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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

DISCOVERING ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES THROUGH ACTION LEARNING
AT NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TUCSON, ARIZONA

Written by

PETER J. SEIFERTH

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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_____
Alan Roxburgh

_____
Kurt Fredrickson

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DISCOVERING ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES THROUGH ACTION LEARNING
AT NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TUCSON, ARIZONA

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PETER J. SEIFERTH
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ABSTRACT

Discovering Adaptive Challenges Through Action Learning
At Northminster Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona
Peter J. Seiferth
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2013

The goal of this study was to explore how inviting church members of Northminster Presbyterian Church (NPC) to cross neighborhood boundaries through the practice of hospitality can stimulate missional innovation and identify adaptive challenges to mission engagement. The thesis was tested by creating holding environments for action-reflection groups to participate in the practices of *lectio divina* and hospitality. This study offers a thick description of the community context, the congregation's history, and the practice of leadership. Formal and functional ecclesiologies, as well as impediments to missional life are examined.

Action learning, appreciative inquiry, and participant observation are methodologies used to structure the project of inviting two groups to participate in a twelve-week challenge to dwell in the biblical text of Luke 10:1-12 and cross neighborhood boundaries using the *Practicing Hospitality* workbook. An appreciative inquiry instrument was used at the start, midpoint, and end of the groups to collect data to assess language use. Participants were followed after the group finished meeting and ongoing data was collected using participant observation. The pastoral leadership team of the church was a focus group to reflect on leadership and authority, using participant observation. An analysis of qualitative data describes themes and how language use reveals ecclesiological and missional imagination.

While these groups struggled to cross neighborhood boundaries, some members demonstrated increased awareness of a missional calling. Leadership, contextual, formation systems, and theological frameworks are reflected upon to identify resources for a local theology of leadership and mission. Opportunities and recommendations for future praxis are explored, as this project is part of a journey of transformation.

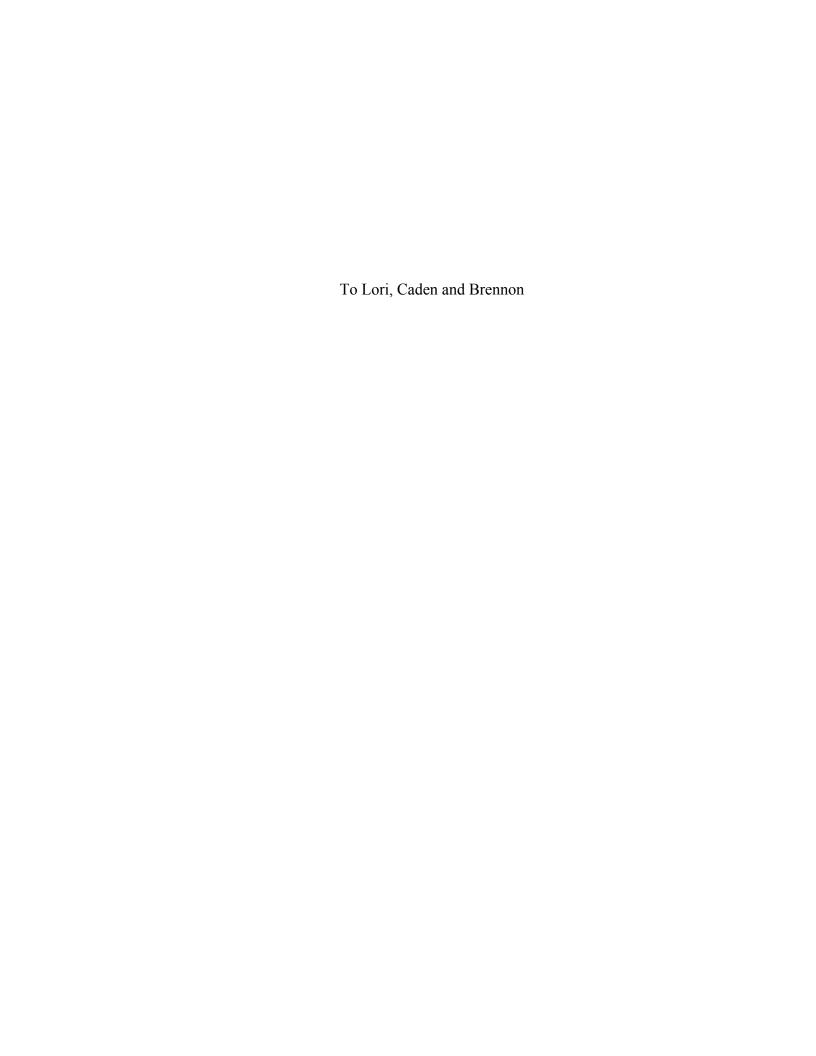Content Reader: Alan J. Roxburgh, DMin

Words: 261

To Lori, Caden and Brennon

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INTRODUCTION

Community and cultural shifts over the last 60 years have significantly impacted

the people of Tucson, Arizona and Northminster Presbyterian Church (NPC). The

composition of the neighborhood where NPC is located has changed from its Caucasian

middle-class beginnings in the 1950s to one of more racial, cultural, and economic

diversity. For many years, participation in worship, programs, and financial stewardship

have been primary measurements of health, and those metrics have stabilized or declined.

Less attention has typically been given to measuring the ways people engage the city,

neighborhoods, and workplaces as a missionary encounter and "exhibition of the

Kingdom of Heaven to the world," though there are increasing efforts to understand the

dynamics of poverty and to minister to the needy through food bags and hot meals.[1]

Missional transformation of churches begins when people develop awareness and

capacity to engage local communities in transformational ways that reflect the

characteristics of the Kingdom of God. If people are predisposed to seeing God at work

in the worship sanctuary or on the church campus, then initiating missional

transformation will challenge people to see themselves as sent by the Holy Spirit to look

in other places to find how they can join in what God is doing in the community. In

church systems that are inwardly focused on the functional aspects of church life and

program, identifying adaptive challenges is a challenging and important step in missional

transformation. Adaptive work calls for challenges to systemic assumptions and requires

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[1] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 2: Book of Order 2011-2013* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 2011), F-1.0304.

people to participate in a process of new learning, towards a fundamental change in attitudes and values.[2] Church systems typically resist seeing challenges which call for changes that might threaten the status quo or stability of the organization. Yet, it is in the midst of systemic disruption that adaptive work is most readily identified.

The congregational culture at NPC has been shaped over the years in such a way that it has relied on pastors and staff to control and lead church programs intended to attract and keep people. Pastors have tended to rely on technical skills to respond to issues as they arise. As an associate pastor with limited formal authority to lead congregational change, I have the opportunity to employ leadership skills in my areas of ministry, to develop the interpretive capacities of congregation members and to create an environment where the gospel can be relearned towards a missional encounter with Western culture.

The central thesis of this project is that missional transformation at Northminster Presbyterian Church can be initiated as action learning team members engage neighbors, identify adaptive challenges, and disrupt typical church ministry and mission habits. While there are many barriers to missional transformation, adaptive challenges can be identified and can begin to be understood as followers of Jesus Christ come face to face with others in light of reflection on scripture. Instead of theory to practice ministry, which usually happens as leadership attempts to respond to technical problems, congregational ministry praxis is practice and action of the faith that is rooted in an engagement with Scripture and prayer with others, with an emphasis on listening. This project follows the

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[2] Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13-14.

actions of two small groups to use action-reflection learning to practice hospitality and reflect biblically and theologically, through a period of twelve weeks of meeting together, with continued observation for many months as some of the members continue in community boundary crossing. Through an invitation to the small groups to dwell and reflect on Luke 10:1-12, and to participate in boundary crossing through the offering of hospitality, expressions of a local theology begin to emerge that locates the church not at the church campus but as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of the Kingdom of God to the community and world.[3]

This paper has three main parts. Part One explores the context where NPC is located and a summary of cultural impediments to missional innovation. Formal and functional ecclesiologies are examined by way of a thick description of the community, congregation, as well as personal leadership reflections. Part Two provides an overview of the task of identifying adaptive work and describes the project methodology, design, implementation, and data collection through interviews and observation. The methodologies of Action Learning,[4] Appreciative Inquiry,[5] and participant observation[6] establish the framework of the project design. An Appreciative Inquiry instrument was used at the start, midpoint, and end of the groups to collect data to assess shifts in

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[3] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 232-233.

[4] Michael J. Marquardt, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black, 2004).

[5] Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2004).

[6] Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 226-238.

language. The participants in the groups were also observed for several months following the end of the group meetings using participant observation in order to identify changes in their actions and ongoing learning. The pastoral leadership team of the church was a focus group to reflect on leadership and authority, using participant observation. An analysis of data will lead to a description of findings about how shifts in language and actions undertaken reveal ecclesiological and missional imagination. Part Three provides reflection and analysis of the project with recommendations for future congregational praxis. Research findings contribute to the formation of a local theology of mission and an understanding of personal learning as they interact with systems, theology, context, and leadership frameworks.   Finally, future congregational and personal leadership praxis is proposed with a view to ongoing diffusion of missional innovation.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUAL LANDSCAPE OF NORTHMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The story of Northminster Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona is intertwined with that of the city of Tucson, as both have grown and changed significantly over the past six decades. This chapter describes the narrative of NPC within its community context. The church and community have both experienced joys and hurts which have had formational impacts on the culture. Formal and functional ecclesiologies are examined which provide insight into church life and impediments to missional transformation.

A Brief History of NPC

NPC began in 1951 at the time when the north side of Tucson was the growing edge of the city. The neighborhood began to develop as new homes were built and the brand new elementary school provided the church's first meeting space. The presbytery with the national board of home mission identified that a Presbyterian church should anchor the north side growth. Given the post-World War II demand for new churches and the growth of suburbs, the 1950s were a "golden era of new churches" started by

mainstream Protestant denominations.[1] The name Northminster denotes it as the church

for that neighborhood. The neighborhood has changed in sixty years, from the north edge

of a small city of 140,000 at its inception, to a central location in a metro area of nearly

one million residents.[2] At its inception, the neighborhood contained a nearly homogenous

population of middle-class Caucasians, many of whom were transplants from other states

who moved to Tucson to work in the industry, education, or military sectors. A remnant

of original homeowners lives in the area, and has been joined by a diverse set of

neighbors. Working poor, refugees, retirees, and college students representing much

ethnic and economic diversity inhabit the homes and apartment complexes nearest to the

NPC campus. Few people walk to Sunday worship services at NPC, and most commute

from all directions of the city, with higher proportions coming from the northern suburb.

