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MISSION THROUGH EVANGELISM
FOR MY FATHER'S HOUSE CHRISTIAN CENTER

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

STEPHEN DE RUSE
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ABSTRACT

Mission Through Evangelism for My Father's House Christian Center

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Doctor of Ministry

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2010

The purpose of this ministry focus paper is to develop a strategy for My Father's House Christian Center to engage the local community through evangelism and realign the church's practice with Christ's mission from a Reformed/evangelical understanding.

My Father's House Christian Center (MFHCC) in La Mirada, California, begun as a non-denominational church plant in 1998, is multi-cultural and growing, with a contemporary worship style. Its mission is to reach the local community through evangelism. One problem is the absence of denominational history/structure; church members bring doctrines and practices from their imbedded theology that veer from biblical Christianity. Therefore, MFHCC needs a strategy for evangelism that develops and installs a Reformed/evangelical understanding of Christ's mission.

The imbedded theological assumption of many members holds that "faith alone" can accomplish all things pertaining to God. MFHCC's mission stems from the Great Commission, calling us "to go" into the world; whereas, a "faith alone" stance believes that God will use other means to achieve His will. This imbedded theology could cause MFHCC to fail to "go" into its community and lose contact with its mission.

The first part of this paper details the history and development of MFHCC, examining the local community for an understanding of ministry context. The absence of a denominational history and its impact on MFHCC are summarized.

The second part develops the biblical and theological foundations for MFHCC. The mission of Christ is explored for biblical directives pertaining to engaging the local community evangelically. Additionally, an examination of the Reformation and Evangelical movements supply MFHCC with a ministry background from which to draw an identity.

The leadership strategy in the third part is derived from parts one and two. It involves small-group learning clusters to educate about biblical evangelism. This strategy provides a clear method for engaging our local community through evangelism and supplies the church's leadership with a renewed vision for evangelism that will be passed on to the congregation through all ministry teams.

Content Reader: John Throop, PhD

Words 348

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INTRODUCTION

The Tower of Pisa, out of plumb and off-kilter, stands as a monument to beauty and bewilderment. The Tower of Pisa, currently more than four meters¹ askew, is perhaps the world's most accomplished and unintentional folly. The tower captures our imaginations for all the wrong reasons. When one stands before the campanile,² it is as if the rest of the world is momentarily off-base. While the discipline of architecture demands the absence of a lean in construction, the tower is celebrated because it leans.

Construction began in 1173 on this campanile of the cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore in Pisa, Italy. By the time work was officially completed on the tower in 1370, the campanile already had an inclination of 1.6 degrees from vertical. The tower has been noticeably leaning for well over six hundred years, yet somehow the tower still stands; in fact, over the years architects, engineers, and artisans have labored to keep the campanile leaning.³

The intent in writing this paper is to use the Tower of Pisa as a backdrop metaphor to illustrate the need for My Father's House Christian Center (MFHCC) in La Mirada, California, to align itself theologically with the mission of Christ while, at the same time, demonstrating how the Bible can be used as the plumb line for evangelism

¹ Five degrees.

² "Campanile" as bell towers are known in Italian.

³ Nicholas Shrady, *Tilt, A Skewed History of The Tower of Pisa* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 2-17.

today. The Tower of Pisa is celebrated because it leans without falling over. In much the same way, the Church of Jesus Christ is leaning off-kilter, and yet it is celebrated, too. The builders of the campanile did not intend to build a leaning tower; likewise, Church fathers did not intend to build church structures off base either. Yet, somehow, both groups did. There is an inherent danger that MFHCC could follow the pattern of previous church organizations that have leaned away from sound biblical directives that pertain to evangelism and the mission of God.

The structures of the church and/or the daily operation of the church lead to the nature and attitudes displayed by the church. These operational attitudes provide the directions and the outcomes for the church today. MFHCC currently seems fragmented, lacking unity and numerical growth. This could be the result of a “lean” within the church structure. Likewise, the nature of the church, those attitudes displayed by the congregants, is a direct result of the operational standards set by church leadership. Presently, the nature of MFHCC is ambivalent towards evangelism, which turns the church away from the biblical mandate of the Great Commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19A).⁴ The outcome is a church structure that leans away from evangelism and the mission of God.

When looking at the Tower of Pisa, eventually the question comes to mind, “Why does the tower lean?” At some point in construction or design, a flaw or flaws occurred that resulted in a lean away from vertical. Concerning the church, the Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 3:10 that he is a wise master builder who laid a foundation and others are

⁴ All Scripture quotations will be taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

building upon this foundation. When taking a critical look at evangelism and mission today (and the church as a whole), one is left with similar questions about design, intent, and the lean away from the biblical plumb line. When Paul writes to the Corinthian church, he is addressing problems that would make the church ineffective. Today, MFHCC reflects some of the same miscues that Paul relates as basic building flaws. Clearly, MFHCC has built upon the work of others that has resulted in a fundamental lean away from biblical evangelism.

Evangelism in Christianity is looked upon today with phrases such as “winning souls,” “making decisions for Christ,” “saving the lost,” and “asking Jesus into my heart.” These descriptions may be true in part, but evangelism is leaning away from the element of discipleship as a vital part of the conversion process. Robert E. Webber, writing in his book *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, raises the question, “Is a convert who does not become a disciple a true convert?”⁵ The broad answer to the question is, all who become converts should be lifelong disciples. The church move must move away from “winning souls” to lifelong discipleship.

To compare buildings with the Church, if a building leans, there is a danger that the whole structure will one day collapse. The gravitational forces that work outside of the structure will hasten the building’s demise. Likewise, if the Church leans away from effective evangelism and the mission of God, the danger exists that the church will collapse because outside worldly forces are not being addressed or even understood. The church must consider the forces that exist and the impact these forces present to the

⁵ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 43.

church. These forces include generational and cultural issues that pull on the church today.

Evangelism should not be looked upon as separate from modern society. For MFHCC, there exists the need to reinvent evangelism and define its mission to the local community. In other words, the “build it and they will come” motif failed in the past and is failing in presently. A new paradigm for modern evangelism must arise or else MFHCC will continue to lose ground to other forms of religion and spirituality. The church today exists and evangelizes in an emerging multi-generational, multi-cultural, postmodern setting. Evangelism is facing obstacles from within and without the church unlike any problems in its history. A reinventing of evangelism for MFHCC is not adaptation, but rather a reformation of thought, process, and application, in order to survive (address the lean) and move forward in the twenty-first century. For example, Wade Clark Roof makes the point that people claim to be spiritual but with little faith grounding.⁶ Thus, the church evangelizes in a world that sees itself as spiritual and in no real need of the Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ, as spirituality tends to make one feel closer to a higher power, and gives the bearer a sense of belonging to a larger spiritual picture. The renewal of evangelism takes place on the postmodern grid of an emerging society that is constantly defining and redefining the face of spirituality.

The development of mission through evangelism is a reformation of biblical studies and theological reflection, but in the context of an emerging postmodern world. The leadership of MFHCC must re-work its ideas about evangelism and allow the Holy

⁶ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 34.

Spirit to guide our dialogue with non-believers. In *Conversion in the New Testament*,⁷ Richard Peace presents the case that New Testament study and practical theology allows for a process of conversion, as well as the dramatic event conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Furthermore, writers such as Rick Richardson⁸ and Brian McLaren⁹ see evangelism in the postmodern world as a journey of belonging before believing. This triad of New Testament, practical theology, and journey becomes the vehicle for the development of mission through evangelism for MFHCC.

Theologically, the teachings of Jesus and Paul must be addressed and applied to the matrix of MFHCC in the form of a biblical hermeneutic for evangelism. Jesus as the “rejected corner stone” (1 Pet. 2:6-7) is the foundation that the apostle Paul looks to as he addresses the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:9-11). This text must be looked to for direction and guidance with the understanding that the current model for evangelism may have to be dismantled. Biblical events should theologically inform evangelism. Also, the church today can look to the historical church in order to shape its future.

Conclusions similar to these and others will be addressed, unpacked, and applied to the matrix of mission and evangelism. The context for this paper is the ministry setting for MFHCC, as well as the broader spectrum of the church as a whole. Within these settings, conclusions, adaptations, and applications will be developed concerning mission and evangelism. The current direction of MFHCC, as well as the history of evangelism in this church, will be assessed and nuanced with reference to historical and current

⁷ Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

⁸ Rick Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

⁹ Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

evangelism methods. In order to form a genuine picture of the “lean” in evangelism, the historical church will be looked at for building errors that have contributed to the “off-kilter” approach to evangelism that prevails today.

The focus of this paper will be on finding the foundational areas where the church began to lean away from vertical in respect to evangelism and apply a correction.

Actually, the study will find that MFHCC has leaned in every area discussed. Once the areas of lean are exposed, the paper will look at the biblical model for evangelism to find the correction. Finally, a new model for evangelism will be determined and put into service.

In Part One titled: “A Non-Denominational Church Plant,” the establishment of MFHCC will be taken into account from the perspectives of organization, community context, and theological assumptions. The organizational structure of MFHCC represents the foundation that MFHCC grew from. This foundation is the theological fabric of the founding members of MFHCC. The purpose in the first chapter is to look at how our local church has viewed evangelism and how this interpretation affects the church today. Alongside that, my own spiritual pilgrimage concerning evangelism will be recounted. In this section, any lean away from vertical regarding evangelism will be uncovered in order to expose potential problems.

The second chapter of Part One will address the tension points within the organization of MFHCC. Once the MFHCC was planted, it became apparent to me as a leader that I was building off-kilter. I was basically taking the church model from the church I had come from, using my own embedded theology; in fact, the other church leaders were doing the same thing. The result was that we were not of one mind, but,

more importantly, our blueprint for church organization was wrong. Therefore, the new church was being informed by old thought.

The embedded theology of church members is from another place and time. If the theology of the previous church is errant or culturally dated and it mixes with the theological direction of the new church, the result is tension, potential for division, or much worse. The New Testament admonishes us not to mix the old with the new, "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined" (Luke 5:38). In the beginning, MFHCC was a product of mixing old and new thought, and the result was tension and stagnation. The church was not able to fully achieve its mission because the "mission" was not articulated with the understanding that this is something new, a reforming of direction that many members failed to grasp for various reasons. In order to reform the embedded theology, an emergent theology must come forth that develops mission and brings the church into unity.

Ray S. Anderson defines emergent theology as being "for churches who are emerging in this current culture and who are definitely passionate about rethinking what it means to be the church on a mission."¹⁰ Anderson continues on to make the case that Paul's theology was informed by the events of the church in Antioch rather than by the church in Jerusalem. Anderson relates that the church in Jerusalem had a fortress mentality while the church in Antioch emerged as biblically based, yet culturally relevant. Clearly, there is a distinction between churches that develop out of tradition and

¹⁰ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 12.

churches that develop through biblical revelation and cultural identity. Thus, MFHCC must take the Antioch model, develop biblically, and address the current cultural context in order to develop mission through evangelism of the local community.

In Part Two; the “Biblical, Historical, Theological Reflection” section, the plumb line of God from the biblical text will be brought into play. It is essential that God’s plumb line (biblically) be clearly established before any reinventing of evangelism can begin. The intent here is to view the historical section with the theological section in order to draw conclusions for the final section: the methodology.

Biblically, the Great Commission from Matthew 28:16-20 will be explored for essential direction concerning the mission of MFHCC. Also, the apostle Paul’s perception of a “wise master builder” from 1 Corinthians will be examined in order to develop a theological plumb line for MFHCC that resonates with the mission of Christ. The intent of this section is to provide the foundation to inform the ministries of MFHCC and to supply a viable directive that reaches back to the inception of the church age.

Additionally, this section will look at the historical church, highlighting the Reformation and Evangelical movements in order to clarify the need for a theological paradigm shift. The early church, with emphasis on the church in Antioch, will be outlined as a beginning point for historical continuity and reference. The events of the Reformation era will be used to further inform MFHCC that the historical church was one of corrective theological movement. The rise of the Evangelical movement will be noted as the outgrowth of reform and of the Great Awakenings’ supplying urgency to evangelism. The intent is to provide MFHCC with an historical antecedent to evaluate

and correct theological issues from a Reformation/Evangelical viewpoint, with continuing church renewal in mind.

In Part Three, “A Strategy to Align with the Mission of Christ,” outcomes from Parts One and Two will be detailed and applied. The purpose of the third part is to gather the pertinent information and develop a strategy for the creation of an applicable model for evangelism for our church. The third section will also work out a feasible time frame for the strategy development and the training of church leaders who will be responsible, in part, for the implementation of the new directives.

In the first chapter of Part Three, the issue of embedded theological assumptions can now be viewed from the perspective of the church in Antioch and the Reformation period for historical antecedents that have supplied a needed correction to the church. These corrections will bring MFHCC back under the direction of the mission of Christ to “go therefore and make disciples.” Once the mission of Christ is in place, evangelism can emerge as a renewed vision for MFHCC.

The ministry of the church is grounded in the mission of Christ. The theological directives that emerge will connect the leadership of MFHCC with Christ at the cost of disconnection from religious forms and historical tradition. Jesus as the first apostle is the cornerstone that the apostle Paul built upon and thus becomes the foundation for MFHCC to assess and build. The result is an understanding that the church, in this case MFHCC, is mandated by God to be the missionary people of Christ. The directive for MFHCC is that the church continue God’s mission to the world through the work of the Holy Spirit who empowers the church for ministry work.

Next, the community context of MFHCC is placed on the grid. The community elements supply the mode of application for evangelism. What follows is the acknowledgement that MFHCC is an emerging evangelical church in the community of La Mirada. The outcome is an emergent theology that guides MFHCC to engage and build trust within our community. Then MFHCC will be positioned to evangelize with the mission of Christ intact. This is where the action of the church meets the plumb line of God.

Next, in chapter 6, “Leadership Strategy and Implementation,” the actual mode for implementation comes into focus. The first step is to communicate the vision for MFHCC to the congregants. The pastor has the responsibility to cast and conduct the renewed vision of mission through evangelism. This is an ongoing task since the strategy for evangelism is fluid and will adapt with church growth. The pastor takes the lead as the primary author of change from which the leadership of MFHCC will become secondary change agents.

The major avenue for the leadership strategy will incorporate Havelock’s “Stages of Planned Change”¹¹ within learning clusters. Learning clusters will develop within each ministry of the church. Each cluster will be supplied Havelock’s stages for change situations. The eight-stage process of creating major change will be detailed, along with the application method. This will supply the leadership clusters with a proven model to use and will provide the necessary entry point for change.

¹¹ Ronald G. Havelock, “The Change Agents Guide” (“Leading Congregational Change,” Syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, February 2005).

In the beginning, all department leaders will cluster together, discussing and outlining the biblical mandates concerning the mission of Christ. Then, a review of the historical church corrections from Antioch, the Reformation, and the Great Awakenings will come into the discussions. Next, the ministry context for MFHCC will be considered, enhanced with community demographics, in order to supply a well rounded view of our target audience. Once these areas are understood, a congregational strategy will develop.

Once the ministry leaders have worked through the material using Havelock's stages and have developed a clear understanding of the renewed mission of the church through evangelism, they will then be positioned to lead their individual ministry teams toward the chosen outcomes. Each ministry leader will then cluster with his or her respective ministry team in order to pass on the renewed vision of evangelism for the church. Within these ministry clusters, each team will contextualize the mission of Christ without presuppositions, thereby adapting evangelism into the function of the respective ministry. The result is that these ministries act as satellites that revolve around the core of the church, applying needed direction from all points.

Finally, a new paradigm will emerge that will reinforce the mission of Christ within MFHCC to engage the local community through evangelism. Each satellite ministry will be able to sustain the mission of Christ and develop evangelistic methods that reaffirm the vision of MFHCC and facilitate unity within the congregation. MFHCC thus emerges as Evangelical, Reformational, missional, theologically sound, healthy, renewing, and positioned for the return of Christ.

PART ONE

MY FATHER'S HOUSE CHRISTIAN CENTER

CHAPTER 1

A NON-DENOMINATIONAL CHURCH PLANT

My Father's House Christian Center is a non-denominational church plant established in November 1998. The congregation is multi-cultural and multi-generational. MFHCC ministers to people with varied ethnic backgrounds—people from birth to those in their eighties. The religious background of the congregation is roughly 50 percent former Roman Catholics with another 30 percent from the Pentecostal tradition; the rest came to know the Lord at MFHCC.

In 1998, the church began holding services at the Holiday Inn in La Mirada, California. After eighteen months, we were able to secure a five-year lease for our own storefront location in a retail center in La Mirada. The church outgrew its facilities during the five-year lease period. For the next two years, the church shared facilities with the La Mirada Church of the Nazarene. Currently, MFHCC holds services at Living Hope Baptist Church in Whittier, California, serving La Mirada. This arrangement gives MFHCC the full use of a large church building in a traditional neighborhood setting. MFHCC is totally self-sufficient and does not receive any outside funding.

What was not understood in the beginning was that a church plant is an evangelistic outreach of sorts. The first meeting to propose a church plant was, in fact, an outreach—I was reaching out, trying to gather a community of believers together. The next step was to give those people the “good news” about what God was doing in our midst. Looking back at the events leading up to the meeting and the meeting itself, the outcome was successful because it was a gathering around the good news.

The approach that was used was not “hey let’s start a church.” Rather, the approach was centered on community. Most of the people in the meeting knew each other from one ministry or another, and those that were new to the group were chosen in part for their ability to make friends quickly. The meeting began with introductions and a listing of how each person was serving or had served God in the past. Next, the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles were told in story form for the purpose of engaging the work of the Kingdom of God on a personal level. The last segment of the meeting was the appeal for the church plant, followed by a time of prayer. Within a week, twelve believers had signed on who were willing to be involved. The successful outcome was based less on the idea of new church, and more on the idea that “this is what God is doing in our midst.”

What followed was about three months of preparation for the first official church service. All of the legal documents were filed with the State of California and with the Federal Government. The Holiday Inn in La Mirada was approached and secured as the initial site for the church. Letters were sent out to friends and families announcing the first service, and follow-up phone calls were made, as well. The initial group of twelve were organized and trained in hospitality and ministry organization.

The opening service was, by all accounts, a huge success. One hundred fifty chairs were set up, and 148 people showed up. The service ran smoothly, we began on time, did Praise and Worship, preached the sermon, and finished with Communion. The intent of the first service was to say, “This is who we are, and this is what we are all about.” When the service was over, there was a great deal of excitement from our group of twelve and myself. Surely, there would be a drop off from the first week to week the second in attendance, but, naïvely, I thought, this was pretty easy. Plainly, what was at was a “build it and they will come” model. It seemed to be working, but the second week brought a reality check. Only seventeen people came to the service.

The evangelistic reality of the beginning process actually took hold in the second week of the church plant. We thought that we had gained 136 people, but the second week turned out differently. The reality was that we had actually gained five people in the first two weeks. In assessing the beginning of the church plant, the markers of evangelism were in place but not identified. If we had understood the church plant in terms of evangelism, the drop of from week one to week two might not have been so great. Instead of inviting church attending believers or non-participating believers, the church plant would have been better served by inviting those that were disconnected from God, and or church attendance. From week one to week two, the believers went back to their home church, and the marginal/seekers stayed. The point that was missed was that the historical church began and was built by people coming to Christ. We had tried to build with people that had already arrived and were serving their call where God had planted them.

Establishing MFHCC within the Local Community

The next phase of the church plant consisted of establishing MFHCC within our local community. Since MFHCC was a non-denominational church plant, lacking a recognizable label, the desire was to legitimize the existence of this church in the community. The focus of the founding members in the beginning was to create a base from which we could have an impact on the local community, in this case, La Mirada, California. Specifically, we wanted to establish who we were and where we would meet. Little thought was given to evangelism since MFHCC was in the “build it and they will come” mode. The church made modest gains in eighteen months, so leadership was content with slow, steady growth. Most of the church growth strategy was centered on trying to get people that were unhappy with their current churches to attend MFHCC. This is not to say that decisions for Christ did not occur. In fact, the first year and half, many people came to Christ and were baptized. Many were converted not because of our evangelistic efforts as much as from the fact that, for many, MFHCC was the first church they had ever attended. They came to see this new church plant, and heard the gospel, rather than hearing the gospel first, then being converted, and lastly looking for a church to join.

During the first eighteen months of MFHCC’s existence, moderate gains were made numerically, and several ministries were established. With the growth of the church, the need for a children’s ministry as well as a youth ministry became apparent. In due time, additional hotel space in the form of two other rooms was added, along with the ministry team leaders who would guide the respective programs. A summer youth

conference was planned with a team of counselors and was attended by twenty-two teenagers.

During the next five years of our church development, evangelism was not in the forefront of the ministry. The main reason was that, as the senior pastor, I had a false “Billy Graham logic” regarding evangelism. I was praying for an evangelist to come and join the church and lead this great explosion of salvations at MFHCC. A small number of people joined the church claiming they had an evangelistic calling, but no evangelism ministry was ever developed. The church did begin a community outreach of sorts with the production of a local cable television program. The purpose was to share the gospel and inform our local community about our church. Another area that we employed as a church was to join the local Chamber of Commerce. The chamber was another way to reach the local community, in this case, the civic and business communities.

In retrospect, the only two areas of our church that were evangelistic were the television program and the Chamber of Commerce meetings. The television program was a cable company production that aired once a week. Its format was a teaching session that was geared toward the unsaved and the nominal Christian, and its appeal was to help people come closer to God and Scripture. The topics were light enough theologically so as to not lose the interest of those who do not understand such things. Yet, the messages tried to engage people where they were, bringing God into their circumstances. On the other hand, the Chamber of Commerce meetings were casual events that were intended to help the business community and our church interface. As a pastor attending these gatherings, it was my intent at first to just be a physical presence from the faith

community. Later on, once the Chamber members became comfortable with a pastor in their midst, I was able to casually dialogue about faith, community, and God.

The television program and my attendance at the chamber events were evangelistic in that they both attempted to reach people with the “Good News” on their own terms without any coercion for a decision for Christ. Both events could fit nicely, I believe, in the scheme of what Rick Richardson titles *Reimagining Evangelism*.¹² The purpose of the television program and the Chamber of Commerce events was to bring people a step closer to God. Prior to this, I had been programmed by church teaching to “demand a decision for Jesus,” or to tell them Jesus loved them and ask why they would not want to accept Him. Without realizing it, the Holy Spirit was changing how I approached evangelism. Yet, I knew there had to be a better way to reach the local community.

As a result of my studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, a desire to reach the local community began to emerge within me, but there was the realization that MFHCC was trying to engage a post-modern community with a modern model of mission. Craig Van Gelder says that mission must emerge within the postmodern condition.¹³ The postmodern world is fast paced and fluid, and it is emerging out of the landscape of past generations. A new model for reaching out to the local community needed to emerge, yet, at the same time, the mission of Christ needed to remain intact. The “build it and they will come” model of church did not work since it kept Christianity inside the four walls. The people of God were secluded in church, praying, and hoping the unsaved would

¹² Richardson, *Reimagining Evangelism*.

¹³ Craig Van Gelder, *Church between Gospel and Culture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 113.

come. The reality is, our stained glass does not open to the world, and it is traditional and rigid. The church cannot close itself off to the world; if it does, it loses its mission. What was needed was a fresh look at our community and our mission.

Gathering All the Pertinent Information

The entry point for the development of a strategy for evangelism and mission in MFHCC is to look at the surrounding community and the composition of MFHCC. The target audience must be established, along with the mode of evangelism. Any attempt to reach a community outside of the church would be perceived as a good thing for the church, but good intentions are not enough. Unless the mission of Christ and the method of evangelism, along with the target group, are established, the church will fail to connect in a meaningful way with the local community.

The community of My Father's House Christian Center, La Mirada, California, is located in the eastern part of Los Angeles County, adjacent to the Orange County line. La Mirada has 50,953 people living in an area of 7.78 square miles. CNN's Money Magazine recently singled out La Mirada as one of the most desirable places to live in United States.¹⁴ The following tables give demographics for La Mirada taken from the city's website.¹⁵

¹⁴ "34. La Mirada," in "Best Places to Live: Top 100" CNN Money.com, 2009, http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2007/moneymag/0707/gallery.BPTL_top_100.moneymag/34.html (accessed September 8, 2009).

¹⁵ Official City of La Mirada Webpage, www.cityoflamirada.org (accessed August 2009).

