically the Dwelling in the Word exercise, heightened the RT's awareness of the Holy Spirit as an active agent in the world and broadened their horizon as to where and how the Holy Spirit is present. The RT came into the project with a robust awareness of the Holy Spirit, having all been raised in a Christian context with previous exposure to the Creeds. However, many indicated that the Holy Spirit was a confusing, enigmatic idea that seemed confined to doctrinal statements and abstractions. Now, they reported, as a result of the Dwelling in the Word and the DITB project, they are beginning to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit, not just in the church, but also in their daily experiences in the world.

Frame One: The Spirit and Time

The first type of frame is the motion picture frame in which we can compare snapshots over time. I have already indicated the power of reflecting on the passage of time. However, the RT indicated that the experience of the DITB project heightened their awareness that the Holy Spirit is active in the world. This awareness often happens in retrospect. When one's frame has been altered to be open to the relationality of God in the world, then suddenly the sense-making of reflecting on past events becomes attuned to the activity of God the Spirit as an agent in the process.

This became evident in a few narrative threads that wove their way through the DITB project. One example is Kelly's testimony of her awareness of God's presence through the difficult journey of the Holy Conversations at Ascension Lutheran. She

journaled extensively as she carried the burden of leadership through these turbulent waters. She confessed that, prior to this project, the Spirit was a nebulous concept. Through Dwelling in the Word exercises and the Trinitarian praxis of this experience she reported a heightened sense of the Spirit's presence in ordinary things; like the passing by of an eagle, a sense of peace in a particular moment, the spoken word of a friend. She felt the Spirit's guidance through the decision-making process, where, previously, she would have explained it away as intuition.

Another example of making sense of the Spirit's agency over time comes through my own narrative and how it interwove with the DITB project. This is true in two ways. First, I have already indicated the power of the narrative as I told my story, both on the website and during session Four, as a means to communicate the social Trinity.[11] The second way my narrative connects has to do with a comment that Sharon made during session One. She introduced herself to the group and indicated that she had been involved in a prayer group at Ascension Lutheran that was praying for God to bring a leader to the church that would help the congregation discern how to move into the future. She was praying at the same time that I felt God call me to leave my home in Las Vegas and move to the Mid-West to pursue a PhD. That journey ultimately led to my joining the staff at Ascension Lutheran, entering the PhD program at Luther Seminary, and transferring my ordination into the ELCA. As we looked back on these snapshots over time, it became apparent that the Spirit of God was active in each of these moments to bring these narratives together.

---

[11] See chapter five under the heading Phase 1.2.

A third example of an increased awareness of the Spirit's agency over time is the experience of the DITB project itself. At each moment that the RT stopped to reflect, to look back at where we had come, to bring those experiences into conversation with our theological conversations, it became more apparent to the team that God's Spirit was at work in and through this process. The Spirit's work was not only in the reflective action of the team's interaction, but, more so, through the way the action projects brought the team into the neighborhoods to experience God in the people and experiences in everyday spaces.

Frame Two: The Structure of the Spirit

The second frame is the internal structure of a building or the operating system of a computer. The RT's increased awareness of the Spirit's agency is, I would argue, a result of the shifting cognitive structure of the Trinitarian imagination. The increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity, made possible through the multiple pedagogical modalities, created cognitive space for the RT to become aware of God's agency in the world in ways that, perhaps were less likely prior to this project.

I will reemphasize, at this point, that all the team members indicated a strong belief in the Trinity and the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the project. It is not that their belief in the Holy Spirit increased or changed as a result of the project. Rather, I would argue, the increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity gave the RT new cognitive frames and new language to both be aware of the Spirit's agency and articulate the Spirit's agency when it was noticed.

John journaled extensively about his increased awareness of the Holy Spirit present in all people, both inside and outside the church. He had been raised in a Lutheran

tradition that taught that the Holy Spirit was confined to the church, through word and sacrament. He now claims that humanity is part of the Trinity in that the Spirit is the animating force that unites us with all things. Mary also felt a heightened sense of God's presence. She had been raised Roman Catholic and associated the presence of the Holy Spirit with the lit candle in the church sanctuary. Now, she reports that she senses the presence of the Spirit in each of us and it is the gathering of people in the sanctuary that is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most dramatic examples of a cognitive shift, in my opinion, is evidenced in Phil's story. He is a retired Lutheran pastor who enjoys the original language of scripture, theological study, and teaching. He expressed a strongly dualistic understanding of the Trinity in our first session. He wondered how the Trinity, "which is up here" he said, holding his hand above his head, "connects to spiritual formation, which is down here," holding his hand below his waist. I interpreted this to demonstrate the dualistic gap between the Immanent Trinity and our lived experience that I articulated in the animated videos and that his theological imagination was framed in this perspective. He was publicly resistant to my early presentations about the social Trinity. He was not mean-spirited and was a welcomed interlocutor. However, he was verbally resistant in the large group sessions and often engaged with my blog posts through the public comments.

I encouraged Phil to continue our personal dialogue via the blog comments and emails. My own research regarding the social Trinity continued during the course of the project. I had originally framed the question using the label "social Trinity" but quickly expanded that language to include the term *relational* Trinity as well.[12] However, I

---

[12] See my commentary in chapter three.

discovered a new set of metaphors borrowed from Quantum Physics that provide a model for the Trinity that speak of God as *The Entangled Trinity*.[13] Simmons specifically speaks of "Entangled Panentheistic Trinitarianism."[14] As I blogged about the authors who proposed the entangled Trinity, Phil latched onto that language.[15] Given his particular bent toward science and mathematics, this model connected for him in a way that the previous language did not. He did not fully embrace any of the models that I had proposed, but the introduction of the third model, or language set, expanded his structural framework to a point that he became excited about the implications for a new imagination of the Trinity and its implications for the local church. He became a prolific author and inundated my email inbox with revision after revision of a plan to structure an entire adult educational curriculum around the Trinity.

Phil's new language opened new frames of imagination for him to articulate the agency of the Holy Spirit in the world. Again, it is not that he suddenly believed that the Spirit was active where he did not before. He clearly believed in the Spirit's agency as he reflected on his previous ministry experience in the early phases of the project. However, the conversation regarding new models afforded him new cognitive space and freedom. I believe that this type of expansion and reframing may not have happened had we not had the holding space in which communicative action could take place.

---

[13] See Polkinghorne, *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*.

[14] Simmons, *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology*.

[15] I mention the entangled Trinity model, not to offer a new argument for my thesis regarding the Trinity, but to illustrate the communicative nature of shifting our structural frames that happened in my dialogue with Phil.

I will press the metaphor and suggest that every member of the RT experienced having at least one "wall of their house" torn down and a new room added to their frame, and one "upgrade to their operating system" installed as a result of the DITB project. It will be interesting to observe how these new cognitive spaces will allow each team member to make sense out of their stories as they move forward from here and are aware of the Spirit's agency.

Frame Three: Expanding the Horizon of the Spirit

The final type of frame is the picture frame that encompasses one part of the environment and leaves the rest out. The data indicate that the RT entered the DITB project with fairly typical frames around the nature and movement of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was either "up there" with the other members of the Trinity, or, at best "in here" within the believer, enhancing the personal relationship with God. The Trinitarian praxis of the DITB project, I would argue, transformed the RT's frame from a standard portrait configuration of a vertical nature to a full 360 theatre-in-the-round where the Holy Spirit is active on every side and in unexpected ways.

<div align="center">Reframing the Frames</div>

I must pause to acknowledge an important aspect of the previous discussion. It, in itself, was a framework in which I appropriated the data from the DITB project and reflected upon it theologically. The simple fact that I chose to pass the three findings through the lens of these three frames impacted the way in which I thought about the findings. The simple, yet profoundly complex and perplexing, point that I make is this: *It is impossible to communicate without frames*. The missional leader must always keep this in mind. Our job is not to convince people of particular doctrines, but to cultivate holding

spaces in which individuals can come together to engage in communicative action—what I would argue, through my frame, is Trinitarian praxis—to experience a mutual reframing that will bring about a preferred future for the community. This is a leadership issue and leads me to my next and final reflection.

Implications for Leadership in the Missional Church

I said, in the introduction, that the typical Lutheran suburbanite lives under extreme societal pressures to be a self-actualized, successful individual who navigates between a myriad of cultural choices as a radical individual with the power to choose. How can the Lutheran leader of suburban congregations cultivate spaces in which these suburbanites can find help to navigate these turbulent waters? What have we learned from the DITB project that might provide some insight into this question? In this, the final section, I will focus on my personal experience of leading the RT, my theological reflection upon it, and its possible implications for the missional church.

Stewarding Power

The first way we can address the question of leadership is to be honest about the issue of power. I faced an ongoing struggle with this issue as I led the RT through the DITB process. How would I handle my power? I entered the project carrying two forms of power. The first form of power is *positional*. I am an ordained pastor in the ELCA. The RT was comprised of ELCA members, most of whom are members of the church in which I serve. The Lutheran tradition has a history of hierarchical power structures in which the pastor (historically male, exclusively) wielded great control over the various congregational processes. I was automatically imbued with this power in the RT simply because I am a pastor. Further, I was the lead researcher. It was my project, for my

dissertation, so the position of "leader" also carries with it inherent power. The second

form of power I possessed was *cognitive*. This was, after all, my PhD research project. I

have been immersed in four years of academic study, therefore my head is full of

information that the RT did not have. Modern, Western society, being dominated by

rationalism and empirical science, values knowledge above all things. Therefore, as

Francis Bacon famously said, "Knowledge is power." Knowledge, training, and extended

vocabulary tends to intimidate people who are not fluent in a particular academic

discipline and shifts the power to the one in the room who is considered "the expert." I

was the "expert" in the question the RT set out to explore and they often looked to me to

give them "answers."

Palmer, Brookfield, Hess, and Kegan all acknowledge the power differential

inherent in the role of the teacher/leader. The purpose of critical social theory and PAR is

to create communicative spaces in which adults can feel empowered to think critically

about the dominant power structures and imagine a preferred future. The subject-centered

model proposed by Palmer ideally brings the teacher into the circle with the other

knowers. This process, however, is not one that ignores the power wielded by the teacher.

Rather, it is one in which the leader/teacher is transparent about the power differential

and understands the weight of responsibility to steward this power for the good of the

community.

I struggled with the power differential throughout the research process. I was

keenly aware of how much control I had over the structure of the room, the framing of

the questions, the direction of the conversation, etc. I was also keenly aware of the

constant push from some of the team members to ask me to give more direction, more

clarity, and more answers. They often felt frustrated by the open-endedness of the process. Honestly, I felt frustrated by it at times and constantly fought the urge to swoop in like the hero-leader and fix everything.

I asked the RT to reflect on this issue in Phase Three. I asked them what advice they would give to the church leader based on their experience in the DITB project. The RT data indicate that the process of this project, and how I stewarded my power, is a good model for how the church leader should structure communicative spaces. They said that the missional leader would be better served if she understands her role to be that of the humble servant who facilitates God's power, through knowledge and wisdom, to create a democratic and generative community of God's grace and peace. This was demonstrated through the communicative action in the Dwelling in the Word exercises, the various pedagogical modalities, and the action projects carried out by the RT.

We must acknowledge that none of these things would have happened if I—the leader of the team—did not set a table that empowered such communicative action. This was my research project, after all, and I could have implemented instrumental reason at every step of the way and used my knowledge and skill to manipulate the research team. It was a learning and stretching experience for me to constantly step back and let the process unfold, trusting that God was working in, with, through, against, and for the RT the whole time.

The Communicative Zone

The second way that we can address the question of leadership is to understand the pluralistic dynamic of the suburbs and the skills necessary to navigate the *communicative zone* that exists in the space between seemingly polarized dichotomies.

The typical suburbanite is constantly faced with a myriad of options at every level of life: ranging from mundane choices between brands of cereal to the profound choice of which faith tradition—if any—in which to participate. These choices form a perplexing array of apparent dichotomies.

Every dichotomy appears to have two extreme and opposing views on either end of a continuum. Most of human history is the story of opposing sides going to war over which side is correct and best for the world. Often times a move toward peace is the move to find a spot in the middle between these extremes. This, however, is not peace between the two poles, but is the creation of a completely new perspective that is neither one side nor the other. This is almost never acceptable to either side, and it simply perpetuates the ontological gap between particular spaces on the continuum.

An image emerged in my imagination as I progressed through the DITB project that has helped me to understand the implications for leaders as we help people navigate these dichotomies. Imagine that there is a pendulum that swings between two extremes. It does not stop in one middle place on the continuum, but continually moves back and forth between the extremes. As the pendulum swings it creates a field of energy between the two extremes.[16] The movement of the pendulum is both a particular object—the flat disc itself—and the field of energy created by the perpetual movement between the polar extremes. I would suggest, as illustrated in figure 18, that the space between the polar extremes is the *communicative zone*. It is a dynamic energy that keeps the tension of the two extremes in constant dialogue, thus creating life in the third space it creates. Further,

---

[16] This is similar to the superposition of quantum physics that Simmons suggests. Simmons, *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology*.

it is another image of Trinitarian praxis. I witnessed the communicative zone form within

the RT as we engaged in communicative action through the various modalities of our

shared project.
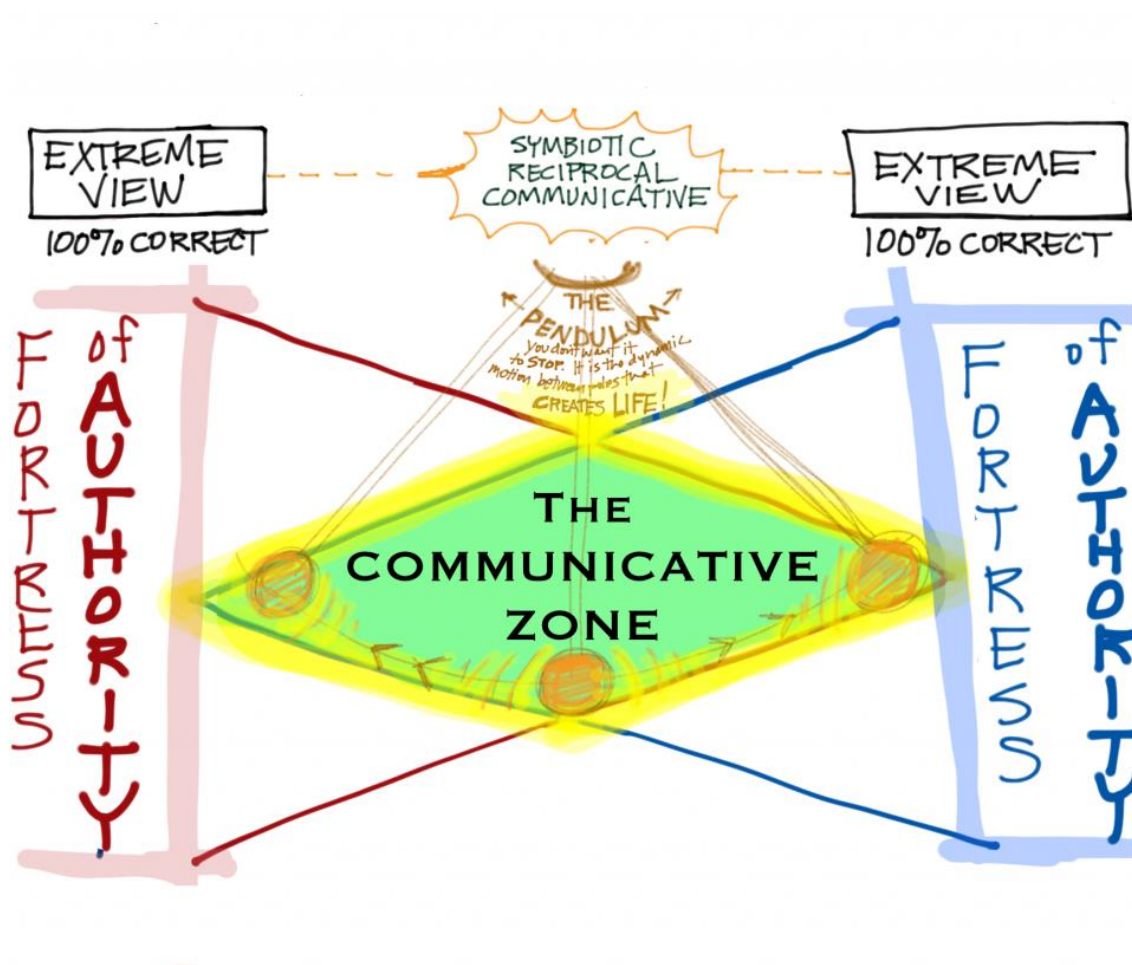
Figure 18. The Communicative Zone

How does this discussion impact the suburban leader? Here, again, we can look to

Kegan for help. Kegan uses historical timeframes as an analogy to help us understand his

orders of consciousness. I will add to that analogy and use a caricatured image of the

small town vs. the suburban context to further describe these orders. The small town is

third-order consciousness.[17] It is a single, homogenous system in which every member

---

[17] I am drawing an analogy to the caricature of the small town as a geographically homogenous space as opposed to the caricature of the suburb which is fractured and multi-faceted. It would be naïve to

understands her particular role in society. Suburban life exemplifies fourth-order consciousness. The suburban landscape is comprised of thousands of radical, atomistic, autonomous selves moving through the chaotic, ever-changing transactionally based networks. Each connection is a consciously chosen, transactional relationship that is accidental to the primary substance of the individual self. Fourth-order consciousness recognizes that there are multiple systems, and each one of these systems are equally valid, and equally meaningless in the larger scheme of the mechanistic universe, in which the detached, objective observer and wielder of power can have free reign. This lifestyle ultimately leads to isolation, loneliness, abuse of power, and the high potential for violence and oppression. These autonomous entities experience an ontological gap between that which is the "other" and this gap can often be terrifying.