The city of Tucson, with its grid layout, has developed around the use of the

automobile and car trips of twenty to thirty minutes are commonplace. The centrally

located Northminster campus is within a typical commute of a large area of the city, with

easy access by automobile owners. NPC members tend to be Caucasian, older, well-

educated, and middle to upper-middle class.[3] Average weekly worship attendance is 580

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[1] Milton J Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 30.

[2] "State & County Quickfacts," U.S. Census Bureau, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/04/04019.html (accessed September 10, 2011). 2010 population of the city of Tucson itself was 518,956, and Pima County was 980,263.

[3] *General Assembly Statistical Report*, (Tucson, AZ: Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2010). NPC is a mature congregation with 60 percent of its members over the age of fifty-five, and 26 percent of members forty-five and younger. Membership is almost entirely Caucasian with 5 percent diversity among Hispanic, Asian, Black, and Native American.

people (about 50 percent of the membership). I serve on a staff of over twenty full- and part-time people and as one of four ordained pastors.

The original pioneers to the American west brought a spirit of rugged resolve, a memory which conjures for some a romanticized vision of a tough town of cowboys with guns overlaid on the Mexican and Native American cultures which have a longer history in the area. Tucson's close proximity to the international border with Mexico, sixty miles to the north, makes the city and region a cultural and economic gateway. The border crisis has created a polarized political environment around the issues of immigration, human trafficking, drug smuggling, violence, and gun control. Arizona State Bill 1070 regarding local and state enforcement of Federal immigration law has made the issue of immigration a polarizing issue.[4] The population of legal immigrants in the form of resettled refugees and political asylees from around the world has steadily increased in recent years. Two immigrant fellowships have begun meeting on the NPC campus as Middle-Eastern and African immigrant communities seek to worship together according to their native language and culture.

In the past sixty years, Tucson has grown steadily, much like other Sun Belt regions. Most residents of Pima County are from somewhere else. Retirees and winter visitors flock to Arizona from cold weather climates, permanently or seasonally. Industry, The University of Arizona, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and various high tech employers attract a mobile yet transient work force of professionals from around the country. College students and young adults from the region who come to Tucson for

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[4] "Fact Sheet for State Bill 1070," Arizona State Legislature, http://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/summary/s.1070pshs.doc.htm (accessed September 16, 2011).

education or work are also highly mobile members of the community who leave for jobs, relationships, or higher education. Neighborhoods are inhabited by people who are mostly strangers.

The front elevations of many homes in Tucson contain garages or car ports, with few front porches, and small yards surrounded by cinder block privacy walls. A key function of suburban homes is as a place of refuge from strangers, from fears of crime and violence, and from summer desert heat. Richard Sennett describes the function of the cathedral in medieval society as a place of refuge, and describes this function of refuge being transferred to the home in industrial society.[5] The increase of border violence, apprehension of undocumented immigrants and drugs in suburban safe houses has raised feelings of xenophobia, and thus further driven many to seek refuge in their homes and churches, where encounters with strangers are less likely to occur.

Recent Violence, Old Wounds, and Public Dialogue

On January 8, 2011, a mass shooting took place outside of a suburban Tucson Safeway store. The young-adult male shooter suffering from mental illness had planned and put into action a plot to assassinate U.S. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and to kill as many others as possible. Though Giffords survived being shot through the skull, six people were killed, twelve others were wounded, and the terror gripped the whole city.[6] In the days that followed, Tucson was the focus of national media attention, as

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[5] Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

[6] Kim Smith, "Five Federal Charges Filed against Loughner in Shooting," *Arizona Daily Star*, January 10, 2011.

Giffords fought for her life and as the many from the community gathered at shrines and memorials that had been set up at the Safeway, at the University Medical Center, and at the offices of the congresswoman. The presence of President Barak Obama to speak at a public memorial service held deep meaning for the community.

The tragedy directly affected NPC congregation, and the suffering and trauma was acutely felt. An elderly female member of NPC died instantly when she was shot while standing in line to greet Giffords. Two other members, a married couple, were at the feet of the shooter during the rampage, and the husband was shot in the arm as he covered his wife with his body.

For many at Northminster, this tragedy brought to mind the pain experienced fifteen years earlier when the organist was murdered on Shrove Tuesday as he was driving home from a performance in a nearby city. January 8, 2011 brought echoes of the experience for many in the congregation of a high-profile crime, the emergence of terrible details, and the pain of a public trial and sentencing. Old wounds opened as the staff and members again experienced anger, fear, grief, and frustration.

Following the shootings, stories emerged about those who died and were injured, as well as about the troubled shooter. Contrasting narratives surfaced as people reacted to the tragedy, and many in the Tucson community wrestled with the observation that neighbors do not know other neighbors very well. Neighbors have the potential to be both a treasure and gift to be enjoyed through relationship, and a danger to safety and security.

Ecclesiology

As complex organizations, congregations derive their self-understanding from a combination of official and informal sources. Both formal and functional ecclesiologies are helpful in describing a congregation's identity. Following is a description of ecclesiologies that describe Northminster Presbyterian Church. NPC is located in the Reformed and Evangelical theological traditions and its institutional formation has been influenced by a Christendom paradigm.

Reformed

NPC affirms its roots in the Reformed tradition as a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PC(USA)). NPC affirms God's gracious sovereignty and establishment of a covenant community which is the church.[7] The doctrine of election is an important feature of Presbyterian belief particularly in articulating a theology of calling and vocation. However, the individualism of western culture and the influences of western corporations and regulatory agencies have had made a deep impact on the practice and understanding of Presbyterian polity as a structure for control.[8] As a denomination, the PC(USA) is realizing its structure is not suited for a missional encounter with the American context yet pressures to maintain the old culture of

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[7] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 53-54.

[8] Joseph D. Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery," (Louisville: Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2008), 7-8.

denominational Christendom are great.[9] Presbyterian theologian Joseph Small provides

a helpful analysis of how modern Presbyterian polity has been corrupted, and draws on

John Calvin's Geneva for a helpful corrective for the relationship of ordered ministries

and the imagination of the presbytery.[10] Calvin resisted priestly clericalism, and

constructed an ordering of ministry by breaking down the distinction between clergy and

laity by instituting the ministries of elder and deacon. These "ordered ministries" were to

be interdependent, and no ministry was to function apart from its essential relationship to

the others as the whole people of God. Ordered ministries were bound together in the

common task of ensuring the church's fidelity to the Word.[11] Results from the Missional

Readiness Survey[12] revealed comments which expressed frustration with pastors for

restricting the use of some people's gifts (whether inadvertently or not), or allowing

people called as elders and deacons to burn out in areas of service where they do not

understand the vision or how to lead effectively.

Small cites points of change that occurred in the 1950s that had unintended and

unfortunate consequences for the ordered ministries in the Presbyterian Church. One

change was the regulation of mandatory rotation of elders that prohibited ruling elders

from serving more than two consecutive three-year terms. While this included many

more women on sessions, this had the effect of reducing the concept of being a part of an

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[9] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Crossing the Bridge* (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2000), 105.

[10] Small, "The Travail of the Presbytery," 1.

[11] Ibid., 4.

[12] Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *Mission-Shaped Church Survey: Feedback Report* (2009). In 2009, I administered the Mission-Shaped Church Survey to leaders at NPC.

ordered ministry, to thinking it was just their turn to take their three-year term on the

board. Another change was that many sessions took on the roles of trustees which added

matters of finance and property to the responsibilities of ordering the congregation's

worship, education, pastoral care, mission, and polity responsibilities. Each of these

changes had effect of lessening the "spiritual" ministry of ruling elders, this elevating the

role of minister as the primary keepers of knowledge of polity and spiritual leadership.

Accordingly, the operative language which once had referenced the unified ministry of

"elders" to roles of "teaching" and "ruling" was changed to refer to "ministers" and

"elders." This harmful severing of ministry resulted in a hierarchy with pastors as the

"real ministers" and elders functioning in lesser supportive roles. The Book of Order

from 1951 (the year NPC was started) contains language that describes this severing of

the ministry roles. The pastoral office was referred to as "first in the church, both for

dignity and usefulness," and elders are described as having a governing role, "but do not

labor in the word and doctrine."[13]

Evangelical

The leadership at NPC is committed to orthodox, evangelical theology that

emphasizes the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world,

Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the need for a personal faith in Christ, the authority of

Scripture, and a response to God's grace by living in obedience to moral teaching of the

Bible. As characterized by Avery Dulles, NPC is an Evangelical Herald, placing the

proclamation of the Word of God, and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as

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[13] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (New York: 1951).

a primary activity of the church. As Dulles observes, a limitation of this ecclesiology is

a tendency to be congregational in church government, not dependent on other church

structures, which is contrary to NPC's stated commitment to the connectional polity of

the PC(USA), but which may explain NPC's ongoing frustration with denominational

actions and directions.[14] A tremendous amount of theological diversity is present within

the mainline PC(USA) that reflects the broad diversity within the western Christian

tradition. Progressives have tended to find deeper meaning in the liberating work of Jesus

and strive to work for compassion and justice. Evangelicals have tended to find deeper

meaning in the saving work of Christ and strive to call people to repentance and saving

faith though the process of discipleship.

Lesslie Newbigin noticed a structural dichotomy in churches between those who

saw mission as justice and those who saw mission as personal conversion. Those who

emphasized justice tended to be involved in higher denominational roles of advocacy and

mobilization. Those who emphasized conversion tended to be passionate about mission at

the congregational level in ministry of worship and discipleship. Newbigin laments that

mission is robbed of its true character by being divided this way, and described the need

for development of a new theological understanding of mission and a reordering of

church structures accordingly.

> Christian programs for justice and compassion are severed from their proper roots
> in the liturgical and sacramental life of the congregation, and so lose their
> character as signs of the presence of Christ and risk becoming mere crusades
> fueled by a moralism that can become self-righteous. And the life of the
> worshipping congregation, severed from its proper expression in compassionate

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[14] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image, 2002), 68-69.

service to the secular community around it risks becoming a self-centered existence serving only the needs and desires of its members.[15]

Progressive understandings of biblical interpretation, Christology, and ethics within the PC(USA) have led to a drive for more inclusive and expansive standards, beyond what is traditionally orthodox. NPC has aligned itself with the evangelical special purpose renewal organizations of the Confessing Church Movement, Presbyterians for Renewal, the Presbyterian Coalition, the Presbyterian Global Fellowship, and the Fellowship of Presbyterians which give member churches reasons to stay in the denomination yet are seen by some as a cause of strife as they oppose progressive theological movements.[16] Recent history has seen NPC's renewed efforts to have pastors and members consciously commit to be involved in leadership and committees in the presbytery, tangibly living its commitment to connectional Presbyterian polity.