Table 1. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Population	Percentage
White	29,546	58%
Black	1,080	2%
American Indian	381	1%
Asian	9,595	19%
Native Hawaiian & Other	157	<1%
Other	8,132	16%
2 or more races	2,062	4%
Total	50,953	100%

Table 2. Race

Race	Population	Percentage
Not Hispanic or Latino	32,524	64%
Hispanic or Latino	18,429	36%
Total	50,953	100%

Table 3. Age

Age	Population	Percentage
Under 5	3,156	6%
5 to 17 years old	9,474	19%
18-24 years old	6,073	12%
25-34 years old	5,494	11%
35-54 years old	14,409	28%
55-64 years old	5,035	10%
Over 65 years old	7,312	14%
Total	50,953	100%

Table 4. Gender

Gender	Population	Percentage
Male	24,606	48%
Female	26,347	52%
Total	50,953	100%

Table 5. Occupations

Occupational Classification	Population	Percentage
Blue Collar	4,556	19%
White Collar	16,223	69%
Service and Farm	2,823	12%
Total (Age 16+)	23,602	100%

Table 6. Households

Household Information	Population	Percentage
Family Households	12,365	79%
Non-family Households	3,317	21%
Total	15,682	100%

**Average Household Size 3.14

Table 7. Home ownership

Home Ownership	Population	Percentage
Owner-Occupied	12,850	82%
Renter-Occupied	2,832	18%
Total	15,682	100%

**Average Length of Residence 13 years

Table 8. Incomes

Household Income	Population	Percentage
\$150,000 and above	1,436	9%
\$100,000-\$149,999	3,066	20%
\$50,000-\$99,999	6,074	39%
\$25,000-\$49,999	3,052	19%
\$0-\$24,999	2,054	13%
Total	15,682	100%

**2006 Average Household Income \$83,289

**2006 Median Household Income \$71,398

The majority of the current members of My Father's House Christian Center live in La Mirada and the adjacent community of unincorporated Whittier. Some members commute from outlying communities but the congregation as a whole identifies La Mirada as its home city. Therefore, evangelistic efforts are concentrated in La Mirada. La Mirada as the target community has thirty-three "Christian" churches listed on its website. Of those thirty-three churches most have church membership under two-hundred, and only four churches claim membership in the range of 200-500. The result is; La Mirada is vastly un-evangelized, un-churched, and provides an excellent source as the local mission field.

As noted earlier in the chapter, one of the first attempts to reach our community at large was to join the local Chamber of Commerce, to reach, in this case, the civic and business communities. Most communities are driven by the civic and business sectors. I realized early in the church's life that the church as a whole, with its "build it and they will come" mentality, had moved away from any evangelical involvement with these two vital elements in our society. The church only interacts with local government when it wants something approved, like a building project. Likewise, the business community is approached for fundraising events and little else. Sadly, there is little or no dialogue between the church and these groups, maintaining a "use as you go" motif. In contrast to that approach, the early American concept of planning a community around the church could be contextualized and applied in La Mirada. The church built on the highest point in town and served as a house of worship, but also as a community meeting place to gather to discuss events, needs, and concerns. Cities today are able to house local government in city hall buildings, but that does not mean that the church should be left on

the outside of influence. In the past, it was unheard of for a government official to not have ties to the local church.

As a non-denominational church plant, MFHCC did not have a history of involvement within the city of La Mirada. Membership in the Chamber of Commerce served as an excellent vehicle to bridge that gap. The chamber is where the civic and government leaders come together, so joining the chamber proved to be a valuable asset for the church and for evangelism. The directive here was to establish MFHCC as a respected Christian church in the city and to develop a strong working relationship with all of the sectors in the community.

Sadly, members of the clergy must overcome built-in misunderstandings in regards to churches and pastors. There was a certain uneasiness from the business community: “Why is a pastor here and what is he up to?” Knowing that it would be an uphill battle for acceptance within the chamber, an unassuming approach seemed the best way to maneuver. I attended meetings, met people, and most importantly I did not push an agenda. After a few months, the tension began to ease, and I was accepted as part of the group. Soon, I was asked to give the invocation at chamber events and city council meetings. Within a year, I was on a first-name basis with the mayor, city council members, city staff, and many business owners in the city. The tactic here was go slowly and to allow them to grow to recognize and become familiar with MFHCC.

The second task was to find out the needs of the community. Several city employees lamented that certain community events such as Thanksgiving services and National Day of Prayer services were no longer being held. Since these activities had been organized by the clergy council and that council had disbanded, the task at hand was

to reestablish the clergy council as a way of serving the community. I met first with the city manager in order to get an official go-ahead. Then I gathered two pastors that I knew in the community and presented the plan to reestablish the council. With the City of La Mirada's approval and the help of the other pastors, within a couple of months, the La Mirada Clergy Council was back and new events were planned. The goal was and is partnership. In order to break down the barriers between the city elements and the church, there was a need to work together. Far too often, the church views the city and business sectors as the enemy, so it should not be any surprise that the church and government disagree. Once the barriers were lowered, the next phase could begin.

The third task and the ultimate goal were for MFHCC and other churches to be accepted as an active part of the community. The long-range plan was to be able to have a church presence at any and all city events. The purpose was to gain name recognition and to "go" into the community with the gospel. If the unsaved and the un-churched are the target, then the church needs to "go" where these people congregate. They are at every community event, so our intent is to bring God to them in a non-threatening manner. George Hunter relates in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*¹⁶ how Celtic Christianity communicated the gospel. The Celts focused on the community first; they chose to evangelize from the inside rather than the outside of society. They emphasized the need to identify with their audience as a means of sharing the gospel. Likewise, the community of La Mirada, as the target audience, had to accept MFHCC as a valid part of the community, thereby opening lines of communication.

¹⁶ George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), chapter 5.

The Need for a Sound Theological Structure

Parallel to the physical growth of the church, personal, embedded theological miscues began surface. The overall dynamic of a church plant brings into play varied situational and organizational challenges that can overshadow the theological side of church life. Perhaps naïvely, as the pastor, I assumed people would just follow the teaching and direction that was projected from the pulpit. This was not going to be the case since I began to sense a subtle tugging from a few people in leadership that they wanted to go in another direction theologically. At first, I identified it as growing pains, but eventually I began to see theological miscues from leadership. Some of the leaders were still locked into the thinking and theology of another church, or they were following the teaching of televangelists, much to my dismay. At the same time, I was moving in a new direction that was fueled by my seminary education. I was influenced by my professors and the many books I had read. My personal theology was changing, yet, for the most part, church leadership wanted to stay the same, and this brought about tension that was not going away.

The theological assumptions of the leaders began to develop a tension that can best be described as a preoccupation with the gifts of the Spirit. Ray Anderson illustrates this as he writes, “Confusion reigns, with members competing with one another for spiritual space in which to exercise their own spiritual gifts.”¹⁷ Many within our church leadership had been influenced by the Word of Faith movement¹⁸ and its preoccupation

¹⁷ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 160.

¹⁸ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), Introduction.

with spiritual gifts. This theology exists within many church members. The danger for MFHCC is that theology is imported from another church or movement does not reflect the teaching of MFHCC. In fact, it can be in opposition to the direction of MFHCC. What happened was that likeminded leaders began to cluster together with the idea that, “their” theology was the right theology. This amounts to spiritual inbreeding. The tension was that I was trying to develop a ministry around the Kingdom of God where the Spirit empowers the church to carry out the mission of Christ. On the other hand, the leaders thought that MFHCC would be empowering them to carry out “their” mission of the church.

The outcome from all of this was that MFHCC was suffering growing pains. Growth, coupled with the growing pain of change, is not altogether a bad thing. Problems occur when the segments of the organization begin to grow apart. The tensions that cause separation are brought about by fragmentation of thought and mission. As the senior pastor, my assumption was that everyone would just follow me. In reality, the church is comprised of individuals who do not always want to follow, since their core beliefs and embedded theology may differ from the beliefs and theology of the pastor and the church structure. In order to bring change, and complete the change process, a new paradigm must be placed on the organizational grid of the church. Since we live in a changing world, there will always be the need to change or develop around a new ministry context. This, in itself, presents a unique set of circumstances that must be addressed, and a strategy for change must be developed. Without a clear understanding of mission, MFHCC could fail. MFHCC could also fail without a clear understanding of how to move the church theologically. It was clear that, like the Tower of Pisa, MFHCC was

leaning. It was also clear that, for MFHCC to be relevant regarding the mission of Christ, the “lean” needed to be addressed and corrected.

CHAPTER 2

MY FATHER'S HOUSE ENTERS REFORM

In the year 1173, construction of the Tower of Pisa began. In the year 1178, work on the tower came to a halt, with the structure standing three stories tall (approximately half way completed). No one knows why the construction was halted (construction workers noted that the campanile's foundation had already shifted), or why it would stand idle for nearly a century before construction resumed. In the year 1272, after ninety-eight years of idleness, work began anew under architect Giovanni di Simone, who found the campanile half finished and leaning noticeably southward. In order to compensate for the southward lean, the architect built the remaining three stories projecting northward.

My Father's House Christian Center had moved from the foundational aspects of a church plant to the building or growth stage. Clearly, when looking objectively at the organization of MFHCC, the structure was leaning in respect to a concise theological mandate for the mission of God. The reality was that as the senior pastor I had three ways in which to address the lean. One, we could just continue on with what we were doing and hope that the lean was not so pronounced, and that the structure would not collapse. Secondly, like Giovanni di Simone we could continue our building phase but supply corrective measures upon a leaning structure. Or lastly, the whole structure would have to be evaluated, dismantling the areas that affect the lean and build anew. Undoubtedly, the

last option would require more study and eventually more work, but in order to provide a safe environment we would need to dismantle and build alternatively.

The Reformation along with its theological Reformers provide a much needed antecedent for looking objectively at the organization of MFHCC and addressing a theological shift away from biblical mandates concerning the structure of the church. Martin Luther, the first of the Reformers was puzzled over the meaning of “But the righteous man shall live by faith” in Romans 1:17. Luther, as he continued to read Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, saw that the Romans 1:17 passage should be understood in the light of Romans 3:24: “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Thus, Luther had a revelation from Scripture that served as a theological turning point for him, and for the Reformation. Luther eventually began to look at the structure of the Roman Catholic Church with what Lewis W. Spitz calls, “his evangelical approach for theology.”¹⁹ In writing his Ninety-five Theses, Luther advocates change for a church structure that he saw as moving away from biblical norms. “Luther did not intend to have the theses spread among the people.”²⁰ His intent was to inform the leadership of the Church and hopefully correct the theological lean away from Scripture. Evidently unknowingly, Luther touched likeminded scholars and church leaders, giving rise to the Reformation.

In much the same way, the theological shift within MFHCC needed to be addressed. The embedded theological assumptions of some of the leaders of MFHCC had begun to influence the various ministries within the church. As the Senior Pastor, I was

¹⁹ Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001) 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

teaching reform and evangelism, and many leaders were building their ministries in an opposite direction theologically. It was at this point that the need for reform within MFHCC became apparent. Of the three ways to address the change, “the whole structure would have to be evaluated, dismantling the areas that affect the lean and build anew,” would be the most logical choice.

Seminary Training Brought Forth a New Church Model

Reggie McNeal argues that leaders do not develop in isolation; rather, they develop in community.²¹ One such community that had a major impact on my theology was my seminary education. Seminary education/experience exposed me to a myriad of people, thoughts, and academic learning. One outcome of this experience was a change of thought concerning the nature of the Church, and the function of the Church in community. Without realizing it, I had shifted theologically from a Pentecostal position that was influenced by the Word of Faith Movement, to a Reformed/Evangelical view of the New Testament. The result was that I was teaching from a Reformed/Evangelical stance to a non-denominational church where the leadership leaned towards a Pentecostalism. Thus, MFHCC suffered from an identity crisis where different theologies were in a subtle tug of war. With each group believing they were right, there was need for a sound church model for MFHCC that would address the issues, biblically, and theologically, while maintaining a connection with the historical church.

One area of concern for non-denominational church plants like MFHCC is the lack of a denominational history that anchors the church to the Reformation and to the church model found in the Acts of the Apostles. The historical factor supplies a

²¹ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 115.

theological heritage to draw from and supplies the church with a tradition. On the other hand, the absence of a heritage and tradition allows a certain freedom to develop the church structure without the pull of stagnant themes from yesteryear. There is a certain tension between tradition and the postmodern world. Traditions can supply a strong support if the traditions are biblically based, as opposed to human traditions that are rooted in earthly passions and desires. Ray S. Anderson alleviates the tension by arguing for a church model that is “vintage” rather than traditional.²² Both vintage and traditional can refer to something old. Anderson’s argument is that when something is vintage, it should become better with age. MFHCC may lack a tradition, but that does not mean it cannot be vintage. Thus, the “vintage” model for MFHCC must be rooted biblically, contextualized for our community, and point to the return of Christ.

Another factor to take into consideration is that MFHCC as a church plant is an emerging church in the community. As Anderson adeptly notes, “The risen Christ is the cornerstone of the church in every generation.”²³ The new church model must be anchored in the risen Christ and proceed forward in much the same way the apostles built upon the work of Christ. The strategy for MFHCC as a church plant is to emerge into our community with the risen Christ as the cornerstone. Thereby, the new church model for MFHCC embraces the risen Christ as its cornerstone and connects to the apostolic foundation as a plumb line. The new church model takes into account the work of the Reformers who addressed building flaws and appealed to the Scriptures for direction. Having a model in place to work from is only one part of the equation. The theological

²² Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 22.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

views of team leaders within MFHCC needed to be assessed in order to evaluate in what way the new church model would be perceived and implemented.

The Tension Created by the Theological Views of Team Leaders

Non-denominational churches can be vulnerable to a variety of theological views that affect the overall structure of the church. Since non-denominational churches lack a historical and traditional heritage that can inform the church theologically, there may be a gap between the biblical directives concerning the mission of the Christ and the contemporary theological culture within the church. Therefore, this lack of a theological heritage could direct the church adversely. Ultimately, non-denominational churches must define a clear mission of Christ that will inform the church theologically. In order to correct this pattern, church leadership must have a concise, biblically sound theology to work with. As many of the leaders and other members have been influenced by unorthodox theology, the resulting tension necessitates a paradigm shift to reform errant theological assumptions. Thus, any attempt at reform would have to come through a change situation for the leaders theologically, bringing them onto the matrix of evangelism, mission, and reform.

Pastor, “I’m believing God,” or “faith is the key,” or “God has to do it.” These and similar phrases from the Word of Faith Movement began to emerge from church leaders. The depth of the tension became apparent with time as leaders began to develop their respective ministries and voice their theological views.

According to D. R. McConnell, the founding father of the Word of Faith

Movement (also known as the Faith Movement) is Kenneth Erwin Hagin.²⁴ Hagin, McConnell continues, was influenced by E. W. Kenyon, whose early ministry life was in the Methodist tradition. He later became a non-aligned Baptist, and eventually he moved in Pentecostal circles.²⁵ Kenyon was also influenced by Metaphysics and Christian Science.²⁶ McConnell says, “Kenyon’s legacy in the Faith movement” is “his syncretism of cultic ideas” “taken from metaphysics, of healing, positive confession, and prosperity.”²⁷

Kenneth Hagin, relates McConnell, adopted the cultic teachings of Kenyon to the point that Hagin actually plagiarizes Kenyon in his own writings. Hagin, beginning in the 1950s had great success with his “Word of Faith” teachings; among his accomplishments are a worldwide television ministry and the founding of Rhema Bible School in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. Because of Hagin’s success, Kenyon’s teachings become the essential principles of the Faith movement. Faith teachers are not the progeny of the healing revivalism, nor is Word of Faith derived from the Holiness/Pentecostal stream says, McConnell. Rather, the Faith movement comes from the metaphysical New Thought/Christian Science stream.²⁸

The result of all of this, McConnell outlines, is that “the Faith movement is heretical.” “Historically, the term ‘heresy’ is best reserved for major departures from

²⁴ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 3, quoting Sherry Andrews, “Kenneth Hagin: Keeping the Faith,” *Charisma Magazine*, October 1982, 24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapters 2 and 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

Christian orthodoxy, especially the doctrines of God, Christ, revelation, and salvation.”²⁹

The consequence for MFHCC is that the theology of some of the leaders “leaned” towards the Word of Faith teachings, believing they were following orthodox Christianity when, in fact, there is a clear danger that MFHCC could be structured around a “faith” theology. Thus, the embedded theological assumptions within leadership must be identified, addressed, and corrected. Clearly, and for the most part silently, lines of tension were building since Evangelicalism and Word of Faith can become opposing forces.

Church Members’ Lack of Understanding of the Impact of Their Embedded Theology

The theological composition of church membership affects the mission and vision of the church. Embedded theology governs the way an individual understands God without presupposition that the theology could be errant. For example, a Word of Faith theology, viewed by a person holding that belief, is deemed to be correct. Unless a person chooses to examine his or her embedded beliefs, those beliefs will remain constant. At some point, the church member’s core belief, or embedded theology, is passed on to the grid of the church. The impact of a Word of Faith theology on an Evangelical church such as My Father’s House Christian Center could be detrimental to its overall mission and vision.

Whenever and wherever people congregate as a body of believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the outcome is the establishment of a church in one form or another. This “establishment” can vary from being highly structured to containing no visible

²⁹ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 185.

organizational structure, yet each church shares the call of God as the foundation for a journey of faith. In turn, the journey of faith is informed by the Scriptures, and how the members understand and appropriate them. Thus, the church consists of potentially like-minded individuals with a common purpose to worship God. “Potentially,” the congregants of MFHCC can assemble together in unity. The challenge is to move from potential to actuality and become like-minded theologically.

Eddie Gibbs says, “Churches can be categorized in one of two ways. They are either churches which people are born into or churches which an individual chooses to join.”³⁰ Gibbs makes the point that these two forms of churches do not always blend together since the “born into church” tends to be a more traditional model whereas, the church an “individual chooses” are churches that can lack a traditional support base such as non-denominational churches. Gibbs also relates that the believer operates within a belief dimension in which the religious person will hold a certain theological outlook. This outlook is derived from the proclamation and teaching of the respective person’s church.³¹ Thus, people who identify themselves as Christian are subject to, and can communicate, various theological perspectives.

The average person attending a church service is not theologically attentive to the various forms or church models that exist. People will attend and join a particular church group for many different reasons. Many of those reasons can be sociological or need based. The result is that, within the confines of any given church worship service, Bible study, or church function, there may be a myriad of expectations as well as assumptions

³⁰ Eddie Gibbs, *In Name Only* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1994), 24.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

concerning the role and function of the church. These expectations and assumptions coupled with previous church teachings culminate in an embedded theology. It is this embedded theology that drives the individual and the church organization. One assumption as these individuals come together and form a church body is that they are all like-minded when it comes to the nature/mission of the church. In actuality, that is not the norm, since opposing theologies are at work in a subliminal way, and later on this becomes evident as theologies begin to clash in outward expressions of discord.

The individual believer arrives with a theological package that he or she will unpack and apply to any given church setting. When this scenario is multiplied many times over, the result could be theological chaos. Although the individual worshipper does not attend a church service with chaos in mind, unless a sound theological direction is formulated and applied to the church structure, individual members will rely on past teachings and apply those teachings to the grid of the new church. Since church members do not understand the impact of their embedded theology, the burden of correction does not lie with them, although many church members will intuitively make the adjustments to their theological views based upon the proclamation and teaching of the new church. It should be the responsibility of church leadership to understand and address the embedded theological issues. Thus, it becomes crucial for church leadership to apply biblical correctives and remove a potential clash within the church.

Moving from Faith in Faith, to Faith in God

The problem, as stated earlier for MFHCC is that many of the leaders and members have been heavily influenced by the Word of Faith Movement. The “faith” movement emphasizes faith as the key to unlocking the promises of God. The premise of

the faith movement is that the more faith you have, the more you receive from God. D. R. McConnell quotes Kenneth Hagin, the founder of the faith movement, who said, “Having faith in your words is having faith in your faith. That’s what you’ve got to learn to do to get things from God. Have faith in your faith.”³² This is just one of the reasons McConnell labels the Word of Faith Movement as, *A Different Gospel*. Quentin J. Schultze refers to the faith movement as a “health and wealth Gospel.” Schultze cites James Goff, “The faith movement teaches that divine health and prosperity are the rights of every Christian who will appropriate enough faith to receive them. The secret of appropriating such faith is in making a ‘positive confession’ that is, stating in faith what one desires or is requesting from God and believing that God will honor it.”³³ Surely, Christianity is based in faith as the believer places faith in God. On the contrary, the Word of Faith Movement can overemphasize faith so that faith, rather than God, is the key or source. In effect, the faith movement does not allow for the providence of God. The result is faith in faith, which is a “lean” away from Christianity orthodoxy.

The challenge for MFHCC is to move those members that have an embedded Word of Faith theology from faith in faith to faith in God. Without moving from faith in faith to faith in God, the mission of Christ as it pertains to MFHCC is in jeopardy. The mission statement for MFHCC stems from the Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:19, calling us to “go” into the world; whereas, a “faith in faith” or a faith alone stance from the Word of Faith movement posits that God alone will evangelize, and the task of the Church is to just ask God it do it. If this embedded theological assumption continues,

³² McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 132.

³³ Quentin J. Schultze, *Televangelism and American Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 134.

MFHCC will fail to mobilize and “go” into our community. Ultimately, it will lose contact with its mission. The assignment to change one’s personal embedded theology requires the assessment of personal core values, the acknowledgement that those values may lean away from the mission of the Church, and the realization that a correction needs to be applied. Then a systematic strategy to rebuild the core values theologically can put into place.

Assessing Church Traditions

Church traditions tend to inform an individual theologically. Church traditions can be beneficial if the tradition implants a biblical truth in the heart of the believer. On the other hand, if the tradition is of human origin, it is fallible and potentially harmful if it moves away from biblical truth. On the positive side, traditions of human origins can be called into question and reformed if deemed necessary. For example, Martin Luther “called a wide variety of Catholic practices into question: the Mass was declared unscriptural, as well as monastic vows and clerical celibacy”³⁴ to mention just a few. Martin Luther and the publication of his Ninety-five Theses mark the beginning of the Reformation, in which church traditions and practices were questioned. Once the practices and traditions were deemed errant, a new model was developed. The Reformation becomes the antecedent for assessing church traditions and practices.

For a non-denominational church such as MFHCC, church traditions tend to be imported into the church from many different traditions. A denominational church exports its traditions to its church membership. The tension for an “imported” church is

³⁴ Hans J. Hillerband, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 29.

that many traditions could be at work in the heart of the believer. Like embedded theology, church traditions are deep rooted and may be hard to overcome. The end result is a subtle church pluralism that competes among the congregation.

This pluralism exhibits itself in the worship practices of the church. For example, traditionally, most Protestant churches celebrate communion and baptize new converts. These acts can be performed as a tradition but with little understanding, or with understanding as to why communion and baptism are incorporated into our church structure. To illustrate, John S. Hammett a Southern Baptist scholar asks the question in his book, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, “Why are you a Baptist?”³⁵ Hammett makes the point that most Southern Baptists have lost the connection with the biblical and historical reasons behind the denomination. Agreeably, Hammett argues that the church must revisit its historical roots and biblical foundations in order to maintain a solid continuity with the Baptist faith.

Church members attend a church for many reasons, and most of those reasons are need-based, rather than theological. Many people do not stray from the denomination in which they were raised; if they move to another city, they are likely to look for the nearest church within that denomination. On the other hand, non-denominational churches attract a wide variety of people with and without “church traditions.” These people arrive as seekers, and, once they commit to a church, they add what “they” believe church is all about to the congregational mix. The result, if not monitored and corrected theologically, is a myriad of church traditions that, like theological views compete against

³⁵ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005) 20

each other. The outcome for MFHCC is that these church traditions must be assessed and addressed for the sake of unity and for the enhancement of the vision and mission of the church. Failure to do so will lead to a detrimental plurality of theology, tradition, and action.

The Impact of Movements on the Modern Church

My Father's House Christian Center, as part of the modern church, is affected by historical church movements such as Pentecostalism. The founding members/leaders of MFHCC consider themselves to be Pentecostal. Unbeknownst to them, they hold to a form of Pentecostalism that is fragmented by the Word of Faith Movement. The impact on MFHCC is compounded by Word of Faith theology and an errant outline of Pentecostalism that has been embedded in the leader.

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. wrote about the birth of the Pentecostal movement in *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival*. In his book, he states that one of the reasons for writing about Azusa Street was to explore the “profound effect on other congregations”³⁶ the Pentecostal revival had globally. Arguably, the Azusa Street event which spawns the Pentecostal movement has had a great effect on the Modern church. Robeck names Pentecostal groups such as, “Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, the United Pentecostal Churches, the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, and victory Outreach” as a few of the groups that acknowledge the revival as an important factor in their origins. Robeck also cites, many “televangelists and religious broadcasters such as Pat Robinson, Oral Roberts, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, and T.D. Jakes” as having

³⁶ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2006), 8.

spoken about Azusa Street as a major influence on their ministries.³⁷ Likewise, many members of MFHCC have expressed a belief that the Azusa Street Revival played a major role in their understanding of God and the nature of the Church.