This is the challenge facing the missional leader in the suburbs. Most of the members of our suburban congregations are either third-order thinkers overwhelmed by the suburban lifestyle, or fourth-order thinkers experiencing increasing levels of isolation. What if God is calling us, as the missional community, to dwell in the *communicative zones* between these autonomous entities and myriad of choices that exist in society? What if we are called to stop and reflect on these relationships and to notice the movement and agency of the Holy Spirit between these seemingly polarized extremes?

We are not asked to abandon our faith cultures, but are invited to open ourselves to the interfaith dialogue, to be willing to listen to each other: to dwell in the world and the words of the stranger. Kegan claims that fifth-order consciousness realizes that all the

---

suggest that all small-town people are third-order and all suburbanites are fourth-order. The reality is that individuals within all geographical locations will be spread along the continuum of the orders of consciousness for various reasons.

apparently disconnected systems are, in fact, interconnected and interdependent. It is impossible to be autonomous. The apparently radical extremes need each other to exist, and are actually created and sustained by the pendulum that swings in the field of *the communicative zone*. This is fifth-order consciousness. This is a picture of *relational ontology*. This is the life of the Trinity.
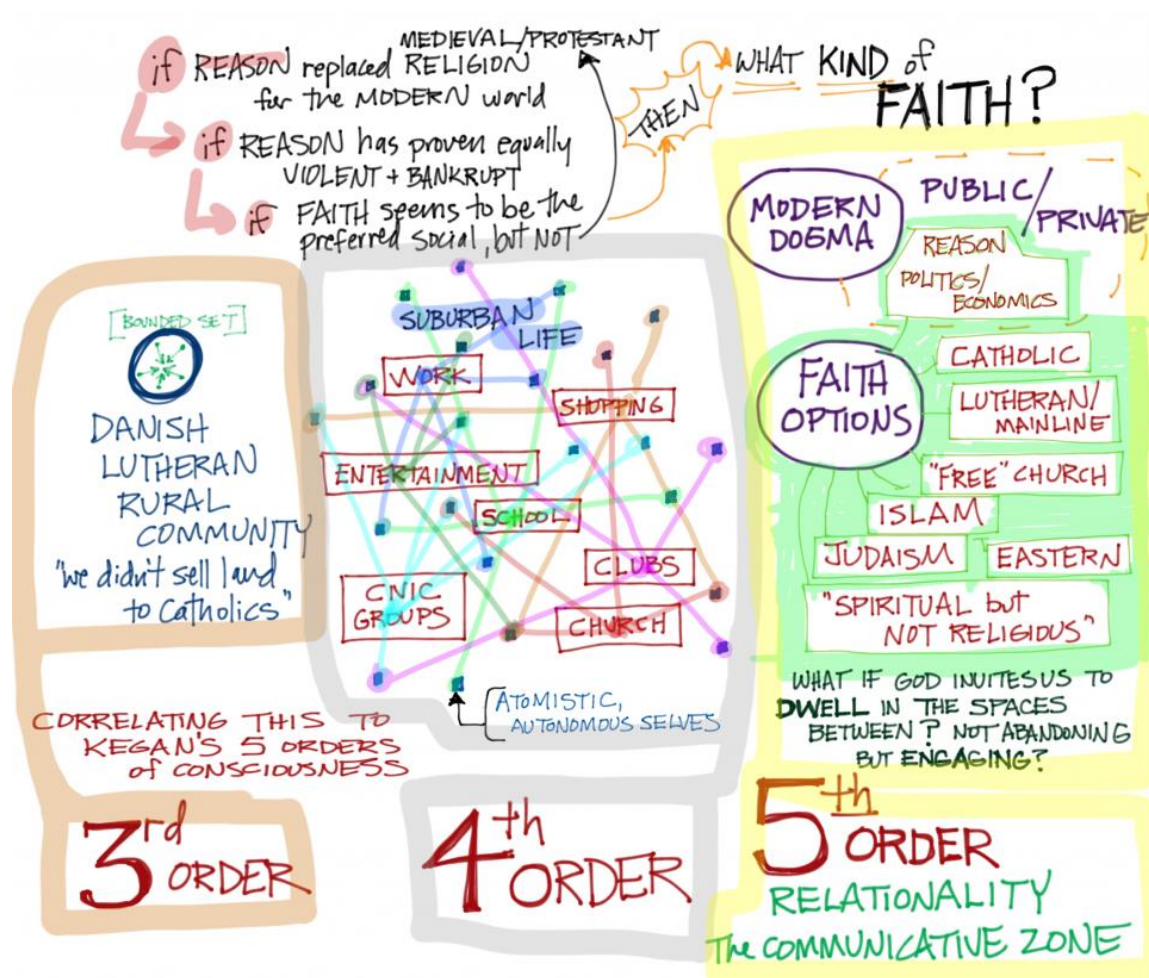
Figure 19. Fifth-Order Consciousness And The Communicative Zone

Here, again, we see why the ELCA may be an ideal space for the missional imagination, as I mentioned in chapter two. Lutheran theology upholds the tensive energy of paradox and has the theological imagination to cultivate the communicative zone in society. Could it be that the Lutheran pastor, leading in a fifth-order, missional key, might

be able to structure spaces that lead to God's peace? I would argue that this is the

framework for a missional spirituality in the suburbs. Who knows? If we step into the

spaces between, we just might meet the Spirit of the Living God in the suburbs.

EPILOGUE

We have come to the end of this journey. The research team no longer exists. My writing is done. You, dear reader, and I have finished our interaction. Hopefully, we have found a fusion of horizons that has expanded each of our theological imaginations.

I come to the end of this leg of the journey in a fixed moment in time. I will move beyond this paper and change, while the text of the paper becomes a temporal frame of my theological imagination at its moment of completion. You will encounter this paper at another moment in time, and it will intersect with you in that space, and invite you into a dialogue of its own. My prayer is that the dialogue is fruitful.

This paper has been a part of my journey that began several years ago. I have slowly evolved from my fundamentalist and conservative evangelical roots, across the fields of the emergent church, and into the world of missional theologians in the ELCA. I had a specific encounter with the social Trinity in 2012 that impacted my ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. I wondered if other people—specifically people in suburban ELCA congregations like the one in which I find myself—would have a similar experience. I constructed a participatory action research project as a holding space in which to ask that question. I brought the social Trinity, spiritual formation, and the suburban context into conversation and placed that conversation as the "great thing" around which the research team would gather. Then, I facilitated the communicative action of that team over a nine-month period.

Did the findings of this project come out the way I thought it would? No, praise God! I thought I would discover amazing insights that would change the world. I thought I would make a compelling argument that the social Trinity is the preferred way to imagine God and provides a solid structure for the missional church and suburban spirituality. Instead, I encountered a deepened understanding of communicative action by engaging in communicative action. I cannot make any claims that there is a connection between the social Trinity and spiritual formation. Yet, I believe that, both in the DITB project and your reading of this paper, we have engaged in Trinitarian praxis. However, I also realize that you may completely disagree with me regarding the Trinity and its connection to spiritual formation.

This project has helped me to understand that it is OK for us to disagree. Our goal in missional leadership is not to reach agreement. That is a static and lifeless prospect. I believe that we, as missional leaders, specifically in the ELCA suburban context, are called to invite people to be continually formed in the Creator's preferred and promised future, through the way of the Redeemer, and in the power of the Sustainer within holding spaces of communicative action where we dwell in the Word and in the World. If the missional leader of the suburban congregation can learn to cultivate these types of spaces in the community, then, perhaps, we can go deep in the burbs.

I conclude this paper with a prayer written by a member of the research team.

Dear God, you have promised that whenever two or three are gathered in your name, you are there also. As we gather together here in this place, we remind ourselves that you are already here, fully present as God our Creator, the One who made us in your own image and who even now knows the thumping of each heart in this room. We remind ourselves that you are fully present as Jesus, our Brother, our Savior, who walked the earth as we walk it, who lived within human relationships we live within relationships. We remind ourselves that you are fully present as the Holy Spirit, the one who gives life and breath and ignites each of

our own spirits. God, Three in One, we ask that you would help each of us to also be fully present to you and to each other. Help us to really live your command to love one another, and in doing so, let this time together be a reflection of your own great glory. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

APPENDIX A

The following text is the story I posted on the Deep in the Burbs website between Session 03 and Session 04.[1] It is the story of how I encountered the social Trinity and the impact that it had on my ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. The RT had access to this online, prior to the meeting. I presented a live version of this story during Session 04 which sparked a lively conversation with the team. I submit it here as an historical record within the research data.

The Story Behind the Question

I write this as the Deep in the Burbs Research Team comes to the half-way mark in our six-week series of conversations. I have been wrestling with how to get after the heart of the research question without using instrumental rationality. (By that, I mean that I am trying to avoid manipulating—whether consciously or unconsciously—the conversation in order to arrive at a desired outcome.) Participatory Action Research is designed to allow the group to create its own agenda. However, my research question demands some sort of interaction with the topic of social Trinity. I am, after all, trying to see how an "increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity might impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations."

_____

[1] This blog entry was posted on March 20, 2014. http://www.deepintheburbs.com/the-importance-of-storytelling-the-story-behind-the-research-question/ (accessed January 16, 2015).

The assumption is that most people in the suburban congregation would have little to no exposure to the conversation around the social Trinity, so I needed to figure out a way to "increase their awareness and understanding" of the topic. I chose to create a series of teaching videos and showed them during our last session, on March 10. Some members of the group commented that this seemed to come sideways to the purpose of our meetings. One suggested that people are not motivated by theology, but by narrative. I agree with this wholeheartedly, and would add that theology is, in fact, the narrative of the God-human conversation.

That means I need to tell the story. Today I want to approach the topic from a different angle and demonstrate how the research question evolved as the natural outcome of my own narrative. The following story expresses how the research question emerged and how the Deep in the Burbs project was formed. I invite you into this story.

I was born into a family where my parents had an authentic faith in God that permeated their entire life. It was not just a go-to-church thing. God was the center of their lives and the primary focus of all that they did, no matter how mundane. Their faith, and so mine, was cultivated in an Independent Baptist Church experience. Thus, our understanding of the Gospel thought that everyone was condemned to Hell because of Adam's original sin and that the only way to escape this condemnation was to place one's faith in Jesus Christ's atoning death, receive the free gift of God's grace and salvation, and accept Jesus as one's Lord and Savior. If you had "prayed the prayer" to accept Jesus, then you had the assurance of salvation.

My parents had a rich personal piety and a deep and meaningful prayer life. I was introduced to spiritual disciplines, and the writings of such authors as Andrew Murray,

from a young age. Spiritual formation was always an interest of mine, and yet, it often seemed to take a back seat to the work of evangelism and getting people saved in the larger life of the church.

I attended Wheaton college where my theology began to expand slightly. I rejected my calling to the ministry in the thought that God doesn't need another pastor. God needs an artist to be a witness in the world. That thought led me to take a job in Las Vegas to manage artists in the tourist industry. My wife and I got involved in a non-denominational, Willow Creek style church that had its roots in the Christian Church/Restorationist movement. This was similar enough to our Baptist theology that it was comfortable. Yet, it was cool and progressive enough to excite us.

The church grew from an average weekly worship attendance of 1200 people to 8000 people in the 12 years that we were part of it. In 1994 I felt called to ministry and went on staff at the church while also enrolling in the M.Div. program at Bethel Seminary.

The church operated under the same gospel message with which I grew up. Everyone is lost, we believed. The world needs to hear the message of Jesus and accept him as their Lord and Savior. The church had become so entrenched in traditionalism, we told ourselves, that it was no longer relevant to the culture. People aren't coming to church, thus not hearing the Gospel, so we need to do something about it. We (the seeker church movement) decided to make the church services more hip and relevant, and we spent the majority of our energy trying to get people into the building so that they can hear the Gospel and get saved. Our job was to get them in, so that they could go up (to Heaven when they die). Once they were in, they could be trained to go into the world and

get more people to come in and be sure they were going to go up. We called this evangelism, and it was, without doubt, the most important thing a Christian could do. Once we got the newly converted trained to a point where they could share their faith and evangelize their friends (and grow the church), then they were handed over to my staff where we could help them grow spiritually by being involved in a small group and finding a place to serve that matched their spiritual gifts.

The Trinity was not something we often discussed. Essentially, God the Father was up in Heaven, bathed in glorious perfection, and untouchable by sinful humanity. Jesus came to down to earth to pay the penalty of sin by dying in our place. He rose from the dead and ascended back up to Heaven to plead our case before the Holy Judge. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit down to the Earth to indwell those who accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The world was doomed, God was transcendent, and the Holy Spirit was encased either within the scripture, or, at best, inside the bodies of the saved in order to bestow gifts to the saved so that they can function as a part of the church. Each one of us, as autonomous individuals, were responsible to make the decision to follow Jesus, or suffer the consequences.

As the church grew and my theology expanded I became increasingly uncomfortable with this event-centered, sell-tickets-out-of-Hell version of the Gospel and the Church. The work of many authors, but significantly the work of Dallas Willard, helped me to realize that the Kingdom of God was "at hand." Jesus came, not to give us a ticket out of Hell when we die, but to bring us life to the fullest and the Kingdom of God on Earth as it is in Heaven, right now.

In 2002 I felt God tell me to leave the mega-church and experiment with being the church in a small community-based context. We started a house church and opened ourselves up to the leading of the Holy Spirit. I started to read more authors in and around the movement called The Emerging Church. These authors—chief among them was Brian McLaren—were trying to figure out how to be the church in the postmodern, postcolonial, pluralistic context.

My fascination with the Emerging church caused division in our house churches. Some people thought I was demon-possessed. Others were being pulled toward a neo-Puritanism where Law and Order solved all the problems of the church and the world. They accused me of being a moral relativist and walked away from our community.

The house church fell apart and left me broken and numb. I vowed I would never be a pastor again. One February night in 2007 I awoke at 3:00am and heard a voice say, "Steve, move to Minnesota and get your PhD." I didn't know where to get a PhD, how to get one, how I could afford one, how I could make a living, or how to convince my wife to move to Minnesota (it's cold there).

My wife miraculously agreed, so we moved. We were near my parents, so that was nice. I rebooted my freelance illustration business and started down an unknown path. I poked around at the University of Minnesota for a PhD in Education, but that didn't seem right. I knew Bethel didn't have a PhD program, so I had no idea what to do. I essentially gave up on the idea.

My Dad introduced me to the pastor of a local Lutheran church and we became friends. The pastor invited me to become a consultant in the area of Adult Spiritual Formation at the church and to help them implement their Focus 20/20 vision. I started

preaching and teaching, and instantly felt welcomed by the congregation. The ice slowly melted from my heart and I felt called into ministry again. I submitted myself to God, to the pastor, and to the ELCA and began the process of transferring my ordination. At the point of my surrender, the pastor suggested, "I think you should pursue your PhD." He pointed me to Luther Seminary, introduced me to Craig Van Gelder, and in the fall of 2011 I began classes in the Congregational Mission and Leadership program with a full scholarship plus stipend. If that's not a God-thing, then I don't know what is.