Institutional

Another ecclesiology identified by Dulles is that of church as Institution which exists for the benefit of its own members, and sees evangelism in terms of bringing people to faith by bringing them into the institution, which is a statistically measureable process.[17] NPC has sought to be a successful church institution by using church growth movement principles to attract members, maintain fine facilities and financial security, and provide fine worship experiences and programs for members. Connected to this is the

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[15] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 10-11.

[16] Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism,* 80-81.

[17] Dulles, *Models of the Church,*33-35.

tendency for pastors and leaders to maintain control over decisions and outcomes, impatience with process, inaction, or stagnation, yet a commitment to incremental change that does not upset people too much beyond their expectations.

Craig Van Gelder traces the development of churches in the United States along a trajectory from established church to corporate church to missional church.[18] NPC was begun in the 1950s at a time when the established church was legitimated by the culture, and it was "the primary geographical location of God's presence" in the community. Even the architecture of NPC, which is a large, brick, tall-steeple building speaks of this presence of God, particularly in a southwestern city where tall steeples are not common. Among the functional ecclesiologies at play at NPC is the one of established American Christian civil religion. As Branson and Martinez describe it, "Christendom is the historic situation in which national structures and church structures are interwoven and participants assume that government, churches, and citizens share a broad agenda."[19] For the church in North America and other western contexts, the period of Christendom saw the church as a central feature of society, and in a privileged location. The language of the culture did not differ that much from the language of the church. Members, usually of retirement age, talk about how they enjoy (and would enjoy much more) inclusion of patriotic songs, the recognition of military service people, prayers for soldiers, and the prominent display of the American flag on the chancel. While this patriotism is to be admired, the desired integration and prominence in the worship of God reveals an ethos

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[18] Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 84-86.

[19] Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 60.

of establishment between the church and state. Cultural disestablishment offers a distinct opportunity to develop and recover distinct ways of being Christian, not by cultural reinforcement, but by the power of the truth of the gospel.[20]

Gerhard Lohfink wrote, "Jesus understood the people of God which he sought to gather as a contrast-society, a community which forms its own sphere of life, a community in which one lives in a different way and treats others in a different way than is usual elsewhere in the world."[21] As the early Christian church lived as an *altera civitas* or a parallel *polis* in relation to the Roman Empire, it established its own norms and patterns of behavior and "didn't play the game of the empire."[22] The Christian community was established by a central story of who they were as a people, and they were bolstered by a commitment to practices which identified them as a distinct community from the culture. As Barry Harvey has observed, becoming a missionary church will mean coming to terms with the ways the church has participated in Christendom. Rather than withdrawal from the culture, the church as a covenant community will need to participate in the culture for the sake of others as another city.[23]

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[20] Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism,* 4.

[21] Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 56, 180.

[22] Barry A. Harvey, *Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1999), 22-23.

[23] Ibid., 30, 21-23, 100-101.

CHAPTER 2

BARRIERS TO MISSIONAL CHANGE

The central question Lesslie Newbigin asked was this: "What would be involved

in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and this modern Western

culture?"[1] As a missionary, Newbigin's interaction with Indian culture allowed him to

reread scripture from the perspective of others. This rereading of the gospel challenged

his assumptions, and in a sense, reconverted him.[2] Missional transformation in church

will involve a similar reconversion for the sake of a genuinely contextualized mission

engagement. For this to take place, assumptions shared with the common culture need to

be examined. This chapter identifies cultural forces shaping NPC's assumptions in order

to name ways it needs to be reconverted. It will, further, argue that the process will

involve adaptive change. Leading a congregation into missional change requires, in part,

the development of awareness skills.[3] Such skills are cultivated through the development

of attentive observation and careful listening, particularly to the interactions between

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[1] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 3.

[2] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 35.

[3] Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 79-108.

church leaders and members. A critically important aspect of leadership is to assist the

congregation to find language with which to understand its loss of place at center of

society and reconceive an imagination from within the narratives of God in scripture and

the Word made flesh. This involves the work of assisting a congregation engage adaptive

change.

The Adaptive Challenge of Identifying Adaptive Challenges

Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky describe the differences between technical and

adaptive change.[4] Technical challenges are those for which leaders are already equipped

with the necessary skills and knowledge to find an effective solution, and which tend to

be management issues. Adaptive problems are challenges for which there is no presently

known solution, and which demand experiments and new discoveries, as well as a change

in attitudes, values and behaviors. What makes adaptive change so risky and dangerous

for the leader is that those being asked to change "cannot see at the beginning of the

adaptive process that the new situation will be any better than the current condition.

What they do see clearly is the potential for loss."[5] Technical change is led by authorities

who apply current know-how to solve the problem, while adaptive change is worked out

by people with the problem as they discover new ways of responding to challenges. With

the uncertain outcomes of adaptive processes, and the potential for loss, leaders take great

risk in leading for change, so many choose to treat adaptive problems with technical

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[4] Ronald A. Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 13-14.

[5] Ibid.

solutions, which the authors point out as "the single most common source of leadership failure we've been able to identify."[6]

While the role of associate pastor comes with limits on formal authority in navigating a church through adaptive challenges, Ron Heifetz mentions three potential advantages to leading with limited authority: (1) having more latitude for creative deviance, (2) permission to focus on a single issue, and (3) the ability to be closer to frontline details, experiences, and information from the people.[7] While an associate pastor cannot initiate large-scale change initiatives, he/she can create a "holding environment" of smaller groups where people can begin to share stories, build trust, and identify what may be significant adaptive challenges.[8]

A church which directs attention, time, and energy to many technical challenges simultaneously has a diminished capacity to commit to a deliberate process for identifying adaptive challenges. A barrier to adaptive change at NPC is, first, a lack of capacity to understand the nature of adaptive challenges. NPC typically reacts to challenges by putting into the frame of a desired outcome. For example, to reverse negative attendance trends in worship the task was developed to create a worship service which would be more desirable and attractive to newcomers. The youth ministry has admitted to a pattern of saying "if only something would change, then youth would attend" with frustrating results. The assumptions lying beneath such responses reflect

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 188.

[8] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 108.

how NPC's culture reflects broader social culture that believes expert technical skills can address all challenges. Such established assumptions cause NPC to focus on the technical competencies of professional staff and put further pressure on existing structures, looking for increasing efficiency and effectiveness. The result is that NPC misses the adaptive work that the Holy Spirit is inviting it to discover. An example of this shift in imagination toward the adaptive is recognizing that increasing internal, attractional efforts will not get it to see that its transformation toward a missional life involves a move toward its neighbors and the communities in which NPC members live, work, and play. While significant barriers to engaging in new missional life exist, NPC has a great opportunity to do this adaptive work. It is made up of gifted people, has a rich theological heritage, and has demonstrated deep faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith and a reliance on God that are some of its primary resources to sustain a process of action and reflection, leading to significant learning about the local context and how to participate in God's future for the people in it. Before this can occur, NPC needs to understand other ways in which it is embedded in the wider cultural realities of its context. The next section looks at several of those.

Consequences of Modernity

The church in North America cannot underestimate the influence of modernity on its structures and how people connect to congregations. When discussing the ways in which modernity forms our ways of seeing the world and relating to one another, the philosopher, Charles Taylor uses the term "social imaginary". He views a social

imaginary as the central way social groups make sense of the world.[9] An example of a

social imaginary in the Western context is illustrated in how modernity has produced a

society in which the highest value is placed on personal independence.[10]

The concept of social imaginary applies to the ways societies and social systems

function, including congregations. To a great extent, the social imaginary of the church in

North American has been shaped more by the social imaginaries of modernity than the

gospel. When the church lived at the center of modern society, the social imaginaries of

modernity and the social practices of congregations where congruent with one another.

They functioned as one and the same story. But, as the church is disembedded from being

a part of the central story of modern society this creates a crisis of identity for churches.

This is because for a long period of time, churches assumed that the social imaginaries of

modernity, for example, the autonomy of the self, and the gospel where the same. In this

way, Christian imagination in the modern period actually became disconnected from its

own story in the Biblical tradition. As a result the narratives of Christian scripture have,

effectively, been forgotten and transformed into the social imaginaries of modern

societies. The resultant disembedding brings this deep crisis of identity.

Modernity has had a dehumanizing and colonizing effect on Western culture and

the church, so that the dominant metaphor for the church location at this point in late

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[9] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-2, 13-14, 185.

[10] Ibid., 150-152.

modernity is that of the Babylonian captivity as a covenant people in exile.[11] The people of God, formed by the Holy Spirit and as a sign, foretaste, and witness of the Kingdom of God, can and should recover ways of being and doing which subvert the dominant cultural patterns of exerting control though pervasive instrumental rationality, commodifying life as a part of a global market economy, living as fragmented expressive individuals, and focusing on a future with a suspicion of the past as obsolete. These colonizing forces upon the church in exile call for a distinctly Christian way of life with the vision of cultivating a Trinitarian community of discourse rooted in an eschatological imagination, shared covenant practices, and the sacred memory of God's covenant people.

At Northminster Presbyterian Church, spiritual formation has typically referred to the programmatic ministry of offering adult Christian education classes, or resourcing small group ministry. These classes tend to emphasize learning a right understanding of Christian faith and fellowship, without a particular emphasis on right action or mission. The Christian small group movement was "designed for a culture of individualism and self-actualization."[12] At the time when Maslow's hierarchy of needs was made popular, the human potential movement claimed that self-actualization was achieved by meeting personal deficiencies in physiology, safety, love, belonging, and esteem.[13] A therapeutic culture was taking shape which sought to find ultimate meaning in the self through self-

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[11] Alan Roxburgh, "Missional Engagement in North America," (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November, 2002).

[12] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 146-147.

[13] Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper, 1954).

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development and self-actualization. This perspective was embraced by churches as a means of gathering people in Bible study groups which centered on personal application and growth.

A missional church needs to understand the cultural forces which predispose people to see the church as an organization centered on the individualistic and consumerist imagination of modernity. If a church is to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God, the people of God must be formed as people who live for God and the other. The synoptic gospel narrative calls followers of Jesus to deny the self and to take up their crosses on a daily basis. North American Christianity has been permeated by a perspective termed "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" which sees God as secondary to the self, as a giver of rules, and as distant to individuals until such a time when God is needed for therapy and comfort in times of crisis.[14] The condition of many churches in the United States, particularly mainline denominations, is that members are largely biblically illiterate. This unfamiliarity with the basic narratives of Scripture leaves many Christians without the basic skills to interpret their lives in light of the sacred narratives of God's people. Many Christians are content with trite statements about a self-centered faith in a god of therapeutic spirituality.

