

9-1-2016

From Open Table to Open Tables: The Challenge and Opportunity of Hospitality in the Suburbs

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THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY OF HOSPITALITY IN THE SUBURBS

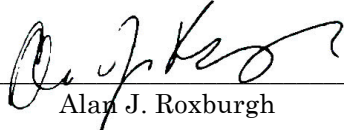
Written by

TROY SYBRANT

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
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Date Received: March 27, 2017

FROM OPEN TABLE TO OPEN TABLES:
THE CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY OF HOSPITALITY IN THE SUBURBS

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

TROY SYBRANT
SEPTEMBER 2016

ABSTRACT
**From Open Table to Open Tables:
The Challenge and Opportunity of Hospitality in the Suburbs**
Troy S. Sybrant
Doctor of Ministry
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2016

The goal of this project was to create a space within which a missional future and imagination could be cultivated in a local congregation. In order to do so, participants would need to be able to name their present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture, denominational tradition, and local context. By first bringing into awareness and understanding how the congregation's suburban context frames their missional imagination and action, participants will be better prepared to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with the context.

The means to reach this goal was a hospitality experiment around the suburban tables of participants. It is argued that by practicing hospitality the participants' awareness and understanding of their cultural context, scriptural resources, and denominational traditions would be increased and their efforts would lead to further diffusion within the congregation and missional innovation beyond it. This hypothesis was tested among four groups of participants within the Tylersville Road Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Mason, Ohio. To validate this hypothesis a hospitality measurement was given before and after the experiment, qualitative interviews to evaluate the experiment were done, and a congregational survey to measure diffusion was given.

This project concludes that practicing hospitality in this experiment did increase participants' awareness and understanding of the cultural context, scriptural resources, and denominational traditions. Furthermore, missional diffusion within the congregation and the groundwork for missional innovation beyond the congregation were both advanced in order to address the adaptive challenge. Given the limited size of the test sample, however, these findings require further research before a definite conclusion can be drawn. Although further research is needed, the practice of hospitality is a holy disruption that permits a glimpse into God's agency, intentions, and work already underway in this world.

Content Reader: Alan J. Roxburgh, PhD

Words: 294

To my wife and daughter, Amy and Abbey, at whose table grace is never a stranger,
and where faith, hope, and love abide and abound.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Tylersville Road Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), now Compass Christian Church, for their vital contributions to this project. Their willingness to enter into an open-ended future with and toward God continues to reveal Christ in surprising places among and beyond us. A special thanks to Richard Walker and Nelson Kennedy for their invaluable assistance in the statistical analysis of this project, and to Aleesa Schlup, editor. Thanks as well to the successive leaders over the years of this project, and for the countless prayers of members that helped bring it to its completion.

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SECTION ONE

THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE IN THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

The roles that meals play within the North American culture run the gamut from memorable to mindless, from wedding receptions to fast food drive-throughs. Meals also play different roles in Scripture and within the tradition of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ, or DOC). The varied cultural, scriptural, and denominational roles of meals will be brought around a single table for discussion. This introduction examines the roles that meals play within culture, Scripture, and within the Christian Church (DOC).

This preparatory work sets the table for the process upon which this project is based, a project whose purpose is for participants to wake up to what God is doing locally by engaging culture, Scripture, and denominational traditions around the tables in their homes. These participants will initially be drawn from the Tylersville Road Christian Church (TRCC) (DOC); future participants beyond this project will be drawn from outside this congregation. This will better prepare the congregation to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with the suburban context.¹ The goal is to continue the incremental movement of organizational change and move toward articulating a contextual theology, a noble goal reached through humble meals.

Meals in the North American Context

Meals in the North American context have become hurried affairs of ingesting a maximal number of calories in the minimal amount of time. Benjamin Barber says, “The

¹ Language about adaptive change comes from Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky’s *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 14.

emblem of the consumerist preference for fast, which has become the emblem of American style consumerism for the rest of the world, is of course fast food . . . To consume is not to experience but to appropriate and swallow for purposes other than intrinsic pleasure, the way dogs eat.”² “Diners” have morphed into “consumers,” food becomes a mere tool, and the presence of others is inconsequential. Barber notes:

The point is the speed with which food is bought and consumed, the radical informality and asociality of the consuming process, the contrast between what we do when we eat and what we do when we (say) break bread together or dine and share a repast. Dining cannot be hurried without impeaching its integrity as dining . . . [yet] Dining was not the point anymore, communion and ritual were wholly beside the point . . . But dining is about sociability, eating as ritual and food as symbol, with the dining table as a kind of secular altar to the family home and hearth. Today, the TV or the computer screen have taken over the ritual function of the household altar, and eating is solitary and passive.³

Lewis Mumford makes a similar point: “After all, one of man’s greatest achievements was the invention of food, not just fodder. All animals eat fodder. Man invented food. Food is not merely something that you put in your stomach and digest. Food is an occasion for a social act. It’s an occasion for meeting. It’s an occasion for conversation. Food is something that stirs the senses.”⁴

As a nation that runs on fast food, consumers have taken leave of their senses by exchanging food for fodder, relationships for rushing, and communion for competitive eating. In so doing the sentence pronounced over King Nebuchadnezzar finds resonance

² Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

⁴ Lewis Mumford, “Closing Statement,” in Robert Disch, ed., *The Ecological Conscience* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), quoted in Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 13.

today, “You shall be driven away from human society, and your dwelling shall be with the wild animals. You shall be made to eat grass like oxen” (Dan 4:25). Culture has set one leaf of a tripartite table for this project, a place of bright plastic furniture, empty calories, and anonymous meals.

Scripture and Meals

While the culture has set part of the table, Scripture forms another leaf section of that table. Meals within Scripture are places of encounter with God, as Abraham and Sarah (Gn 18:1-15) and as two disciples (Lk 24:13-35) discover. They are places of ritualized remembrance of deliverance, forming the Passover narrative (Ex 12:1-20) and Last Supper narratives. Walter Brueggemann notes that within the narrative of Israel’s movement from Egypt to Sinai are a number of peculiar claims:

1. Persons living in a *system of anxiety and fear*—and consequently greed—have no time or energy for the common good. Defining anxiety focuses total attention on the self at the expense of the common good.
2. *An immense act of generosity* is required in order to break the death grip of the system of fear, anxiety, and greed.
3. Those who are immersed in such immense gifts of generosity are able to get their minds off themselves and can be *about the work of the neighborhood*. Children of such enormous abundance are able to receive new commandments that are about the well-being of the neighbor and not about the entitlements of the self.⁵

These peculiar claims have bearing upon this time as well. Brueggemann says, “Eucharist is the great extravagant drama of the way in which the gospel of abundance overrides the claim of scarcity and invites to the common good. There is no doubt that the church’s

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 28-29. Italic original.

Eucharist is, among other things, simply a replay of the manna narrative in the book of Exodus.”⁶ Meals within both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament alike form another leaf to the table. Scriptural narratives have set a second leaf of the tripartite table for this project, a place of theophanies, remembrance, and abundance.

Meals and Denominational Tradition

The table is not fully set without the leaf of the tradition of the Christian Church (DOC). Questions arose early on whether the “pious unimmersed” could be admitted to the Lord’s Supper, with founder Barton Stone erring on the side of inclusion and founder Alexander Campbell waffling on the issue. Douglas Foster and associates write:

Despite some resistance and some divergent theological accents, a consensus emerged among the heirs of Stone and Campbell. “Open communion” as free access to the table for the conscientious—enshrined in the oft repeated phrase “we neither invite, nor debar”—became the predominant usage in all streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement. Not all constituents, however, have interpreted this “openness” the same way. For some [like the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)], the Movement’s passive form of the practice, though it hardly recruits the pious unimmersed to the table, has been tantamount to an ecumenical overture, a positive gesture to the denominations of their shared status in the kingdom.⁷

As one contemporary Disciple author notes:

It could be argued that our greatest contribution to the Church at large is our concept of the Table . . . Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander both famously departed their congregations over the issue of an Open Table. Neither could understand how the church, or its elders, could seize the authority to decide who was, and who was not, welcome at the Table. Wasn’t it, after all, the *Lord’s*

⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁷ Douglas A. Foster et al, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 492.

Table, and not the church's? Yes, we Disciples concluded. The Table belongs to Christ and only he is qualified as Inviter.⁸

The Disciples of Christ tradition around meals, specifically the Lord's Supper, sets the third leaf of the tripartite table for this project.

Each of these leaves—cultural context, Scripture, and denominational tradition—overlap and set a table for this project, creating dynamic spaces for discussion, divergence, and discovery. Lesslie Newbigin recognized the dynamic relationship of culture, gospel, and Church and visualized that interaction as a triangular field.⁹ This project takes that same relationship and visualizes it instead as a table, with contributions from Alan Roxburgh¹⁰ and Craig Van Gelder.¹¹ The table will serve as a model for conversation (see Figures 1 and 2) as well as the direction for this project.¹²

The insights of appreciative inquiry (AI) are foundational to this conversational model of organization change. Mark Lau Branson shares that AI's thesis is that “an

⁸ Glenn Thomas Carson, *Central Casting: The Lord's Table at the Heart of Faith* (Nashville, Polar Star Press, 2008), 67-68. Italic original.

⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 153.

¹⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 31-48. Roxburgh imagines the relationship between Newbigin's field as a conversation between three friends. He sketches this relationship in his *Moving Back into the Neighborhood Workbook* (West Vancouver, BC: Roxburgh Missional Network, 2010), 49. He raises questions of “What is God up to?” and “How do we join in God's work?”

¹¹ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 59-61. Van Gelder echoes Roxburgh's questions and adds, “What does God want to do?”

¹² See Appendix A for Figures 1-3.

organization, such as a church, can be recreated through its conversations.”¹³ As Richard Pascale, *et al* write, “Conversation is the single most important business process when the goal is to shift what people think and how they think.”¹⁴ Bringing culture, gospel, and Church around a table as equal voices in conversation is challenging, but “a dialogue that is safe from all possible risks is no true dialogue.”¹⁵ It is moving beyond the surface opacity of a glass table (Figure 2) whose “on the table” question across culture, gospel, and Church is, “What is going on locally?” It is moving through that conversational process from translucency to transparency to the deeper question “under the table,” “What is God up to?” Both questions are inherently theological ones as Clemens Sedmak shares, “Theology is an invitation to wake up: to be mindful and attentive. Theology is done locally [and] takes the particular situation seriously.”¹⁶

The primary purpose of this project’s conversation is for participants to engage a curriculum customized for this particular congregation to awaken to God’s local activities.¹⁷ This project’s aim is for participants to come to name their present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture and denominational tradition. This will better prepare the congregation to address the

¹³ Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004), xiii.

¹⁴ Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 202.

¹⁵ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 187.

¹⁶ Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1, 3.

¹⁷ See Appendix A for this curriculum that engages culture, gospel, and Church within the homes of participants as they gather around meals.

adaptive challenge of connecting with the suburban context. Beyond that purpose is to continue the incremental movement of organizational change and ultimately the cultivation of a local theology.¹⁸

This project is about moving toward articulating a contextual theology, one done by the people and with the people.¹⁹ What this means is a theology that takes shape within a particular context and in response to and within a particular social situation.²⁰ This local theology will develop in response to a situation found in a predominantly Euro-American, middle-class Disciples of Christ congregation. The particular social situation this local theology will develop in response to is a predominantly Euro-American, middle-class suburb of increasing cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity within the Cincinnati-Dayton metroplex in Ohio. Such a contextual theology “must begin with analysis of the present situation and discover, in this situation, what God is doing now.”²¹ As Robert Schreiter notes, “Ideally, for a genuinely contextual theology, the theological process should begin with the opening of culture, that long and careful listening to a culture to discover its principal values, needs, interests, directions, and symbols.”²² Contextual theologies begin with the local, seek to apprehend the culture on its own terms, and understand that Christ is already active within the culture prior to

¹⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 103-104.

¹⁹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 58.

²² Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 28.

anyone bringing Christ into the conversation.²³ The development and growth of a local theology occurs in the dialectical interaction of culture, gospel, and Church.²⁴ That framework forms the structure and process within which this project's conversation occurs, one outlined in the Missional Change Model (MCM)²⁵ as it is visualized as a journey to the center of a table (Figure 3). Roxburgh observes, "The table is not just a table and the meal is not just food to fill a body with nutrients. The meal is a sacrament that presents and anticipates God's future."²⁶ This project is inspired by early Christian meals that engaged context, gospel, and Church in dynamic ways. Hal Taussig shares:

The meals of early Christians . . . appear as a series of bold social and spiritual experiments. They allowed [them] to try out new behaviors in dialogue with their social visions . . . As spiritual experiments [they] enacted the new social alternatives so vividly that the meal participants experienced themselves as actually a part of a new social order . . . as if they were living in a different world.²⁷

It is around such tables in the current context that others will gather for a taste of hospitality, to consider how moving from the practice of an open table in worship to open tables in suburban homes is both a challenge and an opportunity. These three leaves spread a rich table for this project where conversation amongst these varied voices creates a learning environment itself, much like the symposiums of old.

²³ Ibid., 29.

²⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 140-146.

²⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 145.

²⁷ Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation & Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 54.

SECTION ONE

THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGE IN THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

CHAPTER 1
CONTEXTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Contextual Background

This first section explores hospitality as a sporadic practice within suburbia, a key practice in Scripture, and a weekly practice within the Christian Church (DOC) tradition expressed in an open table during the Lord's Supper. The practice of hospitality within the current suburban context, the history of suburbia, and some potential future trajectories for hospitality's practice within the suburbs are examined. The practice of hospitality within the Church and its changes over time are discussed next. This section concludes with the practice of hospitality within the Christian Church (DOC). Hospitality forms a nexus weaving context, Scripture, and denominational tradition into a dynamic space forming the heart of this project. The goal of this section is to continue setting the table and laying the framework for a redesigned hospitality project tailored for a specific congregation within a particular suburb.

The purpose of this project is to create a space where participants can name the present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture and tradition. By first bringing into awareness and understanding how the

suburban context frames the congregation's missional imagination and action, the congregation will be better prepared to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with that context. The congregation does not yet have the imagination, new learning, and practice needed in order to engage and connect with the local context. This adaptive challenge is enhanced by most members living outside the neighborhood of the church campus and a church campus limited solely to a worship space that shapes and reinforces a drive-in congregational identity. Given these mitigating factors there is a critical need to imagine and enact hospitality beyond Sunday morning's open table in worship in order to connect with the community. This hospitality project within the home will help participants learn about the community, Scripture, and denominational tradition in order to discover what God is doing locally, what God wants to do, and how this congregation joins in God's work. This is a holy calling discovered around tables of hospitality in homes.

Hospitality, the practice of welcoming others into one's home, has become increasingly marginalized within the modern context. Arthur Sutherland, in his book *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*, says: "Hospitality, public and private, is under attack from all sides. The term 'compassion fatigue' has made its way into our lexicon of societal ills . . . Americans are encountering strangers with ever-increasing anxiety [and fear]. Our mistrust exhibits itself in a renewed interest in immigration laws and efforts to limit our borders."¹ Of particular pertinence for this project's context are these words from Sutherland, "The audacious hospitality of the

¹ Arthur Sutherland, *I was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), ix-x.

nineteenth century abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad is almost unimaginable today.”² Within downtown Cincinnati is the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, located here because in the nineteenth century this area was able not only to imagine but embody audacious hospitality.

While perhaps not as audacious, a neighbor of mine, Bob Schilling, remembered when hospitality with neighbors was a regular occurrence about forty years ago, and lamented its passing.³ This diminishment of suburban hospitality is confirmed by data from Albert Hsu: “In 1975 the average American entertained friends at home 15 times per year; the equivalent figure is now barely half that. In other words, most people now host friends over less than once a month.”⁴ Yet not all hospitable practices are lost in suburbia. A church member lives on a street where neighbors routinely socialize, children regularly play together, and residents enjoy one another’s company. When coworkers ask how he spent the weekend and he shares this information, “They look at me like I have three heads.”⁵ Pockets of hospitality survive but are perceived as idiosyncratic; hospitable practices are sporadic within the current context. This hospitality project aims to create a space within which participants can envision and enact a new social imaginary to meet

² Ibid., x.

³ Interview with Bob Schilling, March 3, 2013. See Appendix F for full remarks.

⁴ Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 124.

⁵ Conversation with Scott Frazier, November 12, 2013.

the adaptive challenge of connecting with the surrounding suburban context.⁶

Creating a space within which an alternative community can be formed through the practice of hospitality is challenging within the current context; the project is formed around this primary adaptive challenge. Members of the congregation live scattered across the Cincinnati-Dayton metroplex in suburban built environments that by design mitigate human contact and community formation. As James Kunstler observes, “The two elements of the suburban pattern that cause the greatest problems are the extreme separation of uses and the vast distances between things.”⁷ The suburban built environment of separation and distancing mirrors the cultural environment of modernity’s fragmentation; hospitality as a practice within such an environment finds itself an unwelcome stranger with no “place” to call home. Christine Pohl observes:

Significant changes in the last two centuries have made modern expressions of hospitality both important and difficult. Activities that were originally located in the household—work, religious observance, protection, education, care for the sick, provision for the aging, and care for strangers—are now located in their own spheres and private institutions. Each sphere has its own culture, rules, and specialists.⁸

Contemporary patterns of fragmentation and dissociation of spheres are themselves descendants of bifurcations inherent within the suburban model itself, a model that originated within London’s eighteenth century merchant class. As Robert Fishman notes:

⁶ Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 219. They define a church’s social imaginary as what it means to be church and what it means to be a church in a particular context.

⁷ James Howard Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America’s Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 117.

⁸ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 56-57.

The merchant in his coach and four hurrying along the turnpike road from home to office was the fragile link between these two spheres, which from that time proved increasingly polarized and discordant features in modern life. The growth of suburbia was to build into the physical environment that division between the feminine/natural/emotional world of family and the masculine/rational/urban world of work.⁹

The creation of this “bourgeois utopia” outside the supposed evils of the city created a separate enclave of privilege, power, and class for its fortunate inhabitants. This utopia would not have been possible without the Evangelicals who were “the ideologists of the closed, domesticated nuclear family.”¹⁰

The private realm of family and home was fetishized with the woman’s role simultaneously restricted from urban work and elevated as guardian of the Christian home.¹¹ The suburban home itself became a sanctuary from the depredations of industrialization.¹² As Richard Sennett observes, “Stated baldly, ‘home’ became the secular version of spiritual refuge; the geography of safety shifted from a sanctuary in the urban center to the domestic interior . . . These were the two perverse consequences of the search for refuge in secular society: an increase in isolation and in inequality.”¹³ Despite seeking a refuge from industrialization, technological innovations would ultimately find and transform the suburban home.

⁹ Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 61-62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹² Tim J. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81.

¹³ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 21, 29.

A number of technological advancements significantly altered the suburban environment. Disruptive innovations like automobiles, air conditioning, television, automatic garage door openers, and social media have insulated and isolated immediate neighbors from one another. Architecture followed suit as front porches were replaced by back decks, leading to further privatization of the home and its occupants. As Kunstler observed about America in the 1950s, “The private world of home and family was everything; the public realm was out.”¹⁴ As Andres Duany and his associates write, “The American private realm is simply a superior product. The problem is that most suburban residents, the minute they leave this refuge, are confronted by a tawdry and stressful environment . . . our public realm is brutal.”¹⁵ These authors further say that “Society seems to be evolving in an unhealthy way. Americans are splintering into insular factions . . . with nary a thought for the greater good. Further, more and more citizens seem to be withdrawing from public life into the shelter of their private homes, from which they encounter the world primarily through their television and computer screens . . . By ignoring the issue of context—the quality of the environment surrounding the houses—they miss out on the best opportunity to provide something truly desired: community.”¹⁶

This suburban utopia was a collaborative effort involving real estate speculators, transportation innovations, architects and landscapers, and governmental policies subsidizing middle-class, single-family homes instead of multi-family dwellings for the

¹⁴ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 229.

¹⁵ Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, 41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-60, 112.

poor. Similar policies were put into place which would subsidize road construction to benefit middle-class car owners instead of public transportation for the carless poor. City planners and the construction trade, automotive industries and highway builders, banks and other lending institutions, and related industries and affiliated services also played a part in the suburban phenomenon.¹⁷ Given the breadth of these relationships it is not surprising to hear about the suburbs, “It is where most American children grow up. It is where most economic activity takes place. Indeed, I will make the argument that this process of destruction, and the realm that it spawned, largely *became* our economy.”¹⁸ The suburban, single-family home is designed for consumption and occupants fill those homes with all the “necessities” incumbent upon maintaining this lifestyle. The human, economic, social, and ecological consequences of this lifestyle remain hidden.¹⁹ Given the interrelationship of suburban home to national economy it is not surprising to hear that by the 1950s the automobile, petroleum, and road-building industries “were not so much an influence upon the federal government as they were the federal government.”²⁰ The initial creation by British bourgeoisie of that first suburban enclave effectively severed the rising fortunes of the middle-class from the urban and industrial cores where they made their living, setting in motion a chain of events now commonly referred to as “urban blight.”²¹ A housing choice by London’s merchant class came to profoundly

¹⁷ This is the “thick description” offered in the books by Kunstler, Fishman, and Duany, et al.

¹⁸ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 15, (Italic original).

¹⁹ Hsu, *The Suburban Christian*, 74-78.

²⁰ Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, 86.

²¹ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 90.

reshape the urban landscape in both Britain and America. Space is not neutral, nor is a built environment created without ideological and cultural foundations that often cloak their presuppositions and shortcomings under the guise of “it has always been this way.” The history of suburbia with all its glories and debacles is part of the project’s process of problematizing the context and conscientization²² so that participants may become aware of the local environment and begin to see the “direct causal relationship between the character of the physical environment and the social health of families and the community at large.”²³ By paying attention to context the participants in this project can, through the practice of hospitality, provide something truly desired: community.

Given that suburbia remains a dominant force within the world, this project brings awareness not only to suburbia’s past, but its future, exploring potential trajectories relating to the practice of hospitality.” As Kunstler writes, “To me, it is a landscape of scary places, the geography of nowhere, that has simply ceased to be a credible human habitat.”²⁴ It is no longer sustainable financially, socially, or ecologically. Fishman contends that suburbia ended in 1945 with the rise of the “technoburb.”²⁵ With the technoburb, traditional civic, commercial, and industrial zones of the city are

²² Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1974), ix, 15.

²³ Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, xxiii.

²⁴ Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, 15.

²⁵ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 183.

decentralized with the home itself becoming the new center.²⁶ Instead of the strict separation of uses that prevailed in the suburbs, work and residence are now relinked.²⁷

In such an environment, the meaning and context of the home have changed. Fishman explains, “No longer a refuge . . . the home is a convenient base from which both spouses can rapidly reach their jobs;” in effect, a dormitory for workers.²⁸ Others hold equally dim views of the suburbs yet remain hopeful that since America rebuilds itself every fifty to sixty years that the nation can, with better design and good growth, create homes and neighborhoods worth caring about once again.²⁹ Alan Ehrenhalt has noted the demographic shifts occurring as young singles, young adults, and affluent retirees leave the suburbs for the city and immigrants and the poor bypass the central city for the suburbs where the jobs are located.³⁰ Coupled with suburban demographic changes is the newer phenomenon of suburban poverty, as described by Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube:

For decades the poor population in the United States has grown at a faster pace in suburbs than other types of places. By the mid-2000s, the number of poor individuals in suburbs surpassed that in cities for the first time. The Great Recession exacerbated that trend, so that between 2000 and 2010 the poor population grew by an astounding 53 percent in suburbs, compared with 23 percent in cities.³¹

²⁶ Ibid., 185.

²⁷ Ibid., 190.

²⁸ Ibid., 195.

²⁹ Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, xxiv.

³⁰ Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 6.

³¹ Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube, *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 35.

Notes Leigh Gallagher, “Soaring poverty rates [in the suburbs] threaten the very foundation of suburban identities, suburban politics and the suburb’s place in the nation’s self-image.”³² Others have noted this as a “hopeful trend [because of] the increased presence of lower-income households in once off-limits areas.”³³ For a suburban space designed to separate the middle-class from the working class and poor, this is a profound transition for current residents and project participants seeking to extend hospitality to neighbors.

As if demographic inversions and suburban poverty were not indicators of a momentous shift underway, a “perfect storm” of other factors is exacerbating the changes already in progress. Gallagher names eight of these factors. “Population growth” is now in cities, not suburbs. “Housing values” are holding up better in cities than suburbs. “Building activity” has picked up in cities and slowed down in suburbs. “Poverty’s invasion” of the suburbs is matched by wealth rushing back into cities. “Shrinking households” are a mismatch for suburbs built for families with kids. “Millennial generation” adults hate the suburbs and hate cars even more. “Oil prices” continue rising in an eco-obsessed society. “Suburban design” was poor to begin with.³⁴ A seismic change is currently occurring within the suburban and urban built environment. These are some of the current factors influencing the suburb’s future, and must be taken into account in implementing the practice of hospitality therein.

³² Leigh Gallagher, *The End of the Suburbs: Where the American Dream is Moving* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2013), 179.

³³ Kneebone and Berube, *Confronting Suburban Poverty in America*, 54.

³⁴ Gallagher, *The End of the Suburbs*, 14-22.

While pockets of hospitality survive in the suburbs, they are perceived as idiosyncratic, sporadic, and are diminishing. Besides the memories of residents that recollect a richer expression of hospitality in the suburbs, there are the collective memories of hospitality found in the Bible. One of the resources for the recovery of the practice of hospitality is Scripture.

Theological Background

Hospitality was part of the cultural milieus within which the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament were written. Two cautions are in order in approaching these texts regarding the practice of hospitality, particularly with the Eucharist and *agape* meals of the Church in the first and second centuries C.E. One caution is the origin of the Eucharist, and the other how the categories of sacred and secular are applied to it and other meals. Dennis Smith critiques two studies on the origins of the Eucharist by Joachim Jeremias and Hans Lietzmann. Jeremias proposes the Passover meal as the single origin for the Eucharist, while Lietzmann proposes two origins in Paul and the *Didache*. Both “construct a model for analyzing the ancient data based on the form of the Eucharist in the later church.”³⁵ Smith proposes that diverse Christian meal practices drew upon a common Greco-Roman banquet tradition that was adapted to their various settings, and this in turn gave rise to later orthodox liturgies.³⁶ The banquet was a social

³⁵ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

institution in the Greco-Roman world that cut across ethnic, religious, and social lines and thus created a vigorous space for engaging important socio-cultural issues.³⁷

Smith also critiques the use of Emile Durkheim's categories of sacred and profane as they are applied in comparing early Christian meals to pagan meals. Sacred meals, whether pagan or Christian, are seen as a separate category from mundane and secular meals.³⁸ Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig propose that "there was a religious component to every 'secular' meal . . . and every 'sacred' banquet was also a social occasion."³⁹ Rather than a sacred/secular division, Smith considers "meals to have an integrative function in ancient society in which they combine the sacred and the secular into one ritual event."⁴⁰ These two cautions allow for a better understanding of the Eucharist and *agape* meals of the Church in the first and second century C.E.

Rather than a single voice or two voices dominating the conversation of the Eucharist's origins, a diversity of voices and meal practices can be heard around the table. Instead of trying to force ancient meals into ill-fitting modern categories of sacred and secular realms, a liminal space where meals can be appreciated as being a part of both realms can be created. How origins are viewed matters, as Karen King notes:

The beginning [of the Church] is often portrayed as the ideal to which Christianity should aspire and conform. Here Jesus spoke to his disciples and the Gospel was preached in truth. Here the churches were formed in the power of the Spirit and Christians lived in unity and love with one another . . . But what happens if we tell the story differently? What if the beginning was a time of grappling and

³⁷ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

³⁹ Dennis E. Smith and Hal E. Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 22.

⁴⁰ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 6.

experimentation? What if the meaning of the Gospel was not clear and Christians struggled to understand who Jesus was?⁴¹

How those origins are viewed also matters for this project. This hospitality project aims to create a space where meals can be occasions of experimentation and grappling, of struggling to understand the Gospel's meaning, and where sacred and secular are interwoven. Given modernity's dichotomies that relegate meals such as the Lord's Supper to the private realm and worship as separate from the rest of life, the recovery of an open table that spans both (sacred) Church and (secular) home holds promise as a liminal space where hospitality may be extended across those dichotomies.