Little did I know that in February of 2007, while God was calling me to Minnesota, Craig Van Gelder was working with the church on their Focus 20/20 project. God had already been working long before I even moved to Minnesota or knew of the ELCA.

Much has happened at the church and in me since I arrived. In 2011 we brought Mark Scandrette out for a RENEW weekend to introduce his new book *Practicing the Way of Jesus*. This sparked a group of 60 people to spend the next few months doing 7-day projects of community-based spiritual formation. God sparked some long-term projects from that and people experienced the Way of Jesus—the Kingdom of God—in a new way. The next spring I taught a course on the Life of Jesus and presented the "Kingdom at hand" way of framing Jesus' life and teaching. Many people expressed that this class helped them make sense out of what they had experienced during the RENEW process. We all sensed that God does not necessarily want us to invite people into the church so they can become like us, but that God is empowering the church to be in the world so that the Kingdom of God's peace can be experienced through the love of the neighbor.

This past fall a group formed to study the book *Radical*.[2] A growing number of people are being stirred by the Spirit to do something with their faith. Several groups have gone to Haiti and are building a relationship with a community there. Many people are stretching their faith in various acts of generosity in the community. The church has been through the Free2Be campaign, the Living Generously series, and is currently engaged in the Holy Conversations to communicatively discern what to do about same-sex marriage--should we or shouldn't we perform them at our church?

These events at the church have coincided with my studies and have led me to understand two concepts that helped me make sense out of what was happening. The first was the hermeneutical shift. Scholars increasingly acknowledge that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge and that the process of spiritual formation is one of communal discernment, through a fusion of horizons, as we make sense out of the stories we find ourselves in. This is illustrated in my *Theory of Strategic Action* diagram.[3] Action - Reflection - Action. That is the *praxis* of the Kingdom.

---

[2] David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010).

[3] See figure 28.
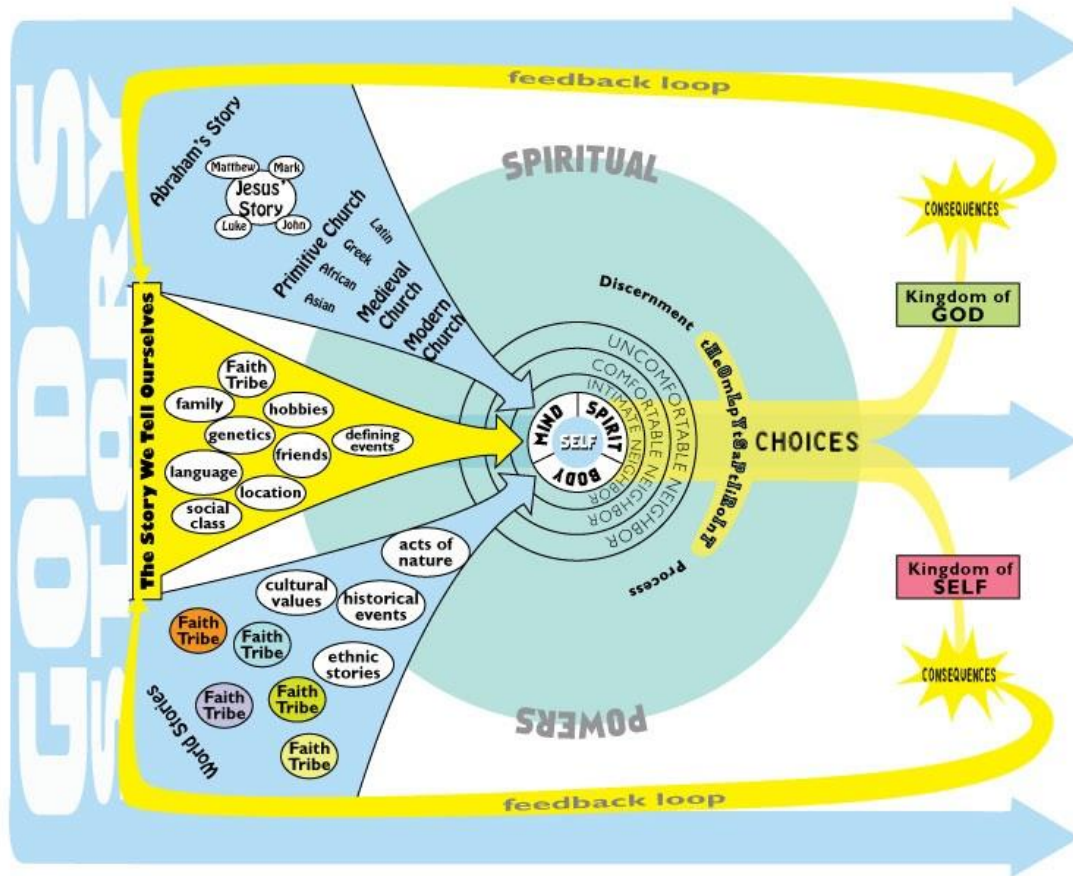
Figure 20. A Theory of Strategic Action

The second theological awakening for me is a new understanding of the Trinity as it has been reframed and discussed in the late twentieth century. Gary Simpson's class on the Trinity, and his article, "No Trinity, No Mission" captured my imagination and helped me see that the Triune God is not "up there", accessible only through the church, but that the Spirit of God--the third person of the Trinity (Love)—is present and active in the world—in many forms (pluriform), and in many places (polycentric)—drawing all people to the risen Christ. The second person of the Trinity (the Beloved) is the Word became flesh that dwelt among us. The Beloved was incarnated in the historical Jesus in order to demonstrate what unity with God looks like and to enter into human suffering to set us free from it. Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death and is now incarnated in the

Eucharistic community (that's the church)—to bring glory to the Lover/Parent (the First person of the Trinity) and draw all nations into the preferred and promised future of God's dream. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."

It is the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity that creates and sustains life itself. When humans move to the rhythm of God's love, as demonstrated most clearly through Jesus, then the Kingdom of God becomes more fully realized. When we resist and move in discord, it causes pain, suffering, violence, and death. We must realize that we need each other and are co-created by each other. God calls us into harmony with all things, as all things are interwoven in the life of the Trinity. This is a huge shift from my original ideas about the Trinity, the Gospel, and what it means to grow spiritually.

I currently find myself in a suburban ELCA congregation, surrounded by many other suburban ELCA congregations within a few miles of each other. I am a suburbanite and I love suburban people, yet, I sense that suburbanites seldom experience the unity, harmony, and love of God that is God's dream for the world. More often we live isolated, frenetic lives that are fragmented and driven by self-motivated, material gain.

The convergence of these two narratives—the congregation's and my theological awakenings—is what led me to craft this research question. I want to know: *How might an increased awareness and understanding of the social Trinity impact the ideation and praxis of spiritual formation in suburban ELCA congregations?* The understanding that God is the dynamic relationships of Lover, Beloved, and Love, and that the relationship itself is that which constitutes life itself, and that the Good News is that we are invited, in each moment, to participate with this dynamic relationship, centered on the risen Christ,

and empowered by the Holy Spirit, has made a huge impact on my life and ministry. I want to see if it would make an impact on other people's lives—specifically those living in my own suburban context—so I created this research project.

That is how *Deep in the Burbs* was born.

APPENDIX B

Video One Transcript: What is the Trinity and Why Does It Matter?

The word Trinity isn't in the Bible, but the idea comes from a problem we get when we read the Bible. It works like this: On the one hand the Bible says that there is only one God. On the other hand that Bible talks about God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, is it one God, or three Gods? The answer is yes and no.

Yes, there is only one God. No there are not three gods.

Yes, there are three persons. No, the three are not the same person.

See. One God, three persons. That's the Trinity. Makes perfect sense, right?

Don't worry, it hasn't made perfect sense to anybody and theologians have been talking about it for 2,000 years.

Here's how the conversation has gone in the Western World (By the way, when we say the Western World, that means the European church that descended from the Latin Church in Rome)

Jesus came to Earth in the Roman Empire. The world at that time was dominated by Greek philosophy. The Greeks thought the universe looked like this: It was divided into two parts. Up here was the realm of the divine. It was pure spirit, it was eternal, unchanging. It was the perfect substance. Down here, under the line, was everything that was created. This is the realm of the physical, changeable, world. It is a shadowy reflection of the perfect realm. This two-part universe is called dualism.

217

The human being had two substances. There was the soul, which was a lot like the perfect, divine substance. The soul was trapped and encased in the shadowy, filthy substance of the flesh and the material world.

Everybody's goal was to figure out how to move up the staircase of ever-increasing perfection until we can finally shed the sinful, physical body and the soul can become united with the perfect substance of the divine.

Remember, this is the way most people thought about the world when Jesus showed up. The first Christians had to figure out who Jesus was, and they tried to explain him, and his talk about the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, in terms of this model of the universe. The problem was this: if God is one, unchangeable substance, then how could you have three persons that are equally God, and how could one of them become flesh? That's just foolishness.

Eventually Christian theology ended up looking like this. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were three co-equal, co-eternal persons that were up here, above the line. Jesus descended momentarily into the shadowy realm in order to die and to establish the church. The church then became the staircase upon which people had to climb in order to reach Heaven. The Pope was up here, and everybody else fell in line under his authority according to their rank in society. The church, the king, the wealthy men, women, peasants, slaves, animals.

A lot of people in the late twentieth century have looked at this picture and said, "Wait a minute. That doesn't seem right. That system has led to Western Imperialism, colonization, and a great amount of pain and suffering under the hands of greedy tyrants. Isn't that the opposite of what Jesus taught in the Gospels?"

For the past 50 years people having been asking some questions.

What if things went wrong because this is not at all how the universe looks. What if it actually looked like this?

What if the universe isn't divided into two-parts, but is actually continually being created by the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? What if we acknowledged the fact God is not male or female and that this masculine imagery has led the church to oppressive practices. What if we referred to God as the relationship between Parent, Child and Spirit, or we could borrow from Augustine and refer to God as the relationship between the Lover, the Beloved, and Love.

Think about how your life works. You exist because of the relationships that you have. Your parents conceived you and sustained you in your early life. You constantly interact with other human beings, animals, plants, water, and air in order to live. Our lives are a dynamic interplay of multiple relationships.

The Bible says that we were created in the image of God. What if God is the dynamic interaction of Parent, Child, and Spirit. What if it is this relationship itself that creates and sustains all things? The purpose of creation is the unity and harmony of all living things to work for peace. When we move against that rhythm of life, we cause stress and disruption, pain and suffering.

God the parent is the source and author of life. Jesus is the Word of life. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, who became flesh and dwelt among us, to show us what God's peaceful rhythm looks like in action and to show us God's promise of life. God entered into our pain and suffering and freely gave himself over to death to demonstrate true love. He rose from the dead to demonstrate the promise of new life and rebirth. The

Spirit of God moves in and through us like the wind, or like a song, to coax us into God's rhythm of life. God is continually bringing about new life and new growth toward the promise of a peaceful relationship with all things.

This way of thinking about God is called the social Trinity, as it understands God to be the social relationship of the Parent, the Child, and the Holy Spirit—the Lover, the Beloved, and Love—eternally co-creating all things.

The question for us today is this. Which picture of the Trinity seems to be more in line with the life and teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of Heaven and what it means to go into all the world and make disciples?

Video Two Transcript: Theology Changes

At the end of the introduction video, we saw two models of the Trinity and asked the question, "Which model seems to best reflect Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God?" That's a fair and important question.

However, you may have had a deeper question. Perhaps you look at models like this and think, "How can there be different models of God?" "Why can't it be clear and simple?" "All that theology talk is too confusing."

Maybe you've heard people say something like this. "I don't need theology, I just read the Bible, or follow the confessions of our founders."

Here's an important thing to keep in mind. All of these statements are actually a theology.

You can't not do theology, because theology is simply the process of human beings talking about God.

You see, theology does not equal God. Theology is the human attempt to use language, metaphors, and images to describe God and how God works.

God is infinite, and we are finite. No human words could ever accurately describe God. The best and most complex theologies are little more than childish sketches in relation to the infinite mystery of God.

So, what's the point? Why even talk about God at all?

Just because we can't wrap words around God or define God and how God works with 100% accuracy doesn't mean that God doesn't exist or that God isn't knowable. That's like saying that just because a child can't completely understand her parents she shouldn't communicate with them or strive to learn more about them and grow in the relationship.

Theology is the process of God's children trying to figure things out. The more connected we are to people and their theologies that have been evolving throughout human history, and the more our ability to observe the universe through telescopes and microscopes, the more necessary it is for our theology to change.

Let's take an example from physics.

What is an atom?

Democritus was a Greek philosopher in 400 B.C.E. He speculated that the universe was built of tiny building blocks that cannot be cut into any smaller pieces. That's what atom means: uncuttable.

Being a good Greek, he imagined that the atom was a perfect sphere.

In 1803, John Dalton started thinking about the atom again and, due to advancing technology, was able to run experiments. He began with Democritus' model of the perfect, solid sphere. The atom was like an 8-ball.

In 1897 J.J. Thomson discovered that there was a smaller part within the atom. He called it an electron. Thomson's atomic model was like a blob of pudding with raisins suspended throughout it.

Ernest Rutherford tested Thomsons theory in 1909 and discovered that there was a solid core at the center of an atom. Scientists began thinking of the atom much like the structure of the solar system. The nucleus was at the center, like the Sun, and the electrons orbited it, like the planets orbit the sun.

Neils Bohr discovered that the electrons are on different levels and can jump levels.

Since the 1930s physicists have discovered that there are subatomic particles called quarks that behave in unpredictable patterns. They also believe that the electrons are not particles at all, but are force fields of energy. Many Quantum Physicists now believe that most of what we consider solid matter is actually the illusion of matter that is constructed by the bonds of high energy force fields.

So, which is it. Is the universe a collection of tiny 8-balls, is it a system of interlocking solar systems, or is it more like a hologram projection of force fields.

The answer...all and none.

Each of these pictures is a model of the atom and none of them equal the atom. The atom is the atom and our models are the human attempt to discuss and frame the atom within our limited language.

Models are necessary and we need to construct them and use them to help us understand the universe and make practical decisions about how to live in the universe. At the same time, we need to be willing to re-imagine our models when new information comes along.

God is God and we will never be able to fully or accurately describe God. Yet, we must construct models of God. This is called theology. Our theology is based on the witness of scripture, the dialogue of cultures, and the human ability to reason and imagine how the universe functions based on our most current experiences and observations.

Theology matters, and theology changes…because we change.

Video Three Transcript: The Modern I

So far, we have established two things. 1. There has been a huge shift in our understanding of the Trinity from the Medieval Times to our current times. 2. Theology shifts, and that is not a bad thing.

Now we must ask another question. What happened? How did we get from this picture in the early sixteenth century to where we are in the twenty-first century?

Things started to shift in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Europe.

The Italian Renaissance brought shifts in the arts, economics, and philosophy.

The Protestant Reformation began to question the authority of the Pope.

The invention of better modes of transportation and the discovery of the New World challenged the notion that the Earth is flat.

The discoveries of Copernicus through mathematical observations, and Galileo through physical observations challenged the idea that the earth was the center of the universe.

The 30 Years' War between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics ravaged the European countryside.

By the early seventeenth century the authority of the Medieval church was being challenged from every side and the fabric of the universe was being torn apart.

A growing group of intellectuals observed the theological and political debates raging between the Christians and declared that the Bible and theology obviously didn't provide any answers. The only thing that could provide real truth for the world was the use of human reason and the employment of empirical science.

This era is called the Enlightenment because it believed it was helping Western society to crawl out of the Dark Ages of the Medieval World and into the light of Reason and the Modern Era. Further advancements in astronomy eventually led the Western Modern World to think of the universe like this: The earth revolves around the Sun, which is just one of trillions of stars that comprise our galaxy, which is just one of trillions of galaxies spinning in a seemingly infinite sea of space with no apparent center, and no apparent purpose or meaning.

Where is God in this universe? What is the truth? Who has the authority to decide? How do we make sense out of this life? What's the point?