Newbigin describes, "The ordinary Christian in the Western world who hears or reads the word 'God' does not immediate and inevitably think of the Triune Being – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He thinks of a supreme monad," shaped more by a combination of "Greek philosophy and Islamic theology, injected into Christendom

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[14] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

during the high middle ages."[15] That the church is infected with a certain vagueness of theology is an understatement. For many, God's being is separated from God's action, as people think of God abstractly. To think of God abstractly is to have little concept or expectation of God's activity and agency.

Branson explains that "spiritual formation is about attending to God, learning about God's activities and character, and participating in God's life and initiatives."[16] This activity is a corporate activity which takes place in groups, and which has a binding effect on the people to each other. However, a missional imagination of spiritual formation in groups rejects the preference for individualism, and fosters a corporate cultivation of Christian practices which aim to re-form a Trinitarian missional identity. Becoming a missional community means being willing to be formed by the Spirit, recovering sacred Christian practices that deepen abilities to interpret scripture and discern God's initiatives for action.

Elizabeth O'Connor describes that the development of the mission groups of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC and the conscious leadership decision that the groups would gather around mission rather than fellowship. "If the church was to find servant structures, the small groups had to be formed around focused and defined missions with each mission also committed to an inward journey of prayer, worship and study."[17] The mission groups of Church of the Saviour were not to be oriented solely

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[15] Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 27-28.

[16] Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 62.

[17] Elizabeth O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures* (Washington, DC: The Servant Leadership School, 1991), 20-24.

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around the inner journey of the self, but they were small communities who agreed to a set of inward practices and outward action intended to participate in God's calling to transform the community where they lived. They discovered that unless groups gather around mission, they would not become missional. The goal of Church of the Savior was not simply to begin mission projects, but to form a missional people.[18]

Theological Reflection in the Church

The source of theological reflection begins in God's self-revelation to the people of God over the course of history, and as recorded in the sacred narratives of the Old and New Testaments. In the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ we discover the source of God's gracious love and provision for his people for salvation and liberation. Theological reflection has resulted for centuries as communities interpret Scripture in light of their contexts. The Protestant Reformation brought about significant re-theologizing as reformers sought to reengage Scripture in the wake of medieval Catholicism and great social upheaval. As the rationalists of the Enlightenment sought to de-contextualize patterns of thought through a process of purification by human reason, the product in theology was the development of a systematic theology of formal descriptions of God constructed by reason and logic.[19] Pastoral training in theological seminaries has centered its curriculum in the study of the forms and application of systematic theology, with lesser emphasis on teaching skills needed to develop

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[18] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, xv.

[19] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 104, 109-116.

contextualized local theologies. A central thrust of this project is that pastoral leaders

need to develop skills in articulating local theologies which interpret God's activity to

local communities of faith. Christendom saw it sufficient that only pastors needed to be

professionally trained in theology. The late modern context requires a shared and

communal theological method. The people of God must learn to live in the narrative of

the Bible as it intersects with the narratives and contours of local contexts. As followers

of Jesus Christ it will be through attentiveness to scripture, through missional practices,

and awareness of contexts that theological praxis will occur.

Newbigin locates his missional theology in a robust Trinitarian framework which

provides an example of a contextualized theology.[20] "The fundamental belief is that God

has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit" and this means that we look at mission in

three dynamic and interrelated ways: proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, sharing the

life of the Son, bearing the witness to the Spirit.[21] Mission is the proclamation of God's

reign and kingship over all history, and that in a total and universal way, what was begun

at creation is moving towards completion and fulfillment. Mission is also recognizing the

presence of God and kingship of Jesus at work in the church in a limited, particular, and

contingent way. Mission as the movement of the Spirit is a recognition that mission is not

just something the church does. Mission is led by the Holy Spirit, and the church's task of

discernment is to be attentive to the "prevenience of the kingdom" as the Spirit "always

goes before the church on its missionary journey."[22] "Mission is not the action of the

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[20] Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 28.

[21] Ibid., 29.

church exerting its power—it's the action of God putting forth the power of his Spirit to bring the universal work of Christ for the salvation of the world nearer to its completion."[23] The church's witness is derived from the Spirit.

For Newbigin, the doctrine of election, which historically has been a distinctive theological emphasis of the Reformed tradition, is a key part of missional theology. In scripture, there is a pattern of God choosing "one to be a bearer of blessing for the many."[24] God's universal purpose of salvation has been accomplished through the choosing of particular people. In describing his own authority as a missionary of the gospel, Newbigin explains that with the community of believers, he has faith in Jesus, and that this Jesus is lord not only of a person, or a people, but over the whole world. Also, describing his own experience of election, he writes:

> I make this confession only because I have been laid hold of by Another and commissioned to do so. It is not primarily or essentially my decision. By ways that are mysterious to me, that I can only faintly trace, I have been laid hold of by one greater than I and led into a place where I must make this confession and where I find no way of making sense of my own life or of the life of the world except through being an obedient disciple of Jesus.[25]

Newbigin addresses the individualistic bent of modern western culture and he writes against individualistic convictions that see "salvation, liberation, or realization" as not related to the world of things and people. Instead, he offers, that the biblical vision for human life is to be in shared relationship with people and creatures. The "real self" is not

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[22] Ibid., 65.

[23] Ibid., 60-61.

[24] Ibid., 68.

[25] Ibid., 17.

to be found by looking within through self-actualization, but through identifying the right way to relate to the created order, as the saving purpose of God is to bring restoration. Just as God is relational within the Trinitarian Godhead, also human beings as created in God's image are created to be relational. Therefore, salvation is not merely individual, but an action that binds us together and restores for us the true mutual relationship to each other and the relationship to the world of nature. Even though Pelagianism is attractive because it emphasizes our responsibility for right action, an emphasis on election as community is a corrective for the modern western social imaginary which is centered on the individual, and freedom of choice.[26]

Calvin's theological heritage is a resource available in Presbyterian communities as a narrative theology that is embodied, communal, and eschatological.[27] For John Calvin, the doctrine of election and predestination was a way of emphasizing the initiative of God's grace as the sole source of salvation, without regard to human agency.[28] To the modern mind, the doctrines of election and predestination are abstracted to be about the one's own election by God to enjoy personal salvation and eternal life. Yet, an understanding of the social context of the development of Calvin's theology leads to a deeper sense of Reformed theology as first rooted in a context of a corporate community of dislocation, exile, and suffering. Geneva was a refuge for thousands of

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[26] Pelagianism "is the heresy which holds that humanity can take the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by their own efforts, apart from divine grace." Cross, F. L. and Livingstone, E. A., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1257.

[27] James W. McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 329.

[28] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans., Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.24.6.

people forced to flee France, especially between 1550 and 1560 when persecuted Huguenot families sought Geneva as the New Jerusalem, as a city of freedom which welcomed outsiders.[29] Calvin's concepts of church discipline, predestination, and Old Testament narratives of a God "trekking" with his people in the desert all provided pastoral comfort in times of uncertainty.[30] Predestination was developed as a local expression of theology grounded in Calvin's reading of Scripture, which provided Protestant churches a grasp of the continuity between the gospel they believed and for which they suffered, and the promises of God made from the beginning and through the ages.

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[29] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Museum Shines Light on Refugee Contribution to Reformation" http://www.unhcr.org/466975134.html (accessed July 31, 2012).

[30] Heiko A. Oberman, *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees* (Geneva, Switzerland Librairie Droz, 2009), 21.

PART TWO

THE PROJECT

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes of the methodologies incorporated into this project and

how, taken together, they were used to initiate praxis towards crossing boundaries into

neighborhoods and identifying adaptive work in the congregation. As Roxburgh and

Romanuk observe, "Congregations are organizations, and like every other organization

that has ever existed they form their own particular kind of culture."[1] In its most broad

definition, culture is "everything learned as a member of society"[2] or a social group.

Congregations as social systems have enormous levels of complexity and leaders who

understand change as a linear process will seek to employ solutions based on one's

knowledge, skill level, or employment of techniques. However, as Ervin Laszlo reflects,

"nothing happens in an unbroken and strictly linear sequence" and incremental changes

seldom have any lasting effect.[3] In order for change or missional innovation to occur in a

congregation, an environment must be created wherein members gain awareness and

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[1] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 21.

[2] Philip Carl Salzman, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2001), 71-74, 145.

[3] Ervin Laszlo, *The Systems View of the World* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996), 40-41.

understanding of issues, leading to evaluation and creating experiments, culminating in

a commitment to a new missional way of life.[4] Followers of Jesus Christ need to develop

interpretive skills to evaluate cultures and the organizational system of the congregation.

This is challenging because people are often not aware of the particular contours and

distinctive features of culture that give certain meaning to life. This is particularly true in

congregations, as "organizational culture shapes how we think about and see the world."[5]

The identification of adaptive challenges and changing the culture towards a

missional framework can only occur in a congregation when methods are used which

stimulate learning, deepen inquiry, and foster agency.[6] Pedagogical models must be

employed where learners care and have ownership of their own learning. Paolo Friere's

work of educating peasant populations in Brazil to learn social and political responsibility

began with the need for the learners to see themselves as the "subjects" of their own

learning.[7] Thomas Groome's "shared praxis" approach to "conation"[8] refers to learners as

"agent-subjects-in-relationship"[9] which engages people as full participants in the life of

the church as agent-subjects rather than dependent objects of their faith in the world. The

effect of learners having agency as the subjects of their own learning is profoundly

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[4] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 79-108.

[5] Ibid., 22.

[6] Salzman, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory,* 33.

[7] Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 3-4, 15, 99.

[8] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 27.

[9] Ibid., 18.

humanizing and energizing. This motivation is what is needed for followers of Jesus Christ to live into the challenging ambiguities of life in postmodernity, and amid discontinuous social change.

Action learning[10] and Appreciative Inquiry[11] are methodologies based in the theoretical frameworks of social construction and systems thinking, which invite agent-subject participants into an interpretive community of shared praxis which is the basis for discovering a practical theology.[12] In order to generate an awareness of the initiatives of God, I formed groups and invited them to participate in a twelve-week process of action learning and dwelling in Scripture. Through interviews using questions of Appreciative Inquiry at the beginning, middle, and end of the twelve weeks I sought to collect qualitative data to see if a change in language use would identify a change in attitudes, hopes or opinions.