Hospitality was part of the surrounding cultures in which Christians of the first and second centuries C.E. in the Mediterranean "lived, moved, and had their being" (Acts 17:28). The culture of hospitality was found in the lifestyles of these early Christians and also the broader Greco-Roman society. As Amy Oden shares, "The ancient cultures from which Christianity drew most heavily, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, all valued hospitality highly."⁴² Hebrew self-identity included a remembrance of being strangers in Egypt and offering protection and a welcome to other strangers. Ancient Greek culture considered wayfarers as helpless and under Zeus' protection, and that hospitality was a basic feature of civilized people unlike xenophobic barbarians. Roman culture understood hospitality to strangers as a mark of civilization, a privilege of patrons, and a sacred duty.⁴³ The New

⁴¹ Karen King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003), 158.

⁴² Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 18.

Testament word for hospitality carries within it the reality of shared identity and partnership. Ogden conveys that “The same word, *xenos*, can mean guest, host, or stranger. The semantic fluidity conveys the blurred identities of guest and host.”⁴⁴ Hospitality was part of the cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean world, and unsurprisingly was a primary characteristic of early Christian communities as an expression of existent cultural narratives. Hospitality was intrinsic to the originating impulses of these communities as seen throughout the canonical writings.

Those narratives are found not only within the New Testament, but in the early writings, too.⁴⁵ Ogden continues her analysis by noting that “The astounding range and depth of the evidence [in early Christian writings] tells us that hospitality as a practice and as a virtue held a central place in early Christian life . . . Hospitality is not so much a singular act of welcome as it is a way, an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honoring.”⁴⁶ Hospitality among early Christians was expressed within a multicultural context that welcomed strangers, questioned roles of guests and hosts, and valued otherness, which are instructive features for this project.

Hospitality was practiced among early Christians in their households. By understanding this setting one can then discern and assess the migrations it has undergone since the early Church. Oden notes, “Practices of hospitality, whether performed by

⁴⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 29. While the historical sweep of texts covers the first through eighth centuries, the bulk come from the fourth and fifth centuries and cover a geographic expanse from the far west of the British Isles and far east of Azerbaijan. North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Europe are also included.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 27, 14.

individuals or groups, were embedded in Christian community.”⁴⁷ As Pohl shares, “Indeed, Christian believers were to regard hospitality to strangers as a fundamental expression of the gospel.”⁴⁸ Sutherland writes, “It is virtually impossible to find a theologian who has not argued that hospitality was an essential mark of what it means to be Christian.”⁴⁹ Pohl agrees, saying that “Even a superficial review of the first seventeen centuries of church history reveals hospitality’s importance to the spread and credibility of the gospel, to transcending national and ethnic distinctions in the church, and to Christian care for the sick, strangers, and pilgrims . . . If hospitality was such an important part of Christian faith and life, how did it virtually disappear?”⁵⁰ Christian hospitality was embedded as a practice within the homes of the earliest Christians, and this location is the starting point for its future migrations.

The history of hospitality in the Western, and particularly, North American churches is its gradual disembedding and dislocation from contemporary Christian homes and its near absence as a practice. As Pohl observes, “The location of hospitality has always strongly influenced its meaning and practices. Changes in the household, church, economy, and political life have had major impacts on the practice of hospitality, but hospitality and its commitments have also helped to shape those institutions.”⁵¹ Pohl notes that Hebraic ideas and practices of hospitality formed the backdrop for Christian

⁴⁷ Ibid., 215.

⁴⁸ Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 5.

⁴⁹ Sutherland, *I was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*, xii.

⁵⁰ Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 6-7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 39.

origins of the same. The Hebraic household was the center of social and family activity. Hospitality was the responsibility of individuals and the larger community (the latter codified in Scripture), and wayward visitors were first encountered at the town gate where neighbors could encounter the stranger and the stranger's otherness be reduced.⁵²

Early Christians thought of themselves as God's *oikos*, a new household that formed the basis for social, political, and religious identity and cohesion. This new household was explicitly translocal and transethnic, hospitality was offered from within this overlap of household and church, and offering such hospitality to the needy reinforced a distinct Christian identity.⁵³ Hospitality that attended to both physical and social needs was embedded within the early Church, but that was soon to change.

The fourth and fifth centuries were a watershed as hospitality began its migration beyond the Christian community, a migration ironically initiated from within that very community. Christian leaders offered hospitality in novel forms through the establishment of hospitals for the sick, hostels for strangers, almshouses for the poor, and monasteries for pilgrims.⁵⁴ Although unseen at the time, the rise of these institutions led to a depersonalized hospitality for the needy while personal hospitality was reserved for visiting dignitaries. Personal, face-to-face hospitality that was once a hallmark and responsibility of the Christian community was now outsourced and "the church itself faded as a significant site for hospitality."⁵⁵ The Middle Ages only accelerated these

⁵² Ibid., 41.

⁵³ Ibid., 41-42.

⁵⁴ Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, 215.

⁵⁵ Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 47.

trends as monasteries and households of bishops and lay aristocrats offered hospitality that varied according to the social status of the guest. Those of lower status ate different and coarser food at a separate table and were housed in different lodgings. Social and economic changes in this period led to increasing vagabondage and this became intertwined with poverty relief. Wealthy hosts used extravagant hospitality to display their power, wealth, and status, and the poor were not received in the home, but at the gate. Care for the poor came to be seen as the province of the bishop rather than the community at large.⁵⁶ Pohl reports, “By the end of the Middle Ages . . . hospitality as material care for strangers and the local poor and hospitality as personal welcome and entertainment—had developed along largely separate tracks [and] the socially transformative potential of hospitality was lost.”⁵⁷ The trajectory set in the fourth century continued hospitality’s migrations, yet further relocations would soon occur.

The Reformation and early modern periods brought new changes and challenges for hospitality. The sixteenth century began a period of significant social, economic, and political dislocations caused by plague, war, urbanization, increasing mobility, and trade. Such massive changes rendered traditional practices of hospitality ineffective.⁵⁸ Reformers critiqued late-medieval hospitality’s excesses and through scriptural and patristic writings recovered a hospitality that extended itself to the needy, one of frugality and orderliness reflecting the values of the rising middle-class.⁵⁹ As Pohl notes:

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

They did not recover from the ancient sources an appreciation of the church as an important location for hospitality; instead, they identified hospitality with the civic and domestic spheres [leading] the public and civic dimensions of hospitality—from hospitals, poor relief, and responsibility to refugees [to become] detached from their Christian roots as the public sphere became increasingly secularized. At the same time, the domestic sphere became more privatized; households became smaller, more intimate, and less able or willing to receive strangers.⁶⁰

Amidst what seems an inexorable dislocation of hospitality, there is a mixed blessing within seventeenth century Methodist small groups. Their recovery of the home as a place where faith formation occurred once again reintegrated church and household. Intentional table fellowship across socioeconomic lines recovered some of the transformational power of hospitality. Yet by not calling such “hospitality,” they actually contributed to the loss of the historical tradition.⁶¹ Without the proper language to name the practice, it became further disembedded and dislocated from that particular faith community.⁶² Scripture and Church practice over the centuries are resources for the recovery of hospitality a history of disembedding, dislocation, and migration. This historical survey of the practice of hospitality is not complete, however, without considering the resource of the denominational tradition of the Christian Church (DOC).

Denominational Background

In the nineteenth century, the Christian Church (DOC) intersected with the history of hospitality. There were three primary occurrences in this denominational tradition that

⁶⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

⁶¹ Ibid., 53-55.

⁶² See Mark W. Stamm’s *Let Every Soul Be Jesus’ Guest: A Theology of the Open Table* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006) for an articulation of current Methodist Eucharistic practice.

continue shaping current practices. The first incident from 1809 involved one of the founders, Alexander Campbell, when he was a seminary student in Glasgow, Scotland. Now, he became associated with religious leaders seeking to reform the Church of Scotland. Although they were outside his own Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian Church, Campbell found within them mentors and friends.⁶³ Glasgow was in the midst of the Industrial Revolution with a concomitant population explosion, urbanization, social dislocations, poverty, and squalor.⁶⁴ While Campbell was walking to chapel with fellow students a beggar in the street cried out, “Give me the test!” in hopes of being found worthy to commune and receive bread from the Lord’s Table.⁶⁵ Campbell had been examined by the Presbyterian elders and had passed the test, receiving a lead token to redeem for admission to communion. Campbell was upset that his own Seceder Church would not admit his Reformer friends and colleagues to the Lord’s Table. He may have been upset by the sight of the beggar asking for bread. As Foster recounts, “On that fateful Lord’s Day in the spring of 1809, [Campbell] waited in line to enter the Communion room, nursing his doubts about it all . . . He placed his token in the plate, but let the elements pass before him without partaking . . . It was a defining moment in his life . . . It could be said that in that Communion service the movement he would soon

⁶³ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster, and Paul M. Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2013), 20-21.

⁶⁴ Michael Moss, “Industrial Revolution: 1770s to 1830s,” *TheGlasgowStory*. <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/storyc.php> (accessed March 14, 2014).

⁶⁵ This is a story recounted on film and online. Jerry L. Jackson, *Wrestling with God*, DVD, directed by Jerry L. Jackson (Worcester, PA: Vision Video, 1990). Ken G. Crawford, “At the Table of the Lord We Celebrate with Thanksgiving the Saving Acts and Presence of Christ,” Ken G. Crawford, <http://kengcrawford.com/2012/11/04/at-the-table-of-the-lord-we-celebrate-with-thanksgiving-the-saving-acts-and-presence-of-christ/> (accessed April 25, 2014).

launch in America was born.”⁶⁶ Rejecting his own church’s closed table, this incident was a powerful impetus for the Disciples of Christ’s current practice of an open table. Campbell’s context of social dislocation and increasing population, urbanization, and poverty is contemporaneous to current times.

While Campbell’s breaking with the tradition of a “fenced table” was a formative event for him and the movement he helped launch, the issue of how broad a welcome was extended at the Lord’s Table was not resolved until the second generation. As Lester McAllister and William Tucker note:

In their early witness Alexander Campbell and the Reformers had yielded to the logic of an inflexible position and defended “close communion”—the practice of admitting only believers baptized by immersion to the service of Communion. Less rigid in their primitivism, Stone and the Christians refused to fence the Table of the Lord in order to keep out “defective believers.” As Campbell moved into maturity, he modified his view and joined some of his followers in shifting from close to open communion. The impulse to reflect the oneness of God’s people around the Lord’s Table was stronger than the will to hold fast to an exclusivist interpretation of New Testament Christianity.⁶⁷

It was a generation before the phrase, “We neither invite, nor debar,” came to predominate in the ethos and practice at the Lord’s Supper among the Christian Church (DOC). This movement from closed to open communion broadened the welcome and extended the hospitality of the Lord’s Table.

One final illustration of hospitality also comes from the era of the founders during the time when horseback evangelists went throughout the frontier spreading the Gospel message. History records some of their names like John Smith of the Disciples and John

⁶⁶ Foster et al, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, 118.

⁶⁷ Lester G. McAllister and William E. Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1975), 240.

Rogers from the Christians that rode together through all the churches to unite the followers of Campbell and Stone into a single church.⁶⁸ Others, such as Walter Scott, were credited with popularizing Campbell's message in such a compelling manner that without his evangelistic efforts the names of Campbell and Stone would have been a mere footnote in the annals of American church history. Whether named or not, such evangelists were dependent upon the kindness of strangers. Foster notes:

A further problem with [nineteenth century itinerant evangelists] was the inadequate financial support of the evangelists, with some of them destitute and unable to continue their work. Those who did this work are mostly lost to history, unsung and unknown. Numbered in the hundreds, they took the gospel to the far reaches of the frontier. They were farmers, teachers, merchants, lawyers, even doctors and dentists, who left their means of livelihood, at least part of the year, to preach "the ancient gospel" and to build churches after "the ancient order." They were known for uncommon devotion and sacrifice, especially in the earlier generations.⁶⁹

Without the hospitality offered to these itinerant evangelists throughout the frontier, the Gospel message would not have been heard. Without churches being established there would be no Christian Church (DOC) today. Without evangelistic forbearers then receiving hospitality from a population that was only 5 percent churched this project now on hospitality in the suburbs would not be possible. Campbell's own experience in chapel, the question of the "pious unimmersed" at the Lord's Supper, and itinerant evangelists each are illustrative of hospitality's importance within this denominational tradition. While the locations of such hospitality vary, an open table, whether found amidst a congregation or a frontier family's home, has been a key aspect of this tradition.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁶⁹ Foster, et al, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, 316.

Hospitality is currently embodied within the worship practice of an open table shared weekly at the Lord's Supper.

A majority of Americans and Christians choose to make their homes in the suburban environment, despite its flaws. Since God has called Christians into such a context, vital and viable ministries within that context will follow. Hsu observes that "The challenge for suburban Christians is to discern how they might avoid the pitfalls of suburban life and be authentic Christians in this very setting . . . For Christians, nothing is beyond redemption."⁷⁰ Because God seeks out the lost (Lk 15) and invites them to a great feast (Lk 14:15-24), there is hope even among the "highways and byways" that grid the suburban landscape. As Hsu notes, "The chief antidote to suburban anonymity and isolationism may well be the Christian practice of hospitality. Hospitality can be a profoundly prophetic, countercultural activity that helps us escape our cocoons, connect with our neighbors and minister to our communities."⁷¹ As Pohl states:

The overlap of household and church combines the most personal level of interaction with the most significant institutional base for transcending social difference and creating community . . . The meal combined the ordinary with the sacred and challenged conventional relationships with heavenly expectation . . . Recovering hospitality will involve reclaiming the household as a key site for ministry and then reconnecting the household and the church, so that the two institutions can work in partnership for the sake of the world.⁷²

It is in the liminal overlap of institutions that the most transformative practices of hospitality and most intense community formation occurred within the history of

⁷⁰ Hsu, *The Suburban Christian*, 13.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷² Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, 56-58.

Christian hospitality.⁷³ Hospitality that bridges the public/private, institutional/personal, and church/home dichotomies has the power to transform all of them. As Elizabeth Newman states, “Christian hospitality is not a private effort separate from politics and economics. It is rather a practice at once *ecclesial* and *public*, embodying a politics, economics, and ethics at odds with dominant cultural assumptions.”⁷⁴ Contemporary efforts to recover hospitality within the suburbs as a viable practice and lifestyle are hampered by privatized homes, fragmented lives, disconnected neighbors, a commoditized culture, and a built environment based upon the principle of exclusion of the “other.”⁷⁵ This project of hospitality seeks to create an environment where a practice of inclusion of the “other” becomes not only imagined, but enacted. A liminal space of a meal that overlaps home and church, interweaving cultural context with Scripture and denominational tradition, creates a dynamic table around which this project’s conversation occurs. It is to that project that attention is now turned.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 56

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 14. *Italic original.*

⁷⁵ Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 4.

CHAPTER 2

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project's overall purpose is for participants within a Christian Church (DOC) congregation to engage the adaptive challenge of connecting with their suburban context. This challenge is enhanced by most members living outside the neighborhood of the church campus and a church campus limited solely to a worship space that shapes and reinforces a drive-in congregational identity. In order to engage this adaptive challenge, a hospitality project has been designed for participants to become aware of what God is doing locally by engaging culture, Scripture, and denominational tradition around the tables in their homes. This project creates a space where participants can name the present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture and tradition. By understanding how the suburban context frames the congregation's missional imagination and action, the congregation will be better prepared to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with that context. The project's goal of heightened awareness and understanding continues the incremental movement of organizational change and helps move participants toward articulating a contextual theology.

The project's participants initially are from the Tylersville Road Christian Church. Given the mitigating factors of a dispersed membership and a solitary worship space, there is a critical need for congregants to imagine and enact hospitality beyond Sunday morning's open table in order to connect with their communities. In addition to these physically limiting factors, the congregation suffered through division and discord for over seven years because of an internecine struggle between past and current leaders. Imagining and enacting hospitality first among congregants through this hospitality project is a necessary and preliminary step before connecting with other communities. Future participants beyond this project will be drawn from outside this congregation. This will better prepare the congregation to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with the suburban context.

The project's curriculum is a redesigned hospitality experiment. The curriculum brings together context, Scripture, and denominational tradition so that participants can reflect upon their present praxis through conversation around open tables in their homes. A prior hospitality experiment was launched in the spring of 2013 yet did not achieve its intended objectives.¹ Lessons from that first trial are incorporated into the redesigned practice and curriculum. The Open Table Conversations (OTC) curriculum takes participants through twelve sessions over meals with hospitality being a nexus, connecting context, Scripture, and denominational tradition. These sessions invite participants to become aware of what is on the table and move toward understanding

¹ Alan Roxburgh's *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide* (West Vancouver, BC: Roxburgh Missional Network, 2010).

what is under the table.² Between these sessions, participants will engage in writing exercises to deepen the understanding beyond the dinner gatherings. The curriculum is customized for this particular congregation in order to generate conversations amongst participants so they may observe what God is doing locally.

The project's progression includes a number of steps. With a redesigned curriculum in hand, an invitation is extended to those that are interested to meet in a pub for an introduction to the project itself. Attendees at this informational meeting receive a meal, an overview of the project, and sample what looking at their context with new eyes entails by discussing what Roy Oldenburg terms "third places."³ They are asked to prayerfully consider the commitment necessary for this project, and those that commit participate in an orientation and training session. During the training session, facilitators are chosen and at least two groups form and are clustered geographically to meet over the following six months in homes for dinner and discussion.

Insights from these conversations are formally diffused within the broader congregation through times of worship, board meetings, mission team discussions, and congregational round table discussions. They are also disseminated in publications such as the newsletter and online through social media, as well as informal networks of conversations. This project is designed to be replicable, and feedback from this first experiment will be used to improve the second to continue the congregation's learning

² See Figure 2, Found in Appendix A.

³ Roy Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 3rd ed. (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1999), xvii.

process. The curriculum's concluding session will be the bridge to innovating experiments that engage those outside the congregation.

The project's action-learning process takes place in several stages.⁴ First, the congregation does not know how to connect with its community, which presents an adaptive challenge. Second, the curriculum is designed so that participants can engage this adaptive challenge and become comfortable with an ongoing learning process of experimenting without preset outcomes.⁵ Third, participants become part of an experiment in hospitality that will enable them to, through action, engage in a new way of thinking.⁶ This process is to prepare them to discover what God is doing locally, what God wants to do, and how this congregation joins in God's work.⁷

The learning stage is designed so participants may have a greater awareness and understanding of their context, Scripture, and denominational tradition as it intersects with hospitality. Measurements of the current awareness of hospitality in general, local hospitality, church hospitality, and Bible hospitality will be compared with the future understanding of the same among participants. Data will be collected through a participant observation approach, and I will be an observer/participant (but not leader) of one of the groups.⁸ I will analyze documents related to this process (instruments,

⁴ Alan Roxburgh, *Action Learning Teams* (West Vancouver, BC: The Missional Network, 2012), 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ See Figure 1, found in Appendix A.

⁸ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, ed. 4 (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Inc., 2009), 226-233. This methodology is also detailed in Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009), 81-85.

discussion materials, journal entries), and conduct qualitative interviews of participants. Non-participant information will be gathered through a survey to measure missional diffusion within the larger congregation. Participant and non-participant feedback will be reflected upon with the leaders and others that are outside of this process.⁹ The actions taken will move participants from awareness to understanding, and from understanding to evaluation to assess data developed along the way. The reflection upon and evaluation of these actions will lead to further experimentation and cycles of action-learning within the congregation.¹⁰

The project has several steps within and beyond it. As a further reflection upon the project itself, a number of perspectives are examined within this paper. The church perspective includes congregational, spiritual, and missional formation. Theological areas include scriptural, historical, cultural, and denominational resources while touching on ecclesiology. The contextual/environmental perspective includes global, regional, and local factors while touching on demographics. The organizational/leadership factor includes an organizational, programmatic, and leadership history of the congregation while assessing its current status, as well as reflecting on leadership from the interpretive, relational, and implemental viewpoints.

There are a number of recommendations beyond this project. One recommendation is that participants be engaged in identifying the next step actions of hospitality in the neighborhood, opening tables further to include neighbors and others as

⁹ Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Roxburgh, *Action Learning Teams*, 11.

hospitality is extended beyond the congregation. In so doing, the congregation will better posture itself to address the adaptive challenge of connecting with the community.

Incorporating insights and improvements from the project, another recommendation is that this experiment be innovated among a new set of participants. While beyond the present scope of this particular project, such innovation and experimentation is a critical next step in addressing the adaptive challenge of this congregation connecting with the community. The structure for this project's process is built around the MCM, illustrated as a journey to the center of the table.¹¹

¹¹ See Figure 3 in Appendix A.

SECTION TWO

THE PROJECT

CHAPTER 1

EXPLANATION OF THE PROJECT

This section gives a detailed explanation of the project from its inception to implementation. Included within this explanation is an outlining of the steps involved in the project as the development of the curriculum and measurement instruments is explained. Included as well is the enlistment of participants, the training of facilitators, the formation of groups, and subsequent support to groups and facilitators. Overall, the portrait of a particular hospitality experiment's first iteration is drawn. Following this section is an assessment of the actions that were taken and the data that was developed from this project.

Curriculum

The first step in this project is the creation of a curriculum to enable participants to engage the adaptive challenge of connecting with their suburban context. The local context, Scripture, and denominational tradition are brought together to form the curriculum for a redesigned hospitality experiment. A prior hospitality trial did not achieve its intended objectives, and feedback from participants is incorporated into the

redesigned experiment and curriculum.¹ Feedback includes the inability to meet consecutively over twelve weeks, a desire for more than a single Bible passage to dwell upon, and for something geographically and denominationally specific to the context. With these responses in mind, the first inklings of a curriculum start to emerge. Participants are to meet every two weeks for six months instead of twelve consecutive weeks.

A variety of hospitality passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament constitute the scriptural reflections. A study guide is created for participants within a Christian Church (DOC) congregation in the suburban context of Cincinnati, Ohio. A curriculum is needed that creates a space where participants can name the present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture and denominational tradition. Hospitality is the structure that interweaves materials related to context, Scripture, and tradition. Because each of these components is a discrete contribution to the curriculum, they are addressed separately below.

Various materials comprise the contextual components of the curriculum. Being able to see God working locally requires participants to become aware of the built environment on the micro and macro levels. A key insight is recognizing that the interior of suburban homes with their separate living quarters² is reflective of the separate zones of the exterior urban landscape with distinct districts for different socioeconomic classes.³ Scaling up from single-family detached homes to various zones of exclusion in the urban

¹ Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide*.

² Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias*, 150.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

landscape is the macro level of modernity's bifurcations from the Enlightenment.⁴ Separateness and exclusion form the backdrop to the suburban context, but are only part of the postmodern landscape. The economic system prizes a mobile workforce and thereby creates transient communities lured by the promise of a brighter future and bigger paycheck elsewhere. That same economic system commodifies everything and everyone and encourages a scarcity mentality with suburban homes being the engines of consumption.⁵ Despite the professed abundance in the suburbs, however, the lack of adequate public transportation means that increasing numbers of poor residents without a vehicle can find themselves stranded in a place where distance contributes as a survival challenge.⁶ Becoming aware of the micro and macro levels of the suburban Cincinnati context is a critical first component of the curriculum.

Taking part in God's local initiative also requires becoming aware of the rich tapestry of stories demonstrating the many facets of hospitality in Scripture, which proves to be a critical component of the curriculum. There are stories of fractured hospitality where Joseph dines with his brothers and Egyptians (Gn 43:15-17, 24-34), Paul lambastes Peter for his circumstantial hospitality with Gentiles (Gal 2:1-14), and the overcoming of those fractures with Peter's visit to Cornelius' home (Acts 11:1-18). There are stories of

⁴ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, revised and expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 6. Those bifurcations are also found in Stephen Toulmin's *Cosmopolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) on pages 30-32, and in Roxburgh, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 37-38.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity," in *The Christian Century* 116, no. 10 (March 24, 1999): 342-347.

⁶ The USDA's website gives a county-by-county view of where food deserts are located throughout the United States. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx> (accessed December 8, 2014).

God's abundant hospitality given through creation (Gn 1-2; Ps 104), the provision of manna in the wilderness (Ex 16:16-18), Jesus' transformation of water into wine (Jn 2:1-11), his multiplication of loaves and fish (Jn 6:1-51), and the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb with the water of life offered to all who thirst (Rv 19:9; 22:17). There are stories of deformed hospitality where King Ahasuerus displays his wealth and power among his officials (Est 1:1-22), genuine hospitality with King David welcoming a crippled enemy Mephibosheth to his table (2 Sm 9:1-13), Jesus advising hosts to invite those who cannot return hospitality (Lk 14:7-14), and the topsy-turvy world of God's hospitality where the hungry are fed and the full go hungry (Lk 6:21, 25).

There are cautionary tales of the dangers of not accepting God's hospitality as the original invitees are rejected in favor of outsiders (Lk 14:15-24). Failing to extend hospitality to others can have eternal significance to the rich that overlook poor Lazarus and to anyone that neglects to welcome the stranger and feed the hungry (Lk 16:19-31; Mt 25:31-46). Hospitality for Israel is informed by memories of their former alien status, and the twin dangers of forgetting God's provisions in the wilderness and delusions of economic self-sufficiency in the promised land (Ex 22:21-23; Dt 8:6-20). Furthermore, Rahab provided hospitality to spies and the widow of Zarephath received Elijah into her home (Jo 2:1-14; 1 Kgs 17:1-16). There are stories of surprising hospitality when Abraham and Sarah and Cleopas and another disciple unexpectedly welcome strangers that turn out to be God (Gen 18:1-15; Lk 24:13-35).

The denominational components of the curriculum are highlighted with valuable materials which allow participants to become familiarized with hospitality's role within the historical tradition of the Christian Church (DOC). Hospitality, particularly as it is

expressed in the worship practice of an open table, has historical antecedents within the tradition that have bearing upon this project. It is significant that not only did the founder Alexander Campbell leave the Old Light Anti-Burgher Seceder Presbyterian practice of a closed table, but his father Thomas did so independently as well. A beggar asking for bread was Alexander's prompt to leave, while his father's prompt was the reaction from the Presbyterian session after his offer of communion to other Presbyterians that were not Anti-Burgher.⁷ Barton Stone's prompt to leave his Presbyterian heritage was his collaboration with Baptist and Methodist preachers in the Cane Ridge, Kentucky camp meeting and his disavowal of Calvinism's doctrine of limited atonement which states that Jesus died only for the elect.⁸

A skit I wrote helps participants imagine what living within a closed communion tradition would be like 200 years ago. In the skit, lead communion tokens from the Presbyterian tradition of that era are procured, similar to what Alexander Campbell would have received after passing the test that allowed him to come to the communion table. Denominational founders saw America as a land of abundant opportunity to complete the Reformation that began in Europe and unite Christians around one table. It was a handshake that united Campbell's "Disciples" and Stone's "Christians" into a single movement, and pairs of evangelists from each tradition rode out on horseback to share the news and encourage local congregations to join in this decision. The

⁷ McAllister and Tucker, *Journey in Faith*, 107.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-75.

dependence of these and other evangelists upon frontier hospitality has already been noted. Ohio's role among Disciples of Christ is also significant:

The simple truth is that the Campbell movement to restore the unity of the church on the foundation of the New Testament did not take hold firmly until Walter Scott began preaching on the Western Reserve [northeastern Ohio] and Barton W. Stone's "Christian" movement spread to Ohio. Without the impetus given by those movements the Campbell's dream of Christian unity on a biblical basis probably would have been passed over quickly on the rapidly changing frontier.⁹

The denominational tradition of the Christian Church (DOC) has a number of rich resources for this project, and it is also a critical component of the curriculum.