The modern world likes to make sense out of things by breaking everything down to its most basic parts. This is a simple picture of how the modern world is broken down.

First, it is divided into two basic sectors. On one hand there is the *public sector* and the other is the *private sector*. The *public sector* is ruled by human reason, and science is the only source of truth. The modern motto is, "Just the facts, ma'am." The only thing that is real in this world is economics and politics.

The *private sector*, on the other hand, is that place where individuals are free to believe and do whatever fantasies they desire, as long as it does not encroach on the public sector. The church was exiled to the private sector and faith was branded as a personal choice that had no place in the public sector. For the first time in human history, having no faith was a valid option, and actually the only option that made sense in the "real" world.

The modern world has also broken something else down to its basic parts: humanity. The most basic part of humanity is the individual person. Each person is a self-contained individual, completely separate from everything and everyone else. The human is a highly evolved bio-chemical machine that has the ability to think and reason. The mind is simply a projection of the body. This self-contained individual is free to travel wherever it wants, and can be plugged into any place in the world like an interchangeable part of a machine. Truth is found through the objective observation of the universe through reason and scientific method. The highest goal for the individual is to become self-reliant and to climb the socio-economic ladder to success, power, and personal fulfillment.

Meet the modern I. The I is the subject of the sentence. It is the actor, the one in control. I see you. I love you. I hate you. I am the center of the universe.

As the modern "I" developed there arose a debate among modern thinkers. They asked, "How does the I really know things?" On one side, the rationalists said that the I observes nature and uses reason to figure out the objective truth. On the other side, a thinker—named Immanuel Kant—said that the I can't really know anything objectively, but can only know what the "I" experiences. This is where we get the terms objective and

subjective truth. Rationalists think the I can be objective and truth exists out there and is discovered through observation. Subjectivists think that the I can only know something as the I experiences it, and therefore creates truth and meaning.

This created another version of Plato's dualism. Up here is the realm of the mind, or the thing that is beyond physical senses, thus can never be known by the I. Down here is the experience of the physical world that can only be known through the perspective of each individual "I."

Confused yet?

Hey, aren't we supposed to be talking about the Trinity? Well, you've probably guessed it already. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hardly anybody was talking about the Trinity. Christian theologians were faced with the task of proving to the rationalist world that God exists, when the rationalist world didn't believe that anything beyond the physical exists.

This led to two major types of theology: On the one hand there is objective theology that spent most of its energy trying to rationally and scientifically demonstrate that a) the Bible was the objective revelation of God to humanity, b) the Bible was the literal truth, c) the Bible was the absolute authority for all of life, and d) that correct belief in Jesus was the way to bridge the gap from the fallen world of sin to the eternal realm of God in Heaven.

The other type of theology was subjective and believed that God could only be known through personal experience of faith and that there was no objective revelation of God. God and the universe are essentially the same thing and the purpose of the Gospel

was to bring about social change to promote peace on earth, thus ending violence and poverty.

The turn of the twentieth century saw Western, Modern Christianity divided into these two camps. The conservatives on the objectivist, foundationalist side, and the liberals on the subjectivist, experientialist side.

So where is the Trinity during this time? Hardly anywhere to be found. Theologians were scrambling to prove that God existed in any form. They didn't have time to quibble over the ancient debate of three or one. The Trinity became little more than a footnote in the Modern Theology books.

Video Four Transcript: The Fusion of Horizons

Now we come to the early twenty-first century and we are left with this picture in the West. There are three basic views. Some people call these worldviews, some call them closed world systems, others call them plausibility structures, others horizons.

The majority of people live their lives operating in the public sector and are forced to function under the *public system*, whether they believe it or not. The *public sector* has no room for the spiritual. There is nothing beyond what human reason can understand and explain with science. The only reality and meaning comes from the interplay of the economic and political power structures.

All faith has been relegated to the private sector, where the individual "I" is free to believe and do whatever she desires, so long as it does not impede on the public sector.

Here there are two basic systems in regard to the spiritual, or supra-rational, or faith. There are those who think of the spiritual as being separate from the physical. It is

completely other than the physical. It transcends, or is transcendent. This is dualism, once again. God is up here, and the hope of humanity is to jump the gap of sin and separation and be united with God, up here. This is Transcendence.

The other system believes that there is no actual separation between the spiritual and the physical. They are one. The spiritual is within, it is the life force of the universe, and the hope of humanity is to find unity and harmony with the spiritual so that the world may live in peace and not destroy itself. God is within, God is immanent—meaning within itself. This is *immanence*.

We have three distinct systems, coexisting: The material atheistic public sphere; the transcendent, dualist sphere; and the immanent, spiritualist sphere.

Which one is right? How can these different spheres co-exist in a productive way?

What typically happens is that each sphere considers itself to be the only correct view and bangs up against the other ones, fighting for dominance. This usually leads to violence.

What if the reason these spheres exist is because people within them experience a unique part of the reality of God that shapes their perspective and behavior, thus making each of them true, but incomplete. Further, what if the path to peace was found in the Trinity and the spiritual practices of relating to the Trinity?

Before we talk about that, it will be helpful to discuss a concept called the fusion of horizons, made famous by a man named Gadamer.

A horizon is the limit of a persons perspective in relation to the fact that the earth is a sphere. It isn't a real boundary, but is created by the person's position on the planet. If

you want to expand your horizon, you must change your position. When you go higher, you see more. Let's say you wanted to get the maximum horizon possible. If you went out into space, and got far enough away, you could see your maximum horizon.

The problem is that, even though you have reached your maximum horizon, you can still only see half of the picture at one time. If you want to see the whole picture, then you have to get other people involved.

Let's launch two more satellites. Now we have three overlapping horizons. The only way one person can get a picture of the whole is if she talks to the person in each of the other satellites and they fuse their pictures into one combined picture. This fusion of horizons is not reality itself, but is a socially constructed representation of reality that will help each individual gain a better, but not perfect understanding of what lies beyond their own horizon. The only way this can work is if each individual trusts the other and allows herself to receive the other horizon and share her own.

This constructed understanding will constantly shift and change as each individual orbits the earth and understands their own perspective in new ways.

It is the relationship between each individual which creates the larger, shared reality. Which comes first, the relationship or the individual? Exactly.

This brings us back to the social Trinity. The fact that humanity has multiple systems from which it perceives reality is a reflection of the essence of God. God is the relationship between the Lover, the Beloved, and Love. There is an aspect of God which is transcendent—that is not created, or physical. There is an aspect of God which is pure spiritual energy and is that which gives life. This is Love, this is the Spirit. There is also

that aspect of God which is enfleshed—that enters into and shares—the physical, bodily reality of the created thing. This is the Beloved.

It is the relationship of these three that creates and sustains life.

The spiritual disciplines that will bring growth, healing, and peace on earth, the Good News for all nations, are those that allow us to humbly enter into the conversations that allow us to fuse our horizons in humility.

What might that look like for people within each of these systems to realize that the relationships we have with each other actually form who we are?

APPENDIX C

Table 9. Helps and Hindrances of Suburban Living for Spiritual Formation: Complete

Data

Helps	Hindrances
• freedom and peace. • many small communities are created • neighborhood, especially those in newest ones where suddenly all are brought together • kid's friends create social circles • kid's activities create network for them and parents, = community can be supportive • shared focus or parent's activities, networks, memberships create social communities • All these contact points can grow relationships which are supportive of individuals and community and may or may not increase spirituality • we're fairly homogenous. • lots of churches/church communities that fit our needs/desires • Living here helps my spiritual formation because of the opportunity offered me of continued learning about God's love and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This project you offered me has opened my mind and spirit to new ways of thinking. My church has led me to grow, although I am probably the oldest person in this group I am surprised at how these sessions have made me grow. • many churches in the area fairly close to home	• we don't get to see those who are in need the most. We tend not to have interaction with those people. • long commutes for most (avg. 20+ min, longest of metro) reduces family/social network time. • focus on material things, new house, furniture, clothing, etc. detracts from spirituality. • isolation as kids grow up and leave. • people who move in are not included as easily • "self sufficiency" - don't need others. • arguments about social and political issues creates barriers • cliques - closed groups • how do I find a group of people • lack info/knowledge • we're fairly homogenous • busyness • garage doors and fences • we generally don't work where we live or even possibly go to church there. • Not living here might not offer this chance [to learn from this group]. • focus on worldly possessions i.e. big house, big car, etc., etc. • busyness takes away time for God, church • all about "Me" • many are self-centered • suburbs are not as prone to see life's difficulties/hardships as the inner city.

231

• a variety of churches that can help people find a "comfortable" place to worship. • some community already somewhat exist: school, sports teams, clubs, work, etc. How can we use the existing connections? • even church community, how do we wake up the "bench warmers?" • this is largely a quiet, hardworking neighborhood -- law abiding! • This allows us independent thinking and decisions ability to rely on self independence. • I can follow GOD and not worry about what others think. • I have sufficient $, shelter, safety.	• so disconnected ==> how can we use that? • How do I spread the Word to others where it makes a difference? • people commute to jobs • suburban people are materialistic • people don't seem to have a sense of community. • seems each suburb is more centered around schools and their activities.

APPENDIX D

A Synthesis of Individual Team Members Data

This document is an attempt to reduce and synthesize the personal data from each

member of the Deep in the Burbs Research Team (RT) that completed the entire project.

The criteria used to choose these data was based on strict attention to the research

question. The question asked how an increased awareness of the social Trinity might

impact the ideation and practice of spiritual formation in this group. I simply want to

detect changes that might have occurred in how the team members think about and/or

practice spiritual formation as a result of this project.

This was a difficult task since the RT generated 470 pages of large group audio

transcriptions and hundreds of pages of emails and online discussion forum posts. The

topics covered in the data were rich and varied and enticed me to chase each of them

down wonderfully colored rabbit trails. This document, again, is a discipline of remaining

focused on the simple, clear purpose of the research question. Did the process of

introducing this team to the social Trinity elicit any noticeable change in their ideas or

practices of spiritual formation?

I have organized each person's story in three sections. First, I highlight their

initial self-introduction, description of their own practices of spiritual formation, and their

own definition of spiritual formation from Phase One. The self-introduction was spoken

to the large group in Session One. The practices and definition were written in their

personal notebooks during Session One and Session Two. These three pieces of data

provide a "base-line" against which I can compare the data from Phase Three regarding where each team member started this journey in his or her ideation and praxis of spiritual formation. The second section simply states the project each member chose to do during Phase Two.[247] The third section highlights Phase Three data that will be used to compare to the Phase One "base-line" data mentioned above. These data are excerpts from Session Ten and Eleven, as well as quotes from emails. These excerpts capture, what I believe, are the evidence of either (a) noticeable change in the individual's ideation and/or practice of spiritual formation, (b) a commentary on the lack of change experienced as a result of the project, or (c) a critique of the project itself.

Pat's Story

Pat dropped out of the team. I tried to reach her, but even her pastor said that she had disappeared. That disappointed me, because her opening statement was amazing. It summarized the lived reality of so many suburban families. It would have been nice to see how the project impacted Pat. I include her opening statement because it is valuable data that represents the social context of the entire RT.

Pat's Opening Statement

I'm Pat. I'm from Calvary. I guess what interested me the most. Well, first of all, I guess I should say, I grew up in a small town. Rural Minnesota. Very unlike suburban atmosphere. Church was central to life where I was from, in Gaylord, Minnesota. Very disconnected here. I really don't have any family close by to depend on. When I look at my neighbors, my neighbors all seem to be very disconnected, too. I look at my kids and my kids friends, the people they associate with. You know, my kids grew up in sports. A lot of baseball, soccer, football, hockey, golf, whatever, they played it. There was a lot of contention with practices on Sunday mornings, practices on Wednesday nights. A lot of decisions

---

[247] I may or may not elaborate on each project as a section of the dissertation. For now, let these data simply note the projects in which each team members engaged.

about what do you forego. Is the choir concert more important than the game tonight? You know, decisions that need to be made. People make those decisions differently? I guess I'm sort of rambling. It's very different in the suburbs than it is in a small community where you have that core that everything is built around. In the suburbs, everything is very…there are so many choices and so many alternatives. So many pressures being put on, especially, young people. As to what they should do, what they should pursue, the amount of time they should spend doing what. And the fear on the part of the parents. I remember—[directed to Tiffany]—you've got young kids—you're going to be making choices about how much time you're going to let your kid play hockey, golf, soccer. Are they going to play all year? You know, how much time are you going to dedicate to that? Are they going to miss church, or miss Sunday school? You know? It's all those hard choices that people have to make. At the time its going to seem like a life or death decision to you. Which it really isn't, but at the time it seems like it. Right, because everyone's afraid that if you miss a season you can't play any more. You're going to be out, you'll be cut. You know, and so I think it's mostly the young people that drew to, because it's those people that you know. Even those kids that grow up in the church—they get baptized, they get confirmed— once they get baptized and confirmed, they're gone. You may never see them again, until maybe they have a kid that has to be baptized. Some way to connect to them and get them to stay. Even adults, their parents, there's so much pressure, so many different things to be involved in to do, and so much juggling. It's really hard for people to get their priorities and to get them straight.

Kelly's Story

Phase One

I'm Kelly. We're married. I think the only thing to tack on to that. Like Heather, we're sort of alien in the suburb as well. My family is from Fargo. Rob's family is from Central Minnesota. And so, the Ascension family is really important to us. And, we have friends that are very involved in church, and we have friends that feel like the church will burn down if they walk through the doors. [Laughter] That was truly their quote. So, how do we bridge that gap, right, between these friends that we have that are walking with us spiritually and those friends that feel like that's not their place. We want to invite them to be part of it.

Kelly's practice of Spiritual Formation

Listening to Christian Radio - I find a lot of comfort and value in the poetry that lives in song. Expressing my feelings known and unknown in me.
Learning to read Scripture.
Taking advantage of opportunities to show God in small ways.
Participating in church family

Serving to recognize all that I have and put life into perspective
Talking with husband about what God has in store for us.
Friends in the faith to challenge us, seeking role models.
Trying to hear God, trying harder to listen.

Kelly's Definition of Spiritual Formation

Developing a foundation from which to work to better understand God's will and
purpose for my life.
Also for the life of the community I belong to.
Other terms: spiritual development

Kelly's Projects

1. Sunday Evening S'mores

2. Holy Conversations Journaling

Kelly's Comments Reflecting on the Project

In what ways, if at all, did the conversation about the social/relational/entangled

Trinity change the way you think about and/or practice spiritual formation?

If I'm being completely honest I'm not sure that it really did. I think it validated
what I already felt about the Trinity. If I had participated in this project even 5
years ago, I think my answer would have been very different but I am "growing
up" in an environment (at Ascension) that has fostered that relationships are key
in Christian growth. That was validated in the first mission trip to Haiti, teaching
a Adult Formation class and in my work on church council. It has been a
continual evolution for me. Next for me is to really dive into the Parish Nursing
work. My introverted nature is working against me in this case because cold
calling people I barely know is a completely uncomfortable thing for me.
However, I know that when I get over that fear the reward will be worth it. I just
need to keep pushing myself.

Heather's Story

Phase One

I'm Heather. What drew me to it, I guess. A couple of things. I'm kind of drawn
to the idea of research. I think that sounds interesting. And spiritual formation
because my spiritual life is just kind of an ongoing thing that I'm trying to

understand at another level. The suburbs, I am in the heart of the suburbs. I grew up as a country girl with a different connection to the land. So now, my world now is suburban. I don't have that…it's just a different lifestyle. So, I've had to adjust. I think that has impacted my spiritual life. I think it impacts how I'm raising two sons. Our life as a family is so different from the life I grew up with. I don't have any grandparents or anything in the area. So, kind of like, it's me and Scott. That makes it very important to be part of a congregation. So, anyway, those are the things that drew me to it. Lot's of curiosity, and spiritual questions.

Heather's Practice of Spiritual Formation

Prayer - I like to pray quietly, alone, or with people sometimes
Journaling - which is also prayer for me.
Worship - hearing the Word of God, music.
Drawn to my spiritual self through my fellowship in groups.
Often very simple things - like how my dog shows love. It seems so pure - then I think of my own spiritual life.
Or when I parent and either of the children have a joy or crushing experience. I am so connected to them and I wonder how God is connected to me in a similar way. Spirit does not form but needs to connect with it.