Action Learning

Action learning is a methodology found to be a "powerful problem-solving tool that has the amazing capacity to simultaneously build successful leaders, teams and organizations."[13] Action learning can be used with groups to stimulate innovation and the identification of adaptive challenges by creating an environment for generative praxis.

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[10] Michael J. Marquardt, *Action Learning for Developing Leaders and Organizations: Principles, Strategies, and Cases* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009). 68. Marquardt, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, 16.

[11] Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 39.

[12] Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 22.

[13] Marquardt, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, 2, 19-20.

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Action learning places the ownership of the problem and structure of group life in the hands of the group.[14] Action learning is a tool not only for problem solving where no immediate answers are apparent, but it also is a tool for leadership development as it challenges participants to move beyond advocacy to a process of asking questions, planning action, and reflecting on that action.

Action learning consists of six components: a problem, an Action Learning group, a process of insightful questioning and reflective listening, an action taken on the problem, a commitment to learning and an action learning coach.[15] For action learning to truly be powerful and effective, all six elements must be in place, interweaving and reinforcing each other.[16] When an action learning group first meets, the coach shares the group norms and ground rules, which provide clear responsibilities and priorities. Action learning teams are invited into a generative environment that is tension between chaos, disequilibrium, and flexibility (elements such as diversity of membership, complex challenges, creative questions, and lack of familiarity with problem or context) and structure and clear expectations (elements such as real problems, accountability and responsibility, careful listening, testing, and action).[17] Action learning practitioners acknowledge that "the edge of chaos" is the place "where maximum creativity and

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[14] Marquardt, *Action Learning for Developing Leaders and Organizations: Principles, Strategies, and Cases*, 56-58.

[15] Marquardt, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, 2-4.

[16] Ibid., 5.

[17] Ibid., 7.

possibility exist and learning best occurs."[18] This is in congruence with systems

thinkers using new science who acknowledge that "equilibrium is death."[19] Also, Heifertz

and Linsky describe how adaptive challenges must be considered by those with the

problem in an environment with enough disequilibrium to motivate innovation.[20] To

effectively surf this wave of chaos, action learning seeks to avoid too much structure,

which could lead to rigidity and constrict innovation and the team's ability to adapt. At

the same time, enough structure is provided in the way of a framework and ground rules

so that disorder, lack of focus, fragmentation, and permeability to destructive inputs are

avoided.[21]

  The starting point of action learning is the problem, or challenge that is important,

urgent, and which has no existing solution. A learning group should be composed of four

to eight individuals who are committed, knowledgeable, familiar with the context of the

problem, and who represent a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Diversity is

important because any given person has certain mind-sets or assumptions which may

limit the scope of ideas they are able to generate. The key practices of action learning are

asking good questions and listening intently and reflectively as the group collectively

commits to learning new things and seeks to identity new pathways and solutions yet to

be discovered. Essential aspects and key motivators for action learning groups are the

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[18] Ibid.

[19] 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: Crown Business, 2000), 19-41.

[20] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 108.

[21] Marquardt, *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, 7.

expectations and empowerment for the group to reframe and understand the problem

for themselves, form experiments, take action, and learn from that action.[22] The role of

the action learning coach is to not participate in the process of action and refection, but to

keep the group focused on the learning and moving towards a solution to the problem by

paying attention to how they are interacting with each other.[23]

There are two main ground rules that govern the action learning process. The first

rule is that statements are only to be made in response to questions. This practice enables

group members to make the important transition from advocacy of a personal opinion or

conviction to genuine inquiry which allows for assumptions and biases to be challenged.

This practice transforms the dynamics of the group as the natural impulse to make

statements and judgments gives way to listening and reflecting. Balancing the number of

questions and the number of statements leads to dialogue, which is a proper balance

between advocating and inquiring. The second ground rule is that the action learning

coach has the power to intervene in the group discussion if things get off track. The coach

focuses their attention on helping the group learn, and making sure questioning is

happening, advocacy is avoided, and learning is progressing. Michael Marquardt has

much to say about the role of reflection and dialog in the learning process:

> The quiet time between questions and responses provides opportunities for group
> members to examine assumptions and to find common perspectives. For reflective
> inquiry to occur there must be space for people to stand back and to unfreeze their
> presuppositions and basic assumptions. Reflection does not come easily or
> naturally. In most group settings, attempts to create reflection fail. Reflective

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[22] Ibid., 3.

[23] Ibid., 12. Marquardt identifies seven stages in the life of an action learning group: formation of group, presentation of the problem, reframing the problem, determining goals, developing action strategies, taking action, and capturing learning.

inquiry generates mutual support for group members, as they need to listen intently to one another. It is the key to transformative learning… Dialogue is a special kind of communication in which listening and learning are prized above talking, persuading, and selling. In dialogue, there is a balance between advocacy and inquiry… Out of this sharing of knowledge emerge seeds of innovation, of some new and imaginative insights that may lead to unexpected but valuable ideas.[24]

Participants in action learning learn at three different levels: understanding something intellectually, applying a newly acquired skill, and experiencing an inner development that touches on beliefs and attitudes. Because of the opportunity for participants to experience "internal dissonance," action learning provides a framework where blind spots and weaknesses may be discovered in a dignified way, while at the same time discovering strengths.[25]

Appreciative Inquiry

A systems approach for leading missional change and innovation in a congregation, particularly as a leader with limited formal authority, calls for introducing slight modifications into the system. Inviting groups into a process of action and reflection around a specific problem does not guarantee a lasting effect on the system; however, *how* this is introduced does affect how people respond to trying something new. Qualitative research[26] can be used to collect data through interviews which produce useful texts and images, the meanings of which can be studied. An analysis of language, and shifts in language over time and experience, can provide an important perspective on

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[24] Ibid., 81-84.

[25] Ibid., 19-20.

[26] Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research,* 21, 465, 472.

the social constructions and imaginations of the group. "The language we use creates our reality." [27] A qualitative study of words used in interviews gives a glimpse of how social construction, or culture of the group, is shifting. Appreciative Inquiry is a helpful research tool, because it begins with asking questions that cause the participants to recall positive experiences and memories. "The 'reality' of an organization is defined by whatever participants think about, talk about, work on, dream about, or plan."[28]

For this project, I invited two focus groups to meet over a twelve week period of time. Using research questions of Appreciative Inquiry, I conducted interviews at the first meeting, to get baseline data, and then conducted interviews at the midpoint, and end of the time period. Because the interviews were a part of the experience of the group, it was important to begin by focusing on positive memories and hopes. As Branson describes, "Memories, perceptions, and hopes are shaped in the midst of research questions. Change, of one kind or another, begins with the very first questions."[29] As this project is about inviting congregation members into a process of action and reflection towards missional innovation, Appreciative Inquiry was used with the group to raise positive memories of church and neighborhood involvement along with the sharing of wishes for the future. [30] Appreciative Inquiry prompts the sharing of positive images, and these

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[27] Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 26.

[28] Ibid., 25.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Appreciative Inquiry is not typically an adequate tool for measuring shifts in the language house because it intentionally shapes the language around appreciative questions. Because I was looking for appreciative responses, the data is limited in its ability to identify shifts in language.

conversations elevate hope, compared to a concentration on gaps, failures, and frustrations.[31]

Dwelling in Scripture

In addition to the introduction of positive questions of Appreciative Inquiry, I also invited the action learning team to focus on the critical input of the Holy Spirit through the practices of prayer and dwelling in Scripture. The goal of this project is that a vital encounter with Scripture and a process of action and reflection through listening will increase the interpretive abilities of people to read the Bible and the context of their neighborhoods so that they may participate more fully and passionately in God's sending activity of the church into our communities. Using the workbook *Practicing Hospitality* as a basis and guide for the twelve week experience, the groups were invited on a weekly basis to read Luke 10:1-12 in a style of *lectio divina*.[32] Participants were asked to pray for the Spirit's illumination of the text, to read the text out loud in the group, and then to read the text silently to themselves, with attentiveness to where they stopped, or had questions of the text. Then in groups of two, they were encouraged to share their insights with a partner. To emphasize the important discipline of listening, participants were asked to share what their partner shared, and vice versa.

This practice of dwelling in the same text of Scripture is an important practice to discern what the Holy Spirit is actually saying to the group. Eugene Peterson writes,

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[31] Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 38.

[32] Alan J. Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide* (West Vancouver, BC: Roxburgh Missional Network, 2010).

"*Lectio divina* is not a methodical technique for reading the Bible. It is a cultivated, developed habit of *living* the text in Jesus' name. This is the way, the *only* way, that the Holy Scriptures become formative in the Christian Church and become salt and leaven in the world."[33] Because people usually bring assumptions and biases to the reading of texts based on their cultural perspective, a reading of a text over time creates space for questions to surface that allow the text to reveal our biases and assumptions. It creates a way for the text to read the social constructions of the group. James K. A. Smith, in explaining Jacque Derrida's line, "there is nothing outside the text," describes that there is no referent which is objectively understandable in the same way by all people. Interpretations are mediated though language, and interpreted for their meaning. Smith encourages a recovery the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* as the primary language lens by which we mediate our interpretation and understanding of the world. An important emphasis of Derrida's work is the role of interpretive communities which collaborate on interpretation of texts towards the discernment of true meaning.[34]

Introducing Missional Viruses into Church Systems

Another aspect of this project involves stimulating a process of diffusing learning through the church system of staff and leadership, rather than letting new missional experiments just exist in action reflection teams. This will be done through the sharing of stories, particularly as I meet regularly with the focus group of the pastoral staff. As

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[33] Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 116.

[34] James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 31-58.

learning happens in the groups, and as qualitative data is analyzed, feedback to the staff

and session and leadership teams will be shared with an invitation to share in future

praxis.

Explanation of the Steps of the Project

The following sections contain a detailed description and explanation of the steps

taken in implementing this research project. There were three phases in the research

involving the group members: recruitment, training, interviews, and continued participant

observation of group individuals as they interacted with African refugees in the months

that followed. The interview questions drawn on Appreciative Inquiry are described.

Also, the process of participant observation with a focus group of pastoral colleagues is

explained.

The Formation of Hospitality Action Learning Focus Groups

For many years NPC has used the six weeks of Lent, from Ash Wednesday until

Easter, to invite new groups to temporarily form for a church wide study of a book or

theme. At the same time the Lenten group program proceeded with training leaders and

recruiting participants from the congregation, this project plan was being designed and

implemented. As the director of small group ministry and adult education, it was essential

that I supported the Lenten groups and their leaders. While it would be ideal to form a

project to involve more groups at the church and have a larger level of participation, the

time necessary to plan and execute such a project was not possible. Focus group

participants were selected based on a pool of people who would not be involved with the

Lenten groups, or who had already completed the same Lenten study in a previous group experience. As I worked to develop a feasible project plan alongside other church programs, it was important to routinely check in with the Senior Pastor to keep him updated.