The assumption that Pentecostalism and the Word of Faith Movement are one in the same, or that Word of Faith somehow split off from the Azusa Street Revival is erroneous. McConnell states, “Contrary to popular opinion, Kenyon was not Pentecostal, nor is the Faith gospel just another Pentecostal perversion.”³⁸ Concurrently, Robeck makes no connection between Azusa Street revival Pentecostalism and the Word of Faith Movement. The impact on the modern church, in this case MFHCC, as a result of the syncretism of Pentecostalism and the Faith Movement, is a move away from church orthodoxy. The implication is that the modern church has become or is moving towards a hybrid of theological and historical assumptions. Clearly, a “lean” is detected that, in itself may not topple the church structure, but, if the assumptions converge with other deviations, the potential for disaster is eminent.

Non-denominational churches are subject to varied theological streams, and exist for the most part without any historical structure that has dealt with false doctrines. Unfortunately, for many members of these churches, televangelism substitutes for theological training. Televangelism, coupled with the Faith Movement, supplies the wrong church model. The result is a tension between the mission of God and the mission of the church if the model for ministry to our communities is derived from televangelism and the Word of Faith Movement.

³⁷ Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission*, 11.

³⁸ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 16.

The task for the Modern church is to contextualize the mission of God for the Twenty-first Century. Eddie Gibbs, the author of *Church Next*,³⁹ describes a cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. This cultural shift requires a paradigm shift by church leaders from being traditional church movement followers to becoming change agents who contextualize the mission of God within our cultural contexts. Gibbs continues, “Change agents are most likely to be pioneering church planters who have no congregational history to deal with.”⁴⁰ The lack of congregational history does free the church planter to structure the church organization away from outdated church models. But, the people who fill the seats and support the ministries of the church bring with them expectations from within their embedded theology that can be just as weighty and hard to get around as stagnant denominational traditions rooted in yesteryear.

The church today finds itself at a crossroads between the mission of God and a modern pluralist society that is constantly on the move. Church leaders are faced with a tension between church models sprung from the latest emerging church fad, or megachurch outreach. There is a constant pull to be creative and new in an ever changing world while, at the same time, holding to valued church structures and traditions that have served the church well in years past. In order to bridge the gap and find the most helpful models for the church, the best place to begin the search is in the past. As Gibbs states, “Indeed we may find that the most helpful church models might be drawn from the first 150 years of the Christian church, when it began as a church movement with neither

³⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

political power nor social influence within a pluralist environment.”⁴¹ In other words, if the structure leans, go back and find the point of differentiation and rebuild on a sure foundation. Thus, the modern church becomes renewing for each community and each generation with the mission of God intact.

As part of the overall assessment of My Father’s House Christian Center, its doctrines and practices will need to be evaluated in order to gauge whether the church aligns with the mission of Christ. The first area of discernment will come from the Scriptures, focusing on the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:16-20. The second area of assessment will be to look at the historical Church to clarify the theological shifts away from errant beliefs and practices. Thus, MFHCC will be positioned for corrective movement based upon orthodox doctrine, and corrective theological movement.

⁴¹ Gibbs, *Church Next*, 11.

PART TWO
BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL, THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3
THE MISSION OF CHRIST

The Tower of Pisa leans away from vertical because the builders neglected two major elements in building the tower. The first area neglected was the soil they planted the tower in. “That the campanile was to be built on unstable ground (soil) was no surprise to the architect or any other builder in Pisa; shifty alluvial terrain, was, and still is, a common occurrence in the region and foundations were calculated accordingly.”⁴² The builders must take into account the soil that the structure will be planted in order to determine the ground will support the intended structure. The second concern was the depth of the foundation. “The whole structure is 60 meters tall and weighs 14,453 metric tons, but the 3-meter-deep foundation is wholly inadequate for such a load.”⁴³ The tower would not be able to stand erect over time since the soil around the foundation is subject to shifts that eventually would produce a lean. Likewise, the depth of the foundation, measured at three meters, is far too shallow to support the height and weight of the tower.

⁴² Shrady, *A Skewed History*, 67-68.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10

Even if the tower was planted in firm soil, the absence of a deep foundational structure renders the tower as vulnerable to a lean and collapse. The result is that the Tower of Pisa was doomed to lean because of foundational factors that should have been taken into account by the towers builders.

In the beginning MFHCC was planted as a new church in the community of La Mirada without any critical thought into the mission of Christ. The idea was to create an environment to develop ministries as those ministries pertained to the church. Secondly, as the church was formed and leaders assigned little thought was given to embedded theology or competing visions by the new leaders and church members. These were overlooked building flaws that would soon surface as a lean away from Christian orthodoxy.

In the first chapter of *Missional Church*, Darrel Guder states, “Mission means sending, and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.”⁴⁴ We see this played out in the calling of Israel to be God’s people and in their history as documented in Scripture. God sends “His only begotten Son” (John 3:16) to bring salvation to humankind through Jesus’ ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. This theme is continued in the sending of the Holy Spirit to empower the Church to witness the good news in Jesus Christ. Thus, I understand the Church to be a missional “sent” people as we carry out Jesus’ command from John 20:21, “as the Father sent me, I send you.” Taking this one step further, “mission is not just what the church does; it is what the church is.”⁴⁵ Thereby the nature of the church is that it “exists as the

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998), 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

missionary people of God.”⁴⁶ The nature of the church is established in its existence as the continuing mission of Christ to our communities.

Reggie McNeal says, “The rise of the missional church is the single biggest development in Christianity since the Reformation.”⁴⁷ This statement by McNeal is a fair assessment of the church’s perhaps un-learning itself, applying a theological correction to the church model from the early/mid twentieth century that held to a “build it and they will come” model. A missional church reflects the mission of Christ in thought and action. The rise of the missional church, a church that carries on the mission of Christ, is a church that incorporates the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19 in its everyday life within each and every ministry event and function.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission from Matthew 28:16-20 contains the command of Jesus Christ to take his teaching throughout the world. The eleven disciples proceed to the mountain that Jesus had designated for them to meet with him. Upon seeing Jesus, they worship him, even though some of the disciples were still doubtful. Jesus speaks to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” Jesus continues, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” It is at this point in time that the mission of God through Jesus Christ becomes the mission of Christ

⁴⁶ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 32.

⁴⁷ Reggie McNeal. *Missional Renaissance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), Introduction.

through evangelism. The Great Commission mandate has to be passed from one generation to the next. Each generation is responsible for reaching its own generation.

The importance of Christ's command to his disciples to go into the world to proclaim the gospel is witnessed by the fact that this command occurs in all four Gospels (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 17:18; 20:21). Each account adds a distinctive emphasis. Eddie Gibbs stresses, "Each underlines the same objective of sending the church out into the world bearing good news."⁴⁸ Of equal importance, the Great Commission stresses Jesus' kingship, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Clearly, nothing is outside of Christ's control. His followers are given the assurance of his kingship, along with his magisterial presence, now and forever.

The Great Commission also directs the Church to disciple new believers, "Go therefore and make disciples." Interestingly, Jesus does not say, make new believers, or new converts. His words are clear and precise, "make disciples." Richard Peace in his book, *Conversion in the New Testament* outlines the conversion process in three stages, Quest, Commitment, and Formation. The Formation stage or process is concerned with making disciples. Peace says, "If formational assistance is not given to new believers, what evangelism produces is converts (who may or may not last) and not disciples (which is what Jesus desires, according to Matt. 28:19)."⁴⁹ Peace rightly makes the distinction between converts and disciples. The Great Commission is not about just confessions of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; rather, it is focused on engaging the new believer in the

⁴⁸ Gibbs, *In Name Only*, 55.

⁴⁹ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 316.

“Formation stage.” The ongoing goal of discipleship is to help the new believer conform to the image of Christ.

The Great Commission serves as the plumb line for the mission of Christ. Any attempt at ascertaining the mission of Christ must develop through Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus’ directives as recorded by Matthew stand as the beacon for evangelism. For MFHCC, the Great Commission is essential as the mission of Christ, informing the church evangelically. In effect, Jesus’ command “to go” “and make disciples” is the soil in which the church builds its structures. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8 NRSV); there is not shifting of thought or intent. I can draw assurance and comfort from God if we are willing to plant in his field.

Called by Christ

The call of Christ, the “follow me” of the Gospels is the entry point of conversion. When Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 5:18-19) to Peter and his brother Andrew, he is saying, in effect, I want to change your life through discipleship. Jesus did not call them to full time ministry outright; rather, he was calling them to take part in a life-long journey that would inform the ministry Jesus was calling them to. The call of Christ advances in the lives of potential believers through process as well dramatic conversion. For example, the apostle Paul experienced the “follow me” call of Christ in a three-part conversion process.

Richard Peaces captures the call of Christ as he relates Paul’s conversion process as a three-part movement. “First there is insight,” Second there is a turning,” and “Third,

there is transformation.”⁵⁰ The call of Christ must take into account the process or journey that each believer enters into as he or she follows Christ. Paul on the road to Damascus with his embedded Pharisaic theology intact encounters light from heaven that flashes all around him. Paul falls to the ground and hears a voice call out his name, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me” (Acts 9:1-4)? Paul responds, “Who art thou Lord?” The voice replies, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). At this point in time, Paul encounters a call from Christ that supersedes his mission as informed by his theology. Paul, blinded and on the ground, asks, “What am I to do, Lord” (Acts 22:10)? Acts 9:7-19, relates that Saul is led on to Damascus where he is three days without his sight. The Lord speaks to a man named Ananias in a vision and tells him to go lay his hands on Paul so that he might regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias does as he is told, and something like scales fall from Paul’s eyes as he regains his sight. In Acts 9:20-22 we are told Paul immediately begins to proclaim Jesus, “He is the Son of God.” All the while, those that know of Paul’s former life are amazed at his transforming, and Paul continues to gain strength and confound the Jews in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Paul’s call by Christ is highlighted by his “insight, turning, and transformation.” Working with Richard Peace’s diagram for conversion, “insight” is necessary before a person can turn. “In order for the turning to take place there must be some sense of what one is turning from and an understanding of what one is turning to.”⁵¹ Certainly Paul had a zeal for the Law that was derived from his embedded Jewish theological assumptions.

⁵⁰ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 56.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

Paul's zeal for persecuting the church was most likely the outcome of his trying to live out his theological assumptions. But once Jesus questions Paul's motives, Paul is challenged to look at himself through his assumptions. This is "insight" as Paul finds his zeal is not pleasing to God. From this point, Paul can now turn to Christ.

Another aspect of conversion, moving from "insight to turning," is defined by Ray S. Anderson as "formal logic" and "inner logic."⁵² Formal logic is ideas and concepts derived from experience that develop into objective knowledge. On the other hand, inner logic disengages judgment based in formal logic, and is now open to the discovery of the inner reality of a new revelation. Paul, in effect, set aside his formal logic about Jesus and his church in order to come to a new reality about Christ. Paul's insight is now informed by the inner logic of Jesus' pointed question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me" (Acts 9:4)?

Paul turns from the Law of Moses to the revelation of the law through Christ; he leaves behind persecution and journeys towards apostleship. Paul does not leave Judaism and wander off as someone lost; he embraces Christ as someone found. Paul's inner logic frees him from the restraint of tradition; he is free to hold onto Christ. Those that were amazed at Paul's transformation would have to move from formal logic to an inner logic in order to grasp the magnitude of Paul's conversion to Christianity. Paul's conversion is informed by his transformation, from persecuting the church to proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. As Richard Peace describes Paul's transformation, "His commitment is

⁵² Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 11.

translated into a new life experience in which there is a different inner dynamic as well as a different outer lifestyle and calling.”⁵³

Into our Community with the Gospel

The apostle Paul’s conversion experience informs MFHCC to move from a formal logic to an inner logic that is based upon the call of Christ. Paul’s three-part conversion process ends with his engaging the local community with the gospel. Engaging the local community is the natural progression of the call of God. The individual members of the local church are not called by Christ just to experience personal enhancement; they are called into the body of Christ. It is the body of Christ that fulfills the Great Commission by going out into the community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Reggie McNeal writes that the Church in North America must “rediscover the mission of the Church.”⁵⁴ McNeal’s thesis in part is that the present-day Church is out of touch with the reality of the world we live in. McNeal relates many congregations and church leaders have responded to the collapse of the church culture in North America “by adopting a refuge mentality.”⁵⁵ What this means is that congregations are at a loss to carry out the Great Commission, to go into their respective communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church exists to take the mission of Christ into the world. When and where that task fails, there must be the desire to recapture the mission of the Church.

⁵³ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 100.

⁵⁴ Reggie McNeal, *Present Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), Introduction.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

In the recovery of the mission of Christ, a distinction must be made between church growth and engaging the local community. Church growth should be the product of evangelism.⁵⁶ The visual appeal of church members can be misleading. The Church is not commanded to draw a crowd; it is commanded to evangelize our communities, baptizing and discipling new converts to Christ. The result of a church growth mentality or a numbers only outlook is what Eddie Gibbs describes as being “market driven,” instead of “mission driven.” Gibbs says, “Unfortunately most pastors and church leaders have no missiological training, Consequently they resort to marketing strategies in place of missionary insights in their attempts to reach out to a population that is becoming increasingly distanced from the church,”⁵⁷ In order to go into our community with the gospel, there is the need for a paradigm shift away from market driven models to a biblical model that realigns the church with the Great Commission.

The task for MFHCC is to develop theologically from the call of Christ. There must be an urgency to fulfill Christ’s mission for the church. The community that MFHCC resides in must evangelized, but the tension lies between the embedded theology of the members of the church and the call of Christ. In order to reach the community, MFHCC leaders and members must do an inward search for their motives and theology and gain an insight to just where they are in the realm of God’s plans. Next, once the insight reveals the need for a paradigm shift to a new model for evangelism, the church can turn in a new direction. Once the new direction is internalized, MFHCC can then act as a transformed entity, moving into the local community with the gospel.

⁵⁶ Often, instead of church growth, individuals transfer from one church to another.

⁵⁷ Gibbs, *In Name Only*, 36.

In order to go into our or any community there must be the reinventing of evangelism from the standpoint of the call of Christ. The formal logic that church members, as well as leaders bring into the overall structure of the church must give way to an inner logic as presented by the Scriptures. The formal logic, the things they heard and believed from errant teaching and then passed on to one another, affects the church as theological inbreeding.

Theological inbreeding is false teaching that leads to false assumptions about God, Christ, and the nature of the church. Once the false assumptions go back and forth among the church members, the mission of the church mutates and become misdirected. As the spiritual gene pool is closed off, the church will adhere to a formal logic that leans away from Christian orthodoxy. There must be a systematic strategy to alter false assumptions and the embedded theology of church members that follow the movements of humans.

The Problems with the Church in Corinth

The apostle Paul implores the Corinthians to adhere to the foundation, which is Jesus Christ, in order to build the Church of Jesus Christ without lean. Paul's task, in effect, is to keep the theological plumb line of the church true to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Thus, 1 Corinthians 3:1-11 stands as Paul's admonition to the Body of Christ to continue in his teaching without the importation of other schools of thought in regards to the structure of the church.

This particular passage is essential for the development of the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul's concern for the Church is that it be theologically true to the mission of Christ. Paul is arguing for a true foundation for the Church without the ills of

syncretism.⁵⁸ Therefore when the Paul speaks of people claiming, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” he is combating syncretism, one of the major intrusions into the historical church that is defined here as the “lean.”

The syncretism that Paul is combating is a result of the pluralistic make up of the city of Corinth. Corinth was an international city of commerce and travel. Since it was situated between the Corinthian and Saronic Gulfs, it was served by two harbors. The vessels sailing from Asia and Egypt landed in the Saronic harbor, while ships sailing from Europe docked at the Corinthian harbor. Corinth was one of the largest and most prominent cities in the Roman Empire. There was a large forum in Corinth, along with a number of commercial and civic buildings, fountains, shops, and public areas. There were also two major inland roads into the city, one from the north originating from the harbor of Lechaem, and the one from the south, which originated from Cenchrea. Since Corinth at any given time was home to a vast array of people of varying beliefs, the city became a melting pot for vice, crime, and pluralistic religious thought.⁵⁹

Pagan sanctuaries thrived in Corinth. At the northern end of the city stood the sanctuary of Asclepius, where medicine was practiced along with idolatry. Close to the forum was the temple of Athena, whose earlier historical identification was as the temple of Apollo. At the west end of the forum, there was a huge temple that first served to worship the Olympian gods, and later the Roman emperors. In addition, several smaller temples were standing at the western end of the forum. Corinth was also home to the temple of Aphrodite with its temple-slaves and prostitutes. These pagan sanctuaries,

⁵⁸ Syncretism is the reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion.

⁵⁹ Gordon Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1987).

along with the commercial elements of Corinth, gave the city a history of being exceptionally immoral.

In the cited Corinthian passage, Paul is attempting to put the Corinthian church in its spiritual and theological place. Paul admonishes the Corinthians as a parent would when counseling a child who is trying to grow up too fast. Paul's concern for their well-being is evident when he uses the analogy of, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food." He does not want them to digest what they are not ready to have, or partake in things of which they have little understanding. Paul takes it one step further as he highlights their acts of jealousy and strife as evidence of their "fleshly" behavior. Paul's authority to speak to them in this manner no doubt stems from the fact that he is the founder and primary teacher of the church in Corinth, having spent eighteen months with them (Acts 18:17).

Following the Movements of Men

Another theme in this passage is the fragmentation of the church, as some were following Paul, Apollos, or other teachers. Paul addresses the syncretism that was taking hold of the church in Corinth by explaining that Godly instruction works together, "I planted, Apollos watered," from 1 Corinthians 3:6. Paul's thought is clear within the text that the Lord is at work in all of them according to God's plan. In order to counter the fragmentation taking hold of the Corinthian church, Paul relates that Jesus has laid a foundation upon which we are to build. "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9a), Paul writes, in order to place the Corinthians at God's disposal. Paul continues, "You are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor. 3:9b), further illustrating that one must stay close to God if God's will is to be the outcome. The premise is that, as Christians, we are God's

field; God desires to plant something within us, such as his word, or will. As God's building, the desire is that God would occupy us as Paul says in First Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells within you?" Paul's point is that there can be no deviation from God's foundation, and that Paul is merely instructing them from God's Divine plan as revealed through Jesus Christ.

At this stage, it should be noted that 1 Corinthians does not reveal any Jewish-Gentile tension, but there are three textual considerations that make reference to the Corinthians' former pagan days: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 8:7; 12:1-3. The Hellenism of the Corinthians may have played a part in the tension within the passages. The Corinthians could have blended Paul's teaching and the teachings of others with *sophia* and *gnosis*.⁶⁰ As a result of that, they could have viewed their new faith as the divine *sophia*⁶¹ and the syncretism of the gospel along with their former ways as increased knowledge, thereby drawing Paul's response that they are walking as mere men.

The Hellenism of the Corinthians and the resulting syncretism of the gospel would affect the theological foundation of the church there. The Tower of Pisa does not lean because the wind blows upon it; rather, it leans because of a faulty foundation. Paul, the master builder, understands God's plumb line and the necessity to build straight. The Tower of Pisa began to lean early on during its construction. The problems with the tower that occurred later were symptomatic of foundational errors. If the builders of the tower had stopped and dismantled the tower and reverted to a vertical plumb line, the tower would have been built without a lean. The apostle Paul comprehends that things were

⁶⁰ Wisdom and knowledge.

⁶¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 14.

developing out of kilter within the church at Corinth, and he sends his words of revelation and correction to address the critical “lean” in God’s building as it relates to the Corinthians. Thus, the passage outlines critical problems facing the church. Those problems include immaturity, syncretism, and failure to place the teachings of Christ as central to their mission.

We Are God’s Fellow Workers

The apostle Paul describes the members of the church as, “God’s fellow workers” (1Cor. 3:9a). Because the church in Corinth was dividing itself into competing theological factions, Paul’s letter is meant to unify them around the common cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The purpose of unification serves to direct the church to the mission of Christ to which they have been called. First Corinthians 3:1-11 is one of Paul’s central themes in his first letter to the Corinthians.

In verse 1-4 of 1 Corinthians 3, there is a certain shock value in Paul’s language that no doubt is used to get the attention of the Corinthians. Paul’s intent, then, is to have them look at their own behavior for he says, “Are you not walking as mere men?” Paul is not saying that they do not have the Holy Spirit; he is merely saying that, since they have the Spirit, they need not walk as mere men. The assertion is for the Corinthians to cease walking in fleshly ways since people of the Spirit should not behave so.⁶²

In verse one; Paul uses *pneumatikoi* (spiritual), *sarkikoi* (fleshly), and *nepios* (baby), as descriptions of the Corinthians’ problem.⁶³ The Corinthians consider

⁶² The word *sarkikoi* means fleshly or carnal. *Bibleworks*, 6: Software for Biblical Research (Norfolk, VA: Bibleworks, LLC, n.d.).

⁶³ All these words are adjective, dative masculine plural.

themselves as *pneumatikoi* (spiritual persons with spiritual gifts), but Paul's use of *sarkikoi* is meant to counter "their spirituality by stating that they are fleshly, which means that they are living from the perspective of the present age."⁶⁴ The intent here is to not accuse them of being void of God's Spirit, but to highlight that they are allowing the wisdom of the present day to permeate their thought. Paul's use of *nepios* rather than *teknon*⁶⁵ makes the distinction between being young in the Lord (*teknon*) and claiming to be adults when in fact they are behaving as *nepios* (babies). Paul uses different adjectives to make his argument in dramatic fashion. Continuing in the same manner, the imagery of "milk" versus "solid food" is used by Paul. Paul has them on a diet of milk as *nepios* since they are not ready to digest the solid food that those that are truly *pneumatikoi* can handle. The evidence that they should continue in the milk of the word is seen in the jealousy and strife and exists among them.

In the next section (1 Cor. 3:5-9), the issues from 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 are picked up again, and the recognizable imagery of farming is used to further enhance Paul's discourse. Paul relates that he and Apollos are only servants; the farming analogy is inserted to back up and frame Paul's assertion for servant-leadership. Paul states, "I planted, Apollos watered,... but it is God who causes the growth." (1 Cor. 3:6-7). In the first part of verse 7, the Greek word *hice* (one) is used to link the one who plants and the one who waters.⁶⁶ The idea is that not only are they one, but they have the same purpose. Paul is speaking directly about the factions that the Corinthians are following that are the

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 124.

⁶⁵ The word *teknon* means child. *Bibleworks* 6.

⁶⁶ *Hice* is an adjective, nominative, neuter, singular.

cause of jealousy and strife. If these factions were true to the gospel of Christ, then the outcome of each group's teaching would be the same, to follow Christ alone. This point illuminates Paul's assertion that the Corinthians are *nepios* and not spiritually mature in spite of their own feelings on the subject. In verse 9, the idea is that the farm and the workers belong to God and it is to God alone that all are accountable. There is a reference to the diversity of the gifts of the workers and also the unity of the workers. The end of verse 9 transitions from images of farm and farm workers to construction as Paul recounts, "You are God's building."

A Wise Master Builder Building upon the Work of Jesus Christ

In 1 Corinthian 3:10, Paul refers to himself as *architekton*. *Architekton* is, of course, the source of the word *architect*. *Architekton* can mean "master builder, an architect, the superintendent in the erection of buildings."⁶⁷ However, Paul's use of *Architekton* is informed by, "I laid a foundation" (*themelios*.)⁶⁸ Jesus Christ is of course the foundation (3:11), but what Paul is saying is that he is a wise builder because he follows the plans laid out before him by Christ. Paul is not in any way suggesting that Paul is building upon Paul or anyone other than Christ. When he relates to the Corinthians that no other foundation can be laid other than that which is laid by Christ, he is consistent with his overall ministry as an apostle and teacher who is following Christ.

Every one of Paul's letters is laced by admonitions warning against false teaching, which becomes in effect the "lean" within the church. For example, Paul writes, "You foolish Galatians," it is not by our works that we are saved (Gal. 3). Paul's letter to the

⁶⁷ Bibleworks 6.

⁶⁸ Noun, Accusative masculine singular.

Ephesians emphasizes that the Ephesians are rich beyond measure in Christ Jesus, yet they are living like beggars because they are ignorant of their true wealth. To the Philippians he writes, “[Follow in] my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (Phil. 3:17). The Colossians are reminded that “Christ is the head of the Body” and that they are free from the doctrine of men (Col. 1:18, 2:20). From this, it can be seen that Paul understands his role as a “wise builder,” and his words and actions stem from his desire to inform the Church of the correct pattern for church structure. Paul is keenly aware that the structure will “lean” from vertical, straight towards God, if anything other than Christ is used in the construction of the church.