Contextual, scriptural, and denominational materials are the basis from which the curriculum is created. Supplemental materials include movies and online video clips that engage questions of hospitality.¹⁰ Other supplemental materials include original materials on the development of housing by a member/architect and the memoirs of a member's father in a Japanese-American internment camp. One field trip is to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to remind participants of the audacious hospitality offered historically by abolitionists in Cincinnati. A second field trip concludes the project at an Ethiopian restaurant to eat African foods community-style,

⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰ Video recordings include Karen Blixen, *Babette's Feast*, DVD, directed by Gabriel Axel (Las Vegas, NV: Astrablu Media, 1987), John Wells, *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*, DVD, directed by Michael Ray Rhodes (Pacific Palisades, CA: Paulist Pictures, 1996), John Goldsmith, *The Gospel of John*, DVD, directed by Philip Saville (Nashville, TN: Visual Bible International, 2003), and Robert Graves, *I Claudius*, DVD, directed by Herbert Wise (London, England: BBC/London Films, 1976). Online video clips include PBS, "Poverty Rates Surge in American Suburbs," PBS Newshour Web site, Windows Media Player video file, 9:44, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/nation-jan-june14-povertysuburb_01-11/ (accessed January 7, 2015), Vimeo, "Le Chambon: A Good Place to Hide," Vimeo Web Site, Windows Media Player video file, 8:21, <https://vimeo.com/98107603> (accessed January 7, 2015).

without individual plates, portions, or utensils to experience what being a guest in a different culture feels like.

These three strands are woven together to form the curriculum called Open Tables Conversations (“OTC”).¹¹ The sessions are structured to move participants through a sequence of different relationships with hospitality. The twelve sessions are paired around specific movements: first, a city/house/table divided against itself cannot stand, second, receiving God’s open table, third, offering an open table to others, fourth, receiving an open table from others, fifth, offering an open table to God, and finally, receiving God’s open table. The purpose of the first two sessions is to help participants see culture, context, and home architecture with new eyes to begin conscientization. Sessions three and four help participants see culture, neighborhood, and church differently to begin moving from a scarcity to an abundance framework. Sessions five and six explore the breadth of welcome of an open table so that participants can begin moving from cultural to biblical frameworks of hospitality. Sessions seven and eight are to help participants consider what being on the receiving end of hospitality means so they can move from control to vulnerability. Sessions nine and ten demonstrate that offering hospitality to strangers actually welcomes God so participants no longer fear strangers, but welcome angels. The final two sessions continue helping participants see culture, neighborhood, and church differently in order to move from their culture’s closed future into God’s open one.

¹¹ See Appendix A.

Materials for an introductory information session and training session are elaborated to introduce and prepare potential participants to engage this curriculum. In addition, an instrument is created to measure the current awareness of hospitality in general, local hospitality, church hospitality, and Bible hospitality to compare with the future understanding of the same among participants. An evaluative instrument for qualitative interviews is designed to capture feedback on the course, and a survey is created to help measure diffusion within the congregation, about which more will be said in the final section of this paper.¹² The curriculum's purpose is to enable participants to name the present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring it into dialogue with Scripture and denominational tradition.

Participants

The process of participant enlistment requires some background to understand the steps taken for this part of the project. A leadership retreat in July 2014 led to a collaborative art and sermon series that turned the front sanctuary walls into a mural. The journey of life on earth and the future after death are laid out like stained-glass windows in a medieval cathedral. It proves to be a living, physical map of the Christian imagination.¹³ The mural aids the congregation's reimagining of its story within the larger story of God; reimagining is critical work toward an alternative praxis. As Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat note, "Praxis requires vision and orientation. But if all the

¹² See Appendices C, D, and E for the hospitality instrument, qualitative interview evaluation, and survey forms, respectively.

¹³ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 8.

maps are provided by the empire, if all the reality we can see is what the empire has constructed as reality for us, then our praxis will never be creative, and it will never be subversive to that empire.”¹⁴ Beginning with Genesis and ending in Revelation, the mural is a visual framework that includes the narratives of Israel, Jesus, and the Church that unmask the imperial powers for the beasts that they are (Dn 7; Rv 12-13). It is an aid for the congregation to corporately recall “the basic memory of what God is up to in the world, of how this great, capacious story from Genesis to Revelation is actually forming a narrative about the nature of the world.”¹⁵ Inspired by Scripture and painted by the congregation, this reimagining means “they can dwell in the story and allow it to reshape their imagination because it is not a story that simply happened to someone else but is now *their* story. They are now *in* this story, and on this basis [they are called upon] to adopt a set of practices that are consistent with it.”¹⁶ The mural is a constant reminder that Christians live within a different narrative than the culture, one that tells their origins, destination, challenges along the way, and the assurance that God is not only ahead of them, but also with them. Recognizing that Christ alone is sovereign over other powers creates a space within which practices such as hospitality can be cultivated. This reimagining work becomes the bridge to recruiting participants for the OTC project.

A group of thirty people expressed interest in learning more about the project. An introductory information session was held in January 2015 at a local pub where the thirty

¹⁴ Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 156.

¹⁵ Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making*, 160. This is an expression of a practice that he and others call a learning community.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158. *Italic original.*

attendees were asked to prayerfully consider the commitment necessary for this project and given two weeks to respond. In February 2015, the twenty-four that committed to participating in the project met in a community center to receive the hospitality of a home-cooked dinner and were oriented and trained for the curriculum. Prior to the orientation part of that meeting, however, participants filled out the instrument measuring their awareness of hospitality in general and their awareness of it locally, congregationally, and scripturally.

As part of the evening's orientation, the participants engaged in varying stories about hospitality's presence or absence in their neighborhoods, God's six-course meal of hospitality in the Bible, and the struggles the Disciples of Christ founders had with an open table.¹⁷ This exercise was a practice round for what the curriculum itself does in each session. Participants grouped themselves geographically to meet in homes, decided which day works best for their schedules, and volunteered to act as hosts or facilitators. With myself as an observer/participant (but not a leader) in one of the four groups, and acting as a coach for the four facilitators and their groups, a target start date of late March to mid-April 2015 was agreed upon. Data about the participants is shared in the next section.

Process

A Tuesday lunch group formed in late March as the OTC activities began to unfold. The remaining three are Monday, Thursday, and Friday evening groups that began in mid-April. Each of the four groups has six participants. Groups rotate through

¹⁷ The six-course meal is a narrative theology framework adapted from Walsh and Keesmaat, 133.

different hosts to be introduced to new neighborhoods, yet there is a primary facilitator for each group. While each participant and facilitator has an OTC workbook, part of my role as coach is to provide supplemental resources for each session. These resources expand upon the OTC workbook and help facilitators prepare to lead discussions every two weeks as coaches remain in contact to assess the project's progress. Facilitators are encouraged to share insights with each other as they move through the sessions. Scribes in each group capture significant insights as they work through the curriculum.

Each group decided that, to have group cohesion and work through the curriculum, they needed a hiatus during July and August. Groups continued in September to conclude in November. Because of the experimental nature of the four groups, there are a variety of meeting sites. The Monday night group gathers solely in participants' homes throughout the curriculum. The Thursday and Friday groups spend the first half of the curriculum in participants' homes and for the latter half they meet prior to worship in the church's sanctuary to build interest in the next OTC round and to diffuse concepts in the larger congregation. The Tuesday group initially met in participants' homes, but had to adapt due to constricted living spaces like apartments or condos. This group decided to meet for the majority of their time in public venues like restaurants and the dining area of a nearby care facility to prepare them for innovating hospitality beyond congregational members.

CHAPTER 2

ASSESSMENT OF ACTIONS TAKEN AND DATA DEVELOPED

This section evaluates the project's action-learning process of helping participants engage the adaptive challenge of connecting with the community. Being involved in a hospitality experiment enables participants to, through action, engage in a new way of thinking.¹ Through learning, participants have a greater awareness and understanding of their context, Scripture, and denominational tradition as it intersects with hospitality. Measurements of their current awareness of hospitality are compared to their future understanding to assess the action-learning process. Qualitative and quantitative data is collected through a participant observation approach with measurement instruments, discussion materials, journal entries, and qualitative interviews.

Four distinct but interrelated perspectives of hospitality such as its general understanding, local expressions, congregational manifestations, and biblical instances become the focal point of the action-learning outcome. The perspectives, once overlapped for the sake of analysis, allow for a clearer picture of the ending result to emerge. This shows the effect the project had on the participants' paradigm of hospitality.

¹ Roxburgh, *Action Learning Teams*, 9.

The data is presented in the following format. The first and second hospitality measurement instruments are referenced as Measurement One (“M1”) and Measurement Two (“M2”). Twenty-four of twenty-four respondents completed both M1 and M2 for a 100 percent participation rate. Where there is no significant variation in frequency of responses between M1 and M2, the average of those responses is reported to provide a “thick” description of a particular hospitality experiment. Those responses are reported in a decreasing frequency manner. Where there are significant variations in frequency of responses between M1 and M2, those differences are examined to show the project’s impact upon participants and demonstrate the action-learning outcomes. Factors that show a statistically significant difference attributable to the program and not random effects are noted with an asterisk (*) for an 80 percent confidence level and a caret symbol (^) for a 95 percent confidence level.² Qualitative interview data in the evaluative instrument (EV) is examined in the project evaluation subsection that follows. It provides the average of responses and demonstrates the action-learning outcomes.

The importance of the participants to this project necessitates a few demographic notes.³ The gender of the participants was 33 percent male and 67 percent female. The ages of participants ranged from thirty-six to eighty-four. The average age was fifty-nine and the median age was sixty-one. Segregating the ages further revealed that nine were in the thirty-six to forty-nine age range, seven were in the fifty-five to sixty-three age range,

² See Appendix C for this data that uses both the confidence level of the difference in percent method as well as the binomial theorem. Data will be drawn primarily from Workbook B that uses the confidence level of the difference in percent method. Factors that can be corroborated binomially from Workbook D will be noted in the footnotes.

³ See Appendix B.

and eight were in the sixty-seven to eighty-four age range. This generational breadth encouraged the sharing of diverse viewpoints during meals. The reported marital status showed 83 percent to be married and 17 percent single due to divorce or being widowed. The vocational status is that 71 percent were working and 29 percent had retired. It was promising that the vast majority of participants are employed and committed to making space within their schedules for this hospitality experiment.

The question of leadership status within the congregation showed that 73 percent are past or current leaders while 17 percent had never been in leadership. The participation of past leadership as opinion leaders is a necessary part of missional diffusion.⁴ Their years of membership within the congregation ranged from two to twenty-two, with the average membership being twelve and the median being thirteen. Segregating their tenure within the congregation further revealed that five participants were in the two to eight-year range, twelve were in the ten to fifteen-year range, and seven were in the seventeen to twenty-two-year range. Newer and long-established members formed the diverse constituency of this project.

General Hospitality

Respondents shared their understandings of hospitality in general through seven questions repeated in M1 and M2 that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The two quantitative questions ask about the frequency of giving hospitality and the frequency of receiving hospitality in their lives.⁵ The mean for giving hospitality before

⁴ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, Fifth Edition (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003), 27.

⁵ See Appendix C, Question 5 and Question 6.

and after was unchanged at 3.9, close to moderately. The mean for receiving hospitality before and after moved from 3.6 to 3.5, located at the midpoint between occasionally and moderately. It is difficult to ascertain the project's effectiveness with so little quantitative variation between these measurements. There are five other qualitative questions to be examined for more insight.

The first qualitative question asked participants to define hospitality. The answers were grouped between the language used to describe hosts and to guests.⁶ Some key descriptors of hosts were generous (22 percent), welcoming (22 percent), and open (15 percent). One host term in M1 that disappeared in M2 is inviting*.⁷ While this term was lacking afterwards, there is no evidence that participants are now more un-inviting as a result of this experiment. Guests were described as strangers (22 percent), comfortable (20 percent), and wanted/valued/respected (18 percent). Two key descriptors were found only in M2, suggesting their presence as a result of participating in this project. No participant in M1 listed hospitality as a give and receive relationship[^], yet it occurred six times in M2.⁸ Likewise, no guest was loved* in M1, but this is mentioned five times in M2.⁹

By comparing the frequency of key descriptors in both of these categories, some interesting patterns emerged. There was a 3.6 greater incidence of language associated with hosts than guests in M1. In M2 that gap narrowed to a 1.4 greater incidence.

⁶ See Appendix C, Question 1.

⁷ Corroborated binomially, see Appendix C.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Comparing the frequency of key terms associated with hosts and guests between M1 and M2 showed in M2 a 22 percent decrease in language associated with hosts while a 200 percent increase in language associated with guests. One could infer that participants became more aware of hospitality as a give and receive relationship in which guests are loved.

The second qualitative question asked about the roles of a host and expectations of a guest.¹⁰ Some key terms for hosts were welcomes* (34 percent), provider (22 percent), and makes comfortable* (16 percent). Although welcomes decreases, makes comfortable increases between M1 and M2. A host term that only appeared in M2 is gives the best they have*. Guests similarly were thankful/appreciative/gracious* (25 percent), receive/accept (24 percent), and participate (18 percent). Unlike the first question, there was no great gap in frequency between responses for hosts and guests and there were more descriptors for guests than hosts. In M1, there was a greater emphasis on the social customs of hospitality such as a host cleaning and arranging seating, entertaining, and introducing guests to others. That same emphasis was seen among guests who are to be polite* and bring food or a gift. None of these social customs appeared in M2, but instead hosts extend grace and God honors them for doing so. Through participation in this project it appears there was a growing awareness that hospitality is more than hosts simply welcoming guests to be polite, but instead making them comfortable by giving the best they have with the expectation of thankfulness.

¹⁰ See Appendix C, Question 2.

The third qualitative question asked what role participants prefer and why.¹¹ Being a host was preferred 43 percent of the time, being a guest 33 percent of the time, and both/either role was preferred by 18 percent, with 4 percent not answering. The preference for being a host decreased from 45 to 41 percent between M1 and M2. The preference for being a guest remained the same at 33 percent. The preference for both/either increased from 16 to 20 percent between M1 and M2, while no answer remained the same at 4 percent.

Some of the predominant answers appeared only in M1 or M2. The most frequent reason for being a host in M1 was they would rather give than receive[^] (22 percent), but that answer was not found in M2. Conversely, the most frequent reason for being a host in M2 was to enjoy serving/fellowship/building relationships[^] (22 percent), an answer that was not found in M1.¹² The equivalence of these two factors is suggestive that perhaps there is a recognition that when a host prefers giving over receiving (and remaining in control), there is no space for building relationships. Hosts in M1 love to entertain and make others smile* (11 percent), but this answer is not found in M2. Hosts in M2 feel it is an easier role, but they are learning how to be a better guest* (9 percent).

The frequency of responses of dislike accepting help or like to be in control is the same in both M1 and M2 (10 percent). Reasons given by those who prefer being a guest include enjoy others and okay accepting hospitality (12 percent) and a lack of responsibility and pressure (12 percent). Reasons given by those who prefer either role

¹¹ See Appendix C, Question 3.

¹² Corroborated binomially, see Appendix C.

include being situational, dependent on the company and circumstances* (13 percent), an answer that only appears in M2. Therefore, having a greater willingness to participate in both roles of host and guest, building relationships, and learning how to be a better guest could be the result of participation in the project.

The fourth qualitative question asked in what direction hospitality flows between hosts and guests.¹³ Respondents used arrows to indicate the directionality. The majority of respondents in M1 and M2 said hospitality flows between host and guest, 58 and 70 percent, respectively. The next largest group said hospitality flows from host to guest, 37 and 25 percent, respectively. One respondent, or 4 percent of the participants, did not answer in either M1 or M2. The 12 percent decrease in respondents that said hospitality flows from host to guest and the parallel 12 percent increase in respondents that said hospitality flows between host and guest would seem to indicate that participation in this project increased their understanding of hospitality as a relationship flowing between host and guest. One respondent noted in M2, “It is entirely bidirectional, but who knew?”¹⁴

The fifth qualitative question asked participants for their most memorable experience of hospitality.¹⁵ Respondents in both M1 and M2 said that milestone family events constituted 33 percent of those memorable experiences. Those milestone events involved significant birthdays, weddings, family reunions, and funerals. Specific stories included hearing of a father’s hospitality in his eulogy, or being given food and lodging in someone’s house when traveling home for a memorial service.

¹³ See Appendix C, Question 4.

¹⁴ See Appendix F.

¹⁵ See Appendix C, Question 7.

The next most frequent memorable experience occurred in foreign countries (21 percent). Japan was mentioned twice by different respondents for its hospitality. Sweden and Haiti were also mentioned as hospitable countries. Other memorable experiences that constituted 10 percent or less of responses in both M1 and M2 were receiving hospitality in a neighbor's or family member's home, during a health emergency, after a disaster like a home fire or citywide power outage, at a Super Bowl party, or on a church mission trip. It is telling that the overwhelming majority of memorable experiences were not in offering hospitality but in receiving it. Respondents reported that 75 percent of memorable experiences of hospitality were in receiving it, while only 25 percent of such experiences were in offering hospitality. Of those memorable experiences, 71 percent had a church connection while 29 percent were a neighborhood practice. It is significant that sporadic milestone family events were the most remembered hospitality events. Equally significant is that foreign countries were the next most prevalent memorable experience. It is also noteworthy that receiving hospitality was more memorable than giving hospitality, and that memorable hospitality was connected with churches and neighborhood practices. It is to the latter that attention now turns.

Local Hospitality

Respondents shared their understandings of hospitality in general through five questions repeated in M1 and M2 that were qualitative in nature. The first qualitative question asked where they saw hospitality offered in their neighborhood.¹⁶ Some key

¹⁶ See Appendix C, Question 8.

examples of such hospitality were mutual caring for kids (14 percent), house parties (11 percent), and talking to neighbors (9 percent). Other local examples were taking care of property while away, clubhouse parties, shoveling the driveway, lending ingredients, and providing food when ill (all 7 percent). Another response that bears further scrutiny spoke not to hospitality's local expression, but rather its absence. Without solicitation, a single respondent in M1 noted that hospitality was rare*, an observation that quadrupled in M2. It appears that as participants became more aware of local surroundings, they became more sensitive to the absence of hospitality in their community.

The second qualitative question asked about the seasonal opportunities for hospitality in their community.¹⁷ The most frequent expression was in block parties (27 percent). The next most frequent response of experiencing a lack of hospitality opportunity (14 percent) spoke to the absence of seasonal activities. Holidays such as Christmas* (13 percent) and Halloween (11 percent) were mentioned next, followed by regular dinner parties* (9 percent). The only other significant place of such hospitality was around fire pits (6 percent), notable for their placement in back yards where hospitality is more a private event than a public invitation. One respondent, recognizing the power of the built environment, shared that without sidewalks and steep hills they do not have neighborhood parties and the local swim club's expensive membership segregates people.¹⁸ Being conscious of the local environment is becoming aware that the built environment is not neutral and actively works against hospitality in the suburbs.

¹⁷ See Appendix C, Question 9.

¹⁸ See Appendix F.

Third, participants were asked whether there is an ongoing practice of hospitality in their community, the form it takes, and if there is no ongoing practice than what the neighborhood memories of hospitality are.¹⁹ Responses to this question illustrated the challenges that such a form of hospitality faces in the community. Respondents struggled with this question and defaulted to occasional events instead. Occasional events constituted 33 percent of the responses while ongoing practices were only 23 percent. A sizable 43 percent of respondents said there is no ongoing practice of hospitality in their community. Perhaps a fuller picture of the lack of ongoing hospitality is painted by adding the “occasional” and “none” categories together to total a staggering 76 percent of communities without an ongoing practice.

A number of respondents shared memories of neighborhood hospitality including street parties, hospitable neighbors moving away, and as a childhood memory. Despite the dearth of ongoing hospitality among the communities of the participants, memories of earlier practices in neighborhoods provide a counter-narrative to the status quo isolationism and hyper-individualism of contemporary suburban life. Memories of doors being unlocked, of neighbors borrowing items without asking, and genuinely knowing and caring for those living nearby can inform, shape, and nurture an alternative practice of ongoing hospitality in the current community. Such memories are reminders that current structures of social life can be changed to something more humane.

¹⁹ See Appendix C, Question 10.

The fourth qualitative question asked participants who their hospitable neighbors are and what actions set them apart.²⁰ The actions that set hospitable neighbors apart were helping while away on vacation (14 percent), sharing resources like tools and equipment (12 percent), watching over neighborhood kids (12 percent), and being invited into their home (11 percent). Respondents also noted the lack of hospitable neighbors (10 percent). Other responses at 7 percent included helping with the property, helping an ailing spouse, and checking in regularly. Such responses illustrate that simple actions done in a caring manner for one's closest neighbors can demonstrate a hospitality that sets one apart. Simple actions can make a profound difference in the lives of the community.

The fifth qualitative question asked participants what they like about the areas in which they live.²¹ The predominant answer was good, friendly neighbors* (26 percent). Other responses were a quiet, peaceful, and safe place (11 percent), helpful neighbors and proximity to shopping (9 percent), a walkable neighborhood (8 percent), and being close to family and good schools* (5 percent). The amenities of suburban living were exemplified in this question, for the benefits of both people and place are well-known. One respondent shared, "It is safe and easy to maintain isolation. There are major internal and external barriers to changing this paradigm, but I now see the problems in this."²² Still another shared about her move out of suburbia to downtown where there are festivals and a more accessible sense of community. This project is helping to bring to awareness the shadow side of suburbia, another part of the action-learning process.

²⁰ See Appendix C, Question 11.

²¹ See Appendix C, Question 12.

²² See Appendix F

Church Hospitality

Respondents shared their understandings of congregational hospitality through four questions repeated in M1 and M2 that were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. One of the quantitative questions asked about the importance of having an open table in worship.²³ The mean of 4.9 in M1 rose to 5 in M2, demonstrating how extremely important this aspect of congregational hospitality is. It is difficult to ascertain the project's effectiveness with so little quantitative variation between these measurements, however there were three other qualitative questions to be examined for more insight.

The first qualitative question asked where hospitality is seen on Sunday mornings before, during, and after service.²⁴ The Awakenings fellowship area provides coffee, juice, fruit, pastries, yogurt and other items before service and is the single most important expression of congregational hospitality (21 percent). Other responses included the exchange of peace during service (17 percent), lunch invitations after service (15 percent), the door greeter before service (11 percent), and communion during service (10 percent). Still other responses included prayers during service (6 percent), informal socializing before service (4 percent), Bible study class before service (4 percent), and the invitation to join* (1 percent). Grouping the above categories shows that 41 percent of congregational hospitality happens before service, 36 percent during service, and 21 percent after service. Given how extremely important an open table during worship is in the quantitative question above, it is puzzling that it does not make a stronger showing in

²³ See Appendix C, Question 15.

²⁴ See Appendix C, Question 13.

this question. There is a slight increase in communion's frequency among respondents from M1 of 8 percent to 11 percent in M2. Perhaps communion's associations with hospitality are obscured because Disciples practice an open table and assume that everyone is welcome. It is the breadth of that welcome that the next question addresses.

The second qualitative question asks what an open table meant to respondents and what phrases about it they have heard from church leaders in worship.²⁵ The key phrase is that "all are welcome" given by all respondents in one form or another. Without explication, this phrase was given by 52 percent of respondents. Another 30 percent unpacked this phrase's meaning to extend to all Christians regardless of denomination. Others within this group included confessional statements about Jesus as part of the meaning of an open table. Still another 15 percent extended that open table more broadly, explicitly including non-believers as those included in the "all" of "all are welcome." While the specific phrase is "All who trust Christ are welcome here," the degree of that table's openness varied by hearers. This unresolved tension is a place of creative ferment, one that can prod participants to consider not only how open the Lord's Table is but how open their home table is to the larger community.

The fourth qualitative question asked how respondents would explain to a Sunday visitor the practice of an open table.²⁶ The most frequent response was because Jesus welcomes all, we do* (50 percent).²⁷ The next most frequent response was anyone who believes in Christ is welcome (14 percent). Other explanations included references to

²⁵ See Appendix C, Question 14.

²⁶ See Appendix C, Question 16.

²⁷ Corroborated binomially, see Appendix C.

denominational founders (12 percent) and it is between you and God and we do not judge* (10 percent).²⁸ Other results were divided between communion unites us as one body,* it is a person's choice if they are comfortable, and regardless of religious connections (each 4 percent).

There were some significant differences between M1 and M2 for two responses. The most frequent response of because Jesus welcomes all, we do, increased from 37 to 62 percent. In a converse manner, it is between you and God and we do not judge decreased from 20 to 0 percent. The laissez-faire attitude of respondents before the project is replaced by a positive attribution to a characteristic of Christ's at the project's conclusion. It appears that participation in this project is cultivating a different manner of thinking about hospitality.

Bible Hospitality

Respondents shared their understandings of biblical hospitality through five questions repeated in M1 and M2 that were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The one quantitative question asked how widespread hospitality is in the Bible.²⁹ The mean of 4.3 in both M1 and M2 showed the breadth of hospitality that participants perceived in Scripture. It is difficult to ascertain the project's effectiveness with no quantitative variation between these measurements, but there were four other qualitative questions that can be examined for more insight.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Appendix C, Question 20.

The first qualitative question invited respondents to share when they knew the importance of an open table.³⁰ The most frequent response was the experience of a closed table, most often Catholic (39 percent). Other responses that are tied were becoming a Disciple of Christ or a specific worship event (17 percent). Those who were raised within the tradition (8 percent) had no specific memory and simply assumed its importance from an early age. Other responses that were tied included a mission trip/serving the homeless*, finally a pastor's class trip to historical sites of the denomination, and Bible hospitality stories (each 5 percent). That such a large percentage listed a negative experience of exclusion as the key to knowing the importance of an open table was significant. Perhaps their own memory of exclusion in worship can be a prod to practice greater hospitality with others at the tables of their homes.

The second qualitative question asked participants to list Bible stories that illustrate hospitality.³¹ The results of this question clearly demonstrated this project's effectiveness in fostering greater understanding of Scripture's intersection with hospitality. M1 and M2 each had a total of seventeen biblical stories about hospitality. However, the total frequency of those stories in M1 is forty-eight to the sixty-six in M2, a 37 percent increase. The average number of mentions of biblical stories increased from 2.82 in M1 to 3.88 in M2.

The ratio of Hebrew Scriptures to New Testament illustrations also changed from M1 to M2. There was one Hebrew Scripture story and sixteen New Testament stories in

³⁰ See Appendix C, Question 17.

³¹ See Appendix C, Question 18.

M1, while in M2 there were five Hebrew Scripture stories and twelve New Testament stories. The percentage of Hebrew Scripture stories increased from 2 to 18 percent from M1 to M2, while the percentage of New Testament stories decreased from 97 to 81 percent from M1 to M2. Respondents have gained a greater breadth and balance of hospitable stories from the entire Bible. One story from the curriculum that only appeared in M2 is Abraham and Sarah's three visitors*.³² Other stories that only appeared in M2 from the curriculum included Revelation's wedding feast*, Joseph welcoming his brothers*, Rahab sheltering spies*, and a widow welcoming Elijah. While they formed 0 percent of the stories in M1, collectively they totaled 22 percent of the stories in M2. Stories in both M1 and M2 illustrated this project's impact with a fourfold increase of the road to Emmaus* and a ninefold increase of the Cana wedding.³³ This project has clearly increased the awareness of how biblical stories intersect with hospitality.

Next, the third qualitative question asked whether God is the host or guest and why it matters.³⁴ Most respondents in M1 and M2 said that God is both host and guest (72 percent), followed by a host (22 percent), and no answer (4 percent). There was some significant movement among those saying that God is both host and guest, increasing from 66 to 79 percent between M1 and M2. Those saying God is only a host decreased from twenty-five to 20 percent between M1 and M2. Key reasons given by those who saw God solely as host were that God is a provider/Creator (8 percent), from God we

³² Corroborated binomially, see Appendix C.

³³ The Cana wedding is corroborated binomially, see Appendix C. This story, across the workbooks, had the greatest impact.

³⁴ See Appendix C, Question 19.

learn how to be good hosts and we learn how to be good guests (both 5 percent), and God is the one who invites us to the table (3 percent).

Hospitality's bidirectional relationship was hinted at among those who saw God solely as host, while this relationship was explicit among those who saw God as both host and guest. Between M1 and M2 there was a 2.33 increase in language about the duality of God's hospitality, modeling a bidirectional relationship*. Commenters shared this duality was key to having a relationship with God, others, and creation and its fluidity reminded people of the reciprocal giving and receiving of God's love. The predominant answer from the guest side of both host and guest was an opportunity to welcome God/ the "least of these"* (17 percent). This answer doubled in frequency from M1 to M2. The next most frequent answers from the host side of both host and guest were asks us to the table and provider/Creator (both ten percent). As a guest, God resides in their hearts/lives (6 percent) and as a host invites them to family/community/kingdom of God (5 percent). As a host, God gives grace/love and as a guest God is always in the home both received 3 percent. One answer only found in M2 was that as a host God gave us Christ and the Holy Spirit*. One can infer from these responses that the project has helped increase the understanding of hospitality as it intersects with Scripture.