The initial plan involved two focus groups to meet in people's homes. To test whether participants' reflections would be shaped in some way by the context in which they lived and met, the plan called for one group of people who lived in closer proximity to the NPC campus, and one group composed of people who lived in the northern suburbs. Appointments with several people led to a discovery of willingness and availability to be trained as action learning coaches, and to host focus group meetings in their homes.

In late February, after identifying individuals who would coach and host the focus groups in their homes, email invitations were sent to prospective participants. Focus Group A invitations were sent to email address of members in two zip codes in the northern suburbs. Focus Group B invitations were sent to members in three zip codes closest to the NPC campus. Email invitations went to twenty-one people for Focus Group A, and forty-one people for Focus Group B. The email was an invitation to participate in a doctoral research project and to learn more about missional leadership at NPC. Emphasis was placed on the time commitment of meeting for twelve weeks, and that the groups would be invited to practice hospitality.

Focus Group A

Before sending the invitation email, I asked a married couple to host the group meetings for Focus Group A in their home in the suburbs, with the female spouse to serve at the action learning coach.[35] They were very enthusiastic. They began to follow up with some people they knew who had received emails in the area. We met together for training regarding the characteristics of action learning, how to coach the group, and how to use the Hospitality Workbook for group discussions and dwelling in the Word. More people responded to the email invitations from the two northern zip codes than the three zips codes nearest the church. The group eventually got started with six participants, including the host couple. Everyone in the group was married, with two couples participating. One couple in their fifties did not have children, while one couple in their forties had three children ranging from preschool to high school. One married woman participant in her early fifties served on the church staff and has a college age daughter. Another married woman in her late sixties was retired and had grown children. This Focus Group A decided to meet weekly on Wednesday nights at the home of the host. Their first meeting was in mid-March and I was present with them for introductions, an orientation, and to interview them. I later met with them for a second interview at the end of April, and a final interview at the end of June. Since one couple was not able to meet for the final interview, I interviewed them at their home mid-August.

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[35] I have chosen to not use the names of the group participants in this project.

Focus Group B

Three people were identified as possible coaches for Focus Group B. After hearing about the project and coach role, the first candidate declined to coach, but was willing to participate in the group. The second candidate was enthusiastic about the project, and in spite of many other commitments at the church, she agreed to be a coach. She was present for the first meeting and the initial interview, but after other obligations rose in importance, she was forced to drop out of the group. This led to the third candidate who had already agreed to be in the group with her husband, also agreeing to take over as coach. In spite of a larger pool of potential group members, there was a weaker response to participation in Group B than Group A. No one who wanted to be in the group agreed to offer their home (one home had suffered storm damage) so they secured a meeting space on the church campus on Sunday afternoons following the last Sunday worship service. Also, one person who had wanted to be in suburb group, but who could not meet on Wednesday night asked to participate in the Sunday group. I agreed to this since I was having trouble finding a critical mass for Group B, and eventually this woman also invited another woman from the suburbs to participate. While I received much encouragement for my project from people in response to the invitation, people who declined cited too much busyness, conflicting priorities, and inability to commit for that length of time on a weekly basis. These responses reflect a general frenzy of activity and pace of life common to western culture, as well as perhaps an expectation of shorter participation commitments to particular episodic church programs.

It took a couple weeks for the group to coalesce into its final form. At the time of the first orientation and interview, there were three women in attendance: A widowed woman in her 60s who agreed to host and coach, but later had to resign; a married woman in her 60s with grown children, a married woman in her 50s with a teenage daughter, whose husband would be participating, and who could not be present for the initial interview. These three women were all trained with the coaching methodology and how to work with the Hospitality Workbook for group discussion and dwelling in Scripture. As others agreed to be in the group, they were met with separately for orientation and interviews. After the group had begun meeting, the previously mentioned husband, and a woman who lived in the northern suburb who is married with adult children were interview together. A couple weeks later, I met the final woman who had been invited to the group, a widowed woman in her early 80s who lived in the northern suburb. The entire assembled group was together for the second interview at the end of June, and the final interview in mid-August.

Initial Meetings

At the initial meeting with each of the focus groups, expectations were communicated about how they would be spending the next twelve weeks together. They were all taught the framework and methodology of Action Learning, including the six essential components. An emphasis was placed on the importance of asking questions, listening carefully, responding only to questions that were asked, and to avoiding advocating for specific positions which short circuited the process of asking questions and listening. While the groups were going to be given a problem to begin their action

learning work around, I stressed the importance of reframing the problem in a way that

they understood and was actionable by members in the group. Each participant was given

a copy of the Practicing Hospitality workbook which is divided into twelve weeks of

meeting plans.[36] I used the workbook to introduce the idea of hospitality as an ancient

Christian practice with roots in Scripture. The first activity of each meeting would be

dwelling in Luke 10:1-12 together. As a group, they would be dwelling in this text for the

duration of their group life, The critical practice of dwelling in scripture would be

comprised of praying and reading the text out loud in the group. Next, individuals would

read and reflect silently in a *lectio divina* style, paying attention to the words or phrases

that God seemed to bring to attention, or noticing questions that came from the text.

Then, participants would get in groups of two or three to listen to the reflections of

others. In the large group, participants would not share their own reflections, but the

reflections of others whom they had listened to attentively. I instructed the focus groups

that over the next twelve weeks, they would be challenged by the questions in the

workbooks to look at their neighborhoods differently, and to engage in the activity of

practicing of hospitality. I emphasized to the focus groups the importance of using action

learning, taking ownership of the problem, and deciding how they were going to take

action, practice hospitality, and learn from it. I also told them to use the workbook as a

tool to contribute to their learning. After I finished sharing about action learning and the

workbook, I then presented the problem to the focus groups. I asked them to find out,

"What is God up to in the neighborhoods and communities where you live and how

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[36] Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide*.

might you join with God?"[37] They were encouraged as a group to begin the action learning process by reframing the question in a way they would understand and would prompt them to action.

<div align="center">Interview questions</div>

The interview questions followed the basic framework of questions used in Appreciative Inquiry (AI). While I was not going to use the entire process of AI to lead change in the congregation, Branson points out that "the theory of simultaneity teaches that change is concurrent with research."[38] Simply asking the questions of a group has a function in changing the group. AI questions typically are three main types. An introductory question is a large one, meant to bring forth memories of best experiences. Next, questions are asked that raise the most important values. Last, a futures question is raised in the form of asking for three wishes. For this project (see figure 1), I chose to pair the appreciative and value questions about the church with questions about the neighborhood. The futures question asked for wishes that could apply to either the church or the neighborhood. For the group interviews, I asked all three sets of questions at the first and last meetings. For the midpoint interview, I used the conversation to check in on the process of action learning, and I asked only the futures question.

Focus Group Interview Questions

Introductory Appreciative Questions:

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[37] Ibid., 4. This question is asked in the "Preparing" section at the beginning of the workbook.

[38] Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change*, 76.

1A.   Reflecting on your entire experience at Northminster Presbyterian Church, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?
1B.   Reflecting on your entire experience of the neighborhood in which you live, remember a time when you felt the most engaged, alive and motivated. Who was involved? What did you do? How did it feel? What happened?

Values Questions:
2B.   What do you value most about Northminster Presbyterian Church?
2B.   What do you value most about your neighborhood?

Futures Question:
3.   If you could wish for three things in the future related to your church or your neighborhood, what would they be?

Participant Observation: Group Members Following the Meetings

As already stated, action learning depends on some critical components, rules, and behaviors in order to create the right team environment for learning and innovation. Most action learning research has been done in the context of profit and non-profit organizations where team members have been employed by the organization. In order to take into the account the possibility that these volunteer action learning groups lacked motivation to engage the requested actions, I planned to continue to observe and interview group participants for several months following the conclusion of the twelve-weeks. Because this project is interested in the ways that missional innovation can occur in the congregation, additional time and reflection is important so that praxis and learning are continuous.

Participant Observation: Pastoral Leadership Focus Group

As I was forming the Hospitality Action Learning Focus Groups, I was also using participant observation to relate my research process and progress with pastoral

colleagues. Because it was necessary to coordinate my research alongside other church programs, these were useful times to check in and hear their thoughts. In 2011, we had scheduled three one-day or two-day retreats when the four pastors would exclusively block out time together to discuss ministries. I used these meetings to share what I was researching and to ask questions relating to missional leadership, church programs, and neighborhood interaction. The meetings were in January, April, and August.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT ACTIONS AND DATA

This chapter narrates the qualitative data collected through the interviews with the

focus groups, and through ongoing participant observation. Highlights of the

conversations will be shared and compared by interview number and each question. A

summary of observations as well as a description of significant themes that arose from

the data are described.

Qualitative Data Collection

Interview questions asked at the beginning and end of the groups were uniform. A

"fixed question, open response"[1] technique allowed for systemization of the data

collection. A weakness of this technique is that more lengthy responses which may

provide a greater depth of quality information can be lost. Since this project was not only

assessing how the use of language might be affected by this process, but also the process

of action learning itself, follow-up questions were asked about group experiences and

learning team actions. For the focus group with the pastoral staff, set questions were not

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[1] Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 12-13.

developed, in favor of attentiveness to conversations regarding mission, leadership and the local context.

First interview: Appreciative Question

Focus Group A had many examples of positive church engagements, but they struggled to identify clear appreciative memories from their neighborhoods. Church involvement was described as participating in church programs, activities, mission trips and Bible studies. These church memories were significant as they represented entry points to church life, provided close–knit connections to fellowship with others in the church, and elicited positive sentiments. One person described how energizing it was to welcome new members and hear people share how they had become involved in church life. When prompted for positive memories of their neighborhood, some responded by describing present hostilities or deficits of the suburban neighborhoods where they lived. Several described positive engagements with specific neighbors that made them feel better about living in the neighborhood. One man described how he felt engaged as he began to start a dialog in the midst of a contentious homeowners' association meeting. Another person living in an apartment complex described the positive experience of developing a friendship with a neighbor, and was disappointed when they moved away.