The final two verses of this section (10-11) bring forth the concept that something is being built. In this case, it is the body of Christ and the individual members of the body that are being built according to God’s plan. When Paul says, “I have laid a foundation,” the word *laid* emphasizes the enduring condition of the foundation.⁶⁹ The Corinthians were quick to move to an “enhanced” foundation of wisdom and knowledge without regard to the enduring nature of Paul’s teaching. The idea is that the *architekton keimai* (laid) a foundation and that someone else is building upon it, but each person must be careful as to how he or she builds since no person can lay a foundation other than that which has already been *keimai* by Christ.

Paul says that he built as a wise master builder because of the *charis* given him.⁷⁰ This might be a reference to the overall grace of God, but more likely “grace” refers to a

⁶⁹ The verb is a participle, present middle or passive deponent, accusative, masculine singular.

⁷⁰ *Charis* (grace) is an adjective, normal nominative, masculine, singular.

specific *charism* “given him” by God.⁷¹ In this case, it would refer to Paul’s apostolic and teaching ministry. The *charis* is God’s enabling power, over and above the wisdom and knowledge of the day. Wisdom and knowledge may certainly enhance one’s position, but only God can gift and enable a person or ministry. Paul is *sophos* (wise) because he laid a foundation of Christ with the Corinthians.⁷² His choice of *sophos* reinforces his argument against the prevailing wisdom of the day, as he is wise since he follows Christ.

Finally, the last verse in this section (11) implores the Corinthians to heed the foundation that Paul built (Jesus Christ crucified). Also, they are to continue to build upon the work of Christ. Paul is clear that, as *architekton*, he is merely following Christ (“What am I to do Lord” [Acts 22:10]) and carefully building up the church, instructing it to follow in the footsteps of our Lord.

An Emerging Community—Antioch

The first-century church in Antioch will be used as an antecedent for an emerging church. There is a distinction between *emergent* and *emerging* as pointed out by Ray S. Anderson in *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Anderson cites Dan Kimball who considers “the term *emergent* to refer primarily to theological change and discussion while *emerging* has more to do those who are rethinking church and ecclesiology as any missionary would as we enter new cultures.”⁷³ My Father’s House Christian Center is an emerging church within the current culture of La Mirada, California. In order to

⁷¹ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 137.

⁷² *Sophos* is an adjective, normal nominative masculine singular.

⁷³ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 12.

“emerge” with the mission of Christ intact there is the necessity to re-think and seek an authentic biblical and theological foundation.

The use of the church in Antioch stems from the fact that Antioch emerged as a church plant in a new environment with an emergent theology that differed from the theology of the church in Jerusalem. Anderson’s thesis is: “The Christian community that emerged out of Antioch constitutes the original form and theology of the emerging church as contrasted with the believing community at Jerusalem”⁷⁴ The church in Jerusalem reflects the established church model that grew from an existing pattern of worship. Anderson says, “The theology of the Jerusalem church was committed to historical precedent, crippled by religious scruple and controlled by a fortress mentality.”⁷⁵ On the other hand, the church in Antioch was free to emerge with a theology of revelation, moving from a formal logic to the inner logic of revelation. The focus of discussion here in considering the church in Antioch is to understand and underline the emergent theology that came out of Antioch. Therefore, the discussion is focused on the theology of a church plant, in this case, My Father’s House Christian Center, as opposed to a study of emergent churches or the emerging church movement.

The city of Antioch was founded about 300 BC by Seleucus I Nicanor one of Alexander the Great’s generals. Seleucus relocated fifty-three hundred residents from Athens and Macedonia to establish the new city. The harbor, Seleucia, served as the gateway to the city. The city had a mixed population of Greeks, Macedonians, Syrians,

⁷⁴ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

Jews, and Romans as a result of its having fallen into Roman control 64 BC when the Romans fought under Pompey.

Once Antioch was annexed by Rome, it became the capital province of Syria and the eastern headquarters for the Roman military. By the first century AD, Antioch ranked behind Rome and Alexandria in size within the Roman Empire. Antioch was also located on the commercial road from Asia to the Mediterranean and enjoyed wealth and prosperity due to its location, harbor, and nearby wine and olive production. The city of Antioch was multifaceted, as well as multi-cultural.⁷⁶

The Book of Acts makes the assertion that, in Antioch, the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). The church in Antioch was the church that sent Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey to the Gentiles. They had ministered in Antioch for a year, and the church sent Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark, on their first missionary journey to Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 11:19-26). While there is no clear evidence that any Christian literature was fashioned in Antioch, some scholars argue in favor of the Gospel of Matthew, Paul's letter to the Galatians, and the Gospel of Luke as have been written in Antioch.⁷⁷ Whatever the actions that took place in Antioch, the church there played an important role in the movement of Christianity from Jerusalem onward.

Ray S. Anderson argues that what we have within the church in Antioch is the continuation of the mission of Christ despite the break with the theology as presented by the church in Jerusalem. Anderson goes on to say that emerging churches must argue

⁷⁶ Source: Craig A. Evans, and Stanly E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

their theological continuity with Christ away from historical traditions. In the same sense, a non-denominational church plant such as MFHCC must present Jesus as the cornerstone of the church so as to inform the mission of the church. The lack of a historical tradition does not remove MFHCC from a connection to the risen Christ. However, as with any emerging church, there must be a theological response that validates and connects to the Body of Christ. Antioch proved to be a sending church that desired to fulfill the Great Commission. Antioch was new wine in new wineskins; it was “vintage” as opposed to traditional.

The church in Jerusalem was stationary, grounded within the Law of Moses and Temple traditions. This does not mean that Jesus was not proclaimed Messiah by the church in Jerusalem. Rather, it illustrates the tension between the old and the new. “The emergent theology of Jesus was like new wine: it could not be contained in old wineskins.”⁷⁸ The apostle Paul is not a product of the church in Jerusalem; he does not have the fortress mentality. Paul encounters the Christ on the road to Damascus, free from the theological restraints of Jerusalem. Paul, free to develop an emergent theology that is clearly new wine, does not travel to Jerusalem where the old wineskin awaits. He moves to Antioch where his new wine can develop in the new wineskin of the church in Antioch. This is vintage theology untainted by tradition.

The church in Antioch expresses the mission of the church within the community of Antioch. As Darrell L. Guder relates, “Churches are called to be bodies of people sent on a mission rather than storefronts for the vendors of religious services and goods.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 85.

⁷⁹ Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 108.

The church in Jerusalem does not model the missional church since it developed out of an existing structure and tradition. Guder continues, “Churches must discover what it means to act faithfully on behalf of the reign of God within the public life of their society.”⁸⁰ Antioch moved beyond the cultural forms in order to become a sent church, which developed an emerging theology for the local community. In other words, Antioch was free to experience and express the mission of God through the lives of its members and develop under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The church is constantly being re-created through the mission of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Antioch models an authentic missional ecclesiology, a community that developed its mission through evangelism.

A missional ecclesiology is biblical. What one believes about the Church must be based on what the Bible teaches. Biblical perspectives inform the Church and send the Church to continue Christ’s mission to the world. The Great Commission gives the Church a purpose and with it an identity. We are called by God to the cross, and we are sent from the cross by Christ “for once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:10).

In order for MFHCC to shape its mission, the church must consider the historical record since a missional ecclesiology is historical. Churches that have emerged into new communities with new cultural expressions stand to enlighten and inform the present-day church. Without Antioch, for example, the church would be confined to replicating the church in Jerusalem with its fortress mentality, forever locked in tradition and never freed to discover new wine in new wineskins.

⁸⁰ Guder, ed. *Missional Church*, 108.

Historical Examples of Emerging Churches

An authentic missional ecclesiology is contextual. Ecclesiology advances within a distinct cultural context. George G. Hunter III, chronicling the conversion of the Irish Celts and their subsequent evangelism of Northern Europe, writes, “Patrick’s leadership had ‘indigenized’ Christianity to Irish cultural soil more than anyone else was attempting anywhere.”⁸¹ Patrick grew up in the late fourth century in what is now northeast England. During the Roman occupation, Patrick’s family had succumbed to the Roman culture. When Patrick was sixteen, Celtic pirates from Ireland captured Patrick and many other young men and sold them into slavery. Three things had a major impact on Patrick during the six years of his enslavement. First, Patrick connected with God in a profound way. Although Patrick’s family was Christian, he had never really connected with God. During his captivity Patrick became a devout Christian. Second, Patrick came to understand the Irish Celtic people, their language, and culture. After Patrick had escaped his captives, he trained for the priesthood and eventually returned to the Irish Celts as an evangelist.⁸² Patrick’s mission to the Celtic people was successful because he did not force a “Roman” ideology on the Celts. Patrick was successful because he contextualized Christianity within the culture of those he was attempting to reach with the gospel. In much the same way, the apostle Paul was successful in Antioch and elsewhere because he did not evangelize with a Jerusalem church model; rather, he was successful because he was free to develop an emergent theology for the culture he encountered in Antioch.

⁸¹ Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, 27.

⁸² *Ibid.*, chapter 1.

Ray Anderson claims, “The emergent theology of Paul was not based on a new religion but new life through resurrection.”⁸³ Paul did not preach a Jerusalem gospel, nor did he expect the people to be anything other than what they were. Paul preached from a Damascus road experience with the risen Christ. He was touched by the love of God as a devout Jew who was persecuting the Church and Christ.⁸⁴ Paul was not converted to a religious tradition; he was converted to a new life through resurrection. This is the gospel he took to Antioch. Antioch likewise is not bound to a system unrelated to their situation. They were bound to the resurrected Christ and the Spirit of Christ. What developed in Antioch was the new wine of Christ that emerges within the believing community there. “Paul does not ask for conformity but for commitment.”⁸⁵ Whatever changes that occurred in Antioch came through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, not through the letter of the law or through conformity. Antioch thus became the antecedent for emerging churches that desire to develop in their respective communities with the gospel, and the mission of Christ intact.

My Father’s House Christian Center is thus informed by the believing community in Antioch and Paul’s ministry. MFHCC emerged in La Mirada in much the same way as the church in Antioch. As a new church, in a new community, is free to develop an emergent biblical theology with the mission of Christ intact.

⁸³ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 141.

⁸⁴ Romans 5:5, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts.”

⁸⁵ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 144.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL CORRECTIVES

In the spring of 1902, a fissure appeared on the northern face of the campanile of Venice's Piazza San Marco, which was built on soil similar to Pisa's. Upon examination of the crack, municipal architects and engineers determined that the damage was insignificant and could be handled with routine maintenance. On July 11, the campanile was again inspected, and city officials were reassured that there was no imminent danger and no cause for alarm. At 9:30 AM on Monday, July 14, a municipal engineer noticed the campanile's fissure now ran the entire length of the tower. Then, at 9:47 AM, the entire bell tower burst open and crumpled to the ground.⁸⁶

In the introduction of his book *The New Reformation*, Greg Ogden writes, "We live in the generation when the unfinished business of the Reformation may at last be completed." Ogden continues, "Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others unleashed a revolution that promised to liberate the church from a hierarchical priesthood by rediscovering "the priesthood of all believers," but the Reformation never fully delivered on its promise."⁸⁷ The Reformation is just one segment of church history in which church leaders took a hard look at the structure of the Church. What makes the Reformation appealing is that the Reformers tried to correct the errors they found. Surely, in some areas, the Reformation dismantled problematic theology and replaced it with sound

⁸⁶ Shrady, *A Skewed History*, 135-137.

⁸⁷ Greg Ogden, *The New Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 11.

biblical directives. Perhaps, in other areas, the Reformers failed to address critical areas of stress within the Church. However, the Reformers spawned a period where the leaders evaluated the church for critical flaws in its structure and applied a correction. In some cases, as with Luther, a whole new church developed as the old structure, in effect, collapsed around him. Like the municipal engineer who noticed the campanile's fissure ran the length of the structure, before he could do anything to prevent the collapse of the tower, Luther suffered a similar fate as the old structure of the church collapsed around him. Luther, excommunicated from the church in Rome, had little choice but to build a new church structure that he hoped would be found not leaning. On the other hand, the Church in Rome initiated its own set of reforms. In its process, the Church attempted to keep the configuration intact by supplying a correction without disturbing the existing structure. Either way, the Reformation and its subsequent events provide a historical antecedent for addressing the problem within the church structure.

Historically, the church has had markers along its path to help steer it in the direction of Christ. At the same time, the Church has struggled to maintain its identity and fulfill the mission of Christ to each new generation. Whether through the teachings of the apostles, the patristic fathers, the Church doctors, or its creeds, the Church has attempted to follow Christ. This is critically important to the life and wellbeing of the church. Without the work, the tireless efforts of countless believers along its path, Christianity would have collapsed in a heap of confused theology. The apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, provides the correct direction for the church, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation

another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it” (1 Cor. 3:10).

Go Therefore and Make Disciples

The Great Commission from Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” along with verse 20, “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,” stands as Christ’s assignment to the eleven disciples, and to all believers in Jesus as Messiah. Jesus’ ascension, linked with the command to “go” and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit, initiate the beginning of the church age. Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, forever changed his followers. Their task was not effortless since they faced the difficult assignment of surviving in a hostile world. The assignment to develop into a believing community was and is an arduous journey. The Church was to keep Jesus’ message alive and withstand the pull of Judaism and other religious forms. Believers were called to conduct their everyday lives according to the Scriptures. They had to obey Jesus’ commandment to spread the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth. The apostles and Christians that followed in their wake would spend centuries working out the answers to these and other fundamental issues.

Kenneth Scott Latourette states, “It was from Judaism that Christianity sprang. Indeed, at the outset it appeared to be only one of several sects of Judaism.”⁸⁸ The first church in Jerusalem consisted mainly of Jewish believers who no doubt struggled with Judaic traditions and the persecution from the Roman government. Once the believing

⁸⁸ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 10.

community spread out from Jerusalem, though, the struggle continued as Christianity went forth into the rest of the Roman world. The early Church endured the official persecution from the Roman government and the unofficial persecution of those that saw Rome's actions towards the church as an opportunity to condemn and attack Christians. The early Church also had to wrestle with pagan societies and various forms of philosophy such as Gnosticism. However, it was not until the fourth century and the Roman Emperor Constantine's identification with Christianity that the Church was able to obtain official religious status. "Historians have speculated about Constantine's motives for identifying with the Christians,"⁸⁹ according to Paul Spickard and Kevin Cragg, but, regardless of Constantine's motives, Christianity became an official religion within the Roman Empire. Latourette, asserts that, within five centuries of its inception, Christianity would move past other competitors for religious allegiance and become the professed faith of the rulers, and majority of the population of the Greco Roman world.⁹⁰ Thus, within five centuries, Christianity moved from a perceived sect of Judaism to the dominant religion of the non-Jewish world.

Inside the span of its first five centuries, Christianity moved southward from Jerusalem to Africa, eastward as far as Central Asia, northward to Turkey, along with Greece, and westward as far as Ireland. Surely one of factors that contributed to the growth of Christianity was the endorsement by Constantine, but, as Latourette points out, Christianity was already strong in many areas prior to Constantine.⁹¹ Christianity

⁸⁹ Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, *A Global History of Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 55.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

progressed for many reasons, but one of the key reasons was that Christians cared for their poor and imprisoned. “In times of distress churches would help one another by gifts of money or food.”⁹² These are but two areas where the modern Church could learn from the early Church and grow. Another area where Christianity took the lead over other religions was in the acceptance of women from all aspects of society. Yet, whatever cause can be found for the spread of Christianity, without doubt the greatest is the influence of Jesus Christ. The distinctive qualities of Christianity come from the teachings Jesus Christ. Other religions can and do exist without the one who began the respective movement, but if one removes Jesus from Christianity, there is no Christianity.

The spread of Christianity through the world was aided by the steadfast faith of believers who were martyred rather than deny Christ. Also, the patristic fathers helped the growth of the Church as they argued for church doctrines derived from the Scriptures. The Christian faith has also benefited from the early statements of faith such as the Apostles Creed, and the Nicene Creed. Such creeds gave a voice to the doctrines of the Church. Also important in the establishment of the Church were the councils, such as those at Nicaea and Chalcedon, from which came creeds and statements of faith, along with organizational structure.

As the church expanded in all geographic directions, the “Great Commission” proceeded as well. Perhaps, what is lost in the historical account of the Church is the telling of the conversion stories. At the heart of the mission of Christ is the salvation of the lost. In order for the Church to grow and expand its influence in the world, the unsaved needed to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. The growth of the early

⁹² Latourette, *History of Christianity*, vol. 1, 106.

Church, whether in the West or the East, was dependent upon the conversion of the lost, and their subsequent discipleship.

The expansion of the church was informed by the Great Commission, which in turn singles Christianity out among other religions. Christianity is not a set of rules or a pattern of life that one can adapt to. Rather, Christianity follows in the wake of Jesus Christ, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension, and his teachings. The gospel of Jesus was preached and accepted by those that were convicted of their sin, they repented, and they confessed Jesus as Lord. The result was the growth of the Church. Without the conversion of sinners to Christ, the Church cannot grow, and that is what makes the Great Commission so essential.

The success of the early Church in expanding from Jerusalem is embedded in Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations." The process of conversion incorporates the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the baptism of confessing believers, instruction, along with the organization of various believing communities. The expansion of the early Church effectively models the "Great Commission" for each succeeding generation. It is understood that each generation must contextualize the commission according to the community it is attempting to reach with the gospel. The Church today would benefit from looking at the early Church for historical correctives. Once the correctives are ascertained, church leaders can apply the necessary changes onto the grid of evangelism for their respective communities. It is imperative that the faulty areas be dismantled in order to supply a true corrective, rather than just building on an already leaning structure. Thus, the modern church, in this case MFHCC, is able to reach back to the inception of Christianity, and renew its call to the mission of Christ.

The Reformation, Correctional Church Movement

The Reformation as a correctional church movement was informed by the monastic movement. Mark Noll asserts, “The rise of monasticism was after Christ’s commission to his disciples, the most important and in many ways the most beneficial institutional event in the history of the church.”⁹³ Noll stresses that during the centuries between the reign of Constantine and the Protestant Reformation the truest ideals of the Gospel came out of the monastic movement. Monasticism developed as a corrective movement that would eventually inform Christianity through the work of the Reformers. For example; Luther began his biblical study as an Augustinian monk, while Calvin returned repeatedly to the work of Augustine.⁹⁴

Monasticism was unknown in the first two centuries of Christianity. The most famous of the early monks was Anthony who in the third century withdrew from the evils of society in search of perfection within the Christian life. The central component of the monastic movement was to seek perfection for the individual and for Christianity. By the fourth and fifth centuries monasticism had spread and developed into orders, with rules that governed each group. Kenneth Scott Latourette speaking of monasticism at the close of the fifth century relates that monasticism was a reaction against the laxity of mass conversion brought about by Constantine and the Roman Empire.⁹⁵ Monasticism was a response that reflected spiritual concern about the church success, and well being. Thereby, monasticism is a correctional movement.

⁹³ Mark A Noll *Turning Points* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000) 84

⁹⁴ Noll, 85

⁹⁵ Kenneth Scott Latourette *A History of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975) 221

The influence of the monastic movement is evident by monks like Jerome, who inspired biblical translation. The witness of the monk Patrick to the Celtic people pioneered Christian missions. The hymn writing monks Gregory and Bernard of Clairvaux, along with the theologians Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have inspired Christians for centuries. Monasticism although not without its flaws, has had a positive impact on the church and its leaders.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century marks one of the great epochs in the history of the church, as well as in the history of Western civilization. The Reformation was an occasion of dramatic change. Few would deny that the Reformation is a battleground of historical interpretation. Many issues and conflicts surround the Reformation. The dominance of the Church in Rome and the buying and selling of indulgences were areas where the battle lines were drawn. The Reformation was not purely a religious upheaval, nor was it the result only of certain political, social, and economic developments. This paper does not attempt to respond to those issues and concerns; rather, the Reformation and the movements that it spawned shall be useful as an antecedent for theological reflection that facilitates change within the structure of the MFHCC.

The events that led up to and surround the Reformation are as varied as the individuals that participated. However, with little doubt, Martin Luther and the publication of his Ninety-Five Theses mark the beginning of the Reformation. Luther was a youthful and unknown professor of theology of Wittenberg. The theme of his Theses was the doctrine of indulgence proclamation of John Tetzel. Since Luther's pronouncement was taken to be directed against the hierarchy and the papacy, he

received support from those that were dissatisfied with the general state of ecclesiastical affairs. Luther's intent was to develop dialogue on the issue of indulgence; the papacy, on the other hand, saw Luther as a troublemaker who needed to be disciplined. With the battle lines drawn and sides taken, the outcome could have been destructive to Christianity. To Luther's credit, he chose to wage his battle theologically from the Scriptures, which did not minimize the schism, but provided a theological corrective.

Earlier, during Luther's study of Scripture he came upon Romans 3:21-22: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe." "Here is where he found the concept of *passive righteousness*, which was to govern his understanding of Christianity from then on."⁹⁶ Luther's theology put him in direct conflict with the edicts of the papacy and informed his Ninety-Five Theses. Luther summarized his theological position with three phrases. The first of these was "faith alone," by which Luther inferred that salvation was by faith in God and not dependant on good works. Secondly, Luther said, "grace alone," meaning salvation is by grace, without any human cooperation. With the third phrase, "Scripture alone," Luther claimed that the Bible was the only source of authority. In doing so, he rejected the traditions of the Church as authoritative interpretations of the Bible. Thus, Luther was arguing against the theological lean away from Scripture by the papacy. The Church in Rome, governed by papal authority (rightly in Luther's mind), had shifted away from the foundational tenets of Christianity. Clearly, Luther spoke out against what he and the other reformers saw as a justification by works mentality from Rome. For Luther, there

⁹⁶ Spickard and Cragg, *A Global History of Christians*, 174.

was no middle ground between justification by faith and justification by works. What is of equal importance to Luther's theology is Luther's journey that inspired his new theological position.

“Martin Luther was the product of the Roman Catholic Christianity of the middle ages.”⁹⁷ He was born in Eisleben, 1483, the eldest of seven siblings. His parents were of peasant stock and as religious as other peasant homes of Germany at that time. His family was relatively well off because his grandfather, owned a large house and a small estate. Luther's father, Hans, worked as a miner, became a foreman and eventually became a member of a mining firm. Hans supported his family well and could afford to send Martin to the best schools in the area. As Luther grew up, he developed a fear of God as a stern taskmaster and judge, or, as Latourette describes it, “He stood in terror of Christ as judge.”⁹⁸ Luther continued his education, graduating from the University of Erfurt with a Master of Arts degree by the age of twenty-one, and began the study of law as a profession.

One day while he was out walking, a bolt of lightning crashed near him, and, in fear for his life, he made a vow to become a monk if God would spare his life. Lewis W. Spitz relates, “Although we do not know his inner state of mind, it seems likely that Luther was oppressed with an acute sense of mortality, was driven by the fear-motivated piety and religious scruples characteristic of the time.”⁹⁹ Holding to his vow, Luther entered an Augustinian monastery. “The monastery did not at once bring to Luther the

⁹⁷ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, vol. 2, 703.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Lewis W. Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001) 71.

assurance for which he longed. Indeed, for several years he was a disappointed, tortured soul.”¹⁰⁰ During his time in the monastery he studied theology, and, in September 1506, Luther took the irrevocable vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and prepared for ordination. In April 1507, Martin Luther was ordained as a priest.

Luther was singled out for theological study and was recommended by Johannes von Staupitz, the vicar-general of the Saxon Province of the Augustinians, to Elector Frederick for a position at the University of Wittenberg. Luther, who had been schooled in Aristotelianism and scholasticism, now moved, “toward the new theology of the Wittenberg theologians based on the Bible, St. Augustine, and the old fathers.”¹⁰¹ It was on October 19, 1512, that Luther became a doctor of theology, assumed the *lectura in biblia*, and took an oath to defend and expound the Holy Scriptures. Luther took this calling seriously; moreover, the private monk would now become a public figure. At this point in his life, Martin Luther was twenty-eight years old.

Luther’s journey from a miner’s son to church doctor required him to move away from the theological assumptions he had held as a youth as he was influenced by the ever expanding area of higher education. Martin entered the monastery as a frightened young man but became the teacher of other young men on a spiritual journey. For Luther to write his Ninety-five Theses, he had to be transformed from unenlightened to enlightened, from fearful, to confident. Yet, there would be another event in his life that would spawn the Reformation.

¹⁰⁰ Latourette, *History of Christianity*, vol. 2, 705.

¹⁰¹ Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation*, 72.