The fourth evaluative question invited respondents to share an important Bible hospitality story and their reasons for selecting it.³⁵ The most popular response in M1 was like all of them or no response,* but there was an 80 percent decrease in this answer

³⁵ See Appendix C, Question 21.

in M2.³⁶ This decrease perhaps indicated a greater awareness of specific biblical stories in M2. The number of stories from M1 to M2 increased from eleven to fifteen, a gain of 36 percent. There was a fourfold increase in the occurrences of the Good Samaritan* from M1 to M2. Stories such as the Prodigal Son* and Luke 14* were only found in M2 and constituted 34 percent of the responses, perhaps indicating a greater comfort with Scripture as a resource for reimagining hospitality in the present context.

Project Evaluation

The participants completed an evaluation (EV) of the project at its conclusion.³⁷ This EV with a mix of Likert scale questions and open questions formed the basis for the qualitative interviews done with each respondent. I interviewed participants in order to get their feedback about the OTC process. Confidentiality was also assured in order for participants to speak candidly about their feedback. Twenty-two of twenty-four respondents were interviewed for a 91 percent participation rate. Additional information from this interview helps to further evaluate the action-learning process of this hospitality experiment.³⁸ Separate measurements for each component of the curriculum were examined along with inquiries about what was liked most or least. Additionally, structural questions about additions or deletions to the project, and specific questions about how effectively the action-learning process has been engaged were entertained.

³⁶ Corroborated binomially, see Appendix C.

³⁷ See Appendix D.

³⁸ Flick, *An introduction to Qualitative Research*, 30. Flick advises linking qualitative and quantitative results of a survey and interview to broaden the study and mutually validate both approaches.

There were six quantitative type questions in the evaluation.³⁹ The first asked whether the Scripture passages selected for each session were relevant to the discussion. One respondent was neutral, three agreed, and eighteen strongly agreed for a mean of 4.8, closest to strongly agree. The second quantitative type question asked whether the discussion questions adequately engaged the topic for each session. One respondent was neutral, nine agreed, and twelve strongly agreed for a mean of 4.5, at the midpoint between agree and strongly agree.

The third quantitative type question asked whether the journal work between sessions enhanced the individuals' learning. Four respondents strongly disagreed, two disagreed, seven were neutral, eight agreed, and one strongly agreed for a mean of three, or neutral. This was the least effective component of this experiment. Because of the lack of participation in this aspect of the experiment, not enough data was generated for an effective analysis. The initial experiment design and/or implementation of journaling did not achieve its objectives; future projects will need to consider whether the design or implementation of journaling needs to be revised or eliminated.

The fourth quantitative type question asked whether the skit, video clips, articles, and online resources were valuable additions. Fourteen respondents agreed and eight strongly agreed for a mean of 4.4, closest to agree. The fifth quantitative type question asked whether they acquired new skills or knowledge in relation to the presented materials. This particular question was one that gets at the heart of the action-learning process and will be engaged further with other questions on what participants have

³⁹ See Appendix D, Question 1. The six quantitative questions are on the same sheet.

gained or learned through this process. On the fifth quantitative question two of the respondents were neutral, ten agreed, and ten strongly agreed for a mean of 4.3, closest to agree. The sixth quantitative type question asked whether the amount of material for each session was suitable for that session's length. Four respondents disagreed, two were neutral, ten agreed, and six strongly agreed for a mean of 3.8, closest to agree. As with the journal component this aspect of the experiment will need to be revised in future projects. The average of the means of these six questions came to 4.13 showing that respondents generally agreed that the hospitality experiment, with the exceptions noted above, helped them successfully engage in the action-learning process.

The first qualitative type question asked what they liked most about the experience.⁴⁰ The predominant answer was getting to know others better (50 percent). The next answer was the curriculum itself (32 percent). Other answers given were meeting in homes (5 percent), and a number of items including strengthening congregational relationships, engaging and developing participants, informing and enriching personally, and helps in building toward external hospitality (each at 2 percent). Within these qualitative statements one can see the impact this project had in developing participants toward external hospitality.

The second qualitative type question asked what they liked least about the experience.⁴¹ Most respondents said the scheduling and commitment or nothing I disliked (each 18 percent). The next answers were repetitive questions and too much material

⁴⁰ See Appendix D, Question 7.

⁴¹ See Appendix D, Question 8.

(each 14 percent). Other answers given were journaling (11 percent) or no answer (7 percent). The remaining responses were too little discussion, tracking assignments, the inability to do all sessions, and wondering how vulnerable to be (each 3 percent). This feedback will help improve future groups using this curriculum.

The third qualitative type question asked what should be expanded or added if the program was repeated.⁴² The largest response was do not know or not applicable (19 percent). Other answers were more discussion time (14 percent), while emphasizing the journal's importance, action plans to become hospitable, and next stage for building congregational life come next at 9 percent each. The remaining singular responses at 4 percent included specific ideas about more content and logistical improvements. This feedback will also help to improve future groups. The desire for next stages and action plans illustrates the readiness for moving this project's practice of hospitality beyond the congregation. The increased awareness and understanding is prompting further experimentation which is one of the key goals of this project.

The fourth qualitative type question asked what should be left out or changed if the program was repeated.⁴³ The greatest response was no change/do not know (34 percent). More current/shorter videos and journal not discussed came next each had 7 percent. The remaining singular answers at 3 percent included ideas about restructuring the curriculum and ways to better engage in the process itself. This feedback will help to improve this project for future participants.

⁴² See Appendix D, Question 9.

⁴³ See Appendix D, Question 10.

Respondents were asked to evaluate the program's effectiveness through a series of statements.⁴⁴ They checked all the statements that they believe applied to themselves as a result of participating in this program. The statements assessed the core components of this project by examining the learning about context, Scripture, and denominational history as well as the action of being prepared for further engagements of hospitality beyond the project. The first statement was, I gained one or more specific insights into the importance of hospitality in Scripture. Twenty-one of twenty- four respondents, or 87 percent, agreed with this statement. The second statement was, I learned things about my community that were previously unknown to me. Sixteen of twenty- four respondents, or 66 percent, agreed with this statement. The third statement was, I gained insights into denominational history of which I was unaware. Fourteen of twenty- four respondents, or 58 percent, agreed with this statement. Taken together, these three statements comprise the learning part of the action-learning process, and averaging these three responses show that 70 percent agreed that greater awareness and understanding were gained by participating in this project. One respondent shared, "I gained fundamental insight into the structural nature of the disconnect between current society and God's vision."⁴⁵ The fourth statement was, I am prepared to be more hospitable in my own life. Eighteen of twenty- four respondents, or 75 percent, agreed with this statement. By participating in this hospitality experiment they became more adept at offering hospitality themselves, one of the key outcomes of this project and the action part of the action-learning process.

⁴⁴ See Appendix D, Question 11.

⁴⁵ See Appendix F.

This statement, in tandem with an earlier question about acquiring new skills or knowledge, indicates this project’s effectiveness at achieving its initial objectives.

Respondents were then asked whether they would recommend the program to others and to explain their answer.⁴⁶ Twenty respondents, or 83 percent, said they would recommend it. Two respondents were unsure, two respondents gave no answer (both at 8 percent), but no one said they would not recommend the program. Those that were unsure listed the repetitive nature of some of the material and the challenge of scheduling. Of those that would recommend this program, the most frequent answer was that it shows how faith is applied today (31 percent). Some comments are in order because this is at the heart of the action-learning process.⁴⁷ One shared, “It is very important for societies and communities to embrace the fact that we are ignorant and continue to turn our heads away from the needs of our struggling neighborhoods. This program explained how to accomplish and approach the issues of today with the knowledge and insight of the past.” Another noted, “This changed everything about my view of applied religion, i.e., before I understood religion but in the abstract, largely struggling with the application to real life.” Another said, “This program did a quality job of showing the importance of hospitality, the biblical precedents, and how simply through this exercise it can be fostered.” One respondent shared, “Small groups on hospitality give us the opportunity to practice sharing around the table before we go ‘outside’ our faith community.”

Participants have acted their way into a new way of thinking in order to engage the

⁴⁶ See Appendix D, Question 12.

⁴⁷ Appendix F has all these quotes.

adaptive challenge of connecting with the community. The next most prevalent responses were that participants enjoyed discussing and learning and anticipating future sessions that others can enjoy (each 10 percent). Current participants recognized they are the first phase in an ongoing action-learning process. The remaining answers at 5 percent clustered around comments on curriculum and how to structure the groups.

The last question asked if there was anything else they would like to share.⁴⁸ The most prevalent response was no answer (25 percent). Other responses were an appreciation for gathering in small groups (14 percent), and gaining in-depth insights on hospitality (10 percent). Future hopes for change (10 percent) were shared and within those responses are insights relevant to the action-learning process.⁴⁹ One respondent noted, “Hospitality is so important to our faith and I wish it were easier for all. This course might help make it so.” Another participant shared, “I really wish to change our views of being invited to an open table for everyone who comes into our home and neighborhood.” Participants have broadened their awareness and understanding of the practice of hospitality beyond congregational members, a key step for the future of the action-learning process. The remaining responses expressed various forms of appreciation, regrets for not fully engaging, or recommendations for improvements.

While the quantitative type questions in M1 and M2 did not show sufficient variation to measure a discernible difference for the action-learning outcomes, by delving into the qualitative type questions those differences were measurable. Some differences

⁴⁸ See Appendix D, Question 13.

⁴⁹ See Appendix F for all these quotes.

were subtle while others were significant. Additional comments through interviews lent support to the hospitality measurements. Both quantitative and qualitative type questions in the evaluations and interviews showed the positive impact of the project. Participants gained a greater awareness and understanding of their context, Scripture, and denominational tradition as it intersects with hospitality. By being part of this hospitality experiment they were enabled to act their way into a new way of thinking. They successfully entered into an action-learning process to engage the adaptive challenge of connecting with the community.

SECTION THREE

REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 1

CHURCH

Congregational Formation

This first section engages one leaf of the table model, that of church, by reflecting upon this project through the lens of a tripartite and overlapping construct on church formation proposed by Branson and Martínez.¹ Those overlapping ellipses are congregational formation, spiritual formation, and missional formation. This framework “provides a basic way for us to examine a church’s identity and agency. The leaders of a church need to guide and nourish the church concerning these ways of paying attention to God, to each other, and to the world, and engaging in activities that express the grace of God.”² God’s “one item agenda” is reconciliation and the primary call on churches is to live into that call as “sign, foretaste, and instrument” of God’s reconciling love.³ Their framework resonates with this project’s table model paying attention to Gospel, Church, and culture. Branson and Martínez note, “This life of paying attention is not passive—it

¹ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 61. Additional information on this framework comes from Branson’s PowerPoint presentation of “Church Formation Details.”

² Ibid., 63.

³ Ibid., 61.

requires commitment, constant learning and being engaged actively in all three arenas.”⁴

This project is one way of paying attention and engaging these arenas. Hospitality expresses God’s grace and can be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of that reconciling love.

Congregational formation is one of the lenses through which to view this project. It “concerns how we attend to each other in our churches. Another appropriate term is ‘social formation.’”⁵ This aspect of church formation is the shaping of a group’s social traits, their sharing of a common memory, common hope, and a cooperative present.⁶ A congregation is shaped by biblical metaphors and imagination; New Testament images such as body of Christ, temple of the Holy Spirit, household, civic assembly, new race, royal priesthood, and living sacrifice are informative.⁷ Those images interact with a particular sociocultural context and geographical locale to form diverse peoples toward unique Gospel characteristics which allows for a relative intimacy, proximity, and permanence among the congregation. Common congregational formation practices include worship, word, fellowship, and service.⁸

This framework permits TRCC’s congregational formation to be examined. Social formation is hindered by both internal and external physical factors in the built environment. The internal physical factors are the congregation’s solitary worship space

⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Branson, “Church Formation PowerPoint”.from Mark Lau Branson and Alan Roxburgh, Notes from “Missional Leadership Cohort,” Fuller Theological Seminary, August 2012.

⁷ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 63.

⁸ Branson, “Church Formation PowerPoint.”

without fellowship hall or kitchen relegating fellowship to a Sunday-only event. The external physical factors are members' dispersion across separate communities living in single family detached homes that constrain hospitality. Congregational formation fostering intimacy, proximity, and relative permanence is challenging in suburban landscapes where anonymity, separation of uses, and relative transience is the norm. One participant noted, "There is no ongoing practice of hospitality because the neighborhood is too transient [to create lasting] memories."⁹

The internal cultural factors that hinder social formation included an internecine struggle between past and current leaders. Despite repeated attempts at social reconciliation there was congregational discord for over seven years. Throughout that time there was no common memory, hope, or cooperative present. The external cultural factors are narratives of fear of strangers, busyness, and a suburban environment where practices of hospitality are occasional but rarely ongoing. This project addressed some of these internal and external physical and cultural factors. By enacting hospitality in a different way than before, participants gained awareness of these factors while simultaneously helping knit a common hope and greater intimacy into the congregation's social formation. This project's timing and design created a safe space where participants could name their present praxis and reflect upon it, paying attention to one another congregationally in ways that had not been possible before. It is not surprising that the act itself of getting together was valued more than the curriculum.¹⁰

⁹ See Appendix F.

¹⁰ See Appendix D, Question 7.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the second lens through which to view this project. This “is about attending to God, learning about God’s activities and character, and participating in God’s life and initiatives.”¹¹ A number of disciplines and practices cultivate spiritual formation within a church. Branson and Martinez say that engaging Scripture, studying the church’s histories, worshiping, praying and listening to God’s voice, welcoming God’s grace, and acting in congruence with it are just some practices that form a church’s spirituality.¹² Branson adds that these practices are found in “festivals, small groups, spiritual friendships, . . . pastoral care, private disciplines, [and] retreats.”¹³

Spirituality is not limited to a private sphere or disengaged from the larger world. Spiritual formation’s practices and results are both personal and corporate, deepening sanctification in personal character, corporate faithfulness, and missional engagement.¹⁴ Paying attention to God makes both individual and group discernment possible, and being reconciled to God overflows into congregational and missional formation.

This framework permits TRCC’s spiritual formation to be examined. Prior to my call to this congregation in 2009, there were no adult Bible study groups. Scripture was a homiletical point of departure for personal stories that made hearers feel good about themselves, but not an imaginative framework to live within or a counter-narrative to the larger world’s story. This congregation has made significant strides since the introduction

¹¹ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 62.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Branson, “Church Formation PowerPoint.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

of adult Bible studies in 2010, and this project exemplifies that progress in spiritual formation. Participants learned about God's activities and character, participated in God's life and initiatives, engaged the narratives of Scripture, studied the church's histories and traditions, and worshiped in various places such as homes, care centers, and restaurants.

They welcomed God's grace into their lives through sharing meals and faith. They listened to God's voice in the conversations over six months as God became not just a topic of discussion, but the unseen and invited guest whose voice joined others around the table. They acted in congruence with God's grace by extending hospitality to others that they had received from God. Through practicing the discipline of hospitality in small groups, new spiritual friendships were formed and pastoral care was given. An open table on Sunday morning was found to have broader implications than simply worship. Spirituality as expressed through hospitality was discovered to not be limited to a private sphere or disengaged from the larger world, but an intrinsic practice of Christian faith. Practicing hospitality revealed the personal and corporate nature of spiritual formation and led to deepening sanctification in both spheres. This project helped participants pay attention to God's reconciling love by discerning that hospitality cannot be limited to Sundays, but must embrace differences and cross boundaries into the neighborhoods where people live. For hospitality to be faithful to God's vision it must engage others not yet at the table, the focus of missional formation.

Missional Formation

Missional formation is the third lens through which to view this project. It “refers to how God shapes a church to participate in God’s love for the world.”¹⁵ Congregations are called to hear and accept their vocation to be sent into the world for the Gospel’s sake.¹⁶ Congregational identity and agency is defined by this *missio Dei* that necessarily engages the world.¹⁷ As a local incarnation of the body of Christ in a particular community, there is a mutual shaping through interacting with the context.¹⁸

Missional formation requires a congregation to attend to its context and discover what God is already doing there, what God wants to do, and how to join in that work. Branson says, “Congregational *praxis* matures in the movement between study/reflection and engagement/action.”¹⁹ It is the unceasing motion of this practical theology, of the MCM, of the movements of what Thomas Groome calls “shared Christian praxis” that gives energy and shape to missional formation.²⁰ Congregations embody the reconciling love of God within their context through grace, justice, healing, peace, witness, invitation, and proclamation.²¹

¹⁵ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 63.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Branson, “Church Formation PowerPoint.” Italic original.

¹⁸ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 63.

¹⁹ Branson, “Church Formation PowerPoint.” Italic original.

²⁰ As detailed by Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 146-148.

²¹ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 63.

Branson and Martínez detail several factors impeding or promoting missional formation in congregations. One impeding factor is the residue of Christendom where church members and leaders believe they occupy a privileged position in society and that government, churches, and citizens share a broad agenda.²² Christendom in America is derived from white Protestants of European background, a particular historical alignment that, because of its supposed ubiquity, was considered normative. The political disestablishment of churches in America dates to the early republic, but the cultural disestablishment of American churches began much later and continues apace today.²³

Another impeding factor is that church imaginations are captivated by the structures and activities of Western corporations.²⁴ Congregations become vendors of religious goods and services, pastors become Chief Executive Officers, members become customers, evangelism becomes marketing, and mission becomes fragmented among various departments. A third impeding factor is the denigration of the local and particular in U.S. society, and the displacement of “place” as a significant and valuable category.²⁵ The suburban “geography of nowhere” with isolating McMansions includes congregations equally isolated from their context.

Much like the residue of Christendom, many congregations continue to default to a mindset of church as corporate denomination where it “succeeded in engaging the

²² Ibid., 67.

²³ This is the argument of Robert P. Jones’ *The End of White Christian America* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2016).

²⁴ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 68.

²⁵ Ibid., 70.

suburbanization of culture through a corporatist, franchise-based organization run by managers and professionals.”²⁶ “Place” means little in a franchised operation whether fast food or a congregation—local ingredients are not allowed. The point of a franchise is the franchise, not the community it is situated within, much like supposed missiological conversations that are in fact ecclesiocentric.²⁷ Communication and transportation technologies, the prioritization of a mobile workforce, and the expendability of creation for capital are other factors working to erase the value of place.²⁸

Branson and Martínez share other factors promoting missional formation. Congregations can let go of the vestiges of Christendom in order to welcome the gift of this new space given to them by the Lord of history. Rather than being chaplains to the culture they can be freed to live as a contrast society enacting a different story of a God that is found among a company of aliens.²⁹ They can affirm that God’s missional imagination dwells among ordinary people of God rather than religious technocrats whose expertise in vision casting needs only to be implemented top-down.³⁰ Instead of a “displaced” and delocalized franchise church, congregations can reenter the local through networks where they discover opportunities. Congregations already have networks of relationships that can help cultivate a sense of place and connecting locally.³¹

²⁶ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁸ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

This framework permits TRCC's missional formation to be examined. Prior to this project, an AI (appreciative inquiry) process was engaged to surface the best memories of the past to help the congregation remember its missional engagement to a particular community. The hospitality experiment furthered this conversation to engage questions of what God is already doing locally, what God wants to do, and how this congregation joins in that work. Through the study/reflection and engagement/action of this experiment, a congregational praxis is developing. Future hospitality experiments that extend beyond the congregation hold the promise of embodying grace, justice, healing, peace, witness, and proclamation of God's reconciling love. Alongside the congregational praxis that is developing within the local context are the factors that impact missional formation.

The Disciples of Christ tradition, though native to American soil, was founded by white Protestants of European background and thus shaped by Christendom. This project helped participants imagine being on the receiving end of hospitality, whether as fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad, Jewish refugees in Le Chambon, or Japanese-American parents deciding prior to internment which neighbors of a different ethnic and cultural background would raise their children. For a predominantly Euro-Anglo congregation it was important for participants to reimagine themselves in a marginalized social position, for "when we are without the prerogatives of privilege we gain capacities for seeing our world through the biblical narratives of being 'strangers and aliens' who attend with the eyes of justice, compassion and neighborliness."³²

³² Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 68.

Like other mainline churches in the 1950s, the corporate denomination ethos formed the imagination as business models and methodologies shaped congregational life.³³ This was still employed in 1990 when TRCC was planted in a suburban area without recognizing that the culture had shifted. Simply being sited on a main thoroughfare with high visibility in a growing suburban area no longer successfully engaged the context. This project helped participants articulate the awareness of that ongoing cultural shift through remembering hospitality's local practice in the past and understanding the factors impeding it in the present. The church's missional engagement is shaped by the colonized imaginations of members that work at Procter and Gamble and General Electric. Despite these factors, hospitality opens avenues for greater missional formation by embodying a contrast society where God is found among a company of aliens with the missional imagination dwelling among the everyday people of God. Hospitality offers rich possibilities for reentering the local through neighborhoods and networks, incarnating a local expression of God's reconciling love within a particular community.

³³ O.L. Shelton's *The Church Functioning Effectively: A Handbook for Church Officers* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1958), published by a Disciples of Christ printing house, is one example. The church is organized and fragmented into different departments. This is the default practice and imagination among many Disciples of Christ churches today.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGY

Within this chapter, the gospel leaf of the table model is engaged. This section reflects upon the theological frameworks within which this project is embedded. Participant feedback illustrating theological frameworks is shared and denominational resources are considered. These implicit theologies are important theological sources originating among amateurs, the people of a community.¹ Since theology is an invitation to awareness, bringing these frameworks from “under the table” into open view is part of the process of moving toward articulating a contextual theology. Naming participants’ narratives allows them to be brought into awareness and understanding, to dialogue with scriptural and denominational resources, and for a local theology to emerge. By surfacing these theological frameworks, one can better engage questions of God’s local activity and where God is ahead of the church in the community. Two contextual observations from participants about their neighborhoods framed this project from its inception. The training session included those observations so participants heard different expressions of

¹ Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 14.

hospitality in two suburban neighborhoods. Because hospitality varied from absence to abundance in those observations, a listening space was created for participants to reflect upon their own neighborhood's hospitality. Those reflections were shared with others at their table. This was a practice run for participants to begin listening to the local context to discern God's movements within it.

The Challenge of Hospitality

A number of narratives and explicit theologies were operative within the participants. Suburbia's "good life" narrative shaped the responses of participants when asked why they like living where they do.² Being close to family and good schools, walkable neighborhoods, helpful neighbors, proximity to shopping, and a quiet, peaceful, and safe place were all answers. The predominant response was having good, friendly neighbors. Suburbia's "good life" narrative is part of the larger "American dream" story. Most participants live within communities of such explicit narratives. Mason's corporate motto is "More than you imagine" and West Chester's is "Where families grow and businesses prosper." Unlimited familial and economic possibilities are local narratives. As Sedmak notes, "The 'American dream' is another famous and influential cultural story that shapes cultural identity."³

Underneath these explicit narratives of suburbia are implicit theologies. Sedmak shares, "Our implicit theologies are like silent languages that shape our way of life. [They] are sometimes more important than the explicit ones because they are hidden,

² See Appendix C, Question 12.

³ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 92.

deeper, more powerful, and less controllable . . . Theologies are silent languages of our cultures.”⁴ Listening for those silent theologies requires attentiveness to and inquisitiveness about the nature of cultural life. As Robert Schreiter relates, “Those cultural realities that cluster around the theological concepts of creation, redemption, and community are of paramount importance for a theologian wishing to listen to a culture. . . . Community [asks,] “What is the quality of life together and how is that way of life developed?”⁵ This chapter will be attuned to the paramount “voice” of the community.

One narrative shared at the training session came from Bob and Bonnie Schilling. They are a participant’s neighbors and related how neighborhood life has changed since 1975. “Back then we had weekly card games . . . We did everything together. We had street cookouts in my garage, and everybody on the street came, but that has changed now. Nobody knows anybody anymore. People once talked to you in those days, but they do not talk to you anymore.”⁶ The Schillings continued:

I remember when nobody ever locked their doors. We shared one bike and all the kids on the street got a turn. You could ride your bike anywhere, but you cannot do that now because of fast traffic. Because we did not have air conditioning we played outside. Kids today have air conditioning, but are not outside and do not see anybody. They have more money, but less fun. We played together then, now they just play alone. Parents never had to worry about their kid being grabbed.⁷

They closed with, “What has happened? Our society is heading in the wrong direction; so much has changed. We need to do more than just go to church. People need to start

⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁵ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 40.

⁶ See Appendix F.

⁷ Ibid.

changing things. All of us Christians should be pushing for Christ, but we keep to ourselves. What do we do?”⁸ Participants corroborated these observations reflected their past memories of neighborliness and current absence in their own neighborhoods. They recognized something important had been shared and a deeper listening was required.

The Schillings’ contextual observations gave voice to the silent languages just beneath the threshold of suburban hearing. Their lamentation for the loss of community in their neighborhood opened a window to discovering implicit theologies. As Sedmak notes, “How should we live? is the basic theological question.”⁹ Their observations helped participants acknowledge something is profoundly awry with current community life, and it was not always so. Air conditioning changed childrens’ recreational and social habits. Suburban design valued adults in cars over children on bicycles and isolated them. Increasing prosperity brought unseen social costs; there is no need to share one bike among the neighborhood when every child owns one. Narratives of consumption replaced those of cooperation.¹⁰ Being a good neighbor once meant engagement in the lives of others, but now it means not bothering them. Insights into suburban life are found in proverbs. Sedmak shares they “can help us assess the situation of a local culture” revealing the “grim values” that “lurk not far beneath the surface of life . . . and this is a key for a little theology.”¹¹ “A man’s home is his castle,” and “good fences make good

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 137.

¹⁰ John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2010), 11-15.

¹¹ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 151-152.

neighbors” vocalizes the isolation and separation of suburban life. “Good neighbors do not drop by unannounced, are not nosy, and mind their own business” illustrates the redefinition of what being a good neighbor once meant. Narratives of abundant social capital were exchanged for scarcity.¹² Narratives of unlocked doors were replaced by fears of strangers grabbing a child. Churches that could be rebuilding community instead keep to themselves. A community where nobody knows anyone or talks to anyone is not a community, yet this is the accepted default in many suburbs. Contextual observations gave a sociological read of the suburban communities of many participants, opening a window to implicit theologies questioning whether this is “how we live” the good life.

Contextual theologies begin with observing the local culture and understanding it on its own terms before then bringing the faith tradition into the conversation. Part of this project’s contextual analysis is to surface the functional theologies among participants. Given they are formed within a culture and faith tradition, the resources of the latter will be brought into conversation with the former. Participants were asked about hospitable neighbors and what attributes they had.¹³ Good neighbors provided assistance on an as-needed basis when on vacation, loaning tools, or helping with property or an ailing spouse. Talking with such good neighbors was a rare occurrence. In general, good neighbors helped out when needed but were not present otherwise, keeping a silent distance.

¹² McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 11-15.

¹³ See Appendix C, Question 11.

Bringing that contextual observation into theological conversation uncovers some operative theologies of participants. Since love of God and neighbors is intertwined (Mt 22:37-39), one's loves of neighbors reveals one's love for God (1 Jn 4:20). If one cannot love the seen neighbor, one cannot love the unseen God (1 Jn 3:17). How one thinks of neighbors reflects how one thinks of God. How one regards good neighbors reveals how one regards a good God. God, like a good neighbor, helps out when needed but is not present otherwise, keeping a silent distance. God respects suburban castles and fences, does not drop by unannounced, is not nosy, and minds God's own business. This is one of the functional theologies of participants. In suburbia, neighbors are mostly unseen, raising questions of God's own visibility there. Hospitality holds out the possibility of revealing invisible neighbors and also the hidden God.

Other implicit theologies emerged as participants engaged the curriculum. Many found practicing hospitality challenging despite their commitment to meeting twelve times over six months in homes. Alan Roxburgh outlines those reasons:

Practicing hospitality requires us to stop busy, demanding routines . . . We quickly start to see how conditioned we are to experience change to our routine as interference . . . The ways our lives are driven by agendas and demands that push away relational encounters with others . . . in the initial months it is experienced as an imposition on busy lives. This is the natural process of awakening to our own captivities, the cultural lies about what is important and essential.¹⁴

One of the things participants liked least was the scheduling and commitment.¹⁵

Comments included the difficulties of younger folks with families to make time for the program, that meeting every two weeks was too hard, and such difficulties in scheduling

¹⁴ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 157.