Focus Group B shared positive memories mostly of having provided leadership in the church. These positive ministry experiences included outreach to those in need, serving on technical ministry teams, teaching study classes, and working with others to perform a task. Similar to Group A, there were fewer stories of neighborhood connection, with some describing virtually no connection to people in the neighborhood. One person

shared a time about ten years before where the homeowner association had come together to prevent an unmentioned negative variable entering the neighborhood. Another described starting a book club more than ten years previously that was a diverse and fun group. In describing a lack of connection to the neighborhood, one person shared that they viewed their workplace more as a neighborhood than the place she lived. Another person explained that she did not have a lot in common with her neighbors, and when busy with church activities she had not been able to participate in activities with neighbors.

First Interview: Values Question

When asked about values, Group A almost overwhelmingly described positive feelings of church life related to encountering friendly people, being welcomed and accepted, and developing relationships with others. One person particularly valued the healthy relationships among leaders and the lack of conflict in the church. In describing what they valued about the neighborhood, all were distant from active engagement with neighbors. One person described valuing neighborhood social events even though they did not participate in them. Some used words like safety, quiet, and friendliness.

Group B reported valuing church as a family and caring community. One person described the high value contained in the church vision statement as "action in Jesus Christ for the glory of God." A couple people valued aspects of the worship services, including classical music and an emphasis on the Bible and biblical preaching. Another person valued the opportunities to be involved in different ministries, participating with others in activities they would not do on their own.

For those in Group B living closer to the center of town, proximity to church and workplace was a value not shared by others who lived in the suburbs. Several neighbors expressed appreciation for the beauty of their neighborhood, one as a great place for walks, and another with a commitment to limiting environmental impact on desert vegetation and animals. Group B also shared a value that their neighborhoods were safe places to live. One person had moved from a central part of the city to the suburb where she was close to her daughter's family, because the home that she had lived in for nearly thirty years had been repeatedly broken into. Though she had had good friends in the old neighborhood, many had become disabled, sick, or had moved.

First Interview: Futures Question

Several people in Group A desired more people (including people in their neighborhood) would be drawn to attend church at NPC through outreach. One wish for the church was for greater blending of the NPC worship services in the morning with the two immigrant fellowships. Other wishes for the church included an expanded outreach to working poor who live in the apartments near the NPC campus. One person had a wish for more peers (parents in their forties) both in the church and the neighborhood to connect and relate to. For a person on the church staff, one of the wishes was for a slower pace, because it sometimes felt like "relationships don't sit and gel." Regarding the neighborhood, one wish was for physical spaces that were less harsh (no cactus or rough aggregate street surfaces) and more inviting for neighborhood interaction. Another thought that the neighborhood would be a friendlier place to live if the homeowners'

association would "lighten up." One person said it would be nice if people looked up and said hello, and to "know people, so it feels like a neighborhood."

Group B had a stronger desire for closer relationships with people in the church than with people in in the neighborhood. Greater participation in Bible studies and commitment to scripture reading as a way of life was also desires. One person expressed wishes both that people in her suburban neighborhood went to "my church," and that she could live close to church and work so that she would not spend so much time in traffic.

Second interview: Discussing Action Learning and Hospitality

At the midpoint of the group, I met with each of the groups to check in the process of action learning, and to ask the futures question again, to see if the process of action and refection with dwelling in scripture would have any effect on hopes and dreams. Action Learning provides the group the opportunity to reframe the problem in terms that are understandable and allow for ownership in working towards learning.

Group A struggled with the problem as I had presented it to them, and in the process of reading Luke 10:1-12, they had begun to reassess the meaning of hospitality. They reported, "Our first reaction in discussing hospitality was to open our home and invite people to a meal." One person said, "We don't know what biblical hospitality is versus ordinary formal Western hospitality." They noticed in Luke 10 that inviting people to dinner was not what the disciples were told to do, but rather the announcement of peace. Group A interpreted that announcing shalom had to do with meeting fearful people in a culture of violence and danger, and extending peace and security to these people. One person explained, "I work in a dysfunctional and harsh work environment, and I

understand offering hospitality as a call to be peaceful in spite of the environment.

Extending peace is more than an abstraction." Another person reported, "We've

redefined that a stranger is everyone we come into contact with. To extend peace, the first

thing to do with people is to begin with listening to them, and opening a door to a

relationship. To provide security is to extend kindness as a safe person in a safe place."

Group A experienced tension between action learning and what the discussion

questions in the workbook were asking them to consider, particularly with inviting people

in their community to share a meal in their homes.[2] Given their reflections, the idea of

sharing a meal with strangers was not seen as biblical hospitality. For a businessman,

sharing meals with others represented a manipulative and coercive selling of products.

For another, it seemed strange to invite a neighbor over for a meal when they struggled to

be able to share meals at home with the family. One person shared a childhood memory

of a grandmother who had used food to offer genuine hospitality. The group shared the

belief that sharing food had evolved in present-day culture. Group A redefined the action

learning problem to ask, "How do we extend shalom (peace/security of God) to places

where we live and work?"

During this interview, I challenged Group A to reconsider this direction. I

explained that the church was not only located at the church campus where we met for

worship, but among the people who lived in neighborhoods. While Luke 10 is not a

method for how to invite people over for a meal, it does deal with some significant

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[2] Roxburgh, *Practicing Hospitality: A Study Guide*, 11. The group discussion questions for week six, regarding practicing hospitality in the neighborhood are: "Where is God leading you to pray for people in your community? Who would you like to invite for a meal? Why do you want to invite them? How will you invite this person(s) to supper in the next two weeks? How might you have welcoming, listening conversations with them? Might some of you do this together?"

barriers that those sent by Jesus would need to cross. Those from the Hebrew tradition would have been scandalized, let alone uncomfortable as they were told to journey through Samaria, seek shelter among unclean Samarians, and eat any unclean food given to them. My challenge was rejected. They were unwilling to invite neighbors to share a meal because of their insistence that such a gesture would be seen as suspicious, manipulative, and inauthentic. They reasoned they had a better understanding of biblical hospitality, which did not necessitate a meal.

Group B did not seek to reframe the action learning problem as presented. They were surprised to continue finding new observations from the Luke 10 text. One person wondered, "Why are we reading this text since this passage is not about hospitality?" They had noticed a disconnect between the meaning of how they were coming to understand the text, and what they were being asked to do. While the text was about the disciples receiving the hospitality of strangers, the group was being challenged by the workbook to invite people over for a meal. Many in the group assumed that inviting someone over for a meal would involve someone they already had a relationship with, not a total stranger that simply lived in close proximity to them. One person said, "It is not my job to create a relationship where one didn't already exist." Group B was not opposed to sharing meals with others, but they were concerned about sharing meals with strangers. As with the previous group, I challenged these group members to extend hospitality to neighbors they could cross boundaries to encounter. I reiterated the concept that the church was not merely located at NPC, and that the neighborhoods where they lived were an important mission field where God is as work.

Second Interview: Futures Question

The second interview of Group A occurred shortly after Easter, and many in the group were excited about Easter worship. One person again wished people from the neighborhood would attend NPC. They had noticed an increased level of energy and expectation that they wished could be felt the fifty-one other weeks of the year. One person said that they wanted to be a person who is "peace giving and healing" not necessarily in the neighborhood where she lived. She explained, "People in this [suburban] neighborhood feel secure. People at work are in a state of unease." When I asked about how this was possible, she explained that most people in her neighborhood where they rented a house were retired. She observed that the neighbors knew each other very well, engaged socially, and cared for each other sacrificially. The neighbors were even encouraging the couple to purchase one of the homes so that they would become permanent residents of the neighborhood. In her work as a nurse in a hospital, relations were strained among nurses and doctors, with low levels of encouragement and support, and high levels of stress and suspicion. With such low-morale, she thought she could have a healing impact in her workplace than in her neighborhood of perceived stability. She shared ways she had brought food to workstations, gone out to lunch with co-workers, and responded kindly when she had negative encounters with co-workers.

Another person reflected personally that she wanted to "be quieter" and "to listen better" and "stop caring about my own ideas" so that people can "feel more open with me." Someone else described a wish to be able to discern his identity as a parent and neighbor apart from the identity solely derived from career. For Group A, wishes about

the church continued to be about desired increased in growth and attendance. Wishes about the neighborhood where stated more personally as having the potential to impact the lives of others, without knowing precisely how to do so.

Group B repeated wishes for increased participation in church programs, Bible studies, and for others to be drawn to God through the church. The group agreed they wanted to form more bonds of care and fellowship with others in their neighborhood. One person recalled a meeting at their condominium complex with a potluck lunch, and how more people came than usual, with the wish that that could happen more often and more naturally. The group identified a challenge in meeting people in the neighborhood in that they rarely saw people outside in order to even meet them.

Third interview: Appreciative Question

As the groups gathered for the final time I asked each of the interview questions again. Group A's appreciative responses regarding the church still brought memories of personally fulfilling programs, studies, and mission trips. One person shared that this group experience was better than other church programs previously encountered, because the action learning group was "most real with true-to-life kinds of activity." Others agreed that there was much more integration with the rest of life, providing a much richer experience and depth of reflection. No new deeply significant engagements with neighbors were reported. Group A continued to be less engaged in their neighborhoods than in the workplace and the church.

Group B's appreciative memories of the church were consistent with the first meeting. In describing positive memories of the neighborhood, some expressed honestly

that they just did not encounter the neighborhood, and had very little to say about it.

Two people shared neighborhood experiences that had occurred since the start of the group. One evening, when the electricity had gone out of one couple's condo complex, they had a chance to see and talk to nearly all of their neighbors. As it was too hot to stay indoors, people were walking around or sitting on their porches, which was out of character for the complex. "It's interesting that if you turn off the electricity, we lose all the things (air conditioning, television, lights, and computers) that take us away from each other." Another person described the discovery of a murdered young Latino man who had been abandoned in the street near her home. In the days that followed, the family of the deceased erected a memorial shrine. She was worried about the potential for a negative reaction of the neighbors to this family. As an expression of hospitality to the family, she introduced herself, pointed out her home to them, and invited them to come over for a visit. While they did not visit in her home, she offered to pray with them and the family was grateful for her kindness. She saw her neighborhood differently than before. She observed, "There were some [neighbors] who I have viewed in the past as not being at all caring. I now see them responding and caring about the needs of others. Others, who I would expect empathy from, I did not see that. Some were very fearful. They can relate to the [natural wildlife] who are in the neighborhood, but not the people."