The key for Luther came about as Luther was reading the Bible in the tower room of the monastery and came upon Romans 1:17, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’” For Luther “The righteousness of God” he understood as “God, active, retributive, and punishing.”¹⁰² Luther saw that the Romans 1:17 passage must be understood in the light of Romans 3:24: “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” He now understood the “righteousness of God” as the passive imputed righteousness that God bestows upon human beings freely through Christ. This was a turning point for Luther; he was now reborn with a greater understanding of God’s grace. Luther’s embedded theology from his youth was replaced with what Lewis Spitz calls, “his evangelical approach for theology.”¹⁰³

Luther’s question of penance and true repentance fueled the indulgence controversy that initiated the Reformation. In response to the indulgences that were granted for visits to the sacred shrines in Rome in jubilee years, Luther prepared his Ninety-Five Theses for academic debate out of his concern for the Church. Surely, Luther viewed the Church as leaning away from the orthodoxy of Scripture. His intent was to restore the Church from theological miscues to a correct position based upon the Holy Scriptures. Obviously, Luther propelled others to speak out and rebel against the authority of Rome over the Church, but he also opened the door for the reclamation of the mission of Christ.

¹⁰² Spitz, *The Protestant Reformation*, 75.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Martin Luther posted his *Nintey-five Theses* on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517. In the years that followed Luther clarified his position in numerous writings. Perhaps the most famous defense of his position came in the form of three treatises written in 1520. In these writings Luther tried to outline his ideas in terms that would be understandable not only to the clergy but to people from a wide range of backgrounds. Luther composes *An Open Letter to Pope Leo X* as part of the treatises. Within the letter Luther frames his indignation as he writes, “I have truly despised your see, the Roman Curia.”¹⁰⁴ Luther continues, “The Roman Curia is already lost, for God’s wrath has relentlessly fallen upon it. It detests church councils, it fears a reformation, and it cannot allay its own corruption.”¹⁰⁵ Clearly, Luther sees the church in Rome as adrift and unable to correct its fall. Although, Luther may not have had a reformation movement in mind when he wrote his *Nintey-five Theses* in 1517, by 1520 Luther by his own words relates that a reform must take place within the Roman Curia.

It should be mentioned however, that the Roman Church did embark on a Counter-Reformation. The Counter-Reformation was in part, a reaction against Protestant criticism; although Kenneth Scott Latourette contends that the “Catholic Reformation” began before Luther and was proceeding simultaneously with the emergence of several varieties of Protestantism.¹⁰⁶ The Counter-Reformation was an attempt by the Roman Church to correct itself, which adds to the assertion that the historical church has attempted to correct its lean away from orthodoxy throughout its own history.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Luther *Three Treatises from the American Edition of Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) 268

¹⁰⁵ Luther, 269

¹⁰⁶ Latourette, 840

The Reformation moved elements within the Church through a passive righteousness. Justification by faith places the initiation and completion of salvation upon God by way of Jesus' work upon the cross. Thereby, the mission of Christ is redeemed for the Church, away from a "works" concept that taxed the people spiritually as well as monetarily. The Reformation also opened the way for the Evangelical movement of the nineteenth century, as the Protestant churches "awakened" to new possibilities. These possibilities resulted from a theological shift that gave away to a new paradigm based on the mission of Christ in the context of new generations.

Evangelicalism as an Outcome of Reform

The term *Evangelical* arises from the Greek term *Evangelion*, translated "gospel" in the English. Therefore, an Evangelical is a person who is committed to the gospel, the good news that God has sent a Savior, and that humanity can share in God's redemptive plan through Jesus Christ. Stanley J. Grenz identifies three historical waves that support, inform, establish, and give substance to Evangelicalism. Two of these areas would be understood as historical corrections. The first major influence is the sixteen-century Reformation. The churches that emerged from the German Reformation adopted the name *Evangelical* as a way of highlighting Luther's emphasis on the gospel and in order to set them apart from the Roman Catholic Church. Because of this historical connection, Grenz relates "that all Protestant churches may claim the term evangelical."¹⁰⁷ Evangelicalism and its supporters can look to the Reformation as a source from which to

¹⁰⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 22.

draw identity and mission. The Reformation calls for a return to biblical doctrine and underscores personal salvation. The Reformation gave to evangelism the directives of Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone.

In addition, Evangelicals are informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, which in turn gives emphasis to the mission of Christ. While Luther addressed certain issues in his Ninety-Five Theses, and other reformers dealt other problematic areas and concerns, one of the outcomes of the Reformation was a desire to return to the mission of Christ. Thereby, the command of the Great Commission, “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” is renewed within the hearts and minds of all believers.

The second area of influence noted by Grenz is Puritanism and Pietism. Puritanism, as Grenz, relates, is the quest for certainty of personal election, and the vision for building a Christian nation. Mark Knoll says, “First, Puritans believed that humankind must depend entirely upon God for salvation.”¹⁰⁸ He goes on to say that Puritans believed God created society as a unified whole, Church and state, the individual and the public. Pietism, Grenz explains, is the desire for personal religion along with a social conscience.¹⁰⁹ Because of these two factors, the heart of Evangelicalism is its concern for a conscious encounter of the grace of God in conversion.

Thus, the Reformation gave way to reform within the Church as an attempt to correct the theological lean of the papacy, and Evangelicalism is a direct result of the renewal that the reformers sought. No true movement within Christianity should be a spontaneous, non-biblical event. Rather, the movements of the Church should be

¹⁰⁸ Mark A. Knoll, *A History of Christianity in America and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 32.

¹⁰⁹ Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 23.

corrective, biblical, and outgrowths of prior corrective historical actions by the Church. The corrective historical movements of the Church should align with the mission of Christ if they are to be considered worthy. It is accepted that historical movements must be interpreted within the context of the contemporary setting. Evangelism rooted in the Reformation, must consider each new generation and locale as the preaching of the Great Commission progresses to the “ends of the earth.” In the recurring outcome, there may be the need to awaken anew to the directives of the Reformation.

The Great Awakening

In early decades of the eighteenth century, before organized evangelical movements began, groups in Europe, Britain, and the American colonies were beginning to practice distinctly evangelical forms of Christian faith. These movements grew out of the Protestant Reformation in the form of revivals. Mark Noll relates these revivals as, “intense periods of unusual response the gospel preaching linked with unusual efforts at godly living.”¹¹⁰ In Britain these events were known as the Evangelical Revival, while in the American colonies they were known as, the Great Awakening.

The colonial revival touched many aspects of life at the time. It was more of an upsurge of revivalistic piety than a singular event or movement. In New England, the revival brought new life to many Congregational and Baptist churches. The Presbyterian and the Dutch reformed of the middle colonies grew as a result of the awakening. In the southern colonies, the Baptists and Methodists would be greatly influenced as well. There were many voices that gave heed to the awakening, along with many who would add the

¹¹⁰ Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 18.

necessary theological thrust to the revival. Perhaps none was of greater importance than an English preacher, George Whitefield, and a New England Theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

George Whitefield (1714-1770) was possibly the most recognized preacher during the eighteenth century. He was an ordained minister of the Church of England, and a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley at Oxford. It was Whitefield who would introduce the Wesley's to some of the practices like outdoor preaching and direct messages of salvation, which became prominent in their Methodist movement. During his second journey to the colonies, Whitefield, who was already a preaching sensation in England, addressed crowds of up to eight thousand in New England every day for a month. This preaching tour was the key event in New England's Great Awakening. At the heart of his message to the colonies, Noll writes, "Whitefield remained most fundamentally an agent of his message. God's grace for guilty sinners was at the heart of his concern."¹¹¹

The importance of George Whitefield for this discussion is that Whitefield did not wait for the people to come to him inside the walls of a church structure. He wanted to reach the people, so he went and preached out in the open where all could hear his message of salvation. The colonies awakened, not early on Sunday mornings inside of hallowed buildings. Rather, the Great Awakening occurred as a result of someone heeding the command of the Great Commission, to go and share the good news. Whitefield's preaching events brought a paradigm shift that proved to be contagious as the awakening moved from New England, to the middle colonies, and onto the southern

¹¹¹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in America and Canada*, 93.

colonies. Surely, Whitefield was not the sole preacher of the Great Awakening. Others played vital and influential roles, but it was Whitefield that brought the gospel of Jesus Christ to the masses. He awakened a revival of active evangelism that is reminiscent of the apostle Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost, "and there were added that day three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41).

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was America's greatest early theologian. Edwards was also the Great Awakenings most important apologist. Many of his works came from his desire to defend the colonial revivals, while in other works he endeavored at discerning true and imitation godliness. Mark Noll relates, "The major themes of his theology are the greatness and glory of God, the utter dependence of sinful humanity on God for salvation, and the ethereal beauty of the life of holiness."¹¹² In 1734-1735, Edwards oversaw some of the initial stirrings of the First Great Awakening. He gained fame as a revivalist and "theologian of the heart" after publishing *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1738), which described the awakening in his church. The widespread revivals of the 1730s and 1740s stimulated one of the two most fruitful periods for Edwards' writings. In this period, Edwards became very well known as a revivalist preacher who subscribed to an experiential interpretation of Reformed theology that emphasized the sovereignty of God, the depravity of humankind, the reality of hell, and the necessity of a "new birth" conversion. Mark Noll makes the point that, in later generations, revivalists would pick up Edwards' position in appealing for a new birth.¹¹³

¹¹² Noll, *A History of Christianity in America and Canada*, 97.

¹¹³ Ibid.

If George Whitefield is recognized as the preacher of the Great Awakenings, then Jonathan Edwards is the theologian of the Awakenings. It is Edwards who studied and wrote about the impact of the Awakenings from a theological standpoint. Edwards' writings, as well as his preaching, supply a biblical foundation for the movement. In respect to changes that the revival of the 1700s brought, Whitefield's preaching would not have had a lasting effect without the apologetics of Edward's writings. Edwards supplied the biblical, foundational, and core values that drive the awakenings, but also gave direction for the Evangelicals that would emerge out the Great Awakenings.

The work of Jonathan Edward stands to inform the discussion on evangelism and the mission of Christ in the areas of the importance of biblical, historical continuity and of allowing for a theological correction. The Reformation opened door, so to speak, for a realigning of the Church with the mission of Christ. The mission of Christ as carried on by the Church through the command of Matthew 28:19, "to go therefore and make disciples" is reclaimed by the reformers, who argued against a "works" doctrine set in motion by the papacy in Rome. The idea that one could "work" one's way to heaven is rejected by the reformers and replaced with the "*sola's*," faith alone, grace alone, and Scripture alone. Edwards agrees with Luther that salvation is by grace alone. However, he added a certain urgency through his writing and preaching, conveying that the invitation to humanity to be reconciled through Jesus Christ to God need not be put off until another day.

A Sense of Urgency

The revivals that Whitefield and Edwards encouraged led to a rapid increase in the number of people making personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Parallel to this,

churches increased substantially as the newly born in Christ joined local churches. In fact, the period after the Great Awakening, from the American Revolution to the Civil War reveals an unprecedented expansion of Evangelical Protestant Christianity. As Mark Noll explains, “No other period in American history ever witnessed such a dramatic rise in religious adherence and corresponding religious influence on the broader national culture.”¹¹⁴ The revivals that formed the Great Awakening also contributed to an urgency that produced the Evangelical movement. The intense preaching of Whitefield, coupled with the narrative of Edwards, placed salvation on the minds and hearts of the people in the colonies. This feverous anthem was picked up and expanded by succeeding generations and ultimately was identified as the Evangelical movement.

The sense of urgency that Evangelicalism spawned touched Christianity as a whole in America. Every Christian denomination experienced rapid numerical growth. From 1770 to 1860, for example, the number of churches increased from 2,481 to approximately 52,500 while, from 1775 to 1845, the number of Christian ministers increased at three times the rate of the population.¹¹⁵ This Evangelical energy in the newly formed United States created rapid expansion of Evangelical churches, but it also brought a new ecclesiastical environment. Perhaps the group that best illustrates this new environment is the Methodists, who took Evangelicalism to the people in the form of camp meetings, and circuit riders.

The United States as a new nation with new ideas, seemingly endless boundaries, and teeming with opportunities, was ripe for the surge of new religious thought and

¹¹⁴ Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, table 9.5.

actions. As the young nation expanded in all directions, most notably westward, Evangelicals saw the need to bring God to the people. All denominations attempted to meet the demands of this unprecedented expansion, but the Methodists applied a paradigm shift to evangelism that reached back to the birth of the Great Awakening.

John Wesley (1703-1791) Oxford educated, Anglican cleric, and along with his brother Charles began what would eventually be identified as Methodism. The Wesleys, along with some friends, began a “Holy Club” at Oxford.¹¹⁶ This group for young men that would include George Whitefield was nicknamed Methodists by their detractors, because they used stringent methods in their search for holiness. Like Martin Luther, Wesley sought to earn God’s favor and found emptiness. In 1738, he was invited to a Moravian meeting. It was at that meeting while someone read from Luther’s commentary on Romans that Wesley felt in his heart that he did trust Christ alone for salvation.¹¹⁷ Wesley soon took to preach this message of grace wherever he could. When hostile Anglican churches closed their doors to the message, John, along with his brother Charles, carried the message to public places and open fields. Wesley travelled on horseback, preaching through England and Scotland. He formed the believers in each area into societies, and, as the movement grew, he appointed other preachers, assigning each to a circuit. Societies were broken down into fellowship classes and prayer groups that again earned the name Methodist. Once the Methodist movement came to America, it found a country that was situated for circuit riders, camp meetings, and revival. The

¹¹⁶ A. Kenneth Curtis, J. Stephen Lang, and Randy Petersen, *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Publishing, 1998), 137.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Methodist movement was another voice on the grid of Evangelical urgency that was sweeping America in the aftermath of the Great Awakening.

By the mid 1800s, Evangelical churches made up the vast majority of American congregations; these churches did not present a harmonized faith. In fact, they fought over many issues such as, atonement, eschatology, the sacraments, and slavery. Yet, Evangelicals were united in their call for people to acknowledge their sin before God, and to believe in redemption through Jesus Christ.

The Evangelical churches were indebted to the reformers for their attachment to Scripture, which provided the theological foundation for the movement. Beginning with the Reformation and onto Evangelicalism, the church moved from tradition to vintage as each generation capitalized and moved the developments into new sociological and geographical areas, while reclaiming the biblical directives and carrying the mission of Christ forward into the world.

It should be noted that the Reformation and the Awakenings did not develop in a vacuum; these events came forth in a world that was questioning the existence of God away from the guidance of the church. The Reformation era parallels the Renaissance. The word renaissance means “rebirth” and refers to the recovery of the values of classical Greek and Roman civilization expressed in literature, politics, and the arts. The differences in the Reformation and the Renaissance can be captured up in the view of man. The Reformers preached the original sin of man and looked upon the world as fallen from God’s intended place. The Renaissance had a positive estimate of human nature and the universe itself. As the Reformation paved the way for the Awakenings, by returning to Scripture, the Renaissance influenced the Enlightenment by returning to human nature.

The Enlightenment also known as the Age of Reason, and described as Rationalism was nothing less than an intellectual revolution, a whole new way of looking at God, the world, and one's self. The Reformation, the Awakenings, and later evangelicalism look at faith in the sense that reason served faith, the mind obeyed authority, and God's Word came first. The Age of Reason rejected that premise. In the place of faith it set reason where humankind's primary concern was not in the next life, but happiness and fulfillment in the world. Thus, Rationalism promotes the mind of humankind rather than faith, is the best guide to happiness.

Rationalism developed in the soil of a new faith in law and order. Modern science arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and nurtured ideas of a new day of peace and harmony. Scientific pioneers such as Copernicus (1473-1543), Johann Kepler (1571-1630), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), and Isaac Newton (1642-1727) forged a new look into the universe and now humanity had a new way to gauge its own existence.

However, as noted earlier, the revivals that spawned the Great Awakenings were calls to piety where the care of souls took center stage. It made preaching as championed by Whitefield, and Edwards, along with pastoral visitations espoused by the Wesley's central concerns of the Protestant ministry. The Pietist's emphasized regeneration as the dominate theme. They believed that "spiritual rebirth was the true fulfillment of the Protestant Reformation."¹¹⁸ They stressed the importance of personal faith. They moved away from a Catholic Christendom and Puritan commonwealths. The Pietist's also

¹¹⁸ Bruce L. Shelly Church History in Plain Language (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995) 329

shifted the center of Christian life from state churches, in which a person was born and brought up, to intimate fellowships of those who had a living faith in God.

The Great Awakenings challenged the prevailing church model, as well as the rational scientific philosophies of the day. They preached and wrote about a world where God is first and foremost the center of all things. The Pietist's revealed the need for a personal relationship with Almighty God, which countered Rationalism where human mind reigned supreme and humanity could discover the reasons and purpose to life outside of the church. Rationalism does not reject the notion of God as creator, rather it questions God's participation after creation and gives breathe other movements such as Deism. It should be noted that the attitudes of the Age of Reason and Rationalism are not a thing of the past. They live on today in the values of the Western world.

Building on the Past, Looking to the Future

George Santayana, the Spanish-American philosopher's uttered a famously misquoted remark, "Those that cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."¹¹⁹ This quotation vicariously informs the historical context of this paper. The history of the Church is a vast reservoir of useful information. Though the Church has made its share of tactical errors, there is a wealth of experience that can be researched, nuanced, and contextualized for the Church today. The early Church, offers a glimpse into the birth of the Church Age, while the evangelism by the Celts, the Reformation, and later developments give us the report of a Church on the move. Each historical generation has at times wrestled with the mandate to "go" into its communities and make disciples.

¹¹⁹ *The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, Copyright © 2005). All rights reserved.

Some have succeeded, others failed, but from each one there is something profound to be gained, reshaped, and perhaps avoided. The best tactic is not to duplicate the past; rather, it is to learn and contextualize methods that promote the mission of Christ to the world.

The first chapter of the Revelation to John informs us, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev.1:8). "The Alpha and Omega," the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are used to describe that God is the beginning and the end. He sovereignly rules over all of human history. In Revelation 22:12-13, Jesus applies the same title to Himself and refers to His return, to judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42). The church looks to the future for the eminent return of our Lord, while we currently carry out the mission of Christ. God has a definite beginning for humanity, which is alpha, along with a definite end--omega. However, it is the Alpha that informs the Church about our present work as we take the things of God into the world while Christ our "foundation" (1 Cor. 3:11) "our precious cornerstone" (1 Pet. 2:6), is the omega for us as we wait for His return. Christ, as a foundational cornerstone from which the church is to build, has been laid. On this foundation, the Church and God's mission are to be built. Christ, our beginning and end, informs us theologically, historically, presently, and eschatologically. Therefore, the church must build from the past as it looks to the future return of Jesus.

Historically, the church has not always built upon the work of Christ. There are many dark periods in the existence of the church where the plans of men went before God's rule. Every New Testament author admonishes the reader to be aware of false teachers, as well as false prophets, even false Christ's. God gave us the Scriptures as the plumb line from which we can line up theologically, and spiritually. The Reformers

appealed to the Scriptures in order to make their case against Rome and papal authority. They argued for the foundation of God's word to rule rather than the edicts of human authorities. Luther and the others applied a corrective to a Church in error, a Church that leaned away from the teachings of Christ.

For My Father's House Christian Center as a non-denominational church plant, history does not begin with the first Sunday worship service or the initial organizational meetings. History for MFHCC begins with the Scriptures and the inception of the Church age. There exists the need to provide a historical linkage for a non-denominational church plant in order to establish a true biblical frame work from which to develop. The undergirding of the church has to attach to and affirm the mission of Christ to legitimize its existence. The danger is that, without proper guidelines, a church could develop as a cult or some sort of fringe movement. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses will imply that they are "Christian" in order to gain members, but, at the core of their belief, they deny that Jesus is God. The denial of Jesus as God eliminates them from Christianity, yet they portray themselves as Christian to those that do not know otherwise. MFHCC must align with historical, biblical Christianity in order to stand erect and link with true Christianity.

The mission of Christ as it relates to the Great Commission, informs MFHCC that the Church at its core should be evangelical in nature. We are called by Christ to go into our communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul further aligns the practice of the Church with his admonition to the Corinthians to build on the foundation of Christ in order to stay true to mission of Christ. The growing Church followed the model of the church in Antioch. This church plant had begun in a new environment, with an emergent theology that differed from the theology of the church in Jerusalem. The

mission of Christ emerged intact in Antioch, yet the Antioch church developed a new strategy for the community it served.

The Reformation and the movements that followed inform MFHCC as to the directional shifting that had occurred as a result of not following biblical mandates. The reformers argued for the biblical foundations of the Church to be reclaimed in order to remain faithful to the mission of Christ, in whose kingdom, through the Church, mercy and grace are extended for salvation, rather than fallible human decrees for penance to earn God's favor. What is of major importance for this discussion is the correction that the reformers championed. They looked at the structure of the Church and applied a correction that gave way to the Great Awakening and Evangelicalism. The reformers and those that followed in their wake were willing to change "their" theology for biblical theology in order to continue the mission of Christ. The lesson that is available is that MFHCC should assess where it is theologically and not be afraid of what it finds, or be unwilling to apply a correction. Then, MFHCC will be positioned to evaluate and correct theological issues within its members from a Reformation/Evangelical viewpoint, with church renewal in mind.

PART THREE

A STRATEGY TO ALIGN WITH THE MISSION OF CHRIST

CHAPTER 5

INTEGRATION OF THE NECESSARY THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DIRECTIVES

By the year 1990, the Tower of Pisa was leaning so badly that the structure was deemed unsafe and cordoned off in order to ensure the safety of the general public. In the same year, John Burland, professor of soil mechanics at London's Imperial College of Science, Technology, and Medicine, was called in by Pisa authorities to see if the campanile could be saved from its impending collapse. Professor Burland prepared a soil extraction scenario for the campanile. After years of delay, Burland was able to put his plan in action in 1999. With specially designed drills, workman bored holes five meters deep into the terrain on the north side of the campanile, and slowly the soil was extracted. The tower responded, and, after a month of soil extraction, the tower moved back towards perpendicular by five millimeters. In time, sixty tons of soil was extracted from beneath the campanile, and the structure moved 0.5 meters back towards perpendicular. Today the structure is deemed safe to continue leaning (without falling) for another three hundred years.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Shrady, *A Skewed History*, 7, 157-160.

The story behind the Tower of Pisa supplies a scenario from which lessons for proper construction may be derived. The Tower of Pisa, used as a metaphor, can also supply valuable insight for My Father's House Christian Center. For example, when gathering all of the pertinent information for the development of MFHCC, two areas are critical. The first, ascertaining the biblical directives for a church, is paramount. The second is researching the development of the biblical directives as they were implemented by the historical church. Finally, there is the integration of all of the facts with a strategy for change.

The builders of the Tower of Pisa did not err from the standpoint of the design of the tower; their errors came from where they planted the tower, along with the shallow depth of the foundation. When one looks at the leaning tower, the visible structure is pleasing to the eye and fits within the architectural designs of its historical period. What one does not see are the hidden flaws of the tower. In much the same way, MFHCC may appear safe and sound outwardly, but it is what may be lurking hidden and within that could cause problems. Today, the Tower of Pisa is celebrated because its lean has been perpetuated. Conversely, MFHCC, or any church for that matter should not be enabled to lean theologically. The result would be a church that looks safe, but at any moment could fail the congregant because of errant theological assumptions that affect the nature and methodology of the church.

The gathered information from the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch supply the thrust to develop with a fresh foundation. Historically, the church in Jerusalem served its purpose as the initial congregation of the Church. However, it is the church in Antioch that forms the model for an emerging church plant.

The church that emerged at Antioch is distinguished by its new theological orientation. Emerging churches, like the church in Antioch, exist in the continuum between gospel and mission. Antioch continues the deployment of the gospel with a renewed mission. An organization cannot be considered a church, simply because it has encased the gospel in its liturgical practice or defined itself as missional; there must be accountability to the gospel. The new theological orientation at Antioch was not bound by the directives of the church in Jerusalem; therefore, Antioch does not lean in the direction of Jerusalem. Antioch is, therefore, free to develop and contextualize the gospel for the local community without submission to traditional practices that are not valid for the local community.

It is important to understand Paul's theological development away from Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul encounters Christ on the road to Damascus, not in Jerusalem. Paul matures theologically at Antioch, not in Jerusalem. It is also from Antioch that Paul is sent as a missionary. Paul's theological correction, from persecuting the church to becoming a wise master builder of the church, is brought about through revelation, a change from Law to grace. As Ray Anderson states, "This theology of revelation became the distinctive theology of the emerging church at Antioch and the churches that emerged through Paul's missionary activity working out of Antioch."¹²¹ Paul writes to the Christians at Thessalonica, "Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and full of conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). Through Paul's work, one can see that the emerging church can be a continuation of

¹²¹ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 28.

the ministry of Jesus, and that it is a clear break from religious forms and historical traditions as represented by the church in Jerusalem.

The Reformers recapture Paul's theology of revelation as they break from the traditional religious theology of the church in Rome. Through the Scriptures and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the Reformers argue for a return to the mission of Christ without the element of human constraint in the form of church tradition. What emerged was a continuation of the mission of Christ that propelled the awakenings and resulted in Evangelicalism. Because of the emergent church in Antioch, and later the Reformation, we can see that the historical church has assessed itself and applied a healthy correction. It is, therefore, prudent and necessary for the church to reevaluate its practices. The danger exists that the practices of the church could rely more on traditions than on revelation by God. Instead of continuing to build on tradition and embedded theology, MFHCC would benefit from the ongoing process of renewal through self examination and an adherence to sound theological doctrines as defined in the Scriptures.