¹⁵ See Appendix D, Question 8.

were no one's fault, just modern life.¹⁶ The clearest expression of these narratives was how the process unfolded. All four groups took a summer hiatus to maintain group cohesion and complete the process. Only one of the four groups was able to meet in homes throughout the twelve sessions. Two of the groups initially met in homes but had to adapt to meeting in the church's sanctuary. The remaining group spent the majority of their meetings in public venues like restaurants and a nearby care facility's dining room. Despite the best intentions of committed participants to hospitality, modern life's imposing schedules were revealed.

Below the surface of modernity's imposing schedules are implicit theologies about busyness and time. In a market economy, an individual's sense of self is defined by what he or she does, the busier one is, the more valuable one is. Busyness becomes a badge of honor and multitasking, a term originally applied to computers processing several tasks at once, reshapes human life into machine imagery. There is never enough time in a market economy that views it as an ever-dwindling commodity. Suburban parents need military precision in constantly adjusting schedules for work, home, school, sports, band, errands, and recreation. Families are overwhelmed and there is no time for genuine human interaction outside the family. Hospitality is an imposition in an already overbooked schedule. Charles Anderson shares that busyness "has become for many the default rhythm of life."¹⁷ He attributes this to three factors: the stress of having more options than we can handle, the blurring of home and work due to technology, and a 24/7

¹⁶ See Appendix F for full quotes.

¹⁷ Charles Anderson "The Business of Busyness" in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 157.

information economy that has eliminated “downtime.”¹⁸ Those narratives injure the community’s quality of life.

Since hospitality provides an opportunity to encounter neighbors and God within one’s neighborhood, what might the imposing schedules of participants reveal about their functional theologies? “God” is a scheduled event elsewhere than one’s neighborhood, occurring Sundays at church unless there is a superseding extracurricular activity for the children. God does not interrupt busy schedules at home during the week, or come knocking on the door as a stranger. God honors the busyness of industrious suburbanites for whom there is no Sabbath. Anderson offers a counter-narrative from the Christian tradition: time is a gift from the Lord of time and not a commodity, while time has cyclical movement it also moves towards God’s consummation, and Christians are to redeem the present time in light of the eschaton.¹⁹ Marketplace and technological narratives about time and busyness are powerful implicit theologies and the difficulties of practicing hospitality expose those hidden narratives.

The Opportunity of Hospitality

A second narrative at the training session came from two married participants who related hospitality’s expression in their neighborhood. Neighbors know and trust one another, collaboratively raise their kids, help with projects, and support one another financially and emotionally in times of need. There are regular and spontaneous

¹⁸ Ibid., 157-159.

¹⁹ Ibid., 160-163.

neighborhood celebrations; they like and enjoy one another.²⁰ They compared fellowship in the neighborhood to the church, “Most churches would envy our fellowship here. The quality of fellowship is deeper and richer than we find in church outside of small groups. The best part of our neighborhood is our neighbors; although we are all different we love them and they love us. I cannot imagine living in a neighborhood without this!”²¹ This contrasts with the woundedness and alienation of suburbia experienced by the Schillings. It points to areas where God is active in the communities and ahead of the church.

Neighbors that know, trust, like, love, care, share, and celebrate life together are an embodiment of hope on earth. Sedmak offers, “We do theology because we share a vision and we experience wounds . . . It is the vision of a promised land, the vision of unbroken closeness and unthreatened community . . . it is a vision of community. Heaven is community, and salvation is the healing of the wound of loneliness.”²² The place of woundedness can also be the site of healing; God acts in the suburbs by crying out in distress and celebrating with joyful hope. A contextual theology emerging from participants is that good neighbors know and love one another, sharing life together, and discovering God there. Practicing hospitality embodies that contextual theology.

There are several theological connections to denominational resources. The DOC identity statement says, “We are . . . a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord’s Table as God has

²⁰ See Appendix F.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 8.

welcomed us.”²³ Modernity’s fragmentations can be met by the wholeness and welcome of a table. Sedmak offers, “Doing theology is an attempt to create a culture of hope . . . It stems from a pre-theological human commitment to change and improve the world . . . to make people’s lives better.”²⁴ This desire to make lives and world better connects with DOC ideas of covenant theology. Steven Sprinkle shares, “The centrality of thought to covenant to their thought and practice, especially as it is understood as the gracious means by which humanity is beckoned to participate with God in the renewal of society, heaven, and earth in a holistic conception of salvation which is personal as well as general, and is firmly rooted in eschatology; their understanding that covenant is key to any conception of church.”²⁵ Covenant underlies theology and ecclesiology for DOC. Sprinkle cites Leo Perdue who “locates the formation of the character and concept of covenant in the Israelite and early Jewish household,” one that develops to include David’s royal and Aaron’s priestly household and embraces the “village of households” in the rest of the world.²⁶ A theology emerging from households engaging in God’s renewal of society and creation holds promise for a people constituted by the table, bound together in covenant, creating a culture of hope, as good neighbors know and love one another, sharing life together and discovering God there.

²³ Howard E. Bowers, ed., *Yearbook and Directory* (Indianapolis: Office of the General Minister and President, 2014), 3.

²⁴ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 158.

²⁵ Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Disciples and Theology: Understanding the Faith of a People in Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 103.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-114.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

In this chapter the context leaf of the table model is engaged by reflecting upon those contextual frameworks within which this project is embedded. Participant feedback illustrating these frameworks is shared. Particular attention is paid to how participants saw and read their context and the responses and questions that surfaced. From participant observations and considerations, a reading of and response to their local context emerges. Bringing those contextual frameworks from “under the table” into open view is necessary for a contextual theology to take shape. Questions of what God is up to locally can only be addressed by noticing the context within which participants live.

Significant contextual frameworks lie beneath the conversations of the participants in this project. Participants were asked to pay attention to their local contexts in new ways. Relevant insights from prior chapters on contextual background and data assessment are summarized here along with new insights; answers are in decreasing frequency. There is no neutral space and suburban built environments mask their ideological and cultural foundations, their presuppositions and shortcomings under the

façade of “it has always been this way.” Participants became attentive to and inquisitive about the taken-for-granted nature of their local environment. As Paulo Freire notes, “One can only know to the extent that one ‘problematizes’ the natural, cultural, and historical reality in which s/he is immersed.”¹ Participants peeked through the lens of hospitality to see things in their lives and neighborhoods that were easily overlooked.

A Local Portrait of Hospitality

As a window into their lives and neighborhoods, participants were asked how frequently they give and receive hospitality.² The mean for giving hospitality was moderately, while the mean for receiving hospitality was between occasionally and moderately. The median for giving hospitality was moderately and the median for receiving hospitality was occasionally. Participants more often gave hospitality within their neighborhoods than received it. Averaging the responses for giving hospitality showed that 31 percent did so often, 29 percent did so moderately, 35 percent did so occasionally, and 4 percent did so rarely. Averaging the responses for receiving hospitality showed that 16 percent did so often, 27 percent did so moderately, 54 percent did so occasionally, and 2 percent did so rarely. Averaging the responses for giving hospitality and grouping the moderately and occasionally categories came to 64 percent. Averaging the responses for receiving hospitality and grouping the moderately and occasionally categories came to 81 percent. Although participants more often gave hospitality in their neighborhoods than received it, the overwhelming majority did not

¹ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1974), ix.

² See Appendix C, Questions 5 and 6.

experience it often at all. This correlates with what Albert Hsu observes, “In 1975 the average American entertained friends at home 15 times per year; the equivalent figure is now barely half that.”³ Participant data supported hospitality’s sporadic nature in suburbia whether on the giving or receiving end. They recognized hospitality’s infrequency by observing their own lives and neighborhoods.

Hospitality’s expression in memorable experiences revealed contextual insights.⁴ Milestone family events were most prevalent at 33 percent and when combined with memories of a family home at 7 percent came to 40 percent. Hospitality was a practice exercised amongst one’s kin. Within a foreign country was next at 21 percent; hospitality was a practice exercised overseas. A neighbor’s home was at 10 percent; hospitality was practically unexercised locally, as far as memorable experiences went. One participant noted the challenges of memorable experiences in the suburbs, “There is no ongoing practice of hospitality because the neighborhood is too transient [to create lasting] memories.”⁵ Participants were embedded within an economic system that values a mobile workforce and creates transient communities. Clemens Sedmak shared, “Theological reflection learns that the ideals of flexibility and mobility are preeminent in contemporary society.”⁶ Few memorable experiences of hospitality existed outside of hosting a Super

³ Albert Y. Hsu, *The Suburban Christian: Finding Spiritual Vitality in the Land of Plenty* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 124.

⁴ See Appendix C, Question 7.

⁵ See Appendix F.

⁶ Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1, 3.

Bowl party. It took disasters like a health emergency, home fire, or citywide power outage to get neighbors engaged in caring for one another. Hospitality happens amongst family or somewhere else, but infrequently amongst those living closest to participants in their local contexts. Nevertheless, of those memorable experiences 71 percent had a church connection while 29 percent were a neighborhood practice. There are opportunities for congregations to reengage their local context and create new memories of hospitality there, but the transient nature of suburban life makes that challenging.

Participants were asked where they saw hospitality in their local context.⁷ Responses fell into categories of service, parties, and socializing. The service category included caring for kids, watching over property while away, shoveling driveways, sharing food when ill, lending tools, and during a power outage; this grouping had 36 percent. Adding different parties together came to 26 percent. Socializing like talking to neighbors or waving when passing by came to 13 percent. Participants saw hospitality's expression in their local context as occasional and predominantly utilitarian. Parties were infrequent and ongoing socializing even less so. One respondent reported hospitality's rareness before the project; that answer quadrupled after the project. It appears the project helped sensitize participants to hospitality's absence in their communities.

Seasonal expressions of hospitality unveiled more insights.⁸ Block parties at 27 percent were the largest single category followed by the lack of seasonal hospitality. Comments on its lack were "usually people are too busy to get together," and "my

⁷ See Appendix C, Question 8.

⁸ See Appendix C, Question 9.

apartment community does not foster hospitality.”⁹ Participants saw the social forces and built environment’s effects on hospitality’s expression. Grouping holiday parties gave 32 percent with dinner parties at 9 percent. Block and holiday parties were 59 percent, far outstripping dinner parties at 9 percent that have potential to be more than an annual event. One respondent recognized the built environment’s power and the “direct causal relationship between the character of the physical environment and the social health of families and the community at large.”¹⁰ She shared, “There are not neighborhood parties as there are steep hills, our streets have no sidewalks, and are not connected very well. The local swim club’s initiation fee is \$1400 and then about \$400 a year so it does segregate people.”¹¹ It was not surprising that a built environment based upon exclusion of the external “other” replicated those exclusions within suburbia.¹² Both physical and social factors of the suburban context were surfaced among participants.

Ongoing hospitality expressions revealed contextual details.¹³ If there were no ongoing expressions then participants offered neighborhood memories of hospitality. They struggled to name ongoing practices and defaulted to occasional expressions. Ongoing practices were seen in 23 percent, occasional events were reported by 33 percent, and 43 percent said there were no ongoing practices. The occasional and none

⁹ See Appendix F.

¹⁰ Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, xxiii.

¹¹ See Appendix F.

¹² Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 4.

¹³ See Appendix C, Question 10.

responses together revealed 76 percent of communities without an ongoing practice. One respondent noted technology's impact on her neighborhood, "We have a neighborhood Facebook page that allows us to keep track of each other. I can call out to this group and receive help; about half of the 450 neighborhood houses are in the group. I have a bigger social network than I did in Toronto, so my neighborhood is not geographical."¹⁴ Social media has stepped into the void of neighborhoods devoid of face-to-face interaction. Respondents shared neighborhood memories of hospitality. One shared, "Neighbors gave exclusive dinner parties. Once they moved it stopped because people were embarrassed about everyone not being invited or not interested." Another said, "I remember being safe at one time, no one ever locked their doors. People could come in and borrow something if you were not home." Exclusionary memories can warn and positive memories can encourage participants to imagine and create a more humane neighborhood.

Participants were asked about hospitable neighbors and their actions.¹⁵ Responses fell into the categories of service and socializing. The service category included different ways neighbors were helpful like helping while away on vacation, sharing resources, watching over kids playing, helping with property or an ailing spouse; this grouping had 58 percent. Socializing like being invited into their home, checking in regularly, sharing a meal, talking with us or waving was 29 percent. For 10 percent, there were no hospitable neighbors. The utilitarian expression was double the social expression of hospitality. Respondents shared their contextual observations.¹⁶ Two respondents noted the

¹⁴ See Appendix F for these quotes.

¹⁵ See Appendix C, Question 11.

¹⁶ See Appendix F for these quotes.

importance of key hospitable neighbors for neighborhood health and hospitality's fragility and brittleness without them. One said, "The most hospitable family moved away and we do not gather as much now." The other commented, "Those neighbors were very close to my husband and I, caring for us, but they moved this summer." One noted, "All neighbors are polite, but there is little active hospitality outside of getting kids to the bus stop." Another offered, "They are 'fence-friendly,' waving or speak a few words but we do not socialize." Another shared, "My upstairs neighbor invited me to game night, but no one else even says hello." Another respondent noted the power of cultural differences in the expression of hospitality, "My best friend from El Salvador just moved in recently and his family is always coming and going. You can tell when they are in town because everyone is invited to come and visit. They provide food and drinks and hugs!" A foreign neighbor practicing hospitality provided a counter-narrative to the lack of community in most neighborhoods. By looking for hospitable neighbors and their actions the participants peered deeper into their context.

Participants were asked why they liked living where they do.¹⁷ Responses were grouped into the categories of people, place, and convenience. The predominant response was good, friendly neighbors at 26 percent. Other responses in the people category included a sense of community, being kid friendly, and having families their age or of different ages; all people responses totaled 48 percent. The place category included a quiet, peaceful, and safe neighborhood, being walkable, with good schools, and homeowner association amenities; this totaled 26 percent. The convenience category

¹⁷ See Appendix C, Question 12.

included being close to shopping, school, and highways; this totaled 20 percent. Suburbia's social benefits were nearly half of the reasons at 48 percent, while the remainder was built environment amenities and convenience at 45 percent. Two respondents saw a different side of suburbia despite its supposed benefits.¹⁸ One said, "I do not like living here because it is not hospitable; I am only here because it is convenient." Another shared, "I am moving closer to downtown where there are festivals and a more accessible sense of community." Participants recognized that suburbia's built environment of convenience did not foster hospitality and that the urban core provided better amenities than the suburbs. By engaging questions of hospitality participants were able to see contextual frameworks that had been hidden in their neighborhoods.

New Questions

Peering through hospitality's lens afforded participants insights into contextual frameworks and raised new questions. Vantage points into the local neighborhood that had been hidden were revealed by engaging the curriculum. New considerations surfaced as participants paid attention to cultural, social, technological, and built environment factors. Being attentive to the local context prompted them to be inquisitive and raise new questions about the built environment and the role of faith in public life.

Two respondents in particular queried the hidden costs of suburban life to residents and those outside of it. One shared, "It is safe and easy to maintain isolation. There are major internal and external barriers to changing this paradigm, but I now see

¹⁸ See Appendix F for these quotes.

the problems in this.”¹⁹ While the first respondent noted suburbia’s isolation, the second saw suburbia’s self-imposed separation from the rest of the urban environment: “It is very important for societies and communities to embrace the fact that we are ignorant and continue to turn our heads away from the needs of our struggling neighborhoods.” Sedmak says that paying attention to the poor “is challenging because we have to ask hard questions: Who are the weakest members of our society? Where are they?”²⁰ Robert Schreiter notes that New England divines interpreted and paralleled their experience of deliverance in coming to the American colonies to Moses’ deliverance out of Egypt. He concludes, “A powerful local theology had an impact of tremendous proportion on the culture.”²¹ One could argue the theme of deliverance continues to play itself out in “bourgeois utopias” that remove suburbanites from the poor, struggling, and weakest in our society. Residing in homes that are insatiable maws for consumerism raises more questions as Schreiter notes, “As it became obvious that the continued success of those rational, advanced consumerist societies was tied up with keeping the rest of the world poor, the innovation and rational ideals no longer could be so easily squared with the most fundamental of Christian values.”²² Sedmak observes, “Questions of lifestyle are key questions for Christian identity. It matters how we live.”²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 99.

²¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 35.

²² Ibid., 105.

²³ Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology*, 135.

Other new questions arose about the role of faith in public life, and that hospitality had broader implications beyond the church. One offered, “I really wish to change our views of being invited to an open table for everyone who comes into our home and neighborhood.”²⁴ Another shared, “This changed everything about my view of applied religion, i.e., before I understood religion but in the abstract, largely struggling with the application to real life. I gained fundamental insight into the structural nature of the disconnect between current society and God’s vision.” This key formal leader invited the congregation to participate in OTC: “I was trying to come up with a way to explain how important this is. [It is] something so remarkable it redefines your reality in a permanent way. That’s really what the Open Table series has been for many of us. At least for me, it has been life-changing in tangible ways. It asks what it means to be Christian and what that means for us living here in this place at this time.” New questions arose about faith’s role in public life and how people of faith engage God’s vision locally. The context of participants was problematized by reflecting on their lives and neighborhoods through the lens of hospitality. Their engagement revealed contextual narratives such as cultural, social, technological, and built environment factors. Those observations led to new reflections and observations. Observing and responding to their local neighborhoods furthered the action-learning process. They entered reflective processes about how the built environment’s isolation and separation actively work against hospitality’s expression. They considered what it means to be Christian and live in such a context at this place and time.

²⁴ See Appendix F for these quotes.

CHAPTER 4

ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

The fourth section examines the organization and leadership of the congregation from before this process up to the present.¹ The organization component examines the organizational, programmatic, and leadership history of the congregation. The leadership component reflects upon my leadership through interpretive, relational, and implemental lenses.² Through reflecting upon the organizational and leadership capacities one can better assess the overall preparedness of the congregation to engage the ongoing adaptive challenge of connecting with its suburban context.

Organization

The organizational history of TRCC began in 1985 with the Ohio New Church Committee, part of the Christian Church in Ohio (DOC), a middle judicatory of the denomination. This committee desired to plant a new church within a new suburb in the Cincinnati metropolitan area and began with demographic and growth studies to narrow their choices. This choice is indicative of the organizational ethos and mindset of the

¹ Portions of Troy Sybrant's Year 2 and Year 3 papers are adapted herein.

² Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 55-57, 210-231.

church as corporate denomination.³ In October of 1988 the Regional Board of Directors of the Christian Church in Ohio voted to purchase 6.8 acres located in Mason, Ohio. Sited on a main thoroughfare with high traffic visibility in a developing suburb, its purpose was to connect to those without a church home and its goal was 1,000 members.

The next step after purchasing land was locating the pastor/developer/franchise manager Reverend George Reese in 1989 to lead this new congregation. Reverend Reese was called, installed, and later trained as a pastor/developer/franchise manager at the denomination's corporate headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana. Tylersville Road Christian Church (DOC) was chosen as a provisional name. Disciples of Christ members that lived nearby but commuted to distant congregations formed the nucleus of the proto-congregation and began meeting in rented office space. A telephone campaign made 10,000 calls to those within a five-mile radius; 130 people without a church home came to the first worship service at Western Row Elementary School on May 4, 1990. On Easter, April 14, 1990, forty-four persons came forward to become founding members, and by October the seventy-six members were chartered at the Regional Assembly. Congregational life was marked by excitement, the sense that everybody was needed somewhere, fluidity in roles and structures, and lots of social interaction among members and the pastor.

Further growth necessitated moving to Hopewell Junior School in 1991. This was the worship and educational site until 1998 when the church erected its own worship site and had its first worship service on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1998. With a new physical

³ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 47.

plant, a new social reality emerged as structures accumulated, roles became less fluid, people were not needed in the same ways as in the past, and new staff positions were added. A number of those that had pioneered the congregation's founding decided they no longer fit in this new paradigm and left. In 2001, a part-time office administrator was hired. In 2003, a modular was purchased to accommodate the growing number of youth. The corporate denomination ethos was a good fit given the origins of the congregation and the number of managers and professionals within it, even if that ethos was twenty years out of sync with the culture.

The programmatic history of the congregation was formed within the same corporate denomination ethos. While there was not cradle-to-grave programming it was not for lack of trying.⁴ Summer camp for youth, Sunday school for all ages, choir, Vacation Bible School, live nativity, softball leagues, Habitat for Humanity projects, prison ministries, youth and adult mission trips, community gardens, Financial Peace University, an onsite food pantry, elementary tutoring, serving the homeless at soup kitchens, animal blessing events, and partnering with other local churches to provide services to the needy are just some of the many programs that have developed over time. Many in the congregation are proud of this level of activity; a frequent comment among visitors is, "For a small church you sure do a lot!" The stark reality is that despite these abundant programs they are more "doing for" than "doing with" and therefore have not engaged people as subjects in their own right.⁵ To see this programmatic focus as a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Branson and Roxburgh, Notes from "Missional Leadership Cohort., August 2011.

barrier to entering the local community where God is already active prior to any activity on the congregation's part requires a shift in imagination, explained by Roxburgh when he observes,

There is something terribly wrong with our churches; they've become like drive-ins where people who are all alike come to consume the kinds of religious goods and services that suit their spiritual taste buds. Our churches have become places radically disconnected from people in the neighborhoods and communities where we live. How can we faithfully live into Jesus' commandment to love the Lord and our neighbor as ourselves if we never have time to connect with our neighbor? Something has to change.⁶

TRCC's programmatic identity and built environment as a drive-in congregation are barriers to discovering what God is doing locally. The corporate denomination ethos remains a powerful default for the congregational imagination. Hopefully this project has prepared the participants to make that imaginative shift to truly engage the community.

Leadership

The leadership history of this congregation is also tied to the corporate denomination mindset. The founding pastor was born in 1943 and began pastoring in 1967, one year before the Disciples of Christ became a corporate denomination. He was formed within this ethos and brought it with him when he was called as a pastor/developer in 1989. In 1998 a seminary student was called to help minister to the youth; when it was discovered he was not actually in seminary he was let go. In 2001 a fully-accredited and vetted associate/youth pastor was called. In 2006 this associate was called elsewhere and a layperson was paid to continue the youth ministry for the next eighteen months. In 2007 another fully-accredited and recent seminary graduate was

⁶ Roxburgh, *Moving Back into the Neighborhood Workbook*, 10.

called as the associate/youth pastor. Within three months the founding pastor retired and an interim minister began. During the twenty-seven months of his interim ministry, his daughter and wife both died and the interim work was left unattended.

I was called to TRCC as another fully-accredited professional beginning his Doctorate of Ministry in September 2009. The interim work that was undone became, by default, my leadership task for the next five years. I arrived to a multi-staff congregation with a full-time associate and part-time accompanist, part-time choir director, and part-time administrative assistant. Within three months, there was a 50,000-dollar shortfall in the general fund and by July 2010 the associate position was defunded. A layperson was paid for the next three years to continue the youth ministry. In December 2013, the founding pastor died; this was a significant milestone and transition in the leadership history. In July 2014, a part-time family pastor/youth coordinator with a Doctorate in Ministry was called and in September 2015 was let go due to lack of funds. The corporate denomination mindset continues shaping the congregation and is a default to be mindful of moving forward.

Branson and Martínez provide a helpful framework for leadership with three overlapping spheres that must be attended to:

Interpretive leadership shapes a leadership team and a whole congregation to pay attention to and interpret texts and contexts, all in service of attending to and being responsive to God's initiatives. Relational leadership focuses on [the health of] human connections [internal and external] and synergism toward an embodiment of gospel reconciliation and love. Implemental leadership guides, reforms and initiates activities and structures so that the church embodies the gospel [in meanings and relationships].⁷

⁷ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 212.

Leading a congregation through significant transformation requires leaders “being able to shape an environment and provide resources so a plural leadership becomes normative.”⁸ Interpretive leadership began in spring 2010 with the formation of the Vision Team that later became the Guiding Team. This group became conversant with missional concepts and was instrumental in helping the congregation engage the MCM. As collaborators and co-learners, they helped shape a leadership team and also seeded missional language and concepts into board conversations. Distinguishing technical from adaptive challenges has been a critical piece of the interpretive work.⁹ Church 360 processes, listening groups, the Action Learning Teams, and AI interviews have each deepened that interpretive work. The AI interviews provided rich insights into the life-giving narratives of the congregation’s life within the local context. Those stories took visible shape in a pictorial timeline that lifted out the themes of those stories and shared those images for a preferred future.¹⁰ The biblical mural on the front wall is an ongoing piece of the interpretive leadership. Each of these processes contributed to laying a foundation for the OTC process. Interpretive leadership work within the OTC was done by weaving Bible stories with the stories of the church and community and giving participants time to make observations and connections.¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Heifetz and Linsky, Linsky’s *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 14.

¹⁰ Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, 140.

¹¹ Branson and Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, 214.

Relational leadership began shortly after my call to TRCC in September 2009 when I worked to build trust through informal meetings where AI type questions were asked in the homes of members. This took place over several months to begin building new relational connections and nurture existing ones. Adult small groups were started in the spring of 2010 to nurture internal connections beyond Sunday morning worship. Pastoral care was broadened and multiplied through a shepherding ministry shared with pastor and elders. With the insights of Heifetz and Linsky, a 2011 refinancing conflict was reframed into a source of energy for change and something to embrace.¹² Throughout a protracted conflict with a few disaffected members, the leadership worked to build trust through listening and caring.

Through forging new relationships with an alliance of different local congregations, new community connections have been noticed and created. Those relationships have helped this congregation see the community through the eyes of others. Each of these processes contributed to laying a foundation for the OTC process. Relational leadership work within the OTC was done through innovating new relationships through this project, seeing the community through the eyes of others, noticing community connections, building trust through listening and caring over meals and discussions, and addressing complex issues by broadening awareness and trying this experiment.

Implemental leadership began with the introduction of adult small groups into the congregation in the spring of 2010. Those who expressed an interest were convened,

¹² Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 101.

listened to, and a space was created where the idea took root. Interpretive and relational leadership was exercised concurrently as this experiment took form. Participants chose a curriculum, leaders were trained, and more than half the congregation participated. From those beginnings, a new structure and culture within church life has been implemented whereby there are spring and fall small group studies in order to build communal meanings broadly and deeply within the congregation.

An experiment that began in July 2014 to reimagine our congregation within the frameworks of culture, gospel, and church led to a number of implemental effects. A mural was painted by members on the front wall to remind the congregation that it lives within a different narrative framework than the world. Voices that explored change were protected and encouraged as the number of united leaders increased. The leadership began to streamline outmoded bylaws and invested in new signage after a new congregational name was chosen. Implemental leadership work within the OTC process is being done by noting hospitality practices that are rooted in societal and cultural norms, providing a space for conversations to share autobiographical resources, expanding the perspectives of participants about change, connecting and increasing the number of leaders, and encouraging experiments. Leadership that continues to pay attention to the interpretive, relational, and implemental aspects of leading congregational transformation remains necessary as this project moves forward.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

This project's purpose was for participants to engage a customized hospitality curriculum to discover what God is doing locally. A hospitality experiment helped participants name their present praxis, reflect upon it with cultural resources, and bring that into dialogue with Scripture and denominational tradition. The participants helped advance the MCM within TRCC by entering into an action-learning process of practical theology through this project's missional innovation. They were the first step in building a critical mass to further congregational diffusion and nurture experiments beyond the congregation. Experiments are emerging from the contextual theology that good neighbors know and love one another, share life together, and discover God there. Congregational diffusion and contextual experiments are the recommendations and actions to be taken beyond the project.

Everett Rogers says the "main elements in the diffusion of new ideas are: (1) an *innovation* (2) that is *communicated* through certain *channels* (3) over *time* (4) among the members of a *social system*."¹ A survey to measure these elements was given to the

¹ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 36. Italic original.

congregation to assess what they have heard about the OTC process.² This survey solicited information from both participants and non-participants, focusing on the latter. Seventy of ninety-one respondents completed the survey for a participation rate of 76 percent. Thirty-nine of those respondents were non-participants meaning that 55 percent of the data is from those outside past or current OTC experiments.³ Filtering out the non-participant information shows how the missional process is diffusing into the larger congregation.⁴ Elements of communication channels, time, social system, what is believed about OTC, and the willingness to engage this process in the future is shown.