Heather's Definition of Spiritual Formation

I think of it as growth, increased awareness of our Spiritual selves and the relationship we have with the Trinity. Our awareness of the part of our lives that is of God. Which is everything.

Heather's Projects

- Journaling

- Fasting

- Planning the Women's Retreat

Heather's Comments Reflecting on the Project

To connect this to DITB, I wonder about God's creation of male, female, child and how that fits into the Trinity. Juliann of Norwich held a seed in her hand and understood something deep and profound about God and creation. I look at that creation of a family, and I feel there is some deep truth there, too, some small glimpse of God.

[The discipline of writing a journal to someone else] helped me to understand my personal stories as part of the larger story.

It forced me to think about things at a deeper level, certainly. Like I said, I grew up in a Lutheran church where there's Trinity Sunday, and you learn your creeds, you know, so I knew about the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but, it did force me to rethink my relationship with each of them. My journaling was kind of going back to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that I knew as a child. All male, all the time. To a point where I'm, just keep interacting with that relationship until I know it in a different way. Like we do with our children, or our spouse, or our friends. If you stay in the relationship you always learn, it always grows. And, so…I guess, for that reason, I think we have all had a change because we participated. And it isn't really about the larger community, or even, in my mind so much about bringing people into the church. It's about the stronger [relationship] we each have with God, the better we can each have with each other.

When we look at the church as a whole. Well, I can't separate myself from the congregation that I'm part of. My spiritual formation, it's not completely up to my church. That's a relationship that I have with God, and therefore, it's something that I have to work at. Then, in community, I build it stronger. To say, just me and Scott, you know. We have a relationship and it is a relationship in our house. Then we go out with friends and, gosh, and he says something funny and I learn something totally new that I didn't really know about him. So, anyway, that's what the church is like. God and I have a relationship, and we come to church and, like "Ah, you have another relationship and another story." And that grows my relationship with God.

John's Story

Phase One

I'm John. I grew up in the city. The suburbs are, I wouldn't say foreign to me. I grew up in the city, I worked the inner city for most of my life. Now I've lived out in the burbs for the past 25 years. I raised a family out here, so I see the difference between the burbs and the city, and what goes on in the inner city and what goes on in the burbs. The reason I'm here is that I got this tearful email from Steve [laughter] "Please, please join our group!" [laughter] No he did not.
I just felt it was to help him out. We're going through generosity at church and I felt that was part of being generous. I felt that would help him out. To put my two cents worth in.

John's Practice of Spiritual Formation

Prayer, meditation, listening to God's voice, giving thanks.
Being generous, accepting, blessing others, helpful to the stranger, kind and compassionate.

John's Definition of Spiritual Formation

The practice of looking to someone or a power greater than ourselves.
Also the practice of looking inward. Looking into that space within ourselves where God abides.

John's Projects

• Journaling

• Feed My Starving Children Group from outside the Church

John's Comments Reflecting on the Project

Here are my thoughts on the trinity?

For me I believe the trinity is us, in that we are apart of it. After much journaling, contemplating, looking inward and listening to that small still voice that is deep within all of us. I have come to see that the trinity is not three beings who are somewhere in the heavens, but that all of humanity, all of creation is one leg of the tripod we call the trinity. God is the father, the creator of all things, His Spirit flows through all things and we are the body of risen Christ. Jesus said I am in the Father and the Father is in me, and I am in you and you are in me. He wasn't just saying this to people who accepted "Jesus in theirs hearts" but to everyone, everywhere, for all times. He said "I am a part of you, nothing can separate me from you". The whole of God walking amongst us in the form of Jesus was to show our connection to God and to others. If the whole purpose of Jesus's coming was to die for our sins, then that could have been done when Herod the Great sent out the order to kill all the babies. The lamb would have been sacrificed and God would have been satisfied, life would have gone on. Jesus came not to change God's mind, but to change our mind about God.

Jesus came to show us how to love our sisters and brothers and not just in our clans, but all clans through out the world regardless if you call the Father, God, Yahweh, Allah, Shiva or the Great Spirit. Did not Jesus say, "That whatever you do for the least of these, you do also for me". Right now in this "Christian" nation we regard the Islamic person as the least of mankind just because they do not

profess "Jesus As Lord". But I am told to love the least, and I believe that the Christ is in those we regarded as the least.

When we start seeing the divine, the sacred in everyone, we no longer see others as "THOSE" people. We become a community, we share in each other's suffering and joy. We humbly serve God and one another, and in doing so we bring honor to God.

It is this connection to God, our connection to one another and our connection to the Spirit. This is the trinity in my opinion. This may sound heretical to many who follow the theology they were taught and were brought up on, but I think Jesus came to turn the world upside down to show us a new way of living. To show us a life of inclusion and not exclusion.

And here is what I would say to the ELCA pastor if he would listen.

"Taking it to the streets" as the Doobie Brothers song goes. It isn't a matter of bringing people into the church, it's a matter of meeting them where they are at. Not to evangelized, but to feed them, to heal their hurts, bind their wounds, to clothe them and be a listening ear. To be the love of God to all people. To be a vehicle of mercy, generosity, kindness, love and grace. Not once did you see Jesus tell people to meet him at the tabernacle, he always came to them and met them where they were living. Always giving of himself. This is our mission, our life long project.

Just by observing others, and being with others. Every day I go to a coffee shop for lunch. I bring my apple and orange, and my banana, or whatever. I'm sitting there and watching all sorts of different types of people walk in. I would see the dregs of society come in. I would see people come in who you knew were, maybe not the top one percent, but they were upper middle-class. And how they reacted to others and how they treated others. To me it seemed like the people that were the lower class were always the friendliest. They look at you, and say hi to you. They interact with you. The people in the upper class, they just didn't want to have anything to do with you. I'm here to get my coffee. Whatever, that kind of stuff…

…But, I just, as I was thinking about a lot of this stuff was…it wasn't so much my relationship to God, but it's my relationship to you, or to you, or the guy on the street, or the dregs of society that walks in there. People I meet down the street. It's how I react to them and treat them.

Mary's Story

Phase One

I'm Mary. I'm a native of California. I didn't live in the big city, but I lived in between Sacramento and San Francisco, growing up. I've been in Minnesota since the late 70s. Most of the time we lived, not in the inner city, but in the surrounding closer areas. Like Egan and Apple Valley area. I've been here in this suburb now for a couple years with John. I joined the church. We discussed whether we wanted to join this process. We felt it would be a good learning tool. Hopefully I'll have a little tidbit of something to give. Hopefully that will help.

Mary's Spiritual Formation Practices

My practice of SF has changed dramatically over the years. I was not feeling drawn spiritually growing up, even though I was educated 1-8 grades in a Catholic school - or maybe that was the problem.
In the past 1 + years I have been reading various books of many authors (Philard Rohr, Rob Bell, etc) and have become aware that my "Christian" questioning is not so out in left field or as I was told one (atheist) but rather questioned by many and reading has developed my understanding of Faith.

Mary's Definition of Spiritual Formation

The development of an individual belief in higher and how it affects the life of that person. Spiritual Formation develops differently in each individual. Can start in early childhood of parental or church guidance is given or later in life as life lessons develop the individual personal practice.

Mary's Original Trinity Teachings

The Trinity has always been a confusing concept for me. Even with my memorization of the Baltimore Catechism. I have had doubts of the 3 in 1 and just a few years ago was told by a friend (who was raised Lutheran but does not believe in God) that I was like him and needed to admit to being an atheist.

Mary's Projects

- Journaling

- Feed My Starving Children with people outside of Church

Mary's Comments Reflecting on the Project

A lot of my, just in hearing people talk tonight, a lot of what I have found the Spirit…because with my Catholic background I never really knew what the Spirit was, or Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they were three persons in one, and just all that kind of conglomerate. But, nobody really understands. And, I've kinda come to feel that the Spirit is what's inside of me. And, I think one of the things that I told you in the car that you seemed to like was the thought on…It's always said that everybody was made—I'm gonna cry—everybody was made in the Spirit and likeness of God. And, as a I child, I used to think, What is it about me that's so much like God. And, I think what it is, is that it's that Spirit that inside of you. It's not how we look or how we talk. It's the spirit thats inside. And, the other day in church, I know that there's always that candle that's always lit. You know, raised Catholic, it was always, well, you know, it's always lit there, because it means God is here. But I was thinking tonight, it's not so much the presence of God there, but it's all the people that come in and its the spirit that's there. Just a reminder of the Spirit that coming and joining together as one.

Sharon's Story

Phase One

Hi, I don't even know all the people from Ascension. I'm Sharon. I usually go to the 10:30 service. I'm in city government. I'm on the City council, and have been for a dozen years. But before then I lived in a different suburb and was in government there. I always seem to get involved in churches and long range planning. Because I know so much about a community after you go door to door to door and talk to people and listen to people. You learn a lot from the ground up. And, I was involved in a vision group at Ascension a few years ago and was invited to talk about the demographics of the area. That was something very interesting to me, and just explaining what is happening. And, those of you who don't live in the suburbs you probably have kids or relatives who grew up near you, and they have a house a little further out north and a lot of people in this suburb grew up in the other suburb and Grandma and Grandpa still live in that one and there are all those connections happening. So, I think that's exciting that there's all those connections.
When we were involved in this long range planning one of the things we talked about was this vacant property Ascension has in Northern part of the suburb that's been there for more than 10 years. I was in another church that tried to buy that land for a church. The deal didn't happen and Ascension has that property now and has been sitting on it and has gardens on it. Because I felt really bad that it is sitting empty. So, we have gardens there, and that's good.

During that time (Steve doesn't know this, and no body else knows this either) when we were doing the vision process in our church. At one point we were asked to pray for one of the things we were asked to pray for the future and mine was that we prayed for was a leader. That has been my prayer. That we would have a leader that would get us to the place where Ascension would use that land and grow a church where there's all these families moving. I mean a hundred people built a home in to this suburb last year. And they're all looking for a church. So, you were being prayed about before you moved here. [Laughter]

Sharon's Practice of Spiritual Formation

My faith was FORMED at an early age--around 10--when I committed my life to God. However it has continued to grow, now more with experiences and challenges that I bump against, get bruised with and try to sort out with God's help through prayer, his Word and conversations with my husband who has a deep faith.

Sharon's Definition of Spiritual Formation

What do I believe?
Do I have faith in anything but myself?
If a do. Have faith in something, what is that. I have spiritually formed my faith; thesis statement
Perhaps, if someone asked why are you the way you are, how come you are that way?
A: Because of my faith I believe in JC as my personal savior and redeemer and have eternal life because of Him, he affects all of who I am.

Sharon's Projects

- Prayer Team with Calvary Ladies

- Journaling during campaign process

Sharon's Comments Reflecting on the Project

In what ways, if at all, did the conversation about the social/relational/entangled

Trinity change the way you think about and/or practice spiritual formation?

It did not change my outlooks on the trinity. I think the ideas explained were too convoluted and some of the drawings focused so much on history or science and I didn't agree totally with the simplification of the historical or scientific references so that became a distraction. A better context for explaining the social trinity

might be examples of it here and now in a social history type perspective or using examples in modern society. By the way, I have 7 years of post-high school education and a doctoral in another field.

However, because of discussions about the trinity, I reflected more on my spiritual relationship with God and others and whether they were occurring because of Father/Son/HS. Most of the time, I believed it was the HS and that was not a change in viewpoints for me. I regularly experience and believe in the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps some of those in the group who believe and know the Holy Spirit impacts us here and now could have shared real-life examples of these promptings. Maybe this would encourage growing Christians to look at their daily interactions a bit differently. The women who attended our group from Calvary [church C?] shared some examples with me when we talked outside the group setting. I think there were other mature Christians who were silent about their real-life experiences because it did not fit into the discussion framework.

There is a conference held at North Heights each August on the Holy Spirit that my sister-in-law has occasionally participated in and I have enjoyed hearing about it. I think the Lutheran branch of the Christian faith ignores some of the gifts the Holy Spirit offers us. Perhaps a study of the Bible verses that describe "the Spirit" or the works of the apostles after Jesus left earth would have been a better prefix to our project. I also have seen tremendous benefit from people receiving instruction about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, giving them a better understanding that each is equipped to serve but not all in the same way and there are not lesser gifts. Respect of these differences also comes from this teaching. I felt there was a bit of a lack of respect for differences/uniqueness within our group.

I continue to believe one's personal relationship with God does involve his complex being and my relationship is enhanced because the Holy Spirit is working on me or others in my life to bring me closer, protect me, bless me, meet my needs, provide counsel, convict me, guide me and more. I experience conversations with people all the time because of these promptings. God puts people in my path because he has prompted them. I wrote about some of these experiences in my journal and could write pages more. I know God better because his son lived as a human to show us the ideal way to live a life of love before serving as the sacrificial lamb to atone for my sins.

My interaction with two Jehovah's Witnesses at my door this fall was impacted by my extra time reflecting on the Trinity, as I know they reject this concept. We had an interesting, respectful and lengthy conversation. I know a bit about them from a study class at another area church. They are each appointed districts and make regular visits w/i these districts unless someone absolutely rejects them at the door. I have had fall visits on a recurring basis with two women and this time it was two men, one obviously an elder. I directed them to John 1:1, after they

reviewed the typical Revelation text they like to focus upon. I pointed out that the Word was God and was with God in the beginning, etc. Their version of the Bible has revised this text to read, and "the word was a god" not the "Word was God." I realize I know a successful businessman who is a Jehovah's Witness. He has called me and asked for my advice on situations on a regular basis even though he does not live in my city where I would normally be a person for him to contact. Perhaps God is preparing me for a conversation with him on our respective beliefs. . . . This thought just came to me as I typed today.

So the church's complicated decision has impacted me more than this project. The author noted this was an interesting time for his project, with this decision occurring. It is a challenging time. It takes a lot of contemplative energy, discussion, study and more to sort out a major change in a church teaching. Our church moved too fast for most people on this topic. I wrote that very comment to the leadership this spring: people need time to prepare for and understand change, especially in a conservative, family-oriented community. I have talked to our senior pastor and he shared his thoughts. "The decision" has impacted my relationships at church as several of my very good friends have contemplated leaving, stopped attending, or have left for other churches. I had a chance encounter with another group member this summer. We chatted about this topic and this person said they were also similarly unprepared for the decision. It seems people like going to go to a church where they have friends. When those friends leave the church, they evaluate their own membership and attendance.

My first week back to church after time away, I knew I was meant to be there [Holy Spirit promptings] because a close friend of my family was listed in the bulletin as being ill. I called the family home and then stopped by to encourage them. The caregiver was walking in her garden. I listened. I offered to pray for her husband and shared a prayer request for this person with a mutual friend. Recently, I stopped by their home again, to retrieve a campaign sign and was happy to find them both outside walking in the yard! He was improving! God answered our prayers. [Maybe I wrote about this in my journal, but it ties in well here too.]

During my campaign, I would daily ask for God's guidance, wisdom and energy. Many times, I felt God's hand in directing me to places where there were lonely people or people who had a story to share or tell. I met other Christians, people who had gone to church with me at my current or a previous church, people who were interested in sharing their concerns, stories, about their worries, their recovery from cancer and illness or were just in need of a visit. I met a few people who had come from other countries. I saw our community becoming more diverse. I had people call me and encourage me, offer their help and assist me. I know God brought them to me to help me continue moving. I did not know what his plan was for me, only that I should not give up and should give it my best effort. I thought a lot about conducting myself as a Christian during this time, remaining positive in outlook and being fair.

After winning, I am thinking about my role as a Christian leader and witness. I am thankful our city administrator is a Christian. When visiting with him about some goals and ideas, he pointed to a document the previous mayor was not interested in, but perhaps, I would support, a code of ethics. I agreed it would be a good idea.

If we were to do this project again, what would you do differently?

If there needs to be an understanding of the trinity, then there needs to be several sessions with an instructional component and a bit less of the group process where the uninformed are left to inform themselves. I have observed that there were participants who lack familiarity with basic Bible principles and I noted the extensive reliance on theological terms failed to communicate effectively with laypersons who use different terminology of do not label some of the ideas discussed. The style you used works better when everyone is coming into the room with the same basic background and foundation of beliefs.
Prayer, Scripture, instruction, then reflection and questions. We needed time for questions and people wanted more direction and information. How often did everyone turn to you and look expectantly as if there was some vital link missing and you could fill in the gap?