Embedded Theology

Embedded theology is, in effect, a core belief; it is what one adheres to. Because it is a core belief, the substance of that belief is embedded in one's heart, as well as in one's mind. God creates leaders in order to share his heart and directives with his people. Leaders are developed through spiritual formation that Reggie McNeal defines as heart shaping. McNeal contends rightly that God is at work in the development of our hearts. He continues on to stress that effective spiritual leaders must become experts in issues of the heart, particularly their own. Leaders must obtain the ability to discern God at work in their own lives, shaping their hearts to embrace the distinct ministries to which they have

been called. This process depends on an interactive partnership with God. Christ set the Church in motion, but the leader's response to the motion affects the development of the church. Thus, it is imperative that leaders assess the intent of their heart.¹²²

Leadership abilities mature throughout the life of the leader. As stated in chapter 2, "Leaders do not develop in isolation; rather they develop in community."¹²³

Communities shape individuals as they are influenced by those around them. These communities are identified by the places people inhabit, such as school, work, family, even places of worship. Each of these communities is a separate environment with standards unique to the community. Although these communities can share values and standards, each one relies on its own norms. For this discussion, one such community that affects believers is their relationship with God. McNeal relates that there are six areas that effect heart-shaping, one of which is communion.¹²⁴ Communion, says McNeal, is the aspect of heart-shaping that reflects the leader's conscious cultivation of a relationship with God.¹²⁵

Communion for McNeal is how one relates to God. In relating to God, a person comes to an understanding of who God is, and what God expects. This translates as individual theology and guides a person spiritually, as a product of spiritual formation. Once a person is formed spiritually, that spirituality or theology becomes embedded in an individual. When the church gathers together, ideally all congregants are likeminded theologically; this would result in harmony of thought and action. However, when people

¹²² McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, Introduction.

¹²³ See chapter 2, the section entitled "Seminary Training Brought Forth a New Church Model."

¹²⁴ Culture, Call, Community, Communion, Conflict, and Commonplace.

¹²⁵ McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, xiii.

with different theological assumptions gather, the outcome has the potential to be less than harmonious. Invariably, when tensions arise within a church organization, the problem can be traced to embedded theology. One person sees the issue one way, based on his or her understanding of God and the Bible while the other party is just as adamant about the issue based upon his or her experience with God. Certainly, all are on a spiritual journey and do not always arrive at the same place spiritually simultaneously. However, since this community of believers learns from that same set of Scriptures, the assumption could be that all are likeminded, with the same heart, and vision. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

The church as a community derives its membership from other communities. These communities are varied, complex, and have shaped the people that occupy them. The church of Jesus Christ does not arrive to us today with a uniform set of observances and standards. Each church has travelled a path that is independent from the other houses of worship in their respective communities. For example, the City of La Mirada lists twenty-six places of worship within its boundaries.¹²⁶ Of the twenty-six institutions, twenty-three identify themselves as Christian. Yet, these twenty-three churches all have different styles of worship, different statements of faith, and different by-laws. If, for example, someone moves from one church to another, that person brings those differences with him or her to the new church. Along with this, evangelization brings people into the church organizations that have little or no experience with God or the Bible. They have been shaped by many of the world's assumptions about God and life. The result is that churches are a mix of thoughts, ideas, and assumptions, based upon the

¹²⁶ City of LaMirada website, www.cityoflamirada.org (accessed August 10, 2010).

communities from which they have arrived. Thus, embedded theology is an area that must be considered by the church.

Understanding Why Our Leaders Believe Their Theology Is Correct

Nutritionists, when advocating the importance of a healthy diet, will make their appeal with the well-worn phrase, “You are what you eat.” The idea is that what goes into the body, forms the body. A good healthy diet will result in the individual’s being fit and healthy. On the other hand, a nutritionally poor diet of junk food will cause harm to our bodies. Theologians could make the same claims for the spiritual aspect of one’s life. A healthy diet of biblically sound doctrine will produce healthy believers and healthy churches. People fed a theologically poor diet of misinformation about God produce doctrinally unsound believers and errant churches. The key to living a healthy life lies in knowing one has been living in an unhealthy way and changing one’s diet. Yet, it is difficult to see revelation about the unhealthy parts of life.

People are born into communities, and they have no control over the accidents of their birth. The culture that a person is born into and raised in shapes that person’s thinking. For example, people tell stories of their early years and how poor their family was. They will relate how they grew up without all the trappings of life that the more affluent can testify about. Yet, those that grew up poor will often say, “But we never knew we were poor.” Awareness is relative to one’s community. People are aware of their environs, but only relate to their community without prejudice. Thus, people extract their identity from their groups, and these groups are unique, self-containing, and in place before their arrival.

For MFHCC's history, people came and joined the church community, bringing with them the givens of their past church community. Several new members had been in leadership positions at prior houses of worship. These people had received salvation through Jesus Christ, attended church services, taken part in Bible study sessions, and eventually progressed to leadership status. They had been indoctrinated by their specific church organization and affirmed for ministry work. Because they were serving the church as leaders, it was assumed that they were on the right track theologically. With each passing day, the beliefs and structure of the church they had attended solidified their embedded theology. Unless they ventured outside of their respective communities, there would be no reason to reaffirm or challenge their embedded theological beliefs.

Why They Are Incorrect Theologically

For those that have an errant theological position, the discovery process can be elusive. For instance, as noted earlier, several of the leaders at MFHCC held to Word of Faith beliefs. One such belief is that God wants all believers to prosper materially. Eddie Gibbs relates that, in the book of Deuteronomy, prosperity is a dominant theme. Gibbs goes on to say, "It should be recognized that the term 'prosper' does not always signify material blessing, but is applied also to a successful outcome to God-inspired plans relating to every aspect of life."¹²⁷ Those nurtured in the Word of Faith system are simply a product of that structure with all of its theological nuances. Word of Faith indoctrinates with the concept that material abundance is a sign of God's favor. In reality, prosperity is not necessarily evidence of God's pleasure, since the godly will have to persevere

¹²⁷ Gibbs, *In Name Only*, 49.

through difficult situations, while the wicked prosper materially (Jer.12:1, James 1:2-3). The problem for those shaped by WOF is that prosperity attained the status of doctrine within that community. The result is a false sense of security in material things, along with other errant, embedded theological suppositions. It was only natural for those indoctrinated in WOF to assert their theological conclusions within My Father's House Christian Center. As a consequence of their previous church experiences, they were without discernment concerning their position in respect to Christianity, but that in itself does not validate their theology.

As noted in chapter 2, the origin of the WOF movement is in the metaphysical New Thought/Christian Science stream. Those that adhere to or rely on an embedded theology of WOF lean away from orthodox Christianity. Once a person or an organization begins to move away from the central or core beliefs of the establishment, anything that is added is subject to the lean. The leaders of MFHCC were directly influenced by WOF teaching. Some were in the process of reevaluation of their core beliefs while others held firm to WOF doctrine. The outcome was that both groups leaned away from the central teachings of MFHCC and orthodox Christianity.

Errant theological assumptions have surfaced in the past and affected the Church. The apostle Paul, before his conversion to Christianity, believed he was theologically correct in his pursuit and persecution of the followers of Jesus. His embedded core belief in Judaism fueled his activism against the Church. His spiritual community indoctrinated him with fundamentals that prevented him from embracing the movement of God through Christ. Likewise, the leaders and congregants of MFHCC who held to the fundamental beliefs of WOF were inhibited from embracing true Christianity. Since those that held

such beliefs were not seeking a pure theological correction, they would continue to build on a shallow foundation. The end result was that they were incorrect theologically and in positions to affect others adversely unless they were willing to assess and modify their core beliefs. Because MFHCC was directing its focus and resources toward evangelism and the mission of Christ, the WOF segment was out of sync with the direction of the church. Unless a correction is applied, they will remain off kilter and incorrect theologically.

The Ministry of the Church Is Grounded in the Mission of Christ

Any attempt at ministry by the church must be rooted in the mission of Christ.

The church Jesus promised to build is truly one body, a spiritual body, and is sent into the world on a piercing spiritual mission, saving the lost through preaching the word.

Churches that lose sight of the objective that Christ commissioned become sidetracked into many unauthorized personal, political, domestic, and economic endeavors. By maintaining an unwavering loyalty to what Jesus said, to His authority, and to His mission, MFHCC is able to minister as part of the body of Christ.

The Church has a twofold framework. First, it is an institution created by God that represents the presence and authority of God's reign on earth. Secondly, it is an organization assembled by humans for the purpose of living out a corporate life and mission. This dual nature of the Church is evident in the tension that its existence is "in" the world while its distinctiveness is that it is not "of" the world. The life and mission of the Church are to be defined by participation in the mission of Christ. The church existing within a community context has a responsibility toward that context. The missiological challenge, hence, is to allow the mission of Christ to drive the ministry of the church

carefully in its community context.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 continues to be relevant today. The commission contains one imperative, “Make disciples.” The organized Church is a significant means for fulfilling Christ’s commission as long as the Church follows the mission of Christ to, “make disciples.” The commission is to make disciples who are characterized by obedience to all of Jesus’ commands, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Problems arise for the church when its twofold framework becomes distorted and human directives drive the church, resulting in a theological lean away from the mission of Christ. Thus, the mission of Christ, driven by the Great Commission, represents the theological foundation for the corporate and individual church.

My Father’s House Christian Center, like any other church plant, must be rooted in some historical narrative. The reasons that surround the need or desire to plant a church supply part of the narrative, while a connection with historical, orthodox Christianity fulfills the other section. A church planted by human hands into human soil will lean away from biblical norms from inception since the true foundational soil of Christ was not present in the narrative. Concerning a church start up, good intentions do not substitute for the will of God. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps.127:1). It is, therefore, imperative for MFHCC to look at its foundation for factors that disperse rather than unify, in order to rectify errant patterns. At the same time, it is equally important to build on the solid foundation of Christ. Along with the foundation of Christ, the historical narrative of church history can help solidify intent and direction.

The authors of the New Testament, such as Paul, declare that to be a Christian means fundamentally, to be united with Christ. This coming together with Christ is more than assenting mentally to a set of doctrines; it also involves embodying in our beliefs and actions the meanings and values that characterized Jesus' own life. In this process of embodiment, the Christian faith community is defined. The believing community transmits the redemptive narrative from community to community, recounting it in word and deed. In doing so, the framework for the formation of our personal identity, values, worldview, and mission is achieved.

Evangelism Emerges out of the Mission of Christ

The mission of Christ is revealed to us through the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the Word that was in the beginning, "became flesh, and dwelt among us," offering humanity not only salvation but revelation about the will of God. Jesus as the incarnate Son of God discloses the Father's plan for the church age. The written Word of God defined as a mystery, is uncovered through the work of Jesus. Paul's letter to the Ephesians discloses that Christ made known the mystery, "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him" (Eph. 1:9). Therefore, if the intent of God is not discerned by the written word, God's intent is uncovered by the work of Jesus' ministry. Thus, the mission of Christ as perceived through his actions informs the Church and provides direction.

Jesus facilitated discipleship in his disciples by introducing them to life situations and then helping them to debrief their encounters. Jesus took the disciples on mission trips. He sent them on learning excursions and exposed them to situations; he asked their opinion on what they were hearing and observing. He asked them to take up a cross and

follow him. He sent them out before they were ready and helped them understand where they had failed, encouraging them to learn from their experiences. Jesus not only talked about the kingdom of God; he lived the kingdom of God in their presence.

Jesus changed the disciples' core values, along with their embedded theology, through the work of his ministry on Earth. Jesus advanced spiritual formation in his disciples by exposing them to the realities of life and ministry. Jesus' classroom was the world around him. By engaging the community around the disciples, Jesus not only was able to help his followers, but he was able to reveal the intent of the Father. This is the work of the Word that defines the mission of God. The outcome of Jesus' work was more than the death on a cross, for a dead man can do no work. The conclusion of the work of Jesus is not defined solely in the resurrection from the dead. Although the resurrection of Christ is a major marker for the church and humanity, it does not culminate the mission of Christ. The fact that Jesus was seen by his followers after his resurrection does not focus the church for ministry. Rather, it is the Ascension of Christ and his parting words from the mount that provides evangelism as the stimulus for the mission of Christ.

Christ's parting words direct his disciples and the church towards the upward call of God. From Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore" is absent of any ambiguity concerning Jesus' final earthly directive. The Church is called to go, therefore, not as a consequence of death and resurrection; the Church is called as a result of Jesus' entire ministry that gives life to the mission of Christ for the church. His final earthly words are the culmination of God's plan for salvation as revealed through the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. "Go therefore and make disciples" is not a suggestion from the mind of God; it is a command to evangelize the nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the

Son, and the Holy Spirit.” As Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, he admonishes the church to the upward, heavenly call of God where Jesus prepares a place for those called through the evangelistic efforts of the church, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The mission of Christ as defined by the ministry of Jesus on earth calls for the transformation of believers, not just conversion to Christ. Richard Peace says, “Without transformation there is not real conversion.” Peace goes on to say that transformation is expressed in different ways, through forgiveness, sense of call, in the activities of discipleship. “Within transformation something discernable takes place in how we live and in who we are.”¹²⁸ Thus, evangelism is not just defined as salvation through Christ; rather, evangelism is defined through the work of Jesus Christ that culminates with Great Commission to make disciples.

Evangelism that emerges out of the mission of Christ does not stop with the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Evangelism must be understood through the lens of Jesus’ entire ministry, most notably his work with his disciples. What emerges out of the mission of Christ is an acute awareness that evangelism engages more than the mind of the believer. The ministry of Jesus Christ on earth was transformational as he reached out to the lost and brought a transforming initiative to everyone he encountered. Jesus accomplished a life-changing transformation among his followers through directives and debriefing life situations. The mission of Christ sets in motion the concept of salvation, discipleship, and transformation, which are made possible through the

¹²⁸ Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 304.

evangelistic efforts of the church. In fulfilling the Great Commission, MFHCC reclaims the biblical narrative, and Christ becomes contemporary.

Mission Leads, Ministry Follows

The task for My Father's House Christian Center is to recapture the mission of the church. The mission of the church is redemptive as demonstrated by Jesus' ministry, which reflects the intent of God. In both the Old and New Testaments, one encounters a God who is on a redemptive mission in the world. In the Old Testament, the central act of God is the Exodus, a divine intervention to set his people free from oppression and slavery. In the Exodus, Moses takes on Pharaoh to liberate his fellow countrymen. In the New Testament, Jesus takes on sin, death, and Satan to bring about deliverance of captive people. In both instances, the deliverance is not just from something, but to something. The Hebrew slaves were destined for the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, while Jesus' deliverance leads to the promised land of eternity with God in heaven.

There is an all-important parallel in the biblical stories of redemption from both Testaments. God has a purpose and a mission for the liberated people. Once the Hebrew slaves were delivered out of Egypt, Moses brought them to Mt. Sinai, just as God had instructed. It was at Sinai that God revealed his purpose and mission for the Hebrews. God spoke to Moses telling him say to the people of Israel, "Now then, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Exodus:19:5-6). The Hebrews were delivered by God in order that they would unite with him in his

redemptive mission in the world.

Likewise, in the New Testament, the apostle Peter relates that as followers of Jesus, "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of the darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). The Old and New Testament passages convey the same message: the people of God inherit the intent of God to tell his redemptive story to the world. The church exists to be the people of God to partner with him in his redemptive mission in the world. The church does not exist for itself; rather it is the chosen instrument of God to expand his kingdom to a lost and dying world.

The mission of Christ/God as the redemptive narrative projects the people of God onto the grid of salvation. God's plan as demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ stands to inform the church of its divine task. As believers in Jesus as the Christ, the church is given the assignment to convey God's message of salvation through the redemptive work of Christ. Thus, the mission of Christ informs the ministry of the Church.

The ministry of the Church, which is the serving work of the people of God, must relate God's mission for the world. Every act of the church must have the ministry of Jesus as its source in order to supply the proper foundation for its outreach into the community. In order for MFHCC to adhere to orthodox Christianity, there must be an applied correction to errant theological assumptions by its members. Thus, the people and ministries within MFHCC will have a solid foundation from which to develop.

We Are an Emerging Evangelical Church in Our Community

My Father's House Christian Center, as a church plant, emerged into the community of La Mirada, California. Like the church in Antioch, MFHCC is new wine in new wineskins. Because of the persecution of the Jews in Jerusalem, a number of believing Jews travelled to Antioch, where they interacted with Gentiles and formed a new believing community. The church in Antioch differed from Jerusalem not solely as a result of ethnicity or locale; it was the theology that emerged in Antioch that had a profound effect. The theology that emerged through this community became a "vintage theology," that maintains its fundamental essence, yet it increases in vitality and intensity. In order for MFHCC to truly emerge as new wine with a vintage theology, any remnant of old wineskins must be purged so that the newness of MFHCC would not be diluted with theological errors.

Each community is unique in respect to locale, and population, which in turn helps to provide vision and direction. Likewise, each church planted into a community is distinctive by its locale, population, and ministry context. Because the Church of Jesus Christ is driven by the command to "go" into a world that is made up of a myriad of communities, the outcome is that each church should emerge in the context of the local community. However, it is the theology of the church that supplies vision and mission.

As stated earlier, My Father's House Christian Center did not emerge with an overt Evangelical mindset. Once the church was planted, Evangelicalism began to arise as a result of the spiritual maturing of the pastor and a desire to grow within the community of La Mirada. The result of the theological shift to evangelism exposed critical issues within the church environment. Some of those issues were a natural by-

product of growth while others were theological. The key factor in uncovering the issues was found in taking a serious look at MFHCC and assessing its journey. The direction of the church and its mission to the local community had changed over time as I matured as a pastor.

Once MFHCC began to move from a self-centered gospel, the church could now emerge into the community. A self-centered gospel is void of a mission to the world; whereas, a community-driven church has a sense of mission to the world. The danger for MFHCC is holding to a Word of Faith theology that is self-centered, lacking mission. The position is that believers receive from God where God exists to “meet my needs” mentality. The result is a narrow focus on individual salvation as the primary intent of the gospel. Once the focus of the church is on the individual, the outcome is a reductionism of the gospel. The tension created by the journey from WOF to Evangelicalism is not enough to stop the journey, but the tension must be alleviated. Chapter 6 will address those concerns directly.

Our Ministry Context within the Community

The ministry context for My Father’s House Christian Center in the city of La Mirada is informed by the Great Commission to go into our community and make disciples. A disciple is somebody who believes in and follows the teachings of a leader, a philosophy, or a religion.¹²⁹ Clearly, MFHCC is attempting to follow in the teachings of the Bible, most notably the teachings of Jesus. Jesus directs his followers at the time of his ascension to go into their community with the gospel message of salvation, baptism,

¹²⁹ *Encarta Dictionary*, s.v. “disciple.”

and discipleship. Thus, mission leads; ministry follows.

It is important for MFHCC to engage the local community in various capacities since Christ is visible in the community through the church. Christ becomes contemporary and relevant through the ministry work of the church to the community. What emerges is a new shape that connects the community with the work and gospel of Jesus Christ. The paradigm shift incorporates all of the pertinent information and reassembles as orthodox, contextualizing the Great Commission for the city of La Mirada as the target group.

The ministry context for MFHCC within the community interfaces with the mission of Christ to “go and make disciples,” and calls the church to renewal. In order to reach a new group of people with a new message of salvation and discipleship, the church must renew itself. Renewal calls for self-examination and a purging of beliefs and systems that do not speak to the new ministry context. In order to speak or be relevant to the new community, the church needs to understand the mission of Christ, understand the target audience, and develop a new paradigm as new wine in new wineskins.

The ministries of the Church are the activities and programs by which it carries out its mission. The Church carries out ministries and partakes in Christ’s mission. Ray Anderson describes the ministry of the Church as being understood, “as grounded in the mission of God in Christ to reconcile the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).”¹³⁰ The result is that the activities and programs of the church are empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church in the community. Mission, thus understood, precedes and creates the church.

¹³⁰ Anderson, *Emergent Theology*, 185.

The church is empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit reveals the inner logic of the mission of Christ as the creative power and presence of Jesus Christ that enables the Church for ministry. The mission of God through Jesus Christ is determined by its relationship to Pentecost, as well as the Great Commission. The outcome is ministry that interacts with the contemporary community, not just with the historical Jesus. The church reaches the local community with the cornerstone the living Jesus, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Building Trust within the Community

The process of establishing My Father's House Christian Center in the city of La Mirada as a non-denominational church plant required the building of a trustworthy relationship within the city. As with any new entity into an established community, there are the elements of mystery and suspicion that may develop when a new church emerges on the landscape. Since MFHCC had no denominational identification, these elements were compounded. Thus, there arose the need to quickly alleviate the concerns about the validity of MFHCC as a church.

My Father's House Christian Center joined the La Mirada Chamber of Commerce as the first step in building trust within the community. The intent was to bridge onto the matrix of the city establishment. In researching avenues in which to build a community relationship in La Mirada, I chose the Chamber of Commerce because members of city government as well as local business's took part in chamber events. The chamber presented the opportunity to meet people that were involved in the daily workings of the community. At first, the presence of a pastor at chamber functions was awkward for those who had joined the chamber for business connections, but, with time, the tension eased.

The first step opened the door for the next opportunity to build trust within the community. During conversations with the mayor of La Mirada at a chamber function, the need for a clergy council was expressed. One of the elements in building trust is meeting the needs of the community. The city had a need that the church could address and assist. My Father's House Christian Center, the newest church in the city, took on the challenge to assemble a clergy council and hosted the initial meetings. The outcome was that MFHCC was perceived by community leaders as a valuable asset to the community. There are churches in La Mirada that have been in existence for over fifty years, yet, when the community needed something done--city council invocations, National Day of Prayer events, and community Thanksgiving services, or advice on faith based issues--MFHCC was summoned for help.

The third area of building community trust was to bring awareness of MFHCC to the people in the community. As a result of city government and chamber contacts, MFHCC began to appear at all city non-profit functions. These functions included Fourth of July celebrations, summer concerts series in the park, and other such events where non-profit organizations can set up booths as fund raising outreaches. The intent was not to make money; the intention was to meet the community and bring awareness about MFHCC to the attendees of such events. The concept was that familiarity brings confidence and trust, while at the same time MFHCC was there to meet the needs of the city.

The result of the three-stage approach was that MFHCC gained the trust of civic leaders as well trust within the community as a whole. MFHCC gained a recognition and trust by engaging the city through interaction with the community service groups. The

benefit was that the church was positioned to make an impact by reaching out and evangelizing the city. However, before MFHCC could emerge with the gospel in its community, its foundational theology needed to be set.

Emergent Theology That Guides MFHCC to Engage Evangelism

For the emerging church at Antioch, Christ is the content of the gospel. If there is no Christ, there is no gospel. Christ's mission is to accomplish God's total redemptive purpose. The mission of the church is to experience and express Christ through the lives of its members as well as a variety of groups and organizations they form. The mission of Christ drives the emergent theology that guides MFHCC to engage evangelism.

The mission of Christ informs the church evangelically. As My Father's House Christian Center emerges into the community of La Mirada, it emerges with Christ alive and active through the Holy Spirit and at work in the life of the church. Churches are called to be bodies of people sent on a mission by Christ to preach the gospel. What comes forth is an emergent theology that replaces the old wineskins and prevents a lean away from the mission of Christ.

This emergent gospel serves to guide MFHCC in much the same way that Paul was aided by the theology of the church in Antioch. It is also reflective of the Reformation as a biblically based emergent theology that supplied reform to errant thought and actions. Both Antioch and the Reformation are useful to reinforce the adaptation of the mission of Christ, which gave birth to the Evangelical movement.

The emergence of evangelism as a product of the Great Awakening, is a reclaiming of the mission of Christ. Without Christ, there is no gospel, without the gospel there is no evangelism. Evangelism is the natural, eventual outcome of a reflective

biblical examination by the church. What emerges is a praxis that enables reform, creativity, growth, and stability. The paradigm shift is a move towards the mission of Christ, and a release of a self-serving assessment of the Scriptures. Thus, MFHCC can engage the community of La Mirada, with fresh ideas contextualized and a recovery of the mission of Christ for the local community.

The Mission of Christ Intact

It is of the utmost importance that My Father's House Christian Center emerges into the community of La Mirada with the mission of Christ intact. The mission of Christ to go make disciples is a mandate for evangelism. In order for MFHCC to emerge without "lean," the mission of Christ must direct the vision and practices of the church. In effect, MFHCC becomes missional or mission driven when the Great Commission precedes the development of ministry forms. The mission of Christ thus fashions the nucleus of MFHCC as a community church.