Most survey respondents have not been involved in past or current OTC projects. These non-participants are a critical piece of future innovation within and beyond the congregation, and this survey gives insights into their perceptions of the process of diffusion. The two most prevalent communication channels for OTC among non-participants are through church announcements (74 percent) and newsletters (61 percent), both of which are formal, one-way, and problematic.⁵ More promising is the next most prevalent communication channels are bidirectional social systems such as a church leader, other than the pastor (41 percent), and a conversation with another church member (28 percent). Key formal and opinion leaders that have participated are speaking favorably about OTC and inviting others to engage this process.⁶

² See Appendix E for the survey and data.

³ See Appendix E, Question 1.

⁴ See Appendix E that compares the participant and non-participant data.

⁵ See Appendix E, Question 3.

⁶ See Appendix F.

A recommendation is for prior or current participants (17 percent) to more actively engage in informal conversations to continue building interest and momentum for further diffusion within the congregation. The point in time when most non-participants became aware of OTC was this year (52 percent), followed by last year (twenty-eight percent), and those who have not heard (18 percent).⁷ While the OTC process began in the spring of 2015, it was not until the following year that most non-participants became aware of it. Most non-participants believe that OTC is about finding ways of connecting with the community (63 percent), indicating the awareness of the adaptive challenge that the OTC process is engaging.⁸ The next most prevalent answer is unsure what it is about (47 percent), indicating that while diffusion is occurring, more needs to occur among non-participants. The next answer is discovering more about the community we live in (36 percent), indicating the awareness of the contextual importance of this project. While most survey respondents have not participated in past or current OTC projects they are positively inclined to consider being a future OTC participant (71 percent).⁹ Their willingness to do so indicates further opportunities for diffusion.

Several steps will be taken to continue the process of congregational diffusion. As the OTC is a customized curriculum, the feedback from its first participants is critical to improve the experience for future participants. Although the process overall was effective, content and structure improvements are needed. Repetitive questions are one area to address. Shortening the material's length is another consideration. Whether the

⁷ See Appendix E Question 2.

⁸ See Appendix E, Question 5.

⁹ See Appendix E, Question 4.

journal remains is an open question. Allowing more discussion time is also a concern. Reformatting the latter portion of the curriculum to more fully engage action plans of hospitality beyond the congregation is another key feedback. I will share the entirety of feedback with a team of veteran participants that have agreed to revise this curriculum to make it their own. This takes into account what Rogers speaks of when he explains, “Unless an innovation is highly compatible with clients’ needs and resources, and unless clients feel so involved with the innovation that they regard it as ‘theirs,’ it will not be continued over the long term.”¹⁰ This is an important step to making missional change sustainable. Broadening ownership of missional engagement further diffuses this project.

A current example of diffusion is a group of veteran participants conducting a summer hospitality experiment. They were briefed on the above areas of concern regarding OTC content and structure, have incorporated that feedback, and innovated a new experiment on Wednesday nights. It is a less cumbersome version of its predecessor. This is an example of re-invention, and it is encouraging to see Rogers express that “A higher degree of re-invention leads to a faster rate of adoption . . . and a higher degree of sustainability of an innovation.”¹¹

Those that were not prior facilitators have grown into that role, discovering that there are no experts, only learners. This experiment is not being driven by the project’s author, but by the OTC graduates. They are the voice and face of this growing movement for hospitality within and beyond the congregation. This particular experiment is not

¹⁰ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 376.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

occurring in homes, but it is seeding new concepts within the congregation and increasing awareness and understanding of what God is doing locally among new participants. By teaching this material and modifying it the veteran participants are furthering their own development as change agents within the action-learning process.

Other actions of diffusion are on the near horizon. With the completion of this project, a rich tapestry of contextual life is now apparent. I will share the collective wisdom of this project with OTC participants so they become conversant with the riches of the collected data. This is to move away from the singular pastor/expert model to cultivate an alternative leadership model where God's missional future is discovered among the ordinary, everyday practitioners of the faith. Isolated practices of hospitality within dispersed suburban neighborhoods that would otherwise be idiosyncratic now hold the possibility of living on in different expressions elsewhere. Good ideas for local experiments are part of the data of this project and can cross-fertilize the imaginations of other participants so that hospitality is practiced beyond the TRCC congregation.

These are a number of missional innovations beyond the congregation that are in development. A heretofore lifeless apartment courtyard has been repurposed as an extended living room by a group of immigrants. One participant is discerning ways to connect with that group. A retired couple's neighborhood is undergoing turnover as older residents move out and younger families move in. A welcome wagon has been launched to begin forming relationships with those newcomers. A couple with younger children is discerning ways of interacting more with neighbors who already are sharing tools, bikes, and clothing. A soccer dad whose games often pull him and his children away from

Sunday mornings is engaging in conversations with parents on the soccer sidelines and listening more intently to the underlying narratives of their lives.

A couple with older children is brainstorming ways of moving beyond the occasional hospitality of a condo clubhouse into a more frequent way of connecting with neighbors. An older condo resident is attending ongoing pool parties to begin forming connections. A longtime resident is sharing her perspectives on the community as it once in formal and informal church gatherings. This is to seed a counter-narrative to the isolation, busyness, and individualism of today's community, and to encourage the congregation that reforming the community is feasible. A recently retired couple whose neighborhood has transitioned is gathering the remaining "old-timers" to build bridges and connections with the newer families moving in.

A couple whose subdivision grew up together as young married couples where hospitality is alive is sharing their story in informal and formal church gatherings. This is another counter-narrative to most of suburbia, and is seeding the congregation's missional imagination. A few are discerning how to participate in the local "Bridges of Faith" dialogue that includes Christians, Jews, and Muslims in order to hear God's voice among neighbors that share the same community with a different faith. A young woman that moved from suburbia to downtown is sharing her story of the differences that place makes in terms of connecting with others. A couple with younger children whose hospitable neighbors moved away is considering how to connect with a neighborhood filled with busy and disconnected neighbors. One participant is walking her dog to form connections with other pet owners doing the same, striking up conversations to learn more about the pets, people, and local community.

These and other experiments are beginning to change the congregation's conversation from itself to the local context. A recommendation and action is to continue nurturing and developing these and other experiments into the future. Those experiments will become part of the ongoing conversation the congregation has with its community, itself, and the gospel in order to continue learning what God is doing locally.

The board plays a vital role in assisting the missional process, for unless it enters the process it is impossible to diffuse missional change through the church and become an essential part of its life.¹² A prior board in 2011 charged the Guiding Team with the adaptive challenge of finding ways to connect with the community. It is only fitting that the current board be apprised of the developments within the OTC process and the future plans for addressing the adaptive challenge. Yearly leadership turnover requires refreshing the current board's institutional memory to continue overseeing the missional process, and the completion of the first phase of an OTC experiment is a good time to do so. It also provides the board an opportunity to hear of the missional innovations beyond the congregation from OTC graduates. These experiments are designed to initially operate on the periphery of church life, but eventually such experimentation becomes the way of life for the congregation and changes programs and structures of church life.¹³

Preparing the board in advance of those changes is wise. The board needs to be apprised beforehand of that eventuality even if structures currently are the same. This project is working to advance not only the awareness and understanding of OTC

¹² Roxburgh, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 174.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

participants, but to advance the incremental organizational change needed to more broadly engage the MCM. An action to make this happen is a special board meeting.

Another event on the near horizon is a World Café conversation with the congregation. Hospitality measurement questions will be reformatted to engage the congregation to become aware of what God is doing locally. Given the OTC process fosters hospitality and conversation, a World Café event with food and questions is a natural next step. By engaging questions that matter, encouraging everyone's participation, connecting diverse perspectives, listening for patterns and insights, and sharing collective discoveries the process of missional engagement is furthered and greater diffusion and innovation is possible.¹⁴ Many good insights were gathered from the OTC's first twenty-four participants, and many greater insights await in the larger congregation. Providing an opportunity to discover and celebrate those insights with an eye toward connecting with the community is a fruitful endeavor for the near future.

Another recommendation is more of a caution. Vigilance is required to the defaults of the built environment, modernity's maps, cultural narratives, theological and ecclesiological systems, and Scripture. "Paying attention" is not passive and vigilance is needed as this learning community begins articulating a local theology. The "three friends" parable that warns of the default of an ecclesiocentric focus within supposedly missional conversations involving culture and Bible is apt for these times, and especially for TRCC.¹⁵ Modernity's corporate denomination ethos is the congregation's default

¹⁴ Juanita Brown with David Isaacs, *The World Café: Shaping our Futures through Conversations that Matter* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2005), 40-41.

¹⁵ Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, 31-34.

imagination despite being nearly twenty years out of sync with the larger culture.

Awareness and understanding of cultural tectonic shifts has been late in coming, and even later the recognition that the old ways of doing church no longer apply. A suburban culture once thought conducive to church growth is now indifferent or hostile.

The question of church identity looms larger now with modernity's scaffolding stripped from the crumbling edifice of a denominational franchise. The ecclesiocentric focus was exacerbated by a protracted conflict that turned congregational attention inward and deferred missional questions of context. This project models an experiment within the transition phase. Roxburgh notes:

It begins by assisting people in the church to listen to one another and to the Scriptures before inviting them to listen to what is happening among people of the neighborhoods where they live . . . Rather than asking, "How do we attract people to what we are doing?" we need to ask, "What is God up to in this neighborhood, and how do we need to change in order to engage the people who no longer consider church a part of their lives?" This is a radical shift in focus; it's a different way of thinking about being the church in a community.¹⁶

This project is opening a space, a small clearing within which a new social imaginary for the congregation is being cultivated.

None of these actions and recommendations is sufficient on their own to continue to advance the MCM within the congregation. However, taken together they greatly increase the opportunities for missional diffusion within the congregation and missional innovation beyond the congregation. Roxburgh shares, "How do we do this? Slowly. With little steps and lots of stopping to reflect on what we're doing and what we're learning. We never do it alone but always with others. This counter-intuitive practice is

¹⁶ Roxburgh, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 130.

done in a community of prayer . . . where the bread and wine continually feed us with the life of Jesus.”¹⁷ In modernity’s world of privatized faith, the sharing of bread and wine in worship is of little consequence to the rest of life. It is an occasion of ritualized communion without connection to the larger world.

The sociocultural setting for this project is one shared with many North American churches: a cultural disestablishment of Christendom, a thoroughly enculturated denomination, a congregation of dispersed members, and a built environment of suburban exclusion. It would seem that hospitality has no chance in such an environment. However, for those who dare to reimagine hospitality as a practice whose power is not confined to worship, whose seating is not limited to sanctuaries, and whose conversation includes the community, a different imagination and future beckons. It is one that cannot be created, but for which the table can be set. It is one that cannot be designed, but only discovered already operative in the local community. It is one that cannot be legislated, but only listened for among neighborhood conversations. While an open table may not seem like much, it is around such tables that we join God, can remake the Church, and can change the world.

¹⁷ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in our Time* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), 109.

APPENDIX A

Open Table Conversation Curriculum **Introductory Information Session**

Agenda: 90 minutes.

Purpose: To give an overview of the OTC process & invite attendees to consider being part of it.

Goal: To heighten interest such that attendees will become participants in OTC.

1. Welcome & prayer.
2. Dwelling in Word: John 1: 1-18 (The Message)
3. Neighborhood & Neighbors: Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind...and love your neighbor as yourself. The man asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)
4. OTC is about discovering the abundance of a God who has moved into our neighborhood, whether the places we live, worship, or work. It is about wrestling with the issues raised in the conversation between Jesus and a questioner. It is imagining and envisioning that God has already moved into where we live, worship, and work. It is about us as the church imagining and envisioning what us moving back into where we live, worship, and work could look like. It is discovering that through God’s abundant gifts already received that we have more than enough to engage these questions. We have cultural resources to understand our community, scriptural resources to discern what God is doing and wants to do, and denominational resources from our history and tradition as well. Ideas from Alan Roxburgh’s *Practicing Hospitality & Moving Back into the Neighborhood* materials.
5. “Third place” discussion—led by Troy.
6. Stories of people engaging neighborhood—small group time.
7. Share diagrams:
 1. Venn table of Gospel, Culture, and Church;
 2. On the Table/Under the Table.
 3. Journey to Center of Table.
 4. Telescope diagram.
8. Overview of Process—1 evening training, 12 sessions, 2x a month @ homes (or otherwise as designated). Hand out 1 sheet.
9. Dialogue time—small groups.
10. No decisions tonight—looking for 2-3 teams clustered in local neighborhood areas, rotating feast. 2 weeks to pray, send with form. Set next meeting date. Closing prayer.

Training Session

Purpose: Given those interested a more complete outline of steps and how they will be involved.

Goal: Create several OTC teams.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—1 Timothy 5:10; Romans 12:9-13; Hebrews 13:1-2
2. Measuring Current Hospitality—see next page.
4. “Hospitality” word study.
5. “Babette’s Feast” clip.
6. Share table diagrams:
 1. Venn table of Gospel, Culture, and Church;
 2. On the Table/Under the Table.
 3. Journey to Center of Table.
7. Open Table stories:
 1. Scott Frazier, a neighborhood where hospitality is alive.
 2. Troy Sybrant, a neighborhood where it’s a memory.
 3. And your neighborhood?
 4. God’s 6 Course Meal of Hospitality in Bible. Troy.
 5. DOC Founders and open table struggles.
8. Outline of Process.
9. 6 months workbook—orient.
10. Q & A.
11. Looking for teams of 5-8, as close proximity as possible, committing to meet 2x/month for 6 months.
12. Support mechanisms of pastor, Elders, & Board members.
13. Set date to start: _____.
14. Communication process—who, how often, where? “Round tables” info to Board, worship, fellowship lunch discussions.
15. Be a network to each other for prayer and support.

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 1

A City/House/Table Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand

Purpose: To begin seeing our culture, context, and home architecture with new eyes.

Goal: Conscientization starts among OTC teams.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Genesis 43:15-17, 24-34 (CEV). What does this passage say about hospitality? What was strange? Why? When have you seen separate tables in your lives—grade school, high school, Jim Crow?
2. Discovering modernity's bifurcations and their strong defaults in our lives. Defaults can hinder us from seeing what's going on, what God's up to, and how we join in.
3. Discovering bifurcations of city—ethnic map of Cincinnati. Where do the poor live in Cincinnati metro area? People of color? Where is business section? Industrial? Working class? Wealthy? Robert Fishman's *Bourgeois Utopias* material, that suburban choice of living space meant city abandoned. Alan Ehrenhalt's *The Great Inversion*, Leigh Gallagher's *The End of the Suburbs* and Elizabeth Kneebone and Alan Berube's *Confronting Suburban Poverty* materials, since poor are no longer confined to city core and moving to suburbs, what do you think God's up to? The auto makes possible the splits between home and work in suburbs; poor have neither skills nor transport to get to jobs that aren't in core anymore.
5. Given modernity's divisions, what role does faith play in the public square? Is faith to be privatized? Does God have anything to say beyond the inner chambers of our heart? Does God have a heart for our city/suburbs/church? Should the church simply accept modernity's divisions? What is the effect? What would resistance look like?
6. How does our choice of where to live impact how we live our faith? Would a change of neighborhood change how we love our neighbors?
7. Prayer, asking God for new eyes to see our culture, city, and neighborhoods.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: How are you becoming aware of the splits in your life? How do you feel about?

Week 2: What are the reasons you chose for where you live? If you could live anywhere in the Cincinnati metro area, where would it be? Why?

Bible passage for reflection & preparation for next gathering: Acts 11:1-18. Using the tools above, what splits did Peter negotiate with Cornelius, and vice versa? What brought them together? What did Cornelius learn? Peter learn? The church learn?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 2

A City/House/Table Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand

Purpose: To begin seeing our culture, context, and home architecture with new eyes.

Goal: Conscientization starts among OTC teams.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Galatians 2:1-14. What does this passage say about hospitality? What was strange? Why? Why was Paul so adamant in rebuking Peter? Is a divided table that big of a deal among Christians? Why or why not?
2. Journal Review.
3. Discovering bifurcations of our homes. Ask architect/member for how homes developed from Roman villas, to English townhomes, country villas, suburban estates, tract housing. Splits in city (classes, gender roles & rooms, etc.) replicated in homes. Our default is that built space is neutral, but housing and neighborhood is not.
4. Given the splits in city and in suburban architecture, how hard is it to be “neighborly”? What does living in a structure that’s designed to ignore others do to us? To our sense of community?
5. Discovering splits in our denominational history. What was bad in Old World was worse in New. Campbell’s and Barton Stone all got in trouble for opening their table to others besides their own congregations.
6. “Can You Pass the Test?” skit. Experiential exercise in which a candidate comes before Elders to be examined before receiving a communion token. (Tokens from Scotland & Ireland from that time will be provided).
7. Close with prayer, asking God to build bridges across the divisions we have created in our culture, city, churches, and homes.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: Of all the splits you have discovered in Weeks 1-2, what troubles you most?

Week 2: Map your neighborhood. Draw a simple bird’s eye sketch of houses, streets, shopping areas, parks, schools, churches, fire & police stations. List any natural features and boundaries like freeways. Mark gathering places, your least & most favorite spots.

This idea from Alan Roxburgh’s *Moving Back into the Neighborhood*, pp. 44-45.

Bible reflection: Jeremiah 29:4-7. Since God has sent us here, how do we seek our city’s welfare

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 3

Receiving God's Open Table

Purpose: To begin seeing our world—culture, neighborhood, church—differently.

Goal: To start moving from a scarcity to enough/abundance framework.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Genesis 1:11-13, 20-31; 2:8-9, 15-25. What portrait of the world is given here? How do you see God's hospitality? Is this a world of scarcity or abundance? Given these terms, how would you describe our culture, church, home?
2. DOC Abundance. Our founders saw America as a land blessed by natural resources and a wide-open frontier. Beneath that "on the table" narrative are stories of slavery, the Trail of Tears, and anti-immigrant sentiments. Regardless, our founders saw a rich opportunity to complete the Reformation and unite Christians around one table.
3. Journal Review.
4. Read Walter Bruggemann's "The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity." Online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=533>. Discuss.
5. Our economic system commodifies everything. Life becomes distorted through the lens of money: people become objects rather than persons, evangelism becomes a means of meeting our budget, members become consumers, and vital practices become goods and services tailored to changing tastes of the customer. Discuss.
6. Do the suburbs encourage an abundance or scarcity mindset? Does every home need its own copy of the same set of tools, mowers, etc.? What if resources were shared—how might that build relationships?
7. John Kretzmann and John McKnight in *Building Communities from the Inside Out* offer two models of addressing community issues, a needs-based (scarcity) model and assets-based (abundance) model. How do you see these frameworks playing out in church, community, and your own life?
8. Close with prayer, asking God to open your eyes to abundance all around you.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: How is your imagination captivated by scarcity? Where does God need to open your eyes to abundance?

Week 2: What are your strengths, gifts, passions? When do you live most from them?

Bible reflection: Psalm 104. Let it be your companion as you walk, work, play, eat, live.

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 4

Receiving God's Open Table

Purpose: To begin seeing our world—culture, neighborhood, church—differently.

Goal: To start moving from a scarcity to enough/abundance framework.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—John 6:1-15, 25-31, 35, 49-51. What is the significance that this is near Passover? While John has no “Words of Institution,” these function as such. The meals Jesus shared with others weren’t separated into “regular/secular” and “special/sacred.” How does this challenge your thoughts about worship/eating?
2. TRCC Abundance. TRCC members remember the abundant opportunity and enthusiasm during the 8 years prior to our building. It was hard work, but there was a common purpose and unity and everyone pitched in. What lessons can we apply now?
3. Journal Review.
4. Consider the crowds of peasants there, recollecting Israel’s past. Stories of slaves delivered from bondage and God’s hospitality in the desert. Why do you think images of loaves and fish were the predominant symbol of early Christianity, not a cross?
5. Discover the “food deserts” in Cincinnati. Find the three tracts in Butler County at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx#.UtjPmbTs1DZ>.
6. Discuss what the suburban life promises—the best of the city and country, the good life, abundance. *Bourgeois Utopia* materials.
7. Watch PBS clip, “Poverty Rates Surge in Suburbs” http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/nation-jan-june14-povertysuburb_01-11/. How does this correlate with the suburban promise? What do you think God is up to?
8. As you’ve been mapping your city and neighborhood with new eyes, is the suburban promise being kept? What do the suburbs have an abundance/scarcity of?
9. Prayer, asking God’s help to distinguish true from false abundance and scarcity.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: Recall other stories of Jesus and abundance. How do they point to God’s Reign?

Week 2: Given what you’ve learned about our community, what might God want to do?

Bible reflection: Exodus 16:16-18. How could having enough transform your life?

Church? Community? If you had more than enough, what might you do with it?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 5

Offering an Open Table to others

Purpose: To explore the breadth of welcome of an open table.

Goal: Moving from cultural to biblical frameworks of hospitality.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Esther 1:1-22. Who's first invited to Xerxes' party? What was the purpose of his hospitality? How was he a good host? Why did he summon Queen Vashti? What's the empire-wide effect of his reaction? Is this biblical hospitality?
2. A seat at Caesar's table. Play 5:55-14:14 of "I Claudius Episode 01 'A Touch of Murder.'" Dining in Jesus' day was on couches, and one's rank was determined by how close to the host one was. Who was welcome at Caesar's table? How did Christian table practice differ, and why did (and does) that matter?
3. Have you ever been a guest at someone's home that was clearly showing off? If you didn't have such items, how did you feel? How does our church welcome or not the outsider?
4. Journal Review.
5. Dwelling in the Word—2 Samuel 9:1, 5-13. As a Saul descendant, what is Mephibosheth expecting? How does he react when summoned? Why should hospitality always surprise us? What "gift" did Mephibosheth give David? How does Mephibosheth represent us as we're summoned before God? What if Mephibosheth had demanded hospitality as something owed him?
6. What does it mean to be a good host? What role(s) does a good host have? Who have been good hosts you have known?
7. Before inviting someone to my house I first make sure....
8. Share a time when you saw genuine hospitality offered—what made it notable?
9. Close with prayer, giving thanks for hospitality you've received tonight and in your life.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Luke 6:20-26. What kind of people would we need to be in order for this to make sense? What might this passage have to say to us about hospitality?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 6

Offering an Open Table to others

Purpose: To explore the breadth of welcome of an open table.

Goal: Moving from cultural to biblical frameworks of hospitality.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Luke 14:1, 7-14. What is the normal circle of invitees among movers and shakers? Have you ever been to a “power lunch” or dinner function just to “network”? Who is invited, what are the rules for attire and behavior?
2. Journal Review.
3. Le Chambon clip on <https://vimeo.com/98107603>. How does “ordinary goodness” follow from living as Scripture directs us? Were the villagers of Le Chambon extraordinary people, or just ordinary people following God’s Word? Discuss.
4. Imagine yourself in Nazi occupied Vichy France. You are poor, a Huegenot, and your ancestors had been persecuted. That memory informed your present actions (read Exodus 22:21-23; Deuteronomy 8:6-20). Are suburbs a place to recollect suffering, or escape from troubles? Why might holding onto our own painful memories of persecution be key to offering hospitality today?
5. In Le Chambon ordinary people decided to resist the powers of death to provide life to Jewish strangers. How might hospitality be an ordinary practice today that resists the powers of death? How is isolation, fragmentation, consumerism, and scarcity each a “power and principality” today?
6. Memoirs of Thomas Sashihara, father of Diane Andow, TRCC member. Diane’s family and many other Japanese-Americans were interned during WWII. What might this story teach us about hospitality today? Visit to National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.
8. Close with prayer, asking for grace to remember our own persecution in order to embrace strangers.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55. What kind of people would we need to be in order for this to make sense? What do these passages say about hospitality?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 7

Receiving an Open Table from others

Purpose: To consider what being on the receiving end of hospitality would be.

Goal: To begin moving from control to vulnerability.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Joshua 2:1-14, 6:20, 22-25. Is Rahab a somebody or nobody? Why would the spies choose Rahab's place to stay, and why did she shelter these vulnerable outsiders? Why are the poor often more hospitable than the rich? Why is Rahab 1 of 5 questionable women listed as an ancestor of Jesus (Mt 1:5)?
2. What are the expectations of a good guest?
3. Journal Review.
4. Share a time when you have been welcomed as a guest, someone who "depended on the kindness of strangers." Maybe in a foreign country, lost and needing directions, or stranded with a broken-down car. How does it feel to be at the mercy of others?
5. God favors the dislocated, strangers, and outcast and works through them. To discover what God's doing in our community we must become vulnerable and open to the marginalized. In effect, tables are turned and the stranger becomes the host and we the guest receiving the gift of the outsider. What do you think/feel about this?
6. Pilgrims and Wampanoag celebrate Thanksgiving. Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to catch eel, grow corn. Chief Massasoit donated food to the colonists when their winter supplies failed. After their first harvest in 1621, the Pilgrims invited Massasoit and 90 of his men. Who are the hosts in this story? Guests? How do those roles change?
7. TRCC receiving hospitality. For 8 years TRCC was dependent on the kindness of local schools, and St. Susanna Catholic church opened their doors for TRCC to have Christmas Eve services. How does recalling vulnerability help us extend hospitality?
8. Close with prayer, asking for grace to be vulnerable, and see strangers as gifts.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Luke 14:15-24. Are the first guests' excuses valid? How eager is the host to have his house full? What measures does he take? What does this say about God's hospitality, the church's, your own?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 8

Receiving an Open Table from others

Purpose: To consider what being on the receiving end of hospitality would be.

Goal: To begin moving from control to vulnerability.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—1 Kings 17:1-16. Elijah's journey from powerful prophet to a refugee in a foreign land is a huge loss of power, control, and prestige. How do you think he felt? Discovering what God's up to meant being exiled from familiar places, customs, and routines. Why would God send him to the house of a widow, among Canaanite idolaters? What might God be trying to teach him that he couldn't learn in Israel? How have you known Elijah's journey—loss of power, control, prestige? How did you feel? What did you learn that you couldn't otherwise? How has the church known Elijah's journey? What might God be trying to teach us? Why did the widow give Elijah her last meal? Who is the host, and who is the guest in this story?
2. Journal Review.
3. How have you seen God's "holy disruption" in our congregation? What is God trying to teach us?
4. Consider that Christians are now a subculture minority, resident aliens in our culture, and exiled from familiar customs. What would it mean to be a good guest in our host culture, no longer powerful but vulnerable?
5. Ethiopian restaurant outing with coffee ceremony. How does it feel to eat strange foods, community-style, without individual plates, portions, or utensils? How can receiving a meal in an unusual place and style teach us something about God's grace? Communion with native wine and injera, public space.
7. Closing with prayer, asking that God give us grace to let go of power, prestige, and control. Remembering Elijah who could only discover what God's up to by letting go and becoming vulnerable. Close with Paul's words from Philippians 3:3b-11.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Luke 10:25-37. Put the church in different characters in this parable.

Which character would we need to be in order to receive God's mercy, and understand what God's up to? Put yourself in each character, which do you prefer/dislike, and why?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 9

Offering an Open Table to God

Purpose: To consider that offering hospitality to strangers actually welcomes God.

Goal: To begin moving from stranger fear to angel welcome.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Genesis 18:1-15. Do these three visitors get special treatment or is this standard desert hospitality? How do Abraham and Sarah show hospitality? If this is standard behavior to receive strangers, how far away is our practice from then?
2. Journal Review.
3. If we were nomads moving in tents with *fewer* people around, instead of being immobilized in homes/apartments/condos with *many* around, would our understanding and practice of hospitality be different? If so, how, and why?
4. Where do you see an open table/hospitality offered in your neighborhood (you may want to check your sketch of neighborhood for places people gather). Where is it offered in your church? On your street?
5. Watch first 35 minutes of “Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story” and discuss. Consider Day’s background and what moved her to see things in a new light. What has been your journey thus far in seeing strangers in a different light?
6. DOC Founders Walter Scott, John Smith, and hospitality. Walter Scott and “Raccoon” John Smith were key leaders in evangelism on the frontier, traveling by horseback to bring the Gospel to a U.S. population that was 5% churched. Without hospitality from others their evangelism would have failed. How does hospitality witness to Christ?
7. How many neighborhood watch signs are in your neighborhood? What does this tell you about their openness to God? What blessing might we be missing? How might hospitality be an “act of resistance” where you live?
8. Close with prayer, asking for grace to move past our fears and to a faith that sees beyond the stranger to the very face of God, and to be open to those blessings.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Watch “The Forth (sic) Wise Man” full movie, avi, 71:54. After you’ve watched, read Matthew 25:31-46. What does it teach you about hospitality?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 10

Offering an Open Table to God

Purpose: To consider that offering hospitality to strangers actually welcomes God.