Third Interview: Values Question

Group A's reflection on the values of the church were centered on what they perceived to be a friendly, warm, secure, open and welcoming place with healthy relationships. There was agreement that joy was a shared feeling at NPC, and that people

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involved in various ministries were eager to talk about God's activity, celebrating good things happening. In discussing values of the neighborhood, characteristics were offered that did not include engagement with the community. While one person observed that many in the neighborhood were sacrificial in their care for others, this person had not personally been. There was criticism to how I asked the question, with the comment that the question assumed neighborhood was a geographical area in proximity to where one lives. One person said, "Your physical neighborhood may not be your real neighborhood relationally." Several agreed that their workplace (the church for one person) was where they spent most of their time, and that their neighbors were their colleagues. Others shared that they valued some "superficial things" of life in the suburbs such as privacy, quiet, "a feeling of general safety," good schools with "not a lot of drugs or negative peer pressure." They were grateful for what they perceived as strong parents and school administrators who create a school environment that "feels more protected." While one person grew up in a poorer area of the city, where they were "always struggling for money," the suburb did not have the same variables for youth to get into trouble.

Several of Group B's reflections about values about the church were repeated. The general positivity and creativity of the pastors, staff, and congregation was highlighted. One person mentioned that they valued new outreach initiatives, and also the developing relationships with the two immigrant communities. Group B valued the safety and security that their neighborhood offered most of all. One person expressed guilt not say she valuing people in the neighborhood. She continued, "We choose all this security because of all of what has developed around us," referring to increased crime in the city.

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The woman who had encountered the family of the slain young man said, "I can't say my community is safe if bodies are being dumped."

Third Interview: Futures Question

Group A shared some new wishes in their last meeting. One wish was the hope that others could experience and find a group experience that both led to the development of quality relationships in the group, but also pressed the participants to integrate the learning and discussion with real life activity and intentional actions. A couple people wished they could replicate the experience for others, but they were not sure how. One person described how she personally wished to maintain the awareness that "biblical hospitality is an attitude, not a program or marketing tool." A couple of people expressed wishes that people in the neighborhood were less militant about homeowner covenants and more neighborly.

Group B concluded with many of the same wishes as previously shared regarding the desire for more people to be involved with church programs and classes, and that people would find God though the ministry of the church. A new wish surfaced from one who sees a conflict between neighbors and students who go to a number of schools which surround the neighborhood. She felt that if neighbors could engage more with these schools, that a lot of fears of the students could be alleviated.

Third Interview: Discussing Action Learning and Hospitality

To conclude the interviews, I asked the focus groups to reflect on their experience of the action learning process and their learning. Group A described that the first problem

they encountered was defining the problem, because there was apprehension about what was expected of them to do. In the orientation, I told the groups to own the action learning process, to make the problem their own, and to follow the workbook. When the workbook seemed to contradict where they sensed their action learning was leading them, they felt anxious about if they were actually going to be helping with this project. One person said, "Once we were able to release that expectation upon us, we were much freer to explore and redefine and grow in ourselves. I remember a community-sigh-of-relief when we realized that we didn't need to do what was preconceived in the workbook." The group shared that biblical hospitality was much better understood as extending safety, security and well-being to others as "people of peace." One person said, "We began to reject the idea of inviting someone to your house as a first step. We came to a consensus that in our culture, that would be too much." This highly contrived activity was very counter to "what we would do in this society." The group realized that they lived by a profoundly different set of practices than those shaped by the Biblical imagination in Luke 10.

When asked if action learning activities were intentional experiments, the group responded that actions individual reactions to interactions with others. Others explained that interactions with others became opportunities to "inject peace" in an intentional way in response to natural events. The group shared a sense that their attitudes had shifted in relating to other people and a desire to be much more relationally generous. One said, "I did not have a planned experiment, but my actions came as I was having the realization that I was acting a certain way with people because my attitude had shifted." Examples

were given where group members noticed that they chose to be present to others as people of healing and peace. Some reported noticing that they listened better and were more attentive to people and situations around them. In workplace environments, some participants reported being more open in talking about their faith as motivation for how they approach their work. One person described interactions in her family, while the tendency would be to be more judgmental and directive toward others, injecting peace meant listening and honoring the dignity of the other. One situation arose for one participant who discovered that there was one sandwich left for two people in line. She bought the sandwich and offered to share it with the other person, which resulted in an opportunity for a brief conversation with a stranger. Other similar unplanned actions occurred in parking lots, stores, and workplaces.

Since the group had rejected the premise of inviting neighbors over for a meal that was the central action of the workbook, they were concerned that they had not "done the project they were supposed to do" and had not fulfilled their responsibility in meeting the expectations of their pastor. All guilt aside, the group believed that they had discovered a solution to the problem they had reframed. They reported that they experienced a big change in attitude. As one person said, "To change an attitude with a program would not have been authentic." They genuinely believed that the actions they were taking in response to their ordinary lives were significant and life-changing.

Group B did not have the same experience of reframing the action learning problem, and about half the group carried out experiments of inviting people they nominally knew from the neighborhood over for a meal. One person liked the challenge

from the workbook to not use the practice of hospitality to talk about church. She said, "It's cool to think in terms that God is already there [in the neighborhood]. Not, 'God is on my side,' but, me asking, 'Am I on God's side, joining with him?'" She continued, "I asked my husband, 'Who do you want to have over?' And it happened! We were able to relax and enjoy being together." One person experienced a challenge to the common assumption that "we need to have things in order to offer hospitality." She reflected on welcoming the family of the slain young man and praying for them was "not a matter of having the house in order, but my spirit in order." Practicing a true spirit of hospitality was not about food but about the interaction with people. She continued,

> Where would I find myself in this story [of the Bible] today? Recall the Samaritan woman at the well and the exchange (John 4:1-41). She was asked by Jesus for help getting water. They had an interaction. She received more than she gave, and she shared it with the whole community. I have a greater sense of awareness of my role in the community as one open to the Spirit in my role as a Christian.

Pastoral Leadership Focus Group

As the research project was developing in design and implementation, I wanted to share progress with my three pastoral colleagues. In the midst of busy schedules, sabbatical plans, mission trips, and summer vacations, the four pastors had planned to gather for three retreats together covering the time this research project. I used these retreats to discuss the content of the research, to listen to their feedback, and to obtain the necessary margin to carry out the groups along the periphery of church life.

For several years, I had been sharing books, articles, and conversations with my colleagues about the missional church, postmodern ministry, and crossing boundaries into the neighborhood. On one occasion, I had shared a chapter from a book which was a

theological reflection on the call to the church to see itself embedded in the local

community and to participate in the life of neighborhoods as an incarnational witness.[3]

Over breakfast at a café, we discussed the chapter, and conversation turned to our own

activities in our neighborhoods. One of the immediate reactions of from one colleague

was a critique that this felt like an accusation of something the church "ought" to be

doing, but was not. He felt a sense of guilt, and said, "This is not freeing." Another

colleague mentioned that in spite of having a newly remodeled back yard, he had

purposely put a table and chairs on the front porch, so that he could eat breakfast and

witness the activity of the neighborhood each morning. This brought about a memory of

the first colleague's father saying, "Our country changed when we started putting back

porches on houses instead of front ones." I shared an account of trimming a disabled

neighbor's bushes, and how that simple act had the effect on me of having greater

ownership of the neighborhood than I previously had. The third colleague shared how

much he was struck about the discussion of the incarnation. He said, "When I think of the

Incarnation, I think about body, but not so much about [Jesus] living in a particular place.

It's interesting to think that the person through whom all places were created now lives in

one of them."

For the first retreat, I shared the preliminary framework of having two focus

groups crossing boundaries into the neighborhood, practicing hospitality. I explained that

this was a part of the learning in the Missional Leadership Cohort. Missional leadership

in congregations needs to take into account the church as an adaptive system, where

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[3] Simon Carey Holt, *God Next Door: Spirituality and Mission in the Neighbourhood* (Brunswick East, Australia: Acorn Press, 2007), 75-94.

change does not occur in a linear fashion. This generated much conversation, with positive affirmations of crossing boundaries, and connecting with neighbors. One of the colleagues then offered a critique of non-linear processes. "Jesus had a linear plan in his life with his disciples. I sense in the missional conversation a bias against church organizations, and towards individualization and the life of faith. I absolutely have an end in mind; to grow disciples for kingdom impact." Another colleague replied, "The missional movement has much more emphasis on the church scattered as opposed to the church gathered. You don't get rid of the gathered, but the purpose of the gathering has changed. Worship is seen as a preparation for being scattered." At the time of this conversation, NPC had formed a number of groups to read a book about mainline evangelism and the importance for Christians to revive a passion and willingness to invite people to participate in worship and church activities.[4] Conversation moved to an appreciation for the book's approach and one colleague commended the author as, "artful in the way she is honest about the struggles of churches; with a passion for the local congregation that I find missing in other missional writers."

Two days following the first retreat, the shooting that was mentioned in Chapter One occurred. This violent act had a traumatic effect on the congregation and leaders, resulting in feelings of grief and sadness. Counselors from the denominational disaster assistance organization came on sight, and warned the staff against "business as usual," and that the congregation may experience a loss of energy due to the shared traumatic

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[4] Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008).

stress. Two months after that, the African refugee fellowship asked for worship space, and the Session approved the rent-free arrangement.

Three months later, we met for another retreat. At the time, NPC was in the midst of the congregational book study with about 170 people participating in small discussion groups. The focus groups had just been formed, so I did not have any data or learning to share with my colleagues at the time. The group discussions that two of my colleagues were involved in were discussed very positively, particularly as they and group members were consistent in an intentional activity of prayer. While there was excitement and energy around the prayer groups, there was also concern that people would see this program as "just a Lent thing" and not continue actively participating past Lent. In discussing the role of church programs, one colleague asked, "What would it look like for the four of us to take intentional steps to do less programmatic leading, and instead gave energy to apprenticing new leaders who we would mentor?" There was a sense that continually offering programs leaves people continually asking for a next program for them to participate in so that they may consume it and have their needs met.

After the summer past, we met once more for a retreat. At this point, I had gathered data from the focus groups, and I was able to share some stories and perspectives that I had. I told of the process of the groups, and of the way that group participants though Action Learning, and the dwelling in Luke 10:1-12 had led to a certain amount of increased awareness and attentiveness to their interactions with others and how they were to extend peace to these situations. I told the story of the person encountering the family of the slain young man in her neighborhood and the impact that

encounter had on the person. One colleague was impressed with hearing this and was interested if I could not only offer feedback to the Session, but also see if this would be something to invite other groups to participate in. He was particularly interested in whether Dwelling in the Word or Action Learning could be taught to the Session or useful in other ways at NPC.

In discussing how I was noticing a certain level of fear among focus group participants to engage in acts of hospitality, another colleague told a story about a neighborhood in