Phyllis's Story

Phase One

I'm Phyllis. I really wanted to learn to listen. That is why I joined the group. I have, I grew up in a small town in Iowa. I have a large number of children, so we've lived in large cities. In Rockford, Illinois close to Chicago. We know how that works. We lived outside of Los Angeles. That diversity out there. We were transferred to a very small town in southern Illinois, which the kids called the armpit of the world. [Laughter] So, I've seen the need for foundation in all of these places. Each place had a different way of attaining their membership to the church. Some of it was good, some places were not so good. In fact some people were turned away because they didn't fit into the church because of status. Interesting.

So, now I'm living here. I have my family here because they moved here. We're not from here. I have six children here. One you might know. He was just made the superintendent of schools. So, I'm a little bit proud about that. And one who does not live here. I'm in that age bracket where I'm really interested in finding out how to get people who are my age back to church. They are not involved in

church. And they don't seem to have a need. And I'm really interested in my grandchildren being involved in church, because I have some of my children who grew up in the church, but are not now. So, I want to hear how people are doing that. Because, the suburbs is where we live. And, this is where we need to get involved. I'm interested in the research end of that. And hopefully the research will give us some answers.

Phyllis's practice of Spiritual Formation?

Try to "bear" my faith. Hard - find I am showing or demonstrating my faith or spiritual belief t friend more than to my family.
Example - with people I am playing bridge with we talk about our faith - why I enjoy the church community I'm in, even inviting them to come to activities.
With my family - I seem to have the wrong words or they sense I'm "pushy" So I show by practicing.

Phyllis's Definition of Spiritual Formation

Belief/Faith in whom.
Why is it important to have a definition of what we believe or who we have faith in as who war trust?
How do we discover about ourselves "what we believe."
Spiritual - deep belief in ?God? That helps us make life decisions.

Phyllis's Projects

- Working with yoga classes

Phyllis's Comments Reflecting on the Project

The other thing was I wanted to increase the number of people that I had in my yoga group that I have on Thursday night. The interesting thing is that I got more people, but they were not from ELCA. They were from other churches. And they came, and they continue to come because we do dwell in the Word. The practice is given over to God, and we have a time in the end to meditate. Although we didn't do the dwelling in the word, like you do, but that's the point of the thing. And that's the point that I thought was interesting, and the interesting thing…people would call and say, "I'm so glad you do that, because we don't have that ability any place else where we 'exercise' where we can incorporate our faith."
So, I feel that the Holy Spirit is working through us in all that we do.

I think that to the question is to make clear what the project was. If we were to do this project again, we talked about it. None of us were absolutely clear what the

project was. So, was the project for us to understand the Trinity more? And, if that was the case, list our views of what it was on the board. Or, was it to pass the word along to other people. Get other people involved in church and want to learn about the Trinity. And want to be involved in the church, and know…so we'd have to know where we were, like you said, do we think God is around us all the time. And is it a valuable person to help us make decisions. Or, do we only worship him when we walk into the doors of Ascension, or Bethlehem, or Calvary, or wherever it is? Or, is God with us everywhere we are? In the car, in our bed. And then, how would that fit into the project, if we knew what the project…not that you didn't make it clear…is that we all understood it in a different way.

Phil's Story

Phase One

Phil is a retired Lutheran Pastor.

Phil, a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church here. I've lived in a small town, I've lived in a city, I've lived in the suburbs. I've lived in the country. So, a little bit of experience in all kinds of communities. The thing that particularly appeals to me about this project is sort of a balance between theology and practice. Balance between spiritual, which is up here, and growth which is down here. The Trinity, which is up there, and the suburbs, which is down here. So, I'm sort of excited about the possibilities that that entails of trying to make our theology practical.

Phil's Practice of Spiritual Formation

Regular Worship weekly
Frequent prayer throughout each day.
Teaching and participation in two Bible study groups
Singin in the choir weekly
Fellowship and weekly choir practice
Prayer at mealtimes
Social Ministry Projects
Reading Theology books
Reading scripture in Greek regularly
Counseling with family and friends on spiritual matters
Listening and reflecting to spiritual mentors.

Phil's Definition of Spiritual Formation

A process by which I grow spiritually in my relationship with the Lord—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and in which I mature in my walk with the Lord through the things I do. Spiritual Formation is also a growth in my relationship to the church, the body of Christ on earth.

In response I would suggest that people in suburban ELCA congregations think about and practice spiritual formation generally in ways that reflect the CULTURE of their own particular ELCA church. Certainly regular worship is part of that culture. A prescribed daily devotional booklet is part of Bethlehem Lutheran Church. Catechesis for youth of confirmation age. I think a few "information classes" for new members. Informal small group Bible Study is offered but not strongly promoted. Some in depth bible study is offered occasionally, but only a few attend. Mission and community service projects are regularly offered. Various other Opportunities for Spiritual Formation are offered, but no clearly obvious plan or designed path for all congregation members to follow as might be true in other Christian congregational cultures. Exposure to Trinity is essentially limited to reciting the creed sometimes during worship and other references during worship.[248]

Phil's Projects

- Pig Roast

- Developing an Adult Spiritual Formation Curriculum

Phil's Comments Reflecting on the Project

1. The conversation about the social/relational/entangled Trinity did not really change the way I think about and/or practice spiritual formation. It may be that the categories of lover, beloved and love were already familiar to me. However, I think that a movement away from dualism theology is helpful. I have recently read some of NT Wright in his book "Surprised by Hope" and I believe that my understanding of spiritual formation is enhanced significantly by seeing the end goal of Gods salvation as being centered upon the redeeming and renewal of the present created physical world and the redeeming and renewal of a person body and soul for new life in a renewed creation rather than centered upon the redeeming of ones spirit for life in heaven. My renewed understanding of spiritual formation therefore seems to come more from a renewed understanding of Gods

---

[248] Phil wrote this in Phase Three, but I think it is a good perspective on the typical congregation.

salvation goal rather than my understanding of the nature of social Trinity as you have explained.

In an email…

I think that Spiritual formation and growth occurs in the Phil soil mixture of faith, hope and love. 1. Faith in the Triune God. 2. Hope of the second coming and 3. love of Christ. The stronger the faith, the clearer the hope and the greater the love... The more abundant will be the growth of ones spiritual formation.

Therefore it makes sense to me that an introduction to doctrine of Social Trinity might be of some effect upon spiritual formation if it enlivened faith in that same triune God. It also seems to me that a clearer picture of Christs second coming and of the resurrection of all believers for the renewal of heaven and earth would also be of some effect upon spiritual formation if it enlivened hope. And... That a greater knowledge of Jesus Christ through reading of the gospel accounts would also be of some effect upon spiritual formation if it stirred up greater love.

I think that the problem of your thesis is that it is focused on only one of the three soils mixture required for Spiritual Formation. Faith in the Social Trinity is not enough. The love of Christ and the clarity of hope are needed as well. I think that NT Wright clearly articulates the soil of Hope in his book "Surprised by Hope". Well, we had the two models that were given: the social Trinity model and the Greek model of the Heavens above and the Earth below. That this was the movement from the old model—the modern model—is the social Trinity. My thought was, what I would like to have done, was really explored in more detail where I was at in relation to those models. Where was I at as I was growing up. Where was I at now, in terms of my view of God. Is he up in the heavens? Huh? Is that where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are, as far as I'm concerned? OK. Or, is it more of the presence of God creating, recreating in me as God is creating and recreating the world, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And do I sense that closeness. I guess that's what I would do different, is I would really try to explore that. For a couple of reasons. One is that would have helped me, from the beginning, to understand the project better. OK, and what it was.

Well, a question for me is, for me personally, is whether social—and I don't buy into the dualism model, for God—but the question for me is whether the social Trinity does it for me either. It's a…Trinity is a mystery. To me…it's a great…I've been reading some N.T. Wright, and some of the things that he's espousing. Especially the thoughts that it's the God of creation. The spirit who is stirring over the waters. The Spirit that was dispersed on Pentecost. The Son who came to earth to redeem. And so on. That it's really more about…rather than trying to define God as Lover, Beloved, Love, or what have you, or trying to understand God. It's more, and it makes sense to me, it's more a matter of

understanding God in the story of scripture. In the account of where God has intersected in various times and places. And relating that…

Yeah, I was going to say, in response to his Where to land the plane. We've all been on a journey for a long time of spiritual formation. And, it's going to continue. What you've added to that for us is an association of the Trinity. OK, we'll ignore the two varieties of which. But, even the thought that our growth, our spiritual formation, our spiritual growth will be the work of the Trinity. It will be the work of the Father creating, re-creating in your life. And and work in your life as he has in the past. It will be the work of the Son granting you grace and being with you and demonstrating the love of God in your life as he has in the past. And it will be the work of the Holy Spirit guiding and leading and blowing us by the wind of the Spirit in the knowledge and the love of God, or in the ways that God would have us to go. But, what we have here is, because, maybe in the past, we thought of spiritual formation as how many times do I go to church. How many times do I read the Bible? How many times do I say Hail, Marys, or whatever. No, maybe not in the Lutheran church. [Laughter] but, just connecting it to the Trinity to begin with. And, having us think about that. Cause that's where it ultimately where it will be. Yeah, that's where…to take off from there.

Rhet's Story

Phase One

I guess, I've been a member here for about twenty years or so.
Steve: At Bethlehem.
Rhet: Yes. I decided. I was at first Lutheran Columbia Heights. I decided that when my kids got old enough I wanted them to go to school where they went to church. I didn't want to drive to Columbia Heights, so we came out here. I've worked with the youth quite a bit. I guess I've worked with the old people quite a bit, too. Right, Roger? [Laughter]
Roger: I know Red Green real well.
Rhet: He knows I only tease the people I love. That was me just saying that right there. I guess I've just been in several groups within the church.
The Pastor strong-armed me right in. He knows I'm a sucker for this. So.
Steve: Sucker for what?
Rhet: for anything he wants me to do. [Laughter]
Just like I tell Youth Advisory: What would you like to do? I say, Anything you need.
Steve: Excellent.
Rhet: I haven't quite told you that yet. [Referring to Steve]

Rhet's Definition of Spiritual Formation

It is how the spirit manifest within me and then presents itself from me to the world through action and word.

Rhet's Project

- Pig Roast

Rhet's Comments Reflecting on the Project

Actually, the studying of the history of people having one god and two gods, I pondered that for a long time. And I realized something. When I do my witnessing to people, it takes months. The first month or two, I'm just listening to them. Because you have to learn where they are to witness to them. And, it just dawned on me that some of the people are still in the one and two god phase. That never dawned on me before we went through that. I think that will help me out a lot in how I interact with other people. By knowing that they're in that phase. Before, when you were talking about working in the Trinity, that's imperative, because that's God's model that he gave to us. So, if we're going to work within God's parameters, and have him on our side, we have to do that. That's imperative.

But, yeah, he big thing for me was, it helped me to understand the way some of the other people were thinking that I'm speaking to.

I wanted to say something. But the conversation went too quick to get it out. But, when you were talking about each of us being a part of other people. I went to a youth congress about ten years ago, where the theme of it was *Ubuntu*. And *ubuntu* was not only a software. It's an African word that talks about how a part of who I am is because of every person I interact with. A part of me is everybody here. And I am me because of you, in that sense. All of us, are us, because of God within us.

Jarod's Story

Phase One

I'm Jarod. I would say probably two things. Number one, I've been fascinated by getting to know Steve. He and I share some similarities in our backgrounds in how we grew up more baptist or E-Free type of church. And having those conversations in the shift to the Lutheran church. So that's just been interesting. So, I'm always intrigued to learn how he's thinking through things. But, I also grew up in multiple different states. Always in the suburbs. And, you know it's

interesting, I've got lots of different data points, if you will, but through the years I've seen the suburbs kind of strangle people out of—I don't even know how to explain it—but who they are. The suburbs seem to push us into a certain type of direction toward what our culture deems important. And, for me, I get worried about my six-year old twin girls. I want to make sure that I'm helping them to think through that, and recognize who they are as people within this suburban culture.

Jarod's Practice of Spiritual Formation

Daily bible reading and prayer
Discussing god with the family
1x1 time with mentors
Serving others - intentionally
Listening to God - but I should do more of this!
Bible Studies or other "groups" at Church
Men's ministry involvement
Daily discipline
Sacrificing time for God
Meditating and memorizing scripture so that I recall it during each day
Worship - Sundays and personal

Jarod's Definition of Spiritual Formation

Discipleship
Growing into a deeper relationship with God
Dwelling in God
Becoming more like God
Are these activities???
Not necessarily
Formation - molding like clay. He is the potter, I aim the clay
Allowing God to mold me into what He wants, letting go surrendering to his desires for me.

<div align="center">Jarod's Projects</div>

• Leadership in Men's Ministry

• Gathering Neighborhood for service project

Jarod's Comments Reflecting on the Project

I was…the project that I was thinking about, as far the community. I reached out to the various individuals throughout the neighborhood and just mentioned the idea… "Hey, we're thinking about doing some kind of like Feed My Starving Children, or something like that, as a community, and then everybody gathering over at our house and just having a neighborhood gathering."

And, didn't say much about it. That's about it. But, the amount of, just, the reaction. The extremely positive reaction throughout the neighborhood. The relational connections that just that questions brought up for the months to come, where people would ask me, "when are we going to do this?"

Now, [laughs] I tried to find dates. I really tried to find dates that would work, and we kept missing, and there's things…we never did it. And we're still talking about doing it. We've talked even now about doing something near the holidays to something like that, but…

Stephanie: We changed it to maybe like a food drive, or a clothing drive, or something…

Jarod: …but, it was amazing to me the amount of connection that that brought. Through it all I've been thinking about the relational aspect and the social Trinity. And my previous worldview, I guess, biblical worldview, being brought up to strive to get to Heaven. I mean, that really was the focus. And, through these thought processes and reflections, I've really turned that about face. Because it was such an isolationist type of view previously. And now it's much more of a relational type of view.

It opened up, I mean these conversations and different things, opened up all kinds of additional conversations opened up additional conversations throughout the neighborhood. I mean, it was really a neat experience for me this summer, to have that with the neighbors.

I've been surprised that I…I don't know if it's fully connected. I think it is. But, a new thought process that's going through my head. It's a very simple one. And that's partly why it's surprising to me. Is, I have this renewed thought that everybody has a story to tell. And, that I'm genuinely interested in that story. And it's a very freeing thought. But, I also—part of the surprise—was I that narcissistic to not have that thought before…maybe

I was just going to say, my response to that though, I did not feel like I…I think I heard a few people say that they had a good grasp of things, and I did not. So, this concept of the Trinity as you laid it out was not something I was comfortable with. Not something that sat well with me. So, I think I normally would sit down and do, like a study type thing. That's more me than anything else. But, I was in

no way prepared to do that, given my understanding. So, it…to take something small, that I could take from the concept, and to act on that, in some way that made sense. That's what I did. And to see the results that I got out of that little small step was surprising.

Stephanie's Story

Phase One

I am Stephanie. I believe God has drawn me here. As you said, we have been on this journey with you following you through your PhD program. We are very intrigued by it. I am kind of on that journey myself. We are in a postmodern world. Things are different. It's really challenging to look at things in a new way. It's also very exciting. I felt very drawn to coming to this. Just to explore that further. To look at things in a new way. To be honest, I was really excited that Bethlehem and Calvary were going to be a part of this. I thought that, that feels like really what God wants. He wants us to be united. We're not just the church of Ascension Lutheran, we are all together. That has given me the most excitement. That we get to meet other Lutherans, other people. Who knows where it will go from here.

Stephanie's Practice of Spiritual Formation

Serving in church and community
Giving financially
Daily quiet times with Scripture and prayer
Participating in small groups
Attending worship services
Asking questions and seeking God through scripture and other people for answers/ideas.

Stephanie's Definition of Spiritual Formation

The process of maturing in my faith…i.e. Going from a baby Christian to a mature Christian

The process of maturing in our faith through an ever-increasing awareness of our own spiritual relationship with God in conjunction with our relationships with those around us.