In respect to MFHCC, the term *missional* reflects a way of living, not an affiliation or activity. With the mission of Christ at its core, MFHCC is positioned to think and live missionally, engaging the local community evangelically as part of its nature. Evangelism can now develop from the very heart of the church, as opposed to being something that should be done. This will challenge church leadership to move beyond self-absorption and preoccupation with their embedded theology.

With the mission of Christ intact, MFHCC emerges as a church that is sent by God with a task. The task is evangelical in nature: to develop followers of Jesus Christ. The activities of the church can now partner with Christ in his redemptive plan for the world. This will require a paradigm shift from an internal to an external focus. The task,

the mission of Christ, is to the world; therefore, MFHCC must experience a continual theological evaluation if the mission of Christ is to remain intact within MFHCC.

The focus for change for MFHCC is the Scriptures. The Great Commission is reclaimed and becomes the emphasis for all ministry actions. Rather than individual attempts to change the core beliefs of the members of the church by the pastor, the gospel of Jesus Christ shall serve the change situation. In other words, this is what the Bible teaches; therefore, this is what the church believes, based upon the Scriptures themselves. For the mission of Christ to stand intact in the hearts and minds of the church community, the embedded presuppositions of church members will be addressed biblically.

When Jesus taught his disciples, he challenged their preconceived ideas about God. He also set before them a task with a new nature--to make disciples of all the nations. He taught them, sent them out, and debriefed them. In all of this, Jesus directed them away from "their" own ideas, however developed, and brought them to his mission. The early Church, as demonstrated by the church in Antioch, emerged with the mission of Christ intact. Even though Antioch differed from Jerusalem in many ways, the essential element that Antioch nurtured was the mission of Christ. Antioch did not try to recreate the church in Jerusalem for the community of Antioch. Antioch emerged with a new approach for taking the message of Christ to the local community. The believing community in Antioch faced new obstacles for the establishment of the church there, yet the mission of Christ emerged intact in Antioch. In much the same way, MFHCC leaves behind preconceived ideas about God and emerges with the gospel intact.

Bridge between Mission and Community

My Father's House Christian Center, planted in the community of La Mirada, faces the challenge of reforming its mission and reaching its target audience with the mission of Christ intact. The first step in this process is to evaluate MFHCC and its leaders for theological miscues that hinder the vision of the church, and to reach the local community evangelically. Next, a systematic approach for the reform of embedded theological assumptions that lean away from orthodoxy must be formed and placed on the matrix of MFHCC. This is a paradigm shift in the form of a change situation. Once the change situation is addressed and reform implemented, MFHCC will face the task of advancing into the local community with the mission of Christ through evangelism.

My Father's House Christian Center will bridge between the mission of Christ and the community. The bridge between mission and community should be travelled in both directions. As MFHCC reaches out to the community, the community will reach back in the form of familiarity and acceptance of the church in its midst. The city of La Mirada, as noted earlier, is an established community with established churches. The established churches in La Mirada have long since ceased to interact with the community, socially or evangelically.¹³¹ Therefore, the necessity exists to meet the needs of the community and to reach the population with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because there is little interaction between the local churches and the people of La Mirada, new lines of communication must be developed and implemented. This represents new wine in new wineskins.

¹³¹ As President of the La Mirada Clergy Council, I have come in contact with the various churches in the community and their respective pastors. The result is an awareness of a lack of community involvement.

La Mirada, with its multiple and varied community events, is a service-orientated city. La Mirada prides itself in supplying community-related services to all of its citizens. In order to bridge the mission of Christ to the community, lines of service must be established between the church and the public. As stated earlier in chapter 1, MFHCC joined the local Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of establishing a service-related dialogue with the civic and business environment. The next step was to participate in community events and forge a relationship with people in La Mirada.

Once the local community began to recognize MFHCC as a serving entity within the city, a bridge for engagement began to develop. The bridge for the mission of Christ to the local community can be realized as MFHCC becomes an accepted part of the fabric of La Mirada. This theme is modeled after the Celtic Christians who contributed to the re-evangelization of Europe. George G. Hunter relates, “Celtic Christians evangelized as a team by relating to the people of a settlement: identifying with the people, engaging in friendship, conversation, ministry, and witness.”¹³² Part of the bridge to the people of La Mirada is to reach people that have not been touched by the organized Church in recent years. Another section of the bridge is the reinventing of evangelism, thereby intersecting the mission of Christ, MFHCC, and the unsaved.

The bridge between mission and community is a two-way dialogue between MFHCC and the people of La Mirada. It is service oriented as the church interacts with the community through local events such as carnivals and celebrations like the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and National Day of Prayer. The fact that MFHCC can act as a bridge to the community indicates that the townspeople accept and embrace the church as

¹³² Hunter, *The Celtic Way*, 47.

part of La Mirada. The other aspect of the bridge consists of evangelical outreaches into the community by MFHCC, as detailed in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

LEADERSHIP STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

A strategy for engaging the community through evangelism shall be communicated through ministry teams and the leaders of the My Father's House Christian Center. The strategy presents a change situation that is varied and complex. The change has several areas of concern. At the forefront of the strategy is the need to change the theological assumptions of leadership in MFHCC. Secondly, a strategy for the implementation of the mission of Christ to the local community must come into focus. In order to bring this about, a working model for change needs to be outlined and implemented.

What is required is a model that would bridge the gap from the known to the unknown. MFHCC has a known history but an unknown future, based on the changes that will need to be made. Hans Finzel's book, *Change is Like a Slinky*¹³³ provides the outline for the approach to congregational change. Finzel describes six phases to organizational change: accept, aim, anticipate, attack, adjust, and align. These stages, coupled with Finzel's assertions as to why change is like a Slinky, provide the point of departure for the leadership model that will be used to facilitate change. Finzel notes that a Slinky really cannot be controlled once its journey begins, and it rarely lands where predicted. Through the six phases of change, the outcome could be unpredictable for all

¹³³ Hans Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2005), 15.

concerned. There are no guarantees that everyone will accept the need for a change situation or be willing to adjust their embedded theology. In order to minimize the negative impact of the change situation, a clear and concise methodology is imperative for a successful outcome.

Along with the six phases for organizational change, Lewin's Force Field will be applied to facilitate the change situation.¹³⁴ Lewin's Force Field identifies two competing forces that must be addressed for a successful outcome for the change situation. The first, restraining forces, are the people that have settled beliefs, in this case, theological assumptions. The second force Lewin describes as driving forces. Driving forces are those individuals that assume the burden to bring about change; they are identified as change agents. Driving forces address the issues of restraining force, and it is critical for the change situation that people are added to the driving force. Driving forces also follow the change situation through to the intended outcome. It is important to understand that change will always cost something, and that is the first step in the journey.

Communicating the Vision to the Church

As the pastor of My Father's House Christian Center it is my responsibility to communicate the vision to the church. The vision is to apply the mission of Christ onto the matrix of MFHCC in the form of evangelism and reach the local community. Before any plan of action can be attempted, the vision must be outlined, goals defined, and the process actively engaged through the whole organization. The vision provides the

¹³⁴Douglas McConnell, "Leading Congregational Change" (class syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, February 2005), 5, diagram. Lewin describes the climate when opposing forces collide, and outlines the need to stop the collision course of the opposing forces.

direction, while the strategy provides the framework for getting there.

Burt Nanus says, “Few organizations have a clearly stated vision.”¹³⁵ Vision is future driven; it says this is where we are going. Unless the vision is articulated and passed throughout the organization the vision is reduced to a dream and never achieves reality. Nanus goes on to say, “For a vision to be effective, it must be well understood and widely shared in the organization.”¹³⁶ Once the vision exists and expressed to all concerned, it can be successful if the organization is positioned to support it.

The basis in communicating the vision is to connect with the congregation in a meaningful way to persuade them to change their perception about what is important for them and for the church. The idea is to create ownership of the vision by the congregation in such a way that people will want to participate and freely choose to do so. The vision, coupled to communication, brings about a shared purpose. The shared purpose, along with people that are empowered to influence appropriate organizational changes, will drive the change situation to a positive outcome.

The Pastor as Vision Giver

As the primary change agent (Accept [according to Finzel’s classification]) and vision giver I am faced with a leadership challenge to move My Father’s House Christian Center in a new theological direction. Leadership is the vehicle, but vision becomes the fuel; this is visionary leadership. Leadership must provide movement from one reality to the next. Being a leader by position does not translate automatically to directive movement. It is the vision that supplies the fuel for movement and direction. The vision

¹³⁵ Burt Nanus, *Visionary Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 57.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58

for mission through evangelism (Aim) is realistic and credible for our organization, but attention must be placed on the articulation of the vision from the pulpit, thereby facilitating direction and movement.

On the level of introducing the vision to the general congregation, certain things must be taken into account when articulating the vision. One obstacle (Attack) that could impact the acceptance of the vision could come from the commuting segment of the parishioners. If one does not identify with the community one worships in, then one could avoid involvement with that community unless a passion can be stirred within that can overshadow the person's resistance. The biblical mandate "to go" into our communities does not require that one live in a certain area in order to relate the gospel message. Part of the Great Commission relates that believers are called by God to go around the corner and around the world in order to evangelize. It is not just about the community of La Mirada; it is about the world around us.

Another "attack" concern is the "restraining forces" within the congregation. Restraining forces in the form of vocal resisters must be dealt with, or they have the potential to subvert the vision.¹³⁷ Resisters resist not because they are against change; rather, they resist because they do not have enough information. The task in communicating the vision is to inform those that are resisting in such a manner as to move them from restraining force to driving force.

The vision must come on the environment of My Father's House Christian Center from every conceivable angle. The vision is given from the pulpit, through sermons, and

¹³⁷ Ronald G. Havelock, "The Change Agent's Guide" (class syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, February 2005). A series of charts is taken from what appears to be a book used by permission.

ministry event announcements. It is also achieved through pastor-led Bible study sessions and in leadership training sessions. In staff meetings, the vision is given and goals projected. In effect, the vision must be pronounced in every action of the pastor. In order for the entire structure of MFHCC—from leadership to new members—to grasp the change situation, the vision must be projected by the pastor.

Ministry Team Leaders as Change Agents

Ministry team leaders guide separate ministry outlets such as men's or women's groups, and, because the leaders are in a position to influence direction, they are prime candidates for change agents. Change agents are those individuals that understand the problem and are willing to assist and guide the change situation to a successful outcome.¹³⁸ The task these leaders must assume is to create a guiding coalition with enough power to lead change. This coalition must work as a team in developing a strategy to direct the change effort. As there should be reasons to believe that the change is necessary, and those reasons must be communicated and internalized before any change is attempted, the desire is to incorporate church leadership and ministry workers in communicating the vision of mission through evangelism.

The initial change agent group will be comprised of every ministry team leader. In all, six ministry leaders will come together as a learning cluster led by the pastor. The problematic areas will be exposed one at a time, and the group under the direction of the pastor will engage each item. The purpose is to allow the group to arrive at a conclusion with input from all attendees. The idea is to direct the group in the needed direction,

¹³⁸ There is a difference between managing and leading. Managing is related to things one can manage, such as balance ledger. Leading is related to people. No one can manage people: this is viewed as control. One must lead people.

allowing for the group to assemble around the new direction from the standpoint of ownership of the working model for change. As the primary change agent, the pastor will keep the group on point. Once the new direction comes into focus, the group will move to the application process. The timeframe for the leadership change situation is twelve weekly sessions. The first four sessions will focus on the need for change and the desired outcome. The second section of four meeting will expose the problematic areas for the group as a whole, with emphasis on the leaders' individual ministry context. The final four weeks will consist of developing the strategy for change.

Ideally, as the team leaders are acclimated to the change situation, they will move to the position of change agents. Each leader will work with their respective ministry teams to address and facilitate the needed change. This group will assist in moving “restraining forces” to “driving forces.”

In this process, Havelock's “Stepping Stone Strategy for Gaining Acceptance” shall be initiated with the learning “cluster group” in order to work with the “resistors.”¹³⁹ Havelock places a strong emphasis on the identification of the change agent and the significant roles they play in the change process. In “Stepping Stone Strategy for Gaining Group Assistance,” Havelock identifies four ways to be a change agent. The first is the “catalyst” who builds arousal and does relationship building. Next, the “process helper” is still part of building relationships but takes on the added role of definition and diagnosis. Third, there is the “resource linker,” who moves from definition and diagnosis to resource search. Finally, the fourth role of the change agent is the “solution giver.” The solution giver does the resource search and applies the solution. Havelock, in effect

¹³⁹ Havelock, “The Change Agent's Guide,” figure 5-2.

supplies a methodology to help control the change situation. Since I am the primary change agent, the thrust of Havelock's grid compelled me to cycle through the change agent's field in order to define, seek, and apply a solution to the resistors.

Ongoing Leadership Learning Clusters

The ultimate goal for ministry team leaders is the establishment of ongoing learning clusters. The central theme behind the learning cluster is unity and revelation. The learning cluster brings together leaders who may or may not be like-minded. The cluster is set in motion by the topic: in this case, the mission of Christ. As the leaders cluster together in a learning environment, they work together for a unified outcome. In the process, the embedded theology of the individuals comes into play. Within the journey to define the mission of Christ, theological presuppositions of each leader will be tested for biblical adherence. In other words, they are challenged to question why they believe what they believe.

The learning cluster as moderated by the pastor unpacks and critiques the reasons and motives behind the action. In respect to those that have an embedded Word of Faith theology, their core beliefs will be challenged through the journey of the learning cluster. For example, the focus of the Great Commission from Matthew 28 will be studied exegetically by the cluster, and assumptions and direction from the passage determined. In this manner, the group unifies around the process of achieving an outcome while, at the same time, difficult embedded theological assumptions are addressed in a non-confrontational manner.

Surely, the ultimate goal of the change situation and the development of the learning cluster are to achieve scriptural adherence and the reform of theological miscues.

The revelation that is achieved individually shall not be detrimental or demoralizing. For some of the leaders, the theological adjustment may be revelatory and enlightening; for others, revelatory and upsetting. The purpose of the cluster is to not prove someone wrong, but to achieve a unified theological goal, followed by implementation.

The leadership learning cluster is not singular in purpose; it is open ended and renewing. The cluster is developed to address critical issues theologically. The present change situation is but one of many issues that will arrive in the life of My Father's House Christian Center. With the development of the learning cluster, leadership at MFHCC will have a valuable resource to sort thru issues and ministry concerns.

The Strategy Must Be Implemented without Leadership Presuppositions

It is crucial that the strategy for change not be subverted by leadership presuppositions. As stated in chapter 5, the leaders within My Father's House Christian Center who hold to a Word of Faith theologically believe that their core beliefs as derived from WOF are correct. Thus, resistance could come from this group. It is crucial, therefore, to identify resistors and strategize accordingly.

It is important to strategize for a positive outcome. Havelock details three groups that need the attention of the change agent. The three groups are defined as: innovators, leaders, and resistors. The innovators are those people that are informed by the change agent for the purpose of helping the change agent enlighten the resistor. Innovators must be spiritually mature in order to handle the task of aligning the resistors. Leaders are positioned to inform their subordinates and the general church population about the mission of the church. Resistors can hinder the process since they could be the leaders or those that have influence with the leader and can create a groundswell of opposition

before anything official is announced.

In a previous change situation, My Father's House Christian Center needed a larger building to hold services. A church in the area was contacted to see if MFHCC could hold services in the other church's building. The logistics of such a move required MFHCC to evaluate such a move and present it to the congregation. Two areas of resistance surfaced: one was a vocal deacon, and the other came from some of the mothers in the church who were concerned about the children's ministry and the care the children would receive. Unless these resisters' concerns could be alleviated, the whole move would be in jeopardy.

The conclusion was to look for possible innovators who could convey the plan and vision for the change situation to the resisters. The music ministry team leader provided an excellent innovator resource. She was a mature Christian, a respected team leader, and a member of the board of directors. I was the second innovator. Since this whole process and approach was new, there was not a proven resource pool of innovators so I had to bridge that gap. As the primary change agent, I informed and empowered the music team leader to speak to the women that were resisting. Secondly, I met privately with the deacon in question. It became apparent that the resisters were resisting because they did not have the proper information. The issue of the move to the new location was addressed promptly, and all parties involved were informed. The resisters were now on the driving side of the move to a new facility instead of restraining. The innovation aspect is an original approach to handling a potentially disastrous situation.

Parallel to Havelock's grid is the role of the interventionist. Lyle Schaller, in his book *The Interventionist* outlines six qualities that an interventionist brings to a given

situation.¹⁴⁰ The quality that resonates for this discussion is bringing the mind of the chess player onto the grid for the change situation. A good chess player thinks ahead and makes moves based on the opponent's probable subsequent moves. It is important at this stage to think ahead of possible resistance or adverse reaction in order to be ready to address resistance.

Another role of the change agent is to create a sense of urgency about the change situation. A sense of urgency is not intended to create panic; rather "urgency" is used to rally the church towards a common goal. What is needed at this stage is a resource linker.¹⁴¹

The resource linker has the primary function of connecting resources (human, material, spiritual) to the recipients. The recipients in this case are the congregation of MFHCC. The change situation needs a driving force in order to solidify the change. The RL, as the driving force, is recruited from church leadership. Leaders that are theologically attuned to the need for the change situation are to drive the change and supply resources. The RL is motivated by a sense of urgency and a common cause to align with the vision and mission of MFHCC and help to inform the congregation in respect to the change situation.

It would be detrimental to the change situation to think that change will occur without resistance. Resistance can come in the form of the unenlightened, or those that fail to see the need for change based upon previous embedded belief. In order to bring about change, the leaders of MFHCC will have to champion the desired outcome as

¹⁴⁰ Lyle Schaller, *The Interventionist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 56-58.

¹⁴¹ Doug McConnell, "Resource Linker" in course syllabus for "Leading Congregational Change."

change agents. Failure to evaluate the theological position of team leaders could derail the whole process.

Acclimatization for New Leaders

The strategy for change will anticipate overall church growth. Because My Father's House Christian Center is a growing church, change will occur in the form of new congregants and new leaders. These new members must be acclimated to the vision and mission of MFHCC. The leadership strategy incorporates existing leaders and prepares for future leaders to emerge within the church.

In order for the change situation to become successful, leadership must align with the renewed mission of the church, and help align new members and leaders. The danger is that, once the change situation has taken hold, the church could fall into a resting state. A church is in a resting state when it, with its various ministries and organizations, ceases to move in accordance with the vision and mission. New members arrive, they join a resting church, and eventually the same problems that effected a church change situation arise again.

Church leadership must maintain a sense of urgency about the change situation. The restructuring of the leaders and leadership teams theologically creates a new church culture. This new culture is reforming, and evangelical in nature. The new church culture must also be renewing in order to keep the change intact, and continually evaluating the vision along with the mission of the church while, at the same time, acclimating new leaders.

Application

The application process of the change strategy incorporates a new leadership model for My Father's House Christian Center. The new leadership model is a deviation from the common pyramid model. In the pyramid model, the leader of the organization, in this case the pastor, stands at the top of the organization and pushes change downward. The pastor pushes the assistant pastor, who pushes the elders; the elders then push the ministry leaders, the ministry leaders push the ministry workers, and so on. As a result, the congregation now feels the weight of every action as they reside at the bottom of the pyramid, and the life is squeezed out of the church. The deviation from the pyramid model that MFHCC will utilize is to turn the pyramid upside down, placing the pastor and other leaders at the bottom of the model. The result is that change is now handed upward, with the ultimate outcome the building of a platform as the place where the congregation lives. The idea is that leadership nurtures and feeds upward as to "a tree planted by a stream" (Ps.1:1). The tree is only as strong as its foundation of deep reaching roots. Consequently, a church can only be as strong as its foundation and life source. By turning the former pyramid model upside down, the church is allowed to breathe, grow, and become missional without limitations as there is nothing between the people and God. (See figure 6.1.)

The steps that have been outlined to this point make up a bridging strategy, linking the "then situation" with the "now situation." The "then situation" represents MFHCC with a multiple theological identity. The "now situation" characterizes MFHCC as a church unified theologically as well as missionally. A bridging strategy is a plan of

action that will transition MFHCC from a mixture of theologically diverse practices to a biblically sound organization that is informed by the mission of Christ.

Pressure is Created by the Downward Push of Leadership

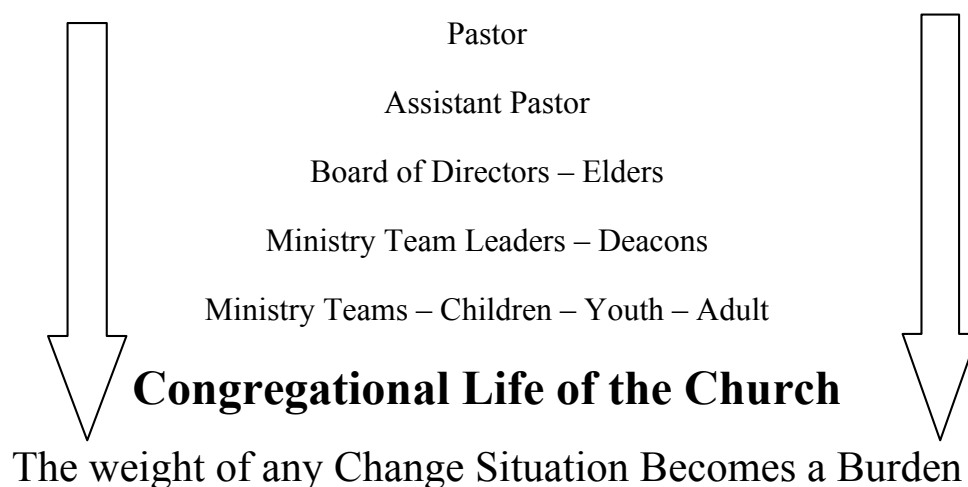


Figure 6.1. Pyramid and reverse pyramid models of leadership

The first step in the application process will be to bring the leaders of MFHCC together as part of an ongoing leadership training series. The group will then be assigned the task of reviewing the vision and mission statement for MFHCC. At this point, the group moves to a learning cluster, where they will develop individually as well as corporately as they handle the issues set before them. The point is to not rework the statements; rather, the task is to develop a strategy to deploy the statements. The pastor as primary change agent and resource linker supplies the needed information for the group.

The first part of the information that will be supplied to the group is the biblical directives concerning the mission of Christ. The Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20, along with 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, will serve as the scriptural genesis for theological reflection. The pastor at this stage becomes the facilitator, and guides the cluster in order to keep the discussion on topic and theologically sound.

The Scriptures drive the cluster to a renewed theological outcome. The Great Commission with its command to “go” serves the cluster as a directional beacon. Each leader will be encouraged to appropriate the mandates for the Matthew 28:18-20 for his or her individual ministry team. For each leader, the question becomes: what does “go” look like inside my groups ministry function? The purpose is to allow each leader to exegete the passage and bring their summations to the group. The group in turn wrestles with the application of the passage. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians acts as the building plumb line for the group. For example: Paul said he was a wise master builder because he built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the learning cluster must become wise master builders.

For the purpose of injecting a change situation for the learning cluster, the Reformation and Evangelical movements will be studied and discussed. The intent is to reveal to the group how the historical Church corrected errant practices, and developed new ministry options, based upon a return to the biblical texts for direction. The outcome is that the group as a learning cluster will find the mission of Christ in the cited passages and redeploy as evangelical and discipling.

Each Ministry Organizes around the Mission of Christ

Once the desired change has been achieved, the leaders move on to the implementation of the mission of Christ to their respective ministry teams. With the theological redirection gained by the leaders, they can now create a change situation for their individual groups. Learning clusters are assembled within each ministry team, and the process begins anew. It is important to keep the mission of Christ intact within each group. Primary change agents will have the responsibility to keep the groups on point. The timeframe for change agents is another twelve week period divided into three sections. Regardless of the size of the change agents group, the timeframe for change must be constant in order for all of the groups to progress together. At this point, it is the responsibility of the pastor as the primary change agent to keep each group on track for a successful outcome.

The feeding upward model is utilized by all members of the leadership team. Change is not being forced upon the church. The church, through leadership and ministry teams, refocuses and redirects according to the revelation derived by the learning clusters from Scripture. This will create excitement around the Word of God, and foster renewal for MFHCC.

The mission of Christ is contextualized for each ministry at My Father's House Christian Center. For example; the men's ministry group now has a direction and purpose for each meeting. The leader supplies the direction based on the learning cluster outcomes and develops a program that incorporates the mission of Christ into the overall pattern of the men's group. The strategy that was employed at the outset of the change situation can be enhanced and nuanced for the men's group. This pattern can occur within each group. Once the leaders have informed their respective ministries with the renewed focus for MFHCC the pastor will continue to give the vision and purpose for the church through the pulpit ministry and interaction with the congregation. At this stage, MFHCC will be six months in the change process. For the next six months the church will reform around the new direction and purpose. After twelve months the process and progress will be evaluated and adjusted as necessary.