Goal: To begin moving from stranger fear to angel welcome.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Luke 24:13-35. Why don't the disciples recognize the stranger? How does the stranger first try and open their eyes (v. 27)? Why would they beg a stranger to stay with them? What finally opens their eyes? What sequence of actions in v. 30 is found elsewhere? Was this a "regular meal" or Communion?
2. Journal Review.
3. Watch last minutes of "Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story" and discuss. She once said, "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed so easily." Day was an ordinary Christian that took Scripture seriously. How do you see hospitality exhibited in Cincinnati? Our community? Church? Your street?
4. Have you ever served a stranger a meal—soup kitchen, hitchhiker, etc.? Share. How easy or difficult is it to see the face of God in a stranger? Why?
5. National and state policies about immigrants and refugees impact how we see them. Who are the strangers in our community? How are they seen, with fear or welcome?
6. What would building relationships with those who utilize the onsite food pantry look like? What would moving from an institutional to a relational interaction look like?
7. A young woman from Tennessee once visited Haiti. She was struck by: 1) their abject poverty yet immense joy; 2) their daily prayers for American Christians whose riches hinder them from following Jesus; 3) their taking up a donation across the village to send a wedding card to her. Who are the poor in this story? The powerful?
8. Close with prayer, asking for grace to move past our fears and to a faith that sees beyond the stranger to the very face of God, and to opening one's own table to Christ.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Luke 16:19-31. How does this parable "read" our community? Who is the "rich man"? Who is "Lazarus?" What is Jesus trying to teach us? Where do you need eyes opened to see what God is up to in your neighborhood?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 11

Receiving God's Open Table

Purpose: To continue seeing our world—culture, neighborhood, church—differently.

Goal: To move from our culture's closed future to God's open one and live within the liminal tension of already/not yet, Table/tables, and foretaste of God's reign now.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—John 2:1-11. Can you imagine Jesus showing up at a party at your house? How would you act? What would you do (see Luke 10:38-42)?
2. Where God is, there is abundance, and overflowing best wine is a sign of God's Reign. Jesus as guest becomes the host saving the party. With Numbers 13:23 and 2 Baruch 29:3, 5-6, 8 readings, can you see why the disciples believed in him? What open future does Jesus bring them? How did this sign point to a future now present?
3. Journal Review.
4. Jesus improvised outside his divine schedule/"hour" in order to save the host from embarrassment, and the couple from a shameful wedding. If God stoops to such a seemingly mundane thing, what estimation does God have of hospitality? How does this impact your view of hospitality?
5. DOC founders and newness. "The Millennial Harbinger" was Campbell's publication, reflecting his belief in preparing the world for Christ's return. Our founders' zeal and hope was fired by a wide-open future where God was doing a "new thing" (see Isaiah 43:19). How open are you to that possibility? Why or why not?
6. How is abundance and a table where all are fed at odds with our economic system, culture, neighborhoods, and lifestyle? Where are you desiring God's abundance/newness/open future for our community/congregation/world/self?
7. Close with prayer asking to be open to receiving God's reign in our neighborhoods, workplaces, culture, congregation, and self.

JOURNAL WORK BETWEEN NOW & NEXT MEETING:

Week 1: What do you think God *is* doing in our community, church, this group?

Week 2: What do you think God *wants to do* in our community, church, this group?

Bible reflection: Mark 8:22-26. God is constantly doing "new things", but our eyes don't perceive them. Repeated treatments are necessary to see. Where have your eyes been opened? What new thing do you desire for your community, church, this group, yourself?

Open Table Conversations Group Meeting: Session 12

Receiving God's Open Table

Purpose: To continue seeing our world—culture, neighborhood, church—differently.

Goal: To move from our culture's closed future to God's open one and live within the liminal tension of already/not yet, Table/tables, and foretaste of God's reign now.

Agenda:

1. Dwelling in the Word—Revelation 19:6-9, 21:1-2, 5-6; 22:12-17. Jesus refers to himself as a bridegroom many times (Matthew 9:15, 25:11) and is referred to as such by John the Baptist (John 3:29) and Paul (Ephesians 5:25-32). How does this image strike you? What abundance do you see in the Revelation passages? Newness? Hospitality and an open table? Invitation? Do those outside the gates get invited—why or why not (see Session 6 passage).
2. Since a place at the Table of the Lamb's wedding feast cannot be earned but only received, how does that impact our hospitality in the here and now? What tree once barred (Genesis 3:24) is now open? What does this tell you about God's hospitality? Do you have to wait to taste the fruit/water, or is there a foretaste, and if so, where?
3. Journal Review.
4. A bride and groom live in the tension of the already/not yet—already pledged/promised but not yet fulfilled/married. Recount stories of your own, or others, of that tension. What might that tension teach us as a church in living between the promises and fulfillment of Christ?
5. How broad a table does God spread for us? Recount the 6-course meal of hospitality.
6. Measure B: Hospitality Questions, to see how far we've come.
7. Next steps: We've learned a lot what's going on in our culture, Scripture, and Church. We've come closer to seeing what's under the table—What is God doing, and what does God want to do? The question we've danced around but now must ask: How do we join in God's work? To “move into your neighborhood” as God did in Christ, and can do so again, through you. We've journeyed from awareness, understanding, and evaluation. The next step as we draw closer to the center of the table is experimentation, where we open ourselves beyond this group to neighbors, coworkers, friends, and others. I'll work with you to innovate something for your neighborhood.
9. Closing prayers of thanksgiving and Communion.

Figure 1
A Three-Leaf Table

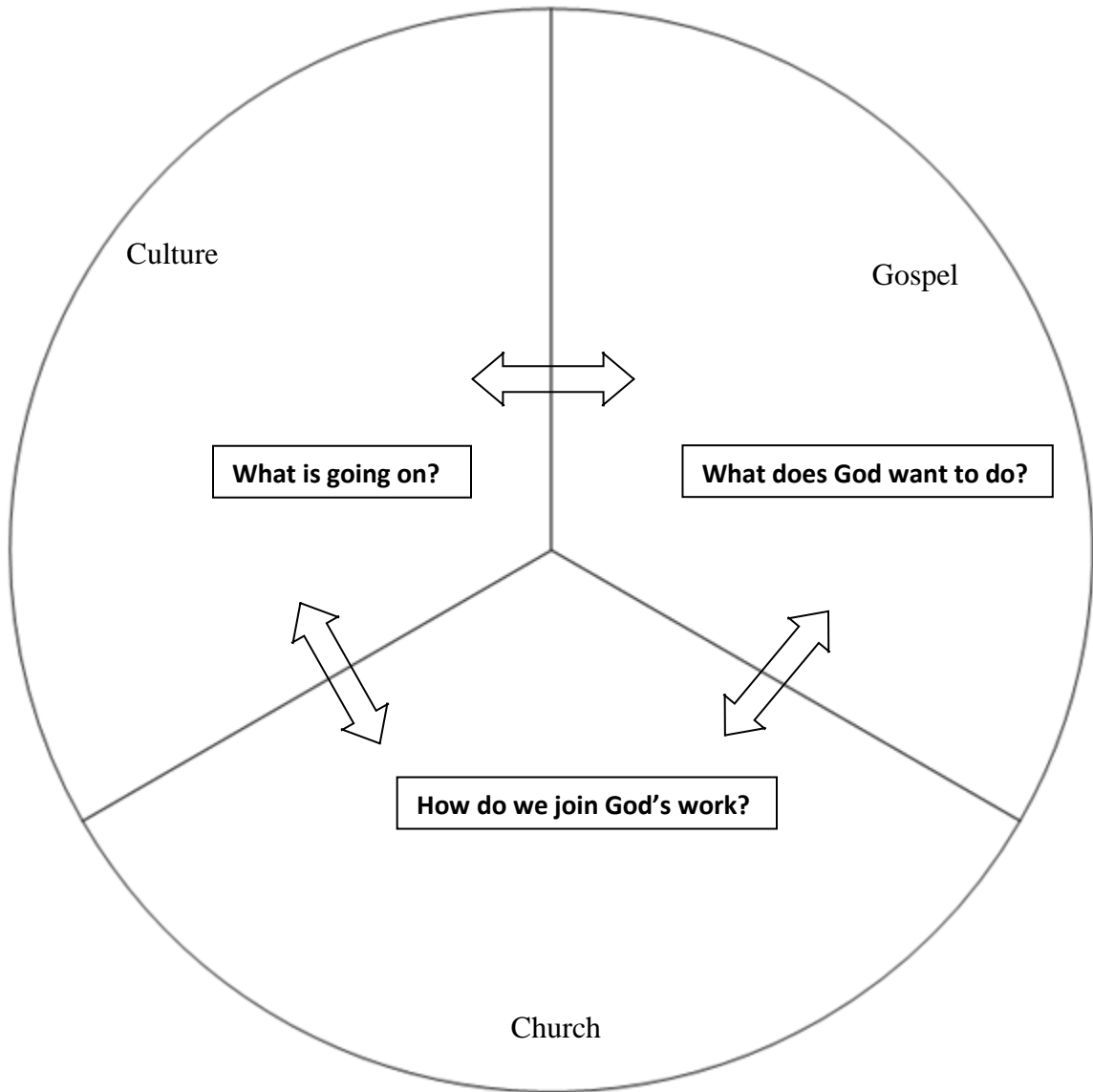


Figure 2
On and Under the Table

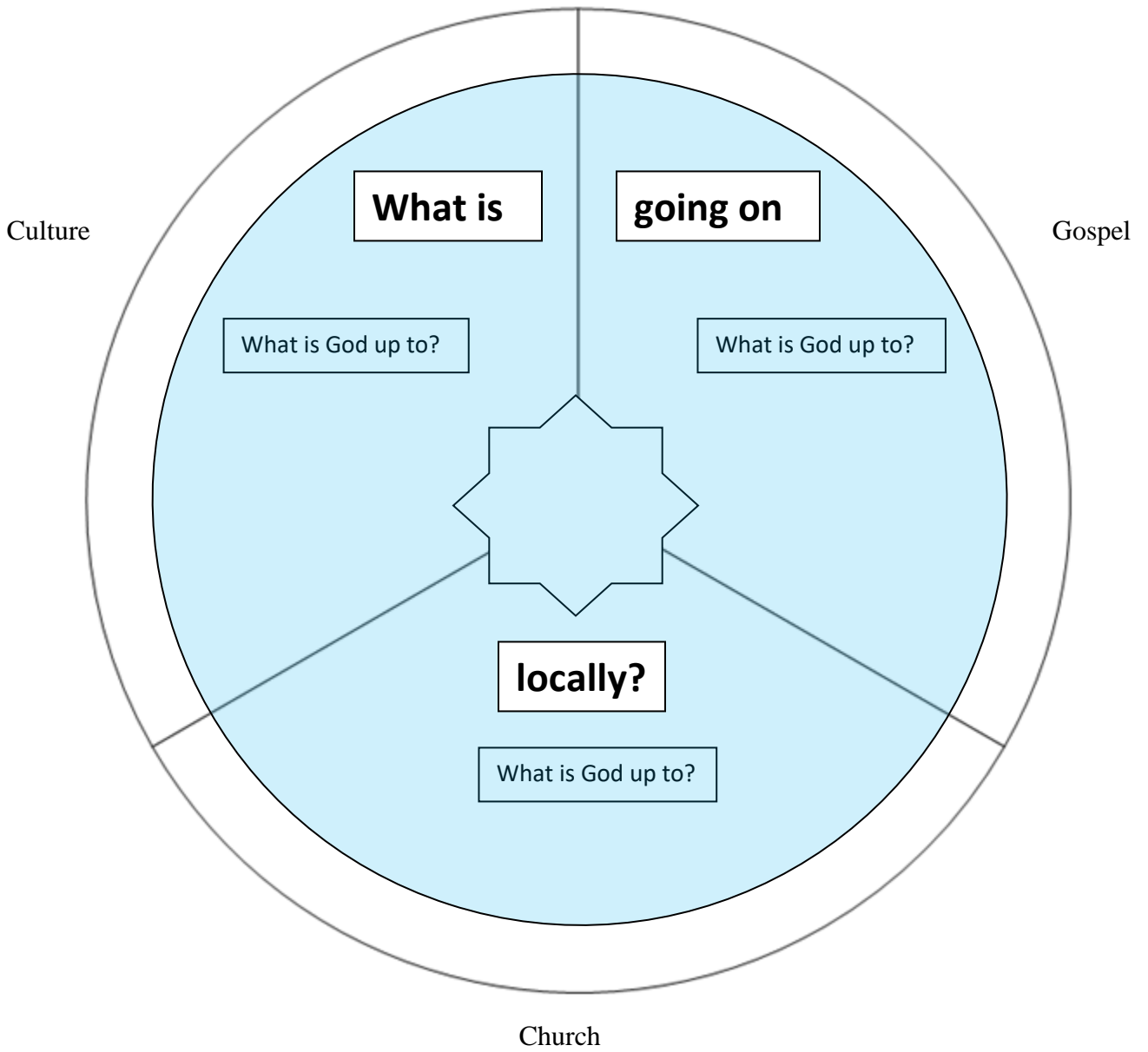
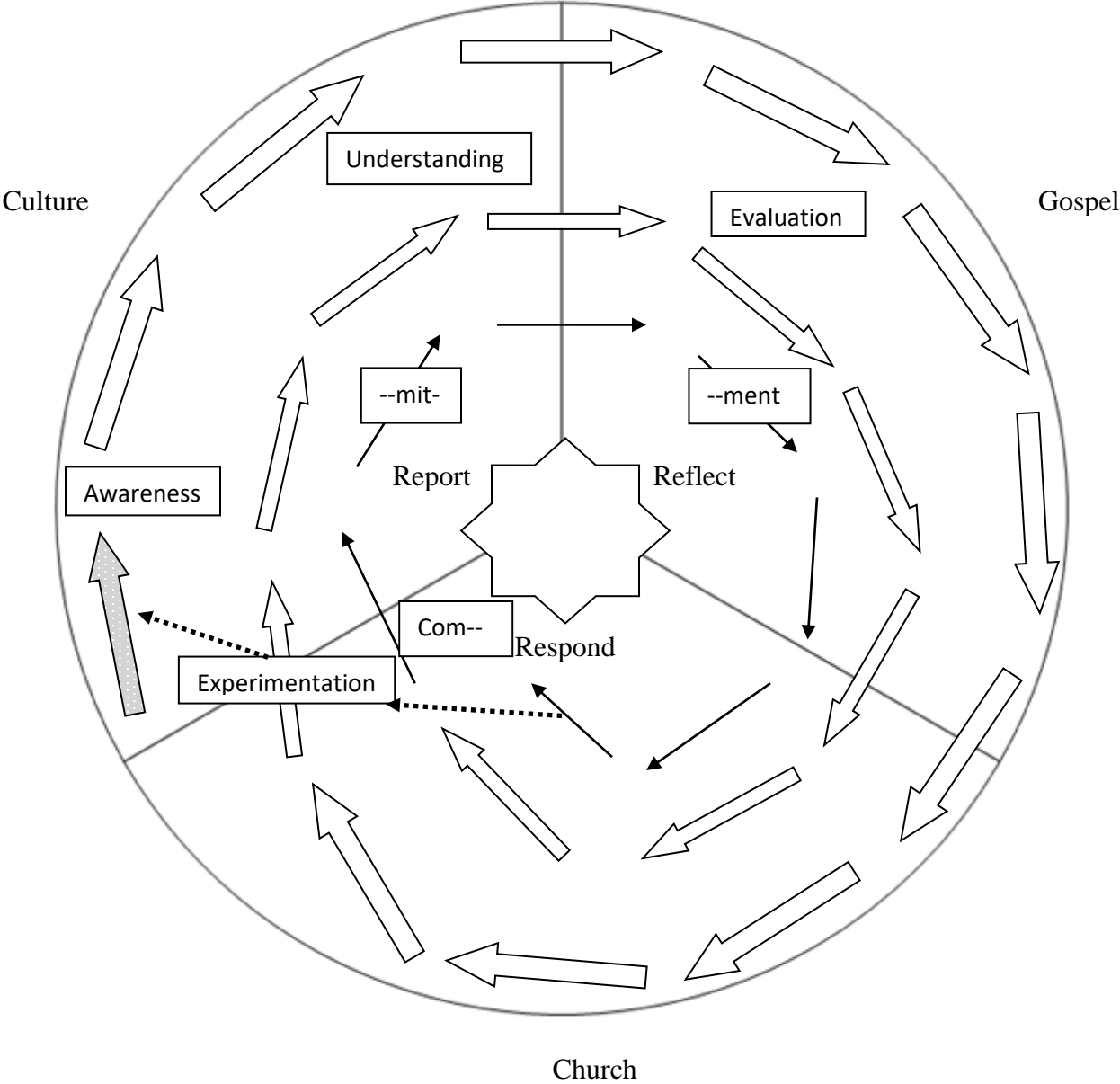


Figure 3
Journey to the Center of the Table



APPENDIX B
Participant Demographics

	MI	Fml	Age	Sng	Mrd	Wrkg	Retd	Leader pst/now	Nvr ldr	Yrs mbr
Respondent										
#1		✓	63		✓		✓	✓		11
#2		✓	36		✓	✓		✓		11
#3	✓		40		✓	✓		✓		11
#4		✓	75		✓		✓		✓	17
#5		✓	41		✓	✓			✓	11
#6		✓	45		✓	✓		✓		19
#7	✓		49		✓	✓		✓		19
#8		✓	62		✓	✓			✓	3
#9	✓		61		✓	✓		✓		15
#10		✓	67		✓	✓		✓		15
#11		✓	47		✓	✓		✓		10
#12		✓	80	✓			✓	✓		13
#13		✓	59		✓	✓		✓		5
#14		1✓	47		✓	✓		✓		14
#15	✓		44		✓	✓		✓		14
#16		✓	39	✓		✓		✓		2
#17		✓	84	✓			✓		✓	8
#18	✓		80		✓		✓	✓		22
#19		✓	80		✓		✓	✓		22
#20	✓		67		✓	✓		✓		12
#21	✓		79		✓		✓	✓		21
#22		✓	63	✓		✓		✓		4
#23	✓		55		✓	✓		✓		17
#24		✓	62		✓	✓		✓		14
Total or average	8	16	59	4	20	17	7	20	4	12.92

APPENDIX C

Hospitality Questions

General Hospitality:

1. How would you define hospitality? _____

2. What are the roles of a host, and expectations of a guest? _____

3. Which role would you prefer, and why? _____

4. What direction does hospitality flow? (use arrows) Host _____ Guest
5. How frequent is *giving* hospitality in your life?
1 2 3 4 5
Never Rarely Occasionally Moderately Often
6. How frequent is *receiving* hospitality in your life?
1 2 3 4 5
Never Rarely Occasionally Moderately Often
7. One of my most memorable experiences of hospitality was _____

Local Hospitality:

8. Where do you see hospitality offered in your apartment/condo/neighborhood? _____

9. What *seasonal* opportunities of hospitality are there in your community—dinner parties, BBQ's, block parties, etc.? _____

10. Is there an *ongoing* practice of hospitality in your community? If so, what form does it take? If not, what *memories* of hospitality does your neighborhood have? _____

11. Who are your hospitable neighbors? What actions do they do that set them apart from others? _____

12. One reason I like living where I do is because _____

Church Hospitality:

13. Where do you see hospitality offered on Sunday mornings? Prior to worship, during, and after? _____

14. What does the phrase “open table” mean to you? What phrase or phrases have you heard in worship by elders or pastors about it? _____

15. How *important* is having an open table?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Slightly	Neutral	Moderately	Extremely

16. If you were explaining to a Sunday visitor why Disciples of Christ have an open table, you would say _____

Bible Hospitality:

17. I knew the importance of an open table when _____

18. Where do you see hospitality offered in the Bible? What stories illustrate it or an open table? _____

19. Is God the host, or guest, and why do you think that matters? _____

20. How *widespread* is hospitality in the Bible?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

21. The following Bible story about hospitality is important to me because _____

Hospitality Measure Before and After Data

The numbers below reflect the total number of times a particular term was mentioned among participants. Unless otherwise noted, all charts show 100 percent participation and include all participants.

Q1: How would you define hospitality?

Host is...				Before %	After %	Mean
generous	9	7		22	22	22
welcoming	8	8		20	25	22
open	7	4		17	12	15
give & receive relationship	0	6		0	19	8
look after needs	4	2		10	6	8
comfort(able)	3	3		7	9	8
inviting	5	0		12	0	7
friendly	4	1		10	3	7
Total	40	31				
Guest is...						
stranger	3	4		27	18	22
wntd/vald/rspcd	2	4		18	18	18
comfort(able)	3	3		27	13	20
friends	1	4		9	18	13
loved	0	5		0	22	11
neighbor	1	2		9	9	9
'at home'	1	0		9	0	4
Total	11	22				

Theological component

	Before	After		Before	After
reach out in Christ	1	0	entertainment	1	0
sharing prayers	1	0	cordial	1	0
G's offer of love	0	1	gracious	1	0
love nbors as self	0	1			

Q2: What are the roles of a host, and expectations of a guest?

Host				Before %	After %	Mean
Welcomes	12	8		44	25	34
Provider	6	7		22	21	22
makes comfortable	3	7		11	21	16
attends to needs	2	4		7	12	9
gives best have	0	3		0	9	4
Entertains	1	0		3	0	1
Humble	1	0		3	0	1
intros guest to others	1	0		3	0	1
hst cleans, arrng seat	1	0		3	0	1
hst extends grace	0	1		0	3	1
hst special diet allow	0	1		0	3	1
Bible says hnrdr whn	0	1		0	3	1
Subtotal	27	32				

Guest				Before %	After %	Mean
thkfl/aprct/gracius	6	12		17	33	25
receiver/accept	7	10		20	27	24
participates	7	6		20	16	18
treat w respect	4	4		11	11	11
comfortable	3	3		8	8	8
welcomed	3	1		8	2	5
polite	3	0		8	0	4
brings food/gift	1	0		2	0	1
Subtotal	34	36				
Total	61	68				

Q3: Which roles would you prefer, and why?

			Before %	After %	Mean
Both/either	4	5	16	20	18
Host	11	10	45	41	43
Guest	8	8	33	33	33
No answer	1	1	4	4	4
Total	24	24			
"Both" reasons					
situatl, company & circumstance	0	3	0	13	6
carry own gifts & responsibilities	0	1	0	4	2
if gracious, ok either way	1	0	5	0	2
as G learned how H from H's	1	0	5	0	2
"Host" reasons					
enjoy serving/fellowship, building relationships	0	5	0	22	11
rather give than receive	4	0	22	0	11
not acpt help, like control	2	2	11	9	10
love entertain & make smile	2	0	11	0	5
easier, lrng how be better G	0	2	0	9	4
born to do/fits comfort zone	1	1	5	4	5
feel I'm putting host out	1	0	5	0	2
"Guest" reasons					
Lack responsibility, prep/pressure	2	3	11	13	12
enjoy others, ok accepting	3	2	16	9	12
hlth issues preclude/down rd	1	1	5	4	5
not entertaining H type	0	1	0	4	2
recd meal from G's & they better	0	1	0	4	2
Total	18	22			

Q4: What direction does hospitality flow?

	# of respondents before	# of respondents after		Before %	After %
Between H & G	14	17		58	70
From H to G	9	6		37	25
No answer	1	1		4	4

Q5: How frequent is *giving* hospitality in your life? Q6: How frequent is *receiving* hospitality in your life? Q15: How important is having an open table? Q20: How widespread is hospitality in the Bible? 1/Never; 2/Rarely; 3/Occasionally; 4/Moderately; 5/Often

Respondents	Before Program	Q5	Q6	Q15	Q20
#1		5	4	5	4
#2		3	3	5	3
#3		3	4	5	4
#4		5	5	NA	NA
#5		5	3	5	5
#6		4	5	5	4
#7		2	3	5	4
#8		5	3	5	5
#9		3	3	5	4
#10		3	3	5	5
#11		5	5	5	NA
#12		4	4	4	5
#13		4	3	5	5
#14		3	3	NA	NA
#15		3	3	5	4
#16		4	4	5	5
#17		4	5	5	5
#18		4	4	5	3
#19		4	5	5	4
#20		3	3	5	4
#21		3	3	5	5
#22		4	3	5	4
#23		5	4	5	5
#24		5	3	5	4
Mean		3.87	3.66	4.95	4.33
Std Dev		0.89	0.81	0.21	0.65

Q6: On a scale of one to five, how frequent is *giving* hospitality in your life? Q6: How frequent is *receiving* hospitality in your life? Q15: How important is having an open table? Q20: How widespread is hospitality in the Bible? 1/Never; 2/Rarely; 3/Occasionally; 4/Moderately; 5/Often (Note: These results are from after the program took place).

Respondents	Q5	Q6	Q15	Q20
#1	5	4	5	4
#2	4	3	5	4
#3	4	4	5	5
#4	4	3	5	4
#5	5	3	5	3
#6	4	4	5	5
#7	3	3	5	4
#8	5	4	5	5
#9	3	3	5	4
#10	3	3	5	4
#11	5	4	5	2
#12	5	4	5	4
#13	3	3	5	5
#14	3	3	5	4
#15	3	2	5	5
#16	3	3	5	5
#17	4	5	5	4
#18	5	5	5	5
#19	4	5	5	4
#20	3	3	5	5
#21	3	3	5	5
#22	5	3	5	4
#23	5	4	5	NA
#24	2	3	5	5
Mean	3.87	3.5	5	4.30
Std Dev	0.94	0.78	0	0.76

Giving hosp	Before	After		%	%	Mean
Often	7	8		29	33	31
Moderately	8	6		33	25	29
Occasionally	8	9		33	37	35
Rarely	1	1		4	4	4
Never	0	0		0	0	0
Receiving hosp						
Often	5	3		20	12	16
Moderately	6	7		25	29	27
Occasionally	13	13		54	54	54
Rarely	0	1		0	4	2
Never	0	0		0	0	0

Q7: One of my most memorable experiences of hospitality was...

				Before %	After %	Mean
Milstn fam event	7	6		33	33	33
foreign country	4	4		19	22	21
neighbor's home	2	2		9	11	10
family home	2	1		9	5	7
health emergency	2	1		9	5	7
after disaster	1	1		4	5	7
mission trip	1	1		4	5	5
Super Bowl party	1	1		4	5	5
cannot recall	1	1		4	5	5
Total	21	18				

Receive from others	17	16		77	72	75
Offer to others	4	6		18	27	22
Both	1	0		4	0	2
Total	22	22				

Connected to church	6	6		75	66	70
N'hood practice	2	3		25	33	29
Total	8	9				

Q8: Where do you see hospitality offered in your apartment/condo/neighborhood?

				Before %	After %	Mean
caring for kids	5	5		12	16	14
house parties	4	4		10	13	11
talking to nbors	5	2		12	6	9
rarely/none	1	4		2	13	7
care properties away	2	3		5	10	7
clubhouse parties	3	2		7	6	7
shovel driveway	3	2		7	6	7
share food/when ill	3	2		7	6	7
nbors help nbors	3	1		7	3	5
block parties	2	1		5	3	4
holiday parties	2	1		5	3	4
wave hi pass by	2	1		5	3	4
lending	1	1		2	3	2
Facebook page	1	1		2	3	2
Bible study	1	0		2	0	1
Power outage	1	0		2	0	1
Total	39	30				
Rarely in condo	1	0				
Not much in nhood	0	1				
Hosp nbors moved	0	1				
Mostly none	0	1				
I don't	0	1				
Total	1	4				

Q9: What seasonal opportunities of hospitality are there in your community—dinner parties, BBQ's, block parties, etc.?