Stephanie's Projects

- She talked about the Book 7

Stephanie's Comments Reflecting on the Project

When I do. I journal by handwriting. But, I have processed. I've watched your videos. Which, by the way, the way…what did you call those?
Steve: Thketches.
Stephanie: Yes, thketches. I watched those a few times, and I love the way those are laid out. And the "aha" moment was…you know, I'm such a science buff. And there's all these things, like back in the middle ages, when we believed the earth was flat, and therefore, if you started to say the earth was…because in the Bible it talked about the four corners…and, if you thought differently then you were killed. Because, that was heretical. And so, but then to see that science…Hey, we've actually got a picture now. This is not flat. Just the fact that you're putting those three different areas and how they work together. And that's kind of the "aha" moment for me. It's like. Well, that makes so much more sense. It's just a perspective from a different angle. And so, that was one "aha."

But, the other thing has really been around the definition of spiritual formation. I always think of it as Bible Study, and Quiet Time, and going to church and small group, and all that. But, I almost think its the forming of your spiritual being. So, what…and that's really, you know, spirit, mind, and body are so connected. And, I think, as human beings, if we're isolated, our spiritual being is not good. If we're isolated from people. I think in general. God didn't make us that way. He didn't make us to thrive individually and not need other people. And so, when we go against that rhythm of the way God created us to be in relationship, our spirit suffers. And so, we just aren't in rhythm. We're not in sync. So, I've been thinking about that a lot lately. That's where my thought process is kind of culminated to at this point. We survive…we thrive, I should say…when we are in relationship with other people. We thrive. And it makes sense then, the way the social Trinity, that God created us in his image, and yet, really, that's how we thrive. So, if we're not in sync with the way he created us, then we kind of…we suffer. We have addictions. We have all kinds of things that we turn to to cope with that isolation.

The question…I couldn't connect…I mean, I could connect the s'mores one, a little bit. Because it's relationship. And I'm understanding it better now. What helped me so much was just keeping…and I'd like to keep, if I can, watching your thketches, because just thinking about those helped. But I felt like I couldn't journal those thoughts because they weren't very well formed. I couldn't get them down on paper because…many times I'd be laying there in the morning, hitting the snooze button, thinking about it, honestly. Then by the time…I think, I've got to write that down…then by the time I'd be up I'd be like, what the heck was that? Then it would come to me again, and I'd be like, I couldn't write it down. And I was sleeping, half asleep. But, I was struggling so much to connect. What the heck does this have to do with spiritual formation. What does this project have to do? And what does journaling have to do with the question of How does social

Trinity impact spiritual formation in the suburbs. I just couldn't connect it. I just had a really hard time writing about it. I just really struggled with that.

Steve: And you still do, right?

Stephanie: I still do to some degree. I mean, I'm getting…It's being…like, when I came to the idea of spiritual, just spiritual well-being and the need for human relationships, and that being the way God created us. That makes a lot of sense to me. That's been a very recent brain…that's been a very recent "aha."

Steve: Spiritual well being.

Stephanie: Yeah. Spiritual well being, and just how we're…

Tiffany's Story

Phase One

I'm Tiffany. My husband and I live in a different suburb with our kids. I'm a stay-at-home Mom for my six year old son and my three year old daughter. I'm here because, honestly, I thought it was a really cool thing. Although I truly struggled with whether I could fit one more thing in. Like all of us, we're all super busy. When he sent out the notice. I emailed him and said I'm really interested but I need to pray about it. The very next morning I get this little quip devotional on my phone. It was this super long thing that I have no idea how it actually tied back to the original verse. But it basically said, you don't have to live at church, but everybody has to be more involved. And I'm like, well OK, there's my answer.

I do think also, the Trinity—the study of it—fascinates me. The thought of all the three of those working together. I also see—I grew up on a farm—As much as I love, sometimes, the anonymity of living in the burbs, there is certainly a disconnect between people, from what I grew up with. I think it's going to be a cool process to be a part of.

Tiffany's Practice of Spiritual Formation

I haven't really thought about this question, ever really. My faith just kind of happened. Grew up in a church, didn't have a relationship with God at all. College, didn't participate much at all in faith/religion. Mid 20s hit hard rock bottom in life due to two major events. Had a child, wanted to get him baptized, tried Ascension (Billy's church growing up) the women's director nudged me into WOW, and dam burst open on my faith. Started/grew friendships, got involved at church.
My life is so much better with God. Why would I stop? :)

Tiffany's Project

- Sunday Evening S'mores

Tiffany's Comments Reflecting on the Project

I do feel like this discussion about the Trinity gave me more details to the puzzle. Going back to that one really long post on the DITB website about tension being good and from God, I feel so strongly and imagine myself in the middle of the Three (or trying to stay there).
This emphasis on relationships was a driving force in wanted to build relationships at S'mores.
Yes the space for spiritual formation is absolutely important, but even more importantly,
"...missional leadership is called to create spaces, and allow for surprises, in which the Spirit can bring to life the self-transcendence, thus the spiritual formation, of the church. The relinquishing of traditional power structures in leadership is, in itself, a form of self-transcendence, and thus spiritual formation for the leader"
This was my answer to other churches/leaders - within a relatively safe space, give your lay people the room to run and make and do. I think this is encouraged at Ascension. Great things come of it, more than we could ever measure.

Well, I can jump in. You and I had a conversation a month back or so, and I had said to you that I felt like I was missing something, because I felt all along that I should feel this "aha" moment, or "oh, this is what he was talking about." But we had discussed that, if I can remember my own thoughts, that this is where I'm at. And, possibly because I had been previously influenced by a lot of your teaching, that I didn't have this big "aha" moment, because I probably had that, I can think back to a different class that you taught. Where you had said—and I still think about this, even when we pray the Our Father—that you know, the Kingdom of Heaven being here and now, not this place being up above. And so, that made me feel better after we talked. I thought I was missing something.

…sure. Well, I remember at the time, it completely changed the way, I guess I thought about the world. That it's not—and I don't know that I necessarily thought this—it's not about doing good works to get into Heaven, its about doing good works here on earth to make earth more like Heaven. And that was a huge, like, wow, that's a totally different way of looking at things. And how it relates to the Trinity, I remember you talked about how God "tents" among us. I mean I still think about that phrase. And I think about that with the Trinity, and how…like I feel that we are enmeshed in the Trinity. It's all around us. If we're in sync with it, or at least sort of in sync with it. And so, did that further answer?

Rob's Story

Phase One

My name is Rob. I guess…So I grew up as a Lutheran in a small town. No sports on Wednesday nights, no sports on Sundays. It was kind of a neat. Then we moved to a city in the Pacific Northwest. We live out there for eight years. It was completely different. All of a sudden I knew what it was like to live in a mission field. Because, when you talked to people at work, nobody went to church. Nobody did anything. So, we found a church, we were part of a church, and stuff, but it was such a minority. It was kind of interesting. It was a bit of a culture shock in a way. Although we loved it out there.

Then we came back. I think there has been a bunch of exciting stuff going on in church. You coming [directed at Steve] has been a huge piece of it. Just all the stuff going on. We've read a book called radical, which Jarod and Stephanie and they were silly enough to get talked into co-leading a group with us in that. So, we've been going to Haiti. The next two weeks we'll be gone, because we'll be in Haiti. All this stuff is just culminating, and so it's just, what to do with this. What's the next step? Where do we go? I think this was a natural next step. We'll go on to latch on and go, "What next?"

Rob's practice of spiritual formation?

2 things - learning and being uncomfortable.
Learning comes from reading the Bible, attending classes, and being involved in small groups.
Being uncomfortable is doing new things.
if you are learning you are uncomfortable
if you are comfortable you are not learning anything new or practicing anything new.
S. being uncomfortable is listening to God's call and the advice of spiritual people and doing new things--putting into action what I have been learning
being comfortable with failing and learning and trying again - being comfortable with being uncomfortable.

It also means learning to trust God. I struggle with wanting God to bless me and why sometimes answering his call isn't as easy as I think it should be. He continues to bless my actions but it is way harder work than I think it should be.

Rob's Definition of Spiritual Formation

Growth, change, metamorphoses, journey, deepening, relationship, personal commitment, action

A journey of growth and change, of a deepening relationship with Christ that results in a commitment of action. A discerning of God's call for you and answering that call

Rob's Projects

• Sunday Evening S'mores

• Building Haiti Mission Teams

• Family Game Nights

Rob's Comments Reflecting on the Project

The conversation about social/relational/entangled Trinity was very interesting to me and it was all new information. It opened up a new perspective to the Trinity to me. What struck me was the relational part of our conversations.

My new default image and understanding of God is still evolving, but has changed to something similar to three spirits circling around us, in relationship with us and those around us, and impacting our relationships with others. So now when I think of spiritual formation, I think about my relationships, how I can leverage them for God's benefit, and how I can deepen them in order to bring others closer to Christ. This is all focused and centered on relationships, which wasn't the case prior to this experiment.

What part of the Deep in the Burbs Project surprised you, and how?

My biggest surprise was how my concept of the trinity and spiritual formation changed. I wasn't sure what to expect when I volunteered to participate, and I was frankly a little skeptical that my concept of the trinity would change much. I was looking forward to learning more about being missional in the suburbs, but I wasn't expecting to change my concept of the process of spiritual formation.

What have been your significant take-aways from this project? In other words,

what have you learned from this experience?

My biggest take away is what I have stated earlier; that spiritual formation and being missional in the suburbs is all about relationships. It is about us forming deep, meaningful relationships with the people we are trying to mission to. It is

about us being in a deep meaningful relationship with God. It is all about relationships.

But I think, also, again, to me, it's been really reinforcing of the concept that if you build relationships with the people, you can now disciple them, lead them, whatever. But without those relationships, it's all superficial, and I don't think you can actually impact people at a meaningful level, or really sponsor or promote spiritual formation without that deep relationship.

Right, and to back to the point that Phil was making, in my mind, there's two things for me. What did the social Trinity teach? And, to me, that was either reinforcement, or something. The social Trinity was all about relationships. And so, to me, that was the piece that became kind of obvious over the course was, to make disciples, to be missional, whatever, is about relationships first and foremost, and then everything flows out of that. But, and I think the thing that taught me, through the process and through the project, was…the whole point of being reflective. Like we talked about. And you spoke of so eloquently before. And I so don't do that enough. And that was an interesting…I still didn't do it enough for this. But, I think that was the thing that I got out of the project.

APPENDIX E

Age Matters

Another observation that I make from the balcony has to do with the age of the

RT. One thing that surprised me about the DITB Project was the average age of the team.

Most of the team members were over 50. I must confess that I was initially disappointed

and discouraged by this, but was ultimately humbled. The disappointment and

discouragement stemmed from my initial expectation that I would focus in this project on

the stereotypical suburban family that has children in late elementary or secondary school

and spends exorbitant amounts of time taxiing children to various extra curricular

activities. I was interested to know how an engagement in spiritual and theological

conversation might impact their spiritual formation. I reached out to many families within

this demographic and was repeatedly and politely denied. "We'd love to participate.

Thank you for asking. But, we're just (you guessed it) too busy."

What was I thinking? One of the biggest challenges that face the suburban family

is the overwhelming amount of opportunities for activity and the social pressure to

engage and excel in all of them. What family, given all the opportunities available to

them, would choose to dedicate nine months of their lives to talk about social Trinity and

spiritual formation to help a pastor in the pursuit of a PhD? The thing that I hoped to

explore was the thing that kept them from engaging. This reflects one of the core issues

that every suburban church faces. How does the church compete with all the other

opportunities that vie for the suburban family's attention and allegiance?

The people that did have more time to devote to a nine-month project, and an interest in the topic of spiritual formation, were those over the age of fifty. So, I was discouraged and disappointed that the median age of the DITB team was over 50. There were fifteen household units represented on the team and only four of them represented the family-with-active-children category. The other eleven households were all past that phase and had adult children. Some had grandchildren and some did not. How would we truly get after the issues of suburban living that I felt were at the heart of my questions?

These thoughts of discouragement and disappointment were all present prior to our first meeting. My feelings of disappointment and discouragement were replaced with feelings of humility and gratitude after the first meeting. God had assembled a far better team than the one I had envisioned. We did have four households that were in the thick of the suburban family situation, so that was good. However, the eleven households that were beyond that phase offered two things that those within it could never offer. First, they offered experience. They had raised their children in the suburban context during the 70s, 80s, 90s, and some as recent as the 00s. Granted, society was pre-internet at that time, but the pressure to succeed and the carting to various activities were very much real. They had lived it and could speak to it. However, the second thing they offered was priceless. They offered the wisdom that comes from perspective. They had been there, done that, and have lived to tell about it.

I came to realize that the presence of older team members became vital to the research for three reasons. First, the wisdom and perspective had a mentoring effect on the younger members of the team. Second, it reflected Kegan's theory of cognitive development and gives credence to *Bob's Big Idea*. Finally, it represents the future of the

suburban landscape as the average age of the suburbs is increasing each year. Each of

these points has practical implication for missional church leaders, and I will address

them each in turn.

Addressing the Age Gap

The typical suburban Lutheran church has three generations always present: the

grandparents, the parents, and the children. These generations have always been present,

but, of course, shift with the passing of time. The current snapshot of these generations, at

the time of this writing, offers a unique moment in the history of Western society as it

relates to both the postmodern shift and the rapid change in technology. The older

generation, born in the 1930s and 1940s, was educated during the 1950s when the

average American small town or suburban context was (a) racially segregated, (b)

dominated by modern rationalist epistemological and pedagogical philosophies, and (c)

surrounded by a dominant Judeo-Christian Culture in which Biblical themes were present

in public media and local church attendance was considered a civic duty.[249] This is

important to note in the context of this study since this generation was part of the urban

sprawl that took place during the post-WWII 1950s and 1960s in which young families

followed the highways and cheap housing out of the urban centers and sought the garden

utopia that the suburban lifestyle offered under the contract of the American Dream.[250]

While many Lutherans followed the migration from the city to the suburbs, the typical

---

[249] Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*.

[250] Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*; Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Jon C. Teaford, *The American Suburb: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

story of this generation, at least within the congregations represented in the DITB project, is one of people who were raised in the rural mid-west in a context dominated by one particular type of Lutheran church. It was only in their adult lives that they moved into the suburban context and sought churches that preserved their Lutheran heritage. In either case, the older generation is first-generation suburban Lutherans who bring a Christian-cultured perspective to the role of the local congregation.

The middle generation represents those who are born in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these people were born in the suburbs and have lived their entire lives in the suburban context, or have moved from the economically struggling small town into the suburban context as young adults. They spent the first half of their lives in pre-computer Reaganomics and their adult lives experiencing the quantum leap into the digital age: from microwave ovens, to cable television, to personal computers, to the internet, to HD television, to smart phones and social media. Some of this generation has been early adopters of digital media, others still function in a paper-based world. This generation, often referred to as Generation X in the 1990s, was the first to experience the mainstream effects of postmodern thought and the disillusionment of the American Dream. This is the first generation of adults to experience a culture in which local church attendance is not the dominant cultural expectation. It is also the first adult generation to experience a globalized world in which career advancement often requires transcontinental and often international relocation. It is the first generation to actualize the radical individual self and the displacement experienced by self-actualization.[251]

---

[251] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

The younger generation, born in the 1990s and 2000s, are often called the Millenials. This is the first generation to never know life without the Internet and instant access to various forms of information and entertainment via personal digital devices and social media. This generation lives with a global awareness and connectivity never before imagined by the older generations. This is the first generation to experience a globalized, pluralistic world in which the white, middle-class, Christian culture is not the dominant culture of their experience, but is simply one culture among many cultures that are offered up as a smorgasbord of preference for the informed consumer. It is the first generation to experience globalized equality as the norm rather than the voice of the minority raging against the system.

This simplified, almost caricatured portrait of these three generations articulates an obvious gap between them. Each generation can safely say that the suburb of 2014 is not our parent's world. The challenge that lies before us in the missional suburban church is one of addressing the gap between the generations and cultivating generative spaces between them. The younger generation needs the wisdom of age, and the older generation needs the skills to navigate the digital world. This brings us to our second issue of age matters.

<div style="text-align:center">Bob's Big Idea</div>

I noted in chapter two that Kegan's theory of the five orders of consciousness offers a helpful framework for understanding the dynamics of spiritual formation. It becomes helpful again in this specific issue of age matters that I have listed above. Let me briefly review Kegan's theory. He states that there are five basic phases through which the neuro-typical human being evolves throughout the course of life. The first

three phases are fairly automatic and happen as a result of development from childhood

to adolescence. Most adults remain in third-order consciousness for the remainder of their

lives, and, prior to Kegan's research in the 1980s, it was believed were unable to move

beyond it.