Change agents, facilitators, resource linkers, and a bridging strategy can progress for each group. The overall strategy for the change situation will remain constant as the congregants move from the "then situation" to the "now situation." The idea is to create change from the Scriptures through the revelation of the individual. As each person understands the mission of Christ from within, the directives for change are no longer external; rather, the directives come from within the believer. The believer can now assume the renewed nature of change situation and apply it to the grid of MFHCC. Thus, change occurs as revelation, a move from a formal logic to an inner logic about the mission of Christ.

Errant theological assumptions are erased and replaced with a sound biblical doctrine according to the mission of Christ. The congregant, regardless of position or

status within MFHCC, can now articulate and carry out the mission of Christ to evangelize their community and make disciples. The members of MFHCC can now build on the foundation of Jesus Christ as the apostle Paul did. They are renewed through the reforming of their theological assumptions, advancing in spiritual maturity according to the Word of God. My Father's House Christian Center will now be positioned to engage the local community from a reformed evangelical perspective.

The Mission to the Community (Christopraxis)

In order to fully understand the model of theology that brings Christ to the local community, it is necessary to understand the meaning of Christopraxis. The word praxis basically means action. Ray S. Anderson notes that praxis is “a form of action which is profoundly saturated with meaning—a form of action which is value-directed and theory-laden.”¹⁴² Praxis is the functional form of knowledge which produces actions through which the church community lives out its beliefs. Therefore, praxis reveals theology in a substantial form. Christopraxis is the actions of the church body that express its theology and its application of the mission of Christ.

Christopraxis is the continuation of Christ's own ministry as carried on by the Church, thereby making Christ contemporary in each generation. The paradigm shift for My Father's House Christian Center is to place the mission of Christ at the core of every ministry action. In the past, MFHCC had forms of ministry that appeared to be of God, but they were “self serving” and did not reveal Christ; therefore, they were not of God. With the theological correction of errant beliefs, MFHCC can now focus on evangelism

¹⁴² Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1999), 26.

as Christopraxis and engage the local community with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As a result of the leadership strategy for the change situation, leadership within MFHCCC will have a new theological foundation from which action is produced. The leadership strategy will saturate the group with a new meaning for ministry action. This new meaning, moving from errant theology to orthodoxy in terms of theology, produces evangelical activity for MFHCC. Along with the new theological input, the action of MFHCC is to bring the mission of Christ to the community.

My Father's House Christian Center connects with the community of La Mirada through the existing avenues of involvement. In the past, MFHCC has opened areas of interaction between the church and the local community. Those avenues can now provide direct access to the people of La Mirada for the renewed purpose of evangelism. Each event that MFHCCC participates in is the mission field where the gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated and where the love of Christ is evident.

The mission to the community brings the gospel message of Christ, but it also brings the work of the gospel to the target group. At this stage, there is the integration of the revelation of God and the mission of Christ through evangelism, which also connects the work of Christ to the present day. The Christopraxis as expressed by MFHCC to the community is the act in which the wholeness of Christ is evident. Thus, evangelism does not assume an authoritarian posture; rather, evangelism becomes inviting and creditable. The reformed discernment coupled to integration takes on the new form of Christ in the community through the work of the church.

Reformational, Evangelical

The process for change within My Father's House Christian Center is reformational in journey and evangelical in outcome. In assessing the framework of MFHCC, several issues became apparent. MFHCC is a church plant without a historical narrative supplied through denominational ties. There was a lack of connection between the vision and mission statements of MFHCC and the actions of the organization. It became apparent that competing theological assumptions were at work within the congregation. More pointedly, some the assumptions were errant theologically and could ultimately hinder MFHCC from achieving its vision and mission to the community of La Mirada. Eventually, it was apparent that MFHCC needed to address these critical issues and foster a change situation to retain the mission of the church.

The mission of MFHCC has always been to evangelize the local community, but the church had failed in the past of live according to its mission. This failure in part was due to the lack of a direct connection to the mission of Christ. Evangelism for MFHCC was an afterthought instead of forethought. Evangelism was deemed by many in the church as something that only certain people were called by God to do. Parallel to this was the Word of Faith doctrine that resided within many members. Clearly, the need for the recovery of the mission of MFHCC was in order. This would result in a leadership strategy that would inform and reform.

As with Luther, reform begins with the biblical narrative and the development of a correction based upon Scripture. The initial search focused on the Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20, along with Paul's admonition to the Corinthians to build on the foundation of Christ. When those two sections were placed on the grid of MFHCC it was apparent that the church was leaning away from the biblical directives. This clarified the

need for a change situation that would reform MFHCC back to orthodoxy.

The journey to reform MFHCC began with the cited biblical instructions, and then the search incorporated the historical church as an antecedent for change. The church in Antioch formed a guideline to contextualize the Scriptures for the present day church. Moving forward historically, the Reformation served as a model in which the church corrected a theological lean away from orthodoxy. One of the outcomes of the Reformation was the Great Awakenings, where the need to continue the reforms eventually led to the Evangelical movement. These events and their subsequent revivals provided MFHCC a clear model from which the strategy for the change situation developed.

The theological emphasis of the Great Commission to “go” brought forth the mission of Christ as the logical cornerstone to adapt onto the matrix of MFHCC. The mission of Christ, the work of Christ at its core, is to bring salvation through Jesus. His atoning work on the cross along with His resurrection and ascension back to the Father provides the way for humanity to reconcile with Almighty God. Jesus, at the time of his ascension, speaks forth the mission of the Church: to complete his mission to the world. The conclusion is that, MFHCC must evangelize the world as they encounter it in their community. Every action of MFHCC must resonate in one way or another with the mission of Christ. The outcome of the journey for MFHCC redefines its nature and structure as reformational and evangelical.

A New Paradigm

A new paradigm began to emerge as reflection and examination of the meaningful acts of the church were critically assessed. What came forth was the challenge to seek the

transformation of the particular forms of praxis within My Father's House Christian Center in the light of the mission of Christ. The practical theology of the change situation is to seek to interpret Scripture, tradition, and praxis in order that the contemporary praxis of the church can be transformed. The understanding of the theological validity of the reformed praxis allows MFHCC to hold together theory, practice, mission, and church in a mutual dialogue about the change situation.

Concerning the nature of ministry, Ray Anderson says, "Ministry precedes and produces theology, not the reverse."¹⁴³ Ministry begins with God; it proceeds out of his Divine will. God sent His son, whose ministry was to carry out the will of the Father on earth. From this ministry, theological activity that explores the nature and purpose of God begins. Anderson suggests that ministry precedes and determines the church. For MFHCC, this is understood to mean that Christ's ministry determines the nature and practice of the church to the community. The paradigm shift is a move away from MFHCC seeking a ministry of its own to developing one from Christ's ministry to the world.

As Christ's own ministry is proclaimed and contextualized within MFHCC, the church discovers its own ministry and identity. Where individual interpretations or embedded assumptions once prevailed, the proclamation of Christ's mission reaches the members of MFHCC as revelation and reconciliation. The people of the church are informed by the revelation of Christ's ongoing ministry to the world and are reconciled to the mission of Christ. This newfound revelation eases the tension between embedded theologies and allows for the change situation to deploy.

¹⁴³ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 39.

The paradigm shift is a repositioning of church members stemming from the adaptation of the ministry of Christ to the world. The impact of the shift informs the existence and life of the church so that the life and practice of the church can now proceed from God without errant theological views imparting a lean away from the true mission of the Church. The shift is a non-obtrusive emptying of needless directives, and a turn towards God and the eventual return of Christ.

The new paradigm brings MFHCC a new nature as an emerging church with an emergent theology for the community of La Mirada. The “new wine” that emerges is really a look back to Christ and bringing Christ into the present day form of church mission. The new wine develops in the new wineskin of ministry context, which is renewed within the congregation and emerges in each ministry function of MFHCC.

The initial thrust of the paradigm shift comes from within the leadership of MFHCC. The leaders informed by their own theological shift pass the renewed reformational/evangelical identity on to their ministry teams. The new identity is then passed from the teams to the general congregation. The outcome of the strategy for change enables MFHCC to align itself with the mission of Christ and develop an evangelical thrust into the community it serves. As a result, MFHCC will be able to maintain a healthy church environment/organization that is doctrinally sound.

Maintaining a Healthy Environment

Authors, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner state that, unless the personal values of an individual were clear, it does not matter how clear the organization’s values

are.¹⁴⁴ The point is that, in a change situation concerning theology, it is not about what the organization believes; rather it is about the theological assumptions of the people that drive the organization. If the change occurs on the inside of an individual, they will be committed to the change because it matters to them. In order to maintain a healthy environment within the change situation as well as in My Father's House Christian Center as a whole, the members of the church must be committed to the new direction.

An organization such as MFHCC does not drive itself; it is driven by its members. The bridging strategy for change requires that leadership pass the directives to the team members, who in turn pass the information with the help of the change agents to the congregation as a whole. Therefore, leadership sets the tone for change. Leaders, create a healthy environment by being credible in word and action. Credibility, say Kouzes and Posner, is simplified by one question: "Do I trust this person?"¹⁴⁵ A healthy environment is one of trust within the leaders of the organization. In order to maintain a healthy environment, church members will have to accept and adjust to the new direction. This will require that team leaders develop trust within their groups. If leadership of MFHCC is not credible in moving change within their groups, then there is the potential for failure. Leaders as change agents possess the factors that can bring and maintain change for MFHCC.

Writing in *Credibility*, the authors stress that leaders are spirited individuals who are motivated, enthusiastic, inspiring, and respected. These leaders then pass their enthusiasm and inspiration into the mix for change. For MFHCC a healthy environment

¹⁴⁴ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), xiv.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

is Reformational and Evangelical in nature. In order to continue to in that the direction, leadership takes on the additional role of caretaker for change. “Spirited” leaders create and maintain the environment because they are motivated by the Scriptures to do so. They are enthusiastic in their service to God and the church, which in turn can inspire others to continue to embrace the change to evangelicalism.

The new environment for MFHCC is missional, which is “not an affiliation or activity”; it is a way of living out the mission of Christ. As MFHCC develops missionally, the very heart of what the church is will be reclaimed from its original mission. It will be challenged to move beyond the self-preoccupation of some, and the traditional programs of others. The way forward for MFHCC is to redefine its position in the community through service and sacrifice.

In order to maintain a healthy environment, MFHCC must refrain from taking on a refuge mentality; rather, it must hold to a missional approach to ministry. MFHCC, as an emergent church with an emerging theology in the city of La Mirada, will focus on sending rather than maintaining a traditional course. The church in Antioch emerged away from the norms of the church in Jerusalem and continued to develop without a refuge outlook concerning church growth.

Reggie McNeal says, “Those with a refuge mentality view the world outside the church as the enemy.”¹⁴⁶ This refuge mentality, McNeal goes on to say, is the Christian subculture that exists in its own bubble, without ever engaging the local community. Refuge churches demonstrate enormous self-preoccupation and view themselves as a persuasive force. A healthy environment for MFHCC is one that understands that the

¹⁴⁶ McNeal, *Present Future*, 9.

church was created to be the people of God to join him in his redemptive mission in the world. The church does not exist for itself; it is the chosen instrument of God to continue the mission of Christ.

McNeal issues a warning in *Present Future*, “Turning members into missionaries, will precipitate a crisis, both in individuals and in a congregation.”¹⁴⁷ Missionaries are people that “go” into the world, as opposed to those that would rather “send” someone into the world. Certainly, the change situation will bring new values, which will clash with the embedded theology of many within the church. A healthy environment for MFHCC will be one that continues to address the issues that affect the church and solidify the mission of Christ in the hearts and minds of church members.

Revaluation as Necessary

The initial foray to develop a strategy for My Father’s House Christian Center to align its practice with the mission of Christ began with a simple question: Are we there yet? The mission statement for MFHCC reads, “Our mission is to glorify God by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, in the context of loving relationships, through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the maturing of the body of Christ, and the salvation of the lost.” The evaluation of MFHCC in light of the mission statement revealed that the church was not living according to its mission. The practice of MFHCC was leaning away from the original intent of the church. The next phase of the evaluation concerned itself with the detection of errant factors that may have contributed to the lean. As a result, it was determined that MFHCC was moving away from it its

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 65.

mission theologically, and that it would be necessary to implement a change strategy to align the organization to the mission of Christ.

The strategy to align MFHCC with the mission of Christ is not a onetime event. The change situation must continually be monitored for adherence to the protocols that are deemed necessary through the research and adaptation from the learning clusters. It is important to keep the development of MFHCC under observation for building flaws. The foundational steps in aligning with the mission of Christ and projecting evangelism to the local community must undergo a continual contextualization in order to assure that leadership for MFHCC is acting as wise master builders.

Leith Anderson says, “Renewal is not something we do at periodic intervals. The best organizations are always renewing.”¹⁴⁸ Renewing organizations are always going through a process of change as they throw out the worst and retain the best, says Anderson. The reevaluation factor must be figured into the change strategy to provide for the renewing of mission and alignment with the standards of the Bible. Renewing organizations are not bound by rules or traditions; rather, they are flexible and desire change as a positive growth stimulus. Change and challenge should not become threatening but recognized as part of the ongoing process of alignment.

Leaders must continue to summon the church and its constituents back to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Fulfilling the mission of Christ is more important than traditions. Reformers and missionaries are proactive change agents; they attempt a new order in the midst of traditional restraint. Traditions are not a bad influence as long as they are reevaluated for contemporary relevance.

¹⁴⁸ Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 136.

The task for MFHCC is to be able to reevaluate its practices and theology in an ongoing quest for relevance. There is a value to both tradition and change as long as they remain faithful to orthodoxy and practical to people. Reevaluation asks, are we they yet, but never expects to fully arrive at a fixated destination. All systems and ministry practices are open for modification. There should always be a certain tension between old and new but a reevaluated, renewing church accepts the tension as necessary for alignment. For MFHCC the process of reevaluation is to insure that the church focuses its resources into knowing and fulfilling its purpose before God and to the community it serves.

CONCLUSION

This ministry focus paper was written as part of a systematic strategy to deploy the mission of Christ through evangelism for My Father's House Christian Center. The paper outlines My Father's House Christian Center as a non-denominational church plant in the city of La Mirada, California, which is undergoing a theological shift towards evangelicalism. This shift is a move away from errant theological assumptions of some members of My Father's House Christian Center, who have been informed by Word of Faith Theology. The initial task of this paper was to detail My Father's House Christian Center and outline the critical theological flaws that could hamper the church from achieving its mission to the community. This paper is not a "how-to-evangelize" manual for MHFCC. Rather, it addresses the need for a theological change situation, relates the essential biblical passages, and uncovers historical antecedents that recount theological change. The final section of the paper details a strategy that incorporates all of the pertinent information and outlines the journey for a successful outcome.

A church, like other organizations, sets goals and develops strategies to help achieve those objectives. My Father's House Christian Center, from its inception, set evangelism as a goal within the context of the local community. Eventually, an assessment of MFHCC was made, and it was discovered that, not only had the church failed to achieve its purpose, but it was ascertained that some within leadership were holding to a wayward theology. This revealed the need for reform as well as reconnection with the vision and mission for MFHCC.

The two areas of concern, failure to live out the mission statement of MFHCC and errant theological beliefs of team leaders, uncovered a linkage between the two that were in effect driving each other. Failure to “go into the world with the gospel” was a byproduct of the theological assumption of team leaders that only a person called as an evangelist was to do that. Secondly, because the nature of the church was never established as evangelical, there was no sense of urgency to reach the local community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This became apparent when events were planned to help church members interact with the people in the community, and the result was little if any evangelical activity.

In looking at the problem as a whole, it was determined that a theological shift had to occur if MFHCC was going to progress in the city of La Mirada as an evangelical entity. The problem was not a managerial dilemma that one could correct by supplying new rules to follow. The problem was theological, and it was embedded in the church members. Therefore, any attempt to alter errant beliefs would require strong leadership on the part of the primary change agent. Simply, people do not want to change, and one cannot force change where there is such an unwillingness. It was obvious that, if change were going to occur, it would have to come from within the people themselves.

The initial movement for change came via a change situation that had occurred previously at My Father’s House Christian Center. The predicament was that MFHCC had to move to a new location. Before any move could take place, certain resistant members needed to be persuaded that the change was for the good of all concerned. A model for change was taken from “Leading Congregational Change,” a class in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Fuller Theological Seminary. Along with course reading

that helped identify the problematic areas of change, several key grids from the class were applied. Havelock's grid for change outlined the roles of the change agent, who is the, catalyst, process helper, resource linker, and solution giver. Other required steps were gleaned from the course, such as the role of the interventionist and the identification of the "Restraining Forces and the Driving Forces." Because these steps were incorporated into the change situation, the move to a new facility was successful. This successful utilization of change tools would now supply the vessel for change. What was needed next was the propellant for change.

Two ingredients for change would be used to facilitate the change situation. The first was the biblical directives that inform MFHCC evangelically; the other would come from historical church movements. The biblical mandate from Matthew 28:16-20, known as the Great Commission, gives MFHCC its mission to the world and to the local community through contextualization. Because we are called by Christ to go make disciples without respect to individual assignments by the Holy Spirit, the emphasis is that all are commissioned by Christ to "go." In addition, the Apostle Paul's admonition to the church in Corinth to build correctly supplies Paul's theological directives concerning the structure of the church.

Paul's perception of a wise master builder is someone who builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ. The initial move to becoming a master builder, in Paul's view, is to follow Christ into the world. The task of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission by following/taking Christ into the world; this becomes the mission of Christ for each generation. The outcome of going into the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ is the evangelical deployment of the body of Christ. This deployment is the

contextualization of the gospel for the local community. What was discovered was that MFHCC is an emerging church in the community of La Mirada; therefore, it needs an emerging theology to fulfill its mission.

The second ingredient for change came from the history of the church in several eras. The first area era was the church in Antioch. The church in Antioch emerged away from the norms of the church in Jerusalem. In Antioch, the concept of new wine in new wineskins is revealed as the church there contextualizes the mission of Christ for the new community. This discovery provides the antecedent for MFHCC to emerge into the community of La Mirada as a new church that develops an emerging theology not bound to previous practices, yet maintaining the flavor of the Scriptures.

The Reformation period supplies the catalyst for theological change from within an existing church structure. The Reformation as a whole is a massive shift away from errant patterns and theology. The reformers looked within their existing church structure, as provided by the church in Rome, and deemed that a correction was in order. Beginning with Luther, the intent was not to do away with the church; rather, the purpose was to identify practices, which strayed from the Scriptures and to expose the erroneous theology behind the actions. Because the reformers used Scripture as the basis for reform, the objective was to re-align the church biblically. In the process, there was a renewal in the hearts and minds of countless believers who took the biblical mandates and developed in churches that attempted to structure themselves biblically.

The Reformation led eventually to the Great Awakenings, where figures such as Edwards and Whitefield taught and preached in a new arena of open-air gatherings. They proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new country with a new style that invigorated

and empowered Christianity with a sense of urgency. The result was a revival that reached back to the first-century church and stretched forward to a new era of change.

The historical search for church correction continued on to the Evangelical movement that began in the early 1800s. The search uncovered that, just as the Reformation had provided a break from tradition and supplied a biblical correction that gave way to the Great Awakenings, the Awakenings in turn opened the door for the Evangelical movement that continues to this day, the Evangelical movement being the natural outcome of a recovery of the mission of Christ. The mission of Christ, as it is carried out in the world, requires the development of evangelical strategies to reach the people with the gospel. As each church continues the mission of Christ to its respective community, the people that make up the church experience renewal.

Likewise, MFHCC is experiencing a renewal that is rooted in the reclamation of the mission of Christ. The renewal stems from a return to Jesus' command at the time of his ascension to go into the world and make disciples. The mission of Christ places the emphasis on God's redemptive plan, shifting the focus away from doctrines of self-empowerment for personal gain, to a doctrine that Christ has commissioned the Body of Christ to go into the world and continues his work. Return to the mission of Christ now becomes a revelation from the Holy Spirit that renews each generation to the work of Christ. This renewal is part of a theological shift within the leaders of MFHCC.

The next phase of this paper captured the problems and the potential corrections, and it outlined the strategy to reform MFHCC around the mission of Christ, which would inform the church evangelically. MFHCC was a church plant that had some success but was in danger of losing its mission to doctrines and practices from the embedded

theological assumptions of church members who had move away from biblical Christianity. Added to this are the cited biblical passages and the relevant historical narratives. The strategy to reform MFHCC theologically was deemed a change situation that would begin with the team leaders at MFHCC and then move on to the respective teams, who would in turn help inform the general congregation through ministry work. This has become the grid that enables MFHCC to renew its practices according the Word of God.

Within this paper, the Tower of Pisa was used to help convey the need for change and provide the reader with a visual metaphor. The Tower of Pisa was used because it leans away from vertical and to the beholder appears to be in imminent danger of collapse. It was uncovered that the tower leans because of foundational flaws. Incredibly, during construction, the lean was detected, and, instead of looking at the foundation for correction, the builders attempted a correction by building as to correct the lean. The result was that the tower continued to lean at an even greater angle. It was also noted that today the tower has been propped up to lean indefinitely. While this may be acceptable for a tourist attraction, it is altogether unacceptable to prop up MFHCC, or any church, in order to maintain a lean away from orthodoxy.

The Tower of Pisa as a metaphor helps to relate the need to correct organizational flaws from the foundation upward. For MFHCC to discover the lean, in this case a move away from orthodoxy, it would be catastrophic to apply a correction on top of an errant theology. The theology would still be critically ill and would eventually collapse under the weight of a mesh of beliefs. The Tower of Pisa allegory enhances the need to dismantle and reestablish the theological foundation for MFHCC. In order to rebuild,

there is the need for a plumb line to help direct the construction of the organization.

The Scriptures were identified as the plumb line of God. Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, is the foundation from which his church is to be built. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, admonishes the church there to build as he has on the foundation of Jesus Christ; to build any other way would be in error. It was also related in this paper that Paul developed theologically as a believer in Jesus Christ in part through his ministry at the church in Antioch. Antioch emerged away from the church in Jerusalem and developed contextualizing the gospel for the community there. The Reformation aided the Tower of Pisa metaphor since the reformers appealed back to Scripture and desired a move to restructure the foundation of the church. The application to MFHCC uncovered was that, once the mission of Christ was reestablished, the nature of the church would be evangelical and then ministry practices would become evangelical, as well.

The strategy for the change situation was informed by all of the above findings, which help to drive the strategy. The strategy incorporated methods from a previous change situation. What is important is that the change situation and the methodology used are not theoretical; this is a work in progress that has shown to be effective in the past. In this paper, the methodology was contextualized and broadened for the new situation. This ministry focus paper highlighted the problems facing MFHCC and the potential problems that could occur if the situation did not change. The use of Scripture and certain areas of church history were utilized to inform the needed correction. Finally, a concise strategy was put in place to facilitate the desired outcome.

During the research and writing phases of this ministry focus paper, the strategy as outlined in this project began to take place within MFHCC. Currently, ministry leaders

have embarked on the journey to connect with the vision and mission of MFHCC. A team of church leaders clusters together once a week to discuss direction and outcomes. In the middle of the table sits an eight inch high replica of the Tower of Pisa as a reminder for the group to find the “lean” and then search the Scriptures for the biblical response to the error. The pastor as primary change agent guides the learning cluster by supplying the needed biblical and historical antecedents for the group.

The outcome of this project for My Father’s House Christian Center is for the church and its members to live, worship, and grow spiritually in a doctrinally sound environment. Certainly, no church is perfect and a detectable lean can be found in any organization, but that does not mean that a lean away from God in any form is acceptable.

This ministry focus paper has supplied My Father’s House Christian Center with the necessary tools to assess and correct errant doctrines from within the church. Not only is the major paradigm shift away from errant theological miscues overcome, but a solid, biblically based doctrine of the mission of Christ can now be applied throughout the church system. MFHCC is now positioned to emerge evangelically through the strategic placement of the mission of Christ within each ministry team. In addition, this study provides MFHCC with the needed recovery of its original vision and mission and offers a clear avenue for continuous evaluation.

As a result of this change situation and the ongoing application of the directives from the learning clusters, spiritual growth and formation is occurring within MFHCC. Everyone concerned has experienced or will experience the presence of the Holy Spirit through the recovery of the mission of Christ. The objective is to supply the leadership of MFHCC with a renewed vision for evangelism that will be passed on to the congregation

through the ministry teams. Thus, the leadership of MFHCC will be able to align the members of the church toward a unified mission/vision, which is reformational, evangelical, and contemporary.

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