			Before %	After %	Mean
Not happening	7	5	14	13	14
Holiday parties					
Xmas	4	7	8	18	13
Halloween	4	5	8	13	11
4th of July	3	1	6	2	4
Thxgiving	1	0	2	0	1
Memorial Day	1	0	2	0	1
Super Bowl	1	0	2	0	1
Easter egg hunt	0	1	0	2	1
Other parties					
Block	12	11	25	29	27
Dinner parties	6	2	12	5	9
Birthday	1	0	2	0	1
Back to school	0	1	0	2	1
Sites for					
Fire pit	4	2	8	5	6
kids play, adults come	1	1	2	2	2
library movie nite	1	0	2	0	1
Hist society gathers	1	1	2	2	2
Total	47	37			

Q10: Is there an ongoing hospitality practice in your community? If so, what form? If not, what hospitality memories are there? Out of total # of 24 respondents 1st 2 columns

				Before %	After %		Mean
Occasional vs.	8	8		33	33		33
Ongoing	5	6		20	25		23
None	11	10		45	41		43
Memories							
once street parties	3	0		42			
hosp nbors moved	2	0		28			
childhood memory	2	0		28			

Q11: Who are your hospitable neighbors? What actions set them apart from others?

				Before %	After %		Mean
help while away	4	4		13	15		14
share resources	4	3		13	11		12
kids play, watch for	4	3		13	11		12
lacking	3	3		10	11		10
invited into home	2	4		6	15		11
check in reglrly	3	1		10	3		7
help w property	2	2		6	7		7
help ailing spouse	2	2		6	7		7
sharing food/meal	2	1		6	3		5
talk with us	2	1		6	3		5
wave at us	1	2		3	7		5
Total	29	26					

Q12: One reason I like living where I do is because....

	Before	After		Before%	After %	Mean
Good/friendly nbors	13	7		29	22	26
helpful nbors	4	3		9	9	9
close to family	2	2		4	6	5
sense of cmnty	1	2		2	6	4
kid friendly	1	1		2	3	2
families our age	1	0		2	0	1
diff aged families	1	0		2	0	1
Place						
quiet/peacefl/safe	4	4		9	12	11
walkable nhood	5	2		11	6	8
good schools	2	2		4	6	5
HOA amenities	1	1		2	3	2
Proximity/cnvnc	2	3		4	9	7
to shopping	4	3		9	9	9
school	2	0		4	0	2
highways	1	1		2	3	2
Total	44	31				

Q13: Where do you see hospitality offered on Sunday mornings? Prior to worship, during, and after?

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
Awakenings	14	11		25	17	21
Exchange of peace	9	12		16	19	17
Lunch invite	7	11		12	17	15
Greeter at door	7	7		12	11	11
Communion	5	7		8	11	10
Prayers	3	5		5	8	6
Infrml social after	4	4		7	6	6
Infrml social before	3	2		5	3	4
Bible study	2	3		3	4	4
Invite to join	2	0		3	0	1
Total	56	62				
	%					
Before worship	41					
During	36					
After	21					

Q14: What does the phrase “open table” mean to you? What phrase(s) have you heard in worship by elders of pastor about it?

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
All are welcome (w/o specifying who)	12	12		50	54	52
All (Christians) welcome	7	7		29	31	30
All believers & non welcome	4	3		16	13	15
No answer	1	0		4	0	2
Total	24	22				

Q16: If you were explaining to a Sunday visitor why Disciples of Christ have an open table, you would say....

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
bc Jesus welcomes all, we do	9	15		37	62	50
anyone believes in Xist ok	3	4		12	16	14
from our founders	3	3		12	12	12
you & God, we don't judge	5	0		20	0	10
church 1 body, each unites	2	0		8	0	4
your choice if comfortable	1	1		4	4	4
regardless of rel connection	1	1		4	4	4

Q17: I knew the importance of an open table when....

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
Closed table (RC or unnamed)	8	6		44	35	39
Becoming a DOC	3	3		16	17	17
Specific worship event	3	3		16	17	17
Raised DOC, always important	2	1		11	5	8
Mission trip/serving homeless	0	2		0	11	5
Pastor's class w kids	1	1		5	5	5
Bible hospitality stories	1	1		5	5	5
Total	18	17				

Q18: Where do you see hospitality offered in the Bible? What stories illustrate it or an open table?

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
Last Supper/washing feet	6	9		12	13	12
Mary & Martha	8	7		16	10	13
Feeding multitudes	7	8		14	12	13
Water into wine	1	9		2	13	7
Good Samaritan	3	5		6	7	6
Jesus eating with all	4	2		8	3	5
Abe & Sarah's 3 visitors	0	5		0	7	3
Road to Emmaus	1	4		2	6	4
Rev wed feast, all thirst come	0	4		0	6	3
Zacchaeus	4	0		8	0	4
Woman at well	3	1		6	1	3
Jesus receiving hosp from othr	3	0		6	0	3
Joseph welcoming brothers	0	3		0	4	2
Do for least of these	1	2		2	3	2
Death of Jesus	1	2		2	3	2
Let children come to me	2	0		4	0	2
Rahab sheltering spies	0	2		0	3	1
Birth of Jesus	1	1		2	1	1
Genesis-creation	1	1		2	1	1
Miracle catch fish	1	0		2	0	1
Jesus touching lepers	1	0		2	0	1
widow welcoming Elijah	0	1		0	1	0
Total	48	66				

Q19: Is God the host, the guest, and why do you think that matters?

	Before	After	Before %	After %	Mean
Both H & G	16	19	66	79	72
Host	6	5	25	20	22
Guest	0	0			
No answer	2	0	8		4
"Both" answers					
As H part of "both"					
asks us to table	4	5	10	10	10
provider/Creator	4	5	10	10	10
invites us to family/cmnty/kog	2	3	5	6	5
gives grace/love	1	2	2	4	3
gave Xist & HS	0	2	0	4	2
reminds us how to do things	1	1	2	2	2
As G part of "both"					
our opp to wlcem G/least of	5	10	13	21	17
resides in hearts/lives	3	2	7	4	6
always in our home	1	2	2	4	3
be a good G ourselves	1	1	2	2	2
when we're doing G's work/wl	1	0	2	0	1
stays with us at table	1	0	2	0	1
Both H & G					
Hosp models bidirectnl relat	3	7	7	14	11
"Host" only answers					
as provider/Creator	4	3	10	6	8
we learn to be good H's	3	1	7	2	5
learn how be good G's	3	1	7	2	5
invites us to table	1	2	2	4	3
Total	38	47			

Q21: The following Bible story about hospitality is important to me because....

	Before	After		Before %	After %	Mean
No answer/like all	5	1		20	3	12
Loaves and fish	4	1		16	3	10
Good Samaritan	1	4		4	15	9
Jesus washing feet	3	2		12	7	10
Mary & Martha	2	3		8	11	9
Woman at well	2	1		8	3	6
Road to Emmaus	1	2		4	7	5
Jesus eating w Zacchaeus	1	2		4	7	5
Abe, Sarah, 3 visitors	2	0		8	0	4
Prodigal son	0	2		0	7	3
Luke 14	0	2		0	7	3
Death & resurrection	1	1		4	3	4
Jesus blessing kids	0	1		0	3	1
John 3:16	1	0		4	0	2
1 Timothy 5:10	1	0		4	0	2
Hebrews 13:2	0	1		0	3	1
Romans 12	0	1		0	3	1
Syro-Phoenician woman	0	1		0	3	1
Rev's open gates	0	1		0	3	1
Total	24	26				

Statistical Analysis of the Hospitality Measure

Overview of the Eight Analyses

- I. Confidence Interval of the difference of two fractions.
 - A. The sample size is the number of total occurrence of key words or phrases.
 1. 95% confidence level (Excel Workbook A)
 2. 80% confidence level (Excel Workbook B)
 - B. The sample size is the number of students.
 1. 95% confidence level (Excel Workbook A)
 2. 80% confidence level (Excel Workbook B)
- II. The Binomial Theorem
 - A. The sample size is the number of total occurrence of key words or phrases.
 1. 95% confidence level (Excel Workbook C)
 2. 80% confidence level (Excel Workbook C)
 - B. The sample size is the number of students.
 1. 95% confidence level (Excel Workbook D)
 2. 80% confidence level (Excel Workbook D)

The formula confidence interval of the difference in percents is as follows:

Confidence Interval = $(p_2 - p_1) \pm t((p_T * (1 - p_T)) * (1/N_1 + 1/N_2))^{0.5}$ where....

p_1 is the percent of “successes” before the training.

p_2 is the percent of “successes” after the training.

t is the t statistic for the number of degrees of freedom, and desired confidence.

p_T is the percent of “successes” both before and after the training combined.

N_1 is the sample size before the training.

N_2 is the sample size after the training.

$^{0.5}$ means the square root of a quantity in parenthesis.

The binomial theorem is as follows:

$P = (n! / (r! * (n-r)!)) * (p \text{ prime})^{**r} * (1 - p \text{ prime})^{**(n-r)}$, where....

P is the probability of finding exactly r “successes” in a sample of size n .

n is the sample size.

R is the number of “successes.”

p prime is the actual fraction of r 's in the parent population from which the sample came.

** indicates the following number is the exponent of the preceding number.

Listing of the Location of Statistically Significant Words and Phrases

Sheet	Line	Word/Phrase	
1	7	give and receive relationship	
	10	inviting	
	20	loved	
2	4	welcomes	
	6	makes comfortable	
	8	gives best have	
	20	thankful/appreciate/gracious	
3	26	polite	
	24	situational, company, circumstances	
	31	enjoy serving, fellowship, building relationships	
	34	love to entertain and make smile	
6	35	easier, learning how to be a better guest	
	7	rarely, none	
7	7	Christmas	
	17	dinner parties	
10	4	good/friendly	
	20	school	
11	13	invite to join	
13	4	because Jesus welcomes all, we do	
	7	you and God, we don't judge	
	8	Church 1 body, Eucharist unites	
14	8	mission trip, serving homeless	
15	7	water into wine	
	10	Abraham and Sarah	
	11	Road to Emmaus	
	12	Rev wedding feast	
	13	Zacchaeus	
	14	woman at well	
	15	Jesus receive	
	16	Joseph welcomes	
	19	"let children come"	
	20	Rahab sheltering	
	16	21	give Christ and HS
		25	our opportunity to welcome God/"least"
		33	hospitality models bidirectional relationship
	17	4	no answer/like all
5		loaves and fish	
6		Good Samaritan	
12		Abe, Sarah, 3 visitors	
13		Prodigal son	
14		Luke 14	

Significant Differences (Before vs. After) were indicated for the following words or phrases:

Sheet	Workbook A:		Workbook B:		Workbook C:		Workbook D:	
	CI,difs of pcts		CI,difs of pcts		Binomial		Binomial	
	N=XX	N=24	N=XX	N=24	N=XX		N=24	
	^95%	^95%	*80%	*80%	^95%	*80%	^95%	*80%
1	7	7	7	7		7		7
	10	10	10	10		20		10
		20	20	11				20
			22	19				
				20				
2			4	6				
			8	8				
			20	20				
			26	26				
3	31	31	24	24		31		31
	32	32	31	31				
			32	32				
			34	34				
			35	35				
6			7	7				
7			7	17				
10				4				
				20				
11			13	13				
13	7	7	4	4		7		7
			7	7				
			8	8				
14			8	8				
15	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
	13	10	10	10—13				10
	15	12	12—16	15—16				
		13	19	19—20				
16				21				
				25				
				33				
17			4—6	4—6		4		4
			12—14	12—14				
Totals	8	10	33	41	1	6	1	8

APPENDIX D

Open Table Conversation Interview and Evaluation

Your feedback is invaluable. Thank you for sharing your confidential reflections!

For questions below: 1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree.

1. The Scripture passages selected to begin each session were relevant to the discussion:

1 2 3 4 5

2. The discussion questions adequately engaged the topic for each session:

1 2 3 4 5

3. The journal work between sessions enhanced my learning:

1 2 3 4 5

4. The skit, video clips, articles, and online resources were valuable additions:

1 2 3 4 5

5. I acquired new skills or knowledge in relation to materials presented:

1 2 3 4 5

6. The amount of material for each session was suitable for that session's length:

1 2 3 4 5

7. What specifically did you like *most* about the experience?

8. What specifically did you like *least* about the experience?

9. If this program were repeated, what specifically should be *expanded or added*?

10. If this program were repeated, what specifically should be *left out or changed*?

11. By participating in this program, I believe (check all that apply):

___ I gained one or more specific insights into the importance of hospitality in Scripture.

___ I learned things about my community that were previously unknown to me.

___ I gained insights into our denominational history of which I was unaware.

___ I am prepared to be more hospitable within my own life.

___ Other (please state): _____

12. I would recommend this program to others: Yes___ No___ Unsure ___

Please explain:

13. Anything else you would like to share?

THANK YOU!

Interview and Evaluation Data

Q1: Scripture passages relevant. Q2: Questions engaged topic. Q3: Journal enhanced learning. Q4: Extra materials valuable. Q5: New skills/knowledge acquired. Q6: Amount of material suitable. 1/Strongly disagree; 2/disagree; 3/neutral; 4/agree; 5/strongly agree

Respondents	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
#1	5	5	4	4	5	5
#2	4	3	1	4	4	4
#3	5	4	3	4	4	5
#4	5	4	3	5	5	4
#5	3	4	4	4	4	3
#6	5	4	4	4	5	5
#7	5	4	4	4	4	2
#8						
#9	4	4	3	5	3	3
#10	5	5	4	4	5	4
#11	5	5	3	4	4	2
#12	5	5	5	5	4	5
#13						
#14	5	5	4	5	4	4
#15	5	5	4	5	5	5
#16	5	5	3	4	4	2
#17	5	5	3	4	4	4
#18	5	5	3	5	4	5
#19	5	5	4	5	5	4
#20	5	4	2	5	5	2
#21	5	5	1	4	3	4
#22	5	4	1	4	5	4
#23	4	5	2	4	4	4
#24	5	4	1	4	4	4
Mean/average	4.77	4.5	3	4.36	4.27	3.81

Q7: What did you like *most* about the experience?

As people could give multiple answers, the totals are greater than 24

	Number of responses		%
Get know others better	17		50
Strengthen congtrl relations	1		2
Place			
Meeting in homes	2		5
Curriculum			
curriculum itself	11		32
Building to external hospitality	1		2
Informed, enriched me	1		2
Engaged & developed	1		2
Total	34		

Q8: What did you like *least* about the experience?

Response	Number of Responses		%
0 dislike	5		18
Scheduling/commit	5		18
Repetitive ?s	4		14
Too much material	4		14
Journaling	3		11
No answer	2		7
Too little discussing	1		3
Tracking assignments	1		3
Unable do all sessions	1		3
How vulnerable be?	1		3
Total	27		

Q9: If this program were repeated, what should be *expanded* or *added*?

Response	# of Responses		%
Don't know/NA	4		19
more discussing time	3		14
emphasize journal import	2		9
action plans to be hospitable	2		9
stage 2 to build congl life	2		9
1 large study group, smaller breakout	1		4
gather non-members in home	1		4
gather in same geographic locale	1		4
more re early church belief	1		4
more local history for growth/development	1		4
watch video & debrief	1		4
group last longer	1		4
make more exciting	1		4
Total	21		

Q10: If this program were repeated, what should be *left out* or *changed*?

Response	# of Responses		%
Don't know/no change	9		34
Current & shorter videos	2		7
Hmwrk not discuss/journal	2		7
No answer	1		3
DOC skit long	1		3
less reading	1		3
shorter/focused discussion	1		3
extend from 12 to 16 session	1		3
easier to bring own food	1		3
bundling supplmntl matrls	1		3
different lesson distribution	1		3
min # participants	1		3
repetitive conversations	1		3
holding in non-home site	1		3
rotate groups to know better	1		3
Scheduling	1		3
Total	26		

Q11: By participating, I believe I have gained insights into.... Out of 24 respondents

Respondents	Hospitality in Bible	learned re community	Learned re DOC	Prepared being hospitable	Other
#1	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#2	✓			✓	
#3	✓	✓		✓	
#4	✓		✓	✓	
#5	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#6	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#7	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#8	✓			✓	
#9					
#10	✓			✓	
#11	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#12	✓				
#13					
#14	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#15	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#16		✓			
#17	✓	✓	✓		
#18	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#19	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#20	✓	✓		✓	
#21	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#22	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#23	✓	✓	✓	✓	
#24	✓				
Total	21	16	14	18	0

Q12: I would recommend this program to others. %

	# of Responses		%
Yes	20		83
Unsure	2		8
No Answer	2		8
"Yes" comments			
Shows how faith applied today	6		31
Enjoyed discussing/learning	2		10
Future sessions others enjoy	2		10
Needs good leader & committed people	1		5
Great for community event	1		5
Needs 8-10 participants	1		5
Gained much each session	1		5
We don't see hospitality as Christian duty	1		5
Scripture references for sessions helpful	1		5
DOC history interesting refresher	1		5
"Unsure" comments			
Repetitive	1		5
some folks busy schedule	1		5
Total	19		

Q13: Anything else to share?

Response	# of Responses		%
No answer	7		25
Thx/apprect gather sml grps	4		14
In depth insights gained	3		10
Future hopes for change	3		10
Scheduling prevent full engagement	2		7
Thx w/o comments	2		7
Liked Bible vss & hospitality insights	1		3
For guiding enjoyable exper	1		3
For lot of work developing program	1		3
More visuals, less words	1		3
Future			
Wish to change hospitality in neighborhood	1		3
Look forward to next steps	1		3
Hope makes hospitality easier for all	1		3
Total	28		

APPENDIX E

Congregational Survey
Open Table Survey

1. I am: [Check all that apply]

- a participant in LAST YEAR'S Open Table groups
- a participant in THIS YEAR'S Wednesday night Open Table group
- NOT a participant in LAST or THIS year's Open Table groups

2. I first heard about Open Tables....

- Last Year
- This Year
- Haven't heard about it

3. These are the places I've heard about it: [Check all that apply]

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church's FaceBook page/website | <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation with church member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In sermon | <input type="checkbox"/> A church leader (other than pastor) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Email invitation | <input type="checkbox"/> From a prior or current participant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Announcement at church | <input type="checkbox"/> Haven't heard about it |

4: I am willing: [Check one]

- as a former PAST PARTICIPANT to share what I've learned
- as a new CURRENT PARTICIPANT to invite others to Wed. night Open Tables
- to consider being a new FUTURE PARTICIPANT

5. I believe Open Tables is about: [Check all that apply]

- Getting together to share food with others
- Learning why Disciples of Christ welcome all to communion
- Discovering more about the community we live in
- Exploring Bible stories about hospitality
- Finding ways to connect to our community
- Unsure what it's about

Name: (Optional)_____

Congregational Survey Data

Q1: I am:

Participant	Responses	Percentage
last year's participant	19	63
this year's participant	11	27
not this or last year's	0	0
Total	30	
Non-Participant		
last year's participant	0	0
this year's participant	0	0
not this or last year's	39	1
Total	39	

Q2: I first heard about Open Tables.... Note: One participant and one non-participant skipped this question

Participant	Responses	Percentage
last year	22	73
this year	8	26
haven't heard about	0	0
Total	30	
Non-Participant		
last year	11	28
this year	20	52
haven't heard about	7	18
Total	38	

Q3: These are the places I have heard about it: (note: because respondents could check more than one response the totals are greater than 100 percent).

Participant	Responses	Percentage
Newsletter	24	80
Leadership meeting	14	46
Church's Facebook/website	7	23
Church member conversation	20	66
Sermon	21	70
Church leader (not pastor)	15	50
Email invitation	19	63
Prior or current participant	11	36
Church announcement	27	90
Haven't heard about	0	0
Total	30	
Non-Participant		
Newsletter	24	61
Leadership meeting	3	7
Church's Facebook/website	8	20
Church member conversation	11	28
Sermon	9	23
Church leader (not pastor)	16	41
Email invitation	10	25
Prior or current participant	7	17
Church announcement	29	74
Haven't heard about	4	10
Total	39	

Q4: I am willing: (note: 11 non-participants and 1 participant skipped this question.)

Participant		%
former participant to share	14	48
current participant to invite	11	37
consider being future participant	4	13
Total	29	
Non-Participant		%
former participant to share	0	0
current participant to invite	0	0
consider being future participant	28	1
Total	28	

Q5: I believe Open Tables is about: (note: 1 non-participant skipped this question. Because respondents could check more than 1 response, the totals are greater than 100 percent).

Participant		%
sharing food with others	21	70
why Disciples have open table	21	70
learning about community	29	96
exploring Bible hospitality stories	29	96
connecting with community	29	96
Unsure	0	0
Total	30	
Non-Participant		
sharing food with others	13	34
why Disciples have open table	7	18
learning about community	14	36
exploring Bible hospitality stories	11	28
connecting with community	24	63
Unsure	18	47
Total	38	

APPENDIX F

Significant Quotes from Interviews, Discussion Materials, and Conversations

Hospitality in the Suburbs Portrait #1
Shared at Training Session
Bob and Bonnie Schilling Interview Excerpts
March 3, 2013

We have lived in this area since 1968, and in this house since 1975. The most valuable aspects of our neighborhood are the good neighbors we have had. We had weekly card games every Friday night, lawnmower races, and played Michigan rummy for pennies. We did everything together. We drove to Frisch's Big Boy for dinner. We had street cookouts in my garage, and everybody on the street came, but that has changed now. Nobody knows anybody anymore. People once talked to you in those days, but they do not talk to you anymore.

Things changed in our neighborhood when a neighbor died in a plane crash that he was not supposed to be on. All the news companies wanted to interview his widow right away, and she had not even heard yet. We did things as couples, and after that nobody wanted to get together anymore because they felt awful with him not around.

Once you saw trees everywhere, it was all farmland. I could eat breakfast and watch the cows on Bluebird Avenue. Everywhere there is open land they have put houses up—any vacancy they have filled with homes.

This community is helpful for minority groups by having condos nearby. I have heard a lot about the drug situation, very bad on the one side of the condos. The ones who walk their pit bulls give themselves away. I hear from folks in that area they have had some raids.

I grew up nearby and remember when nobody ever locked their doors. Neighbors chipped in gas rations so we could visit relatives in Dayton. They would close our house windows when it rained, and open them when the storm passed. We shared one bike and all the kids on the street got a turn. That is how close things were. You could ride your bike anywhere, but you cannot do that now because of fast traffic. Back then we did not have air conditioning, and because of that we were outside playing. Kids today do have air conditioning, but they are not outside breathing fresh air and they need that. They have air conditioning, but do not see anybody. They have more money, but less fun. We played together then, now they just play alone. The kids have lost the most since then. Parents never had to worry about their kid being grabbed.

A wish for this community is that people need to slow down around the neighborhood. When you get to be our age you have to slow down and we notice things that others do not.

I cannot wish it to be the way it was when we had a big street party. What has happened? Our society is heading in the wrong direction, so much has changed. We need to do more than just go to church. People need to start changing things. All of us Christians should be pushing for Christ, but we keep to ourselves. What do we do?

Hospitality in the Suburbs Portrait #2

Shared at Training Session

Respondents 11 & 23

Our street is different from most. We moved in to our development with other young married couples starting families and began socializing. A shared experience and history grew that makes it easy to be together although we are very different people with different ideas, life goals, politics, etc. The school and extracurricular activities for kids keep us engaged in each other's lives. We celebrate milestones together and watch each other's children in their talents and activities.

Kids have an extended family beyond their home. In summer there are bike races, games in the front and back yards, and the neighbor with a pool welcomes kids to use the pool whenever, as long as an adult keeps watch. Kids know they can come in through the garage door without knocking. This is your neighborhood, and you are welcome in our home as others welcome you to theirs. On this street we are that village keeping a loving eye on the children we are raising. Because the parents know and trust one another, we do not have a problem with children misbehaving because the kids know all it takes is a call. It is not just a caring place for kids, however. When a neighbor was locked out at work from an eighteen month strike we provided food, rides for kids to school, financial assistance to make sure their kids had Christmas presents, and constant encouragement. We wrapped that family tightly in a blanket of love and support, stood by them, and persevered together until the strike was over. Then we threw a big block party!

Regular celebrations are part of this neighborhood. We have Winterfest, a Christmas party, a summer pool get together, and Fourth of July at the park. There are also random fire pits, deck crawls, Ladies & Gents Night Out, and more. We like and enjoy one another, and do not really need an excuse to get together. Gatherings can happen spontaneously with someone saying, "I am firing up the grill and bought more steak than I need. Want to come over?" and word spreads as folks chip in and add to the meal. When someone needs a hand with a project, like our downstairs remodeling, the guys will show up and help out. It is what we do.

About 75 percent of our neighbors are churched. Most churches would envy our fellowship here. This neighborhood's fellowship is something most churches would envy. The quality of fellowship is deeper and richer than we find in church outside of small

groups. At church we tell others we are fine when that is just a surface answer; we have deeper conversations with neighbors because of the trust built over time. God placed us in this neighborhood to care for, and receive care from, others.

The time we have invested over the years in our neighbors has been rewarding; I cannot imagine living in a neighborhood without this. The best part of my neighborhood is my neighbors; although we are all different we love them and they love us!

Respondent Quotes

Respondent 1: “They are ‘fence-friendly,’ waving or speak a few words but we do not socialize.” “The difficulty of scheduling folks together—it is no one’s fault, just modern life.

Respondent 4: “I remember being safe at one time, no one ever locked their doors. People could come in and borrow something if you were not home.”

Respondent 5: “My best friend from El Salvador just moved in recently and his family is always coming and going. You can tell when they are in town because everyone is invited to come and visit. They provide food and drinks and hugs!” “I really wish to change our views of being invited to an open table for everyone who comes into our home and neighborhood.”

Respondent 7: “The most hospitable family moved away and we do not gather as much now.” “It is very important for societies and communities to embrace the fact that we are ignorant and continue to turn our heads away from the needs of our struggling neighborhoods. This program explained how to accomplish and approach the issues of today with the knowledge and insight of the past.”

Respondent 10: “The time involved—meeting every two weeks was too hard.”

Respondent 12: “Those neighbors were very close to my husband and I, caring for us, but they moved this summer.”

Respondent 13: There are not neighborhood parties as there are steep hills, our streets have no sidewalks, and are not connected very well. The local swim club’s initiation fee is \$1400 and then about \$400 a year so it does segregate people.” “We have a neighborhood Facebook page that allows us to keep track of each other. I can call out to this group and receive help; about half of the 450 neighborhood houses are in the group. I have a bigger social network than I did in Toronto, so my neighborhood is not geographical.”

Respondent 14: “There have been a few neighborhood barbecues in the past thirteen years, but usually people are too busy to get together.” “Neighbors gave exclusive dinner

parties. Once they moved it stopped because people were embarrassed about everyone not being invited or not interested.”

Respondent 15: “There is no ongoing practice of hospitality because the neighborhood is too transient [to create lasting] memories.” “All neighbors are polite, but there is little active hospitality outside of getting kids to the bus stop.” “It is safe and easy to maintain isolation. There are major internal and external barriers to changing this paradigm, but I now see the problems in this. I gained fundamental insight into the structural nature of the disconnect between current society and God’s vision.” “This changed everything about my view of applied religion, i.e., before I understood religion but in the abstract, largely struggling with the application to real life.”

Excerpts from invitation to summer OTC session by Respondent 15:

“As I was trying to come up with a way to explain how important this is, I was reminded of some compound words when usual English just doesn’t provide enough firepower. *Fantabulous* is a contender, so is *fabulantastic*, but the word I need for today is *phantasmagorical*, something so remarkable it redefines your reality in a permanent way. That’s really what the Open Table series has been for many of us. At least for me, it’s been life-changing in tangible ways. It asks what it means to be Christian and what that means for us living here in this place at this time. Those of us that have completed the Open Table experience want to share it with each and every one of you. And a lot of other people, too.”

Respondent 16: “My upstairs neighbor invited me to game night, but no one else even says hello.” “I am moving closer to downtown where there are festivals and a more accessible sense of community.” “It is difficult for the younger folks with families to make time.”

Respondent 22: “My apartment community does not foster hospitality.” “I do not like living here because it is not hospitable; I am only here because it is convenient.”

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