Third-order consciousness is that in which the individual perceives herself as a

part of a larger system, and that the larger system is the sum-total of reality. The

individual knows her place in society and has the choice to either accept that place, or

rebel against it. In either case, there is basically one reality in which life functions. Kegan

uses a historical metaphor to explain these orders. The third-order is the Traditionalist

period in which the laws and mores of the tradition are the lived reality of every member

of society.

Fourth-order consciousness, Kegan argues, is that phase in which the individual is

faced with contradictory and competing cultural systems and realizes that the world is

bigger than his own system of origin. This is the modern problem in which most of us

feel "in over our heads."[252] The individual that moves into fourth-order consciousness

perceives himself as a radical, atomistic, individual who is a free-agent in the universe

and able to negotiate his way through transactional-relational spaces. Kegan uses the

historical metaphor of the Modern Era to describe the fourth-order and claims that it still

dominates Western society.

I would like to add a geographical metaphor to Kegan's historical metaphor. We

might compare the third order to a small town and the fourth-order to the suburbs. Third-

---

[252] Thus the title of Kegan's seminal work. Kegan, *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*.

order consciousness is akin to the small town/rural mid-west context of the 1940s and 1950s, in which the older generation began. Several team members described their small town upbringing as one in which one particular religious tradition (typically a Lutheran church) dominated the town. This churched-culture provided a centralizing, unifying, and homogenizing effect on the society. The homogeneity and ubiquitous nature of the churched-culture created a third-order reality in which the typical young adult believed that the ways of this small town were the ways of the entire world.

Fourth-order consciousness is akin to the suburban context. The suburban ideal is one of radical individualism in which the self-sufficient free-agent marks off his own property with fences and garage doors, moves himself through space in his automobile, and chooses his own use of private time to achieve the maximum benefit for his own perceived objectives. Any relationships he has are transactional, conditional, and utilitarian. This includes work, marriage, friendship, civic, and religious affiliations, in that order of priority. This is the modern suburbanite.

Before we discuss the fifth-order consciousness and Bob's Big Idea, it is important to note the danger of my geographical metaphor. It would be dangerous to suggest that all small town people are third-order thinkers and that all suburbanites are fourth-order thinkers. This is simply false. The point of my metaphor is to imagine the simplicity, homogeneity, and centrality of the church in the small town in contrast to the urban sprawl, disconnectedness, and propensity for independence fostered by the suburban city planning and architecture.

The truth is that the suburbs are full of a mixture of third and fourth-order consciousness. In fact, according to Kegan, the majority of adults, regardless of location,

function in third-order thinking. The challenging aspect of the suburbs is that, due to the transient, mobile nature of the globalized world, the typical suburb is a potpourri of various systems-of-origin. Very few suburban residents are from the suburbs, thus they come from somewhere else and bring with them their own cultural system. If they are functioning in third-order consciousness, then they believe that their own cultural system is the same system within which everyone else functions. When this individual has the inevitable encounter with a person from another cultural system, she will usually either respond by withdrawing and seeking a like-minded enclave, or reacting and seeking to eliminate the "wrong" point of view. The survival tactic of the modern era, Kegan argues, is to evolve into fourth-order thinking in which one acknowledges the potpourri nature of the suburban context and learns to utilize the differences for personal advantage. This is the enlightened, modern suburbanite who feels she has adapted.

Let us bring this conversation into the context of the suburban congregation and spiritual formation. There are two basic categories of suburbanites with respect to faith. There are those who fully embrace the secular age and have completely removed themselves from the cultural expectations of religious involvement and seek to live fully in the public sector. Then, there are those who choose to engage in various levels of faith, realizing that this has been relegated to the private sector of life. Within this segment of the faith-engaged population there is a wide assortment of people-groups represented in the suburbs. The diversity of this population is increasing each year as the demographics of the suburbs shift. The faith-engaged suburbanite is faced with an overwhelming amount of churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples from which to choose. Now,

with the increasing population of "nones" there is also the increasing choice of self-actuated spirituality in which the discerning suburbanite can engage.

The member of the suburban ELCA congregation is left with a dizzying array of choices and pressures from many angles. Typically, the older generation has been part of the same church which transplanted the Lutheran tradition into the suburban context and they consider themselves cradle-to-grave Lutherans and, thus, feel no pressure to leave the church. The middle generation, however, especially those whose parents come from the third-order, small-town Lutheran system, feel pressure to get their kids involved in Sunday School and Confirmation. Yet, the traditional Lutheran liturgy leaves many of the middle-generation, and even more of the Millenials, wanting. The younger generations are faced with multiple church options. There are many denominations, and supposedly non-denominational, suburban churches that seek, and market themselves, to meet the felt needs of the overwhelmed, middle-aged suburbanite who is disillusioned with the traditional church, but feels a need for spirituality. This marketing strategy often pulls the middle-generation Lutheran away from the familial allegiance of their parent's church. The Millenials sense the inconsistency of their parents and the disconnect between their grandparent's faith and the pluralistic, globalized landscape of their lived experience. How do these generations navigate this space?

A further complication in this scenario comes with Kegan's argument that the human being is not able to evolve past the third and fourth order of consciousness until after middle age. In other words, the Millenials live in a pluralistic world but function cognitively within a third-order consciousness. Therefore, they can only recognize the cognitive dissonance between the generational and denominational worlds, but do not

have the cognitive ability to process it constructively. This is an anxiety-producing

predicament. Similarly, the middle-generation is able to evolve into fourth-order, but, for

those who do so, this leaves them in a self-focused, utilitarian space of transactional

relationships. Perhaps it is the combination of these things which is increasingly

motivating the middle-generation and the Millenials to either opt-out of faith altogether

or to self-identity in the "none" zone as spiritual but not religious. This, too, leaves the

older generation—many of whom are also in third- or fourth-order thinking—wringing

their hands as they watch their children and grandchildren walk out the church doors and

wonder, "What did we do wrong?"

Kegan suggests that a solution to these problems comes with the evolution to

fifth-order consciousness. He labels this with the metaphor of the postmodern era. Fifth-

order consciousness recognizes that the individual is not actually an independent agent in

the universe. Rather, the individual exists in an interdependent relationship with her

system of origin and, further, her system of origin exists in an interdependent relationship

with all other world-systems. Fifth-order thinking situates the individual in a place of

humility that acknowledges one's own limitations and need for the other. This humility

opens space for communicative action to take place and, Kegan argues, is the only hope

for true peace on earth.

Bob's Big Idea, as Kegan calls it, states that humanity is evolving toward fifth-

order consciousness.[253] He notes that advancements in medical technology over the past

century have extended the average life expectancy from 45 years to 70 years. This

---

[253] RSA Blog. "Searching for a Way Out of Hell: Mental Complexity, Wellbeing, and Bob's Big Idea." http://www.rsablogs.org.uk/2013/socialbrain/searching-hell-mental-complexity-wellbeing-bobs-big-idea/ (accessed January 7, 2015)

development means that there will be a larger number of people over the age of fifty than has ever been alive at the same time in human history. Since fifth-order consciousness cannot be reached until after the age of fifty, there will be a higher chance of more people who will be functioning in fifth-order thinking. This, Kegan suggests, is an evolutionary adaptation in which the human species is trying to get enough people to reach the ability to figure out world peace before we, through our majority third-order thinkers, annihilate ourselves.

In other words, I became grateful that the RT represented the older generation more than the middle generation. It became apparent to me that the older generation brought with it the capacity to move into fifth-order thinking and bring larger perspective to the conversation.

The Aging Suburbs

I have noted two reasons why I was grateful for the older age of the RT. First, there was a sense of mentoring going on between the older and younger team members. Second, it demonstrated Kegan's theory of the five orders of consciousness. The third and final reason why the older age of the team was important for this study is that it represents the future of the suburbs. The Met Council report on the future of the suburbs indicates that the median age of the suburbs will increase dramatically over the next two decades. This is true for two reasons. First, the baby-boomer generation is retiring and living longer. There are simply more people in this age bracket than in any other, and the majority of them live in the suburbs. Second, an increasing number of younger families are moving into the city where they are closer to amenities and less dependent on automobile transportation.

The aging suburban population leaves the missional suburban church leader with the challenge to cultivate spaces that connects with the aging middle generation and the emerging Millenal generation.

Bibliography

Arens, Edmund. *Christopraxis: A Theology of Action*. 1st Fortress Press ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.

Barnes, Michael R. "Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology." *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (1995): 237-250.

Baum, Fran, Colin MacDougall, and Danielle Smith. "Participatory Action Research." *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 60, no. 10 (2006): 854-857.

Bennett, Marlyn. "A Review of the Literature on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Participatory Action Research." *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 1 (September 2004): 19-32.

Bevans, Stephen B., and Roger Schroeder. "Missiology after Bosch: Reverencing a Classic by Moving Beyond." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 29, no. 2 (2005): 69-72.

Black, Gary. *The Theology of Dallas Willard: Discovering Protoevangelical Faith*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013.

Bliese, Richard H., and Craig Van Gelder. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005.

Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008.

Bosch, David Jacobus. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series no 16. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Brookfield, Stephen. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

———. *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

———. *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning: A Comprehensive Analysis of Principles and Effective Practices*. The Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.

Cameron, Helen, Deborah Bhatti, and Catherine Duce. *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2010.

Charmaz, Kathy. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006.

Coakley, Sarah. *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'on the Trinity'*. 2013.

Conde-Frazier, Elizabeth. "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice." *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 321-329.

Conn, Walter E. *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

Davis, Dent C. "Dialogue of the Soul: The Phenomenon of Intrapersonal Peace and the Adult Experience of Protestant Religious Education." *Religious Education* 102, no. 4 (2007): 387-402.

Deshler, David, and Merrill Ewert. "Participatory Action Research: Traditions and Major Assumptions." http://actmad.net/madness_library/POV/DESHLER.PAR (accessed March 20, 2015).

Dirkx, John M. "Images, Transformative Learning the Work of Soul." *Adult Learning* 12, no. 3 (2001): 15.

ELCA. "Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/Constitutions_of_the_ELCA_April_2015.pdf?_ga=1.41172258.18395 45692.1408805828 (accessed April 1, 2015).

Ellison, Pat Taylor, and Patrick Keifert. *Dwelling in the Word*. St. Paul: Church Innovations Institute, 2011.

Engelsviken, T. "Missio Dei: The Understanding and Misunderstanding of a Theological Concept in European Churches and Missiology." *International Review of Mission* 92, no. 367 (2003): 481-497.

Farley, Edward. *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Fink, Ben. "Organized Ideas, or Defeating the Culture Wars (What We Need to Know, and How We Need to Know It)." PhD Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2014.

Fishman, Robert. *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

Flett, John G. *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th anniversary ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

———. "Spiritual Formation Agenda: Richard Foster Shares His Three Priorities for the Next 30 Years." *Christianity Today* 53, no. 1 (2009): 28-33.

Foster, Richard J., and Julia L. Roller. *A Year with God: Living out the Spiritual Disciplines*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th anniversary ed. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1975.

Garreau, Joel. *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. 1st ed. New York: Doubleday, 1991.

Gorringe, Timothy. "Living toward a Vision: Cities, the Common Good, and the Christian Imagination." *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 4 (2009): 521-537.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Grenz, Stanley J., and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

Grenz, Stanley J., and Roger E. Olson. *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Groome, Thomas H. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*. 1st ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.

———. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. 2 vols. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Hall, Budd L. "In from the Cold? Reflections on Participatory Research from 1970-2005." *Convergence* 38, no. 1 (2005): 5-24.

Hatch, Mary Jo, and Ann L. Cunliffe. *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Hayden, Dolores. *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2003.

Heifetz, Ronald A., and Martin Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Hess, Mary E. "Collaborating with People to Study "the Popular": Implementing Participatory Action Research Strategies in Religious Education." *Religious Education* 96, no. 3 (2001): 271-293.

———. *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind*. Communication, Culture, and Religion Series. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

———. "Pedagogy and Theology in Cyberspace: All That We Cant Leave Behind." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 30-38.

———. "What Difference Does It Make? E-Learning and Faith Community." *Word & World* 30, no. 3 (2010): 281-290.

Horsfield, Peter G., Mary E. Hess, and Adán M. Medrano, eds. *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.

Hunsberger, George R., and Craig Van Gelder, eds. *The Church between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996.

Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Jennings, Willie James. *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

Jenson, Robert W. *Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

———. *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

Kegan, Robert. *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

———. *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Kegan, Robert, and Lisa Laskow Lahey. *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*. Leadership for the Common Good. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

Keifert, Patrick R. *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009.

———. "The Trinity and Congregational Planning: Between Historical Minimum and Eschatological Maximum." *Word & World* 18, no. 3 (1998): 282-290.

———. *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery*. Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006.

———. *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

Kelsey, David H. *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Knowles, Malcolm S., Elwood F. Holton, and Richard A. Swanson. *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*. 7th ed. Boston: Elsevier, 2011.

Martin, Bruce. "Transforming a Local Church Congregation through Action Research." *Educational Action Research* 9, no. 2 (2001): 261-278.

Mead, George Herbert, and Charles W. Morris. *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago press, 1934.

Melancthon, Philip. *The Augsburg Confession*. Edited by F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

Merriam, Sharan B., Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa Baumgartner. *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. 3rd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Mitchell, Jolyon P. *Media Violence and Christian Ethics*. New Studies in Christian Ethics 30. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. 1st HarperCollins paperback ed. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986.

———. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications 1989.

Norton, Christine Lynn, Amy Russell, Betsy Wisner, and John Uriarte. "Reflective Teaching in Social Work Education: Findings from a Participatory Action Research Study." *Social Work Education* 30, no. 4 (2011): 392-407.

Orfield, Myron. *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability*. Cambridge, MA: Brookings Institution Press; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1997.

Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. 10th anniversary ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

———. *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. 1st HarperCollins pbk ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

Placher, William C. *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Platt, David. *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*. 1st ed. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010.

Polkinghorne, J. C. *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010.

Powell, Samuel M. *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

Reynhout, Kenneth A. *Interdisciplinary Interpretation: Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Theology and Science*. text.

Roxburgh, Alan J. *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*. Leadership Network. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Scandrette, Mark. *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011.

Scharer, Matthias Hilberath Bernd Jochen. *The Practice of Communicative Theology: Introduction to a New Theological Culture*. New York: Crossroad Pub. CO, 2008.

Schneiders, Sandra M. "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality." In *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, 49-60. Balitmore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

———. "The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline." In *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, 5-24. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Sheldrake, Philip. *A Brief History of Spirituality*. Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007.

———. "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic." In *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, edited by Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, 282-298. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

———. *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice*. New York: Paulist Press, 2010.

———. "Spirituality and Social Change: Rebuilding the Human City." *Spiritus* 9, no. 2 (2009): 137-156.

———. *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

Shults, F. LeRon. *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999.

Simmons, Ernest L. *The Entangled Trinity: Quantum Physics and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

Simpson, Gary M. *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination*. Guides to Theological Inquiry. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

———. "No Trinity, No Mission: The Apostolic Difference of Revisioning the Trinity." *Word & World* 18, no. 3 (1998): 264-271.

Stoecker, Randy. "Are Academics Irrelevant? Roles for Scholars in Participatory Research." In *American Sociologcial Society Annual Meeting*, 1997.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Guides to Theological Inquiry. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

Teaford, Jon C. *The American Suburb: The Basics*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Thomason, Steven P. "Thketch of Kegan's Five Orders." https://youtu.be/mW4LTqRJDW8 (accessed March 20).

Tisdell, Elizabeth J. *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Van Gelder, Craig. "Effects of Auto-Mobility on Church Life and Culture." *Word & World* 28, no. 3 (2008): 237-249.

———. *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.

———. *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.

Van Gelder, Craig, and Dwight J. Zscheile. *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. The Missional Network. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Vella, Jane Kathryn. *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Rev. ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

Volf, Miroslav. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Sacra Doctrina. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Wallis, Allan D. "Filling the Governance Gap." *National Civic Review* 87, no. 1 (1998): 97-106.

Welker, Michael. *God the Spirit*. 1st English-language ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.

Wuthnow, Robert. *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Zizioulas, Jean, and Paul McPartlan. *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. New York: T & T Clark, 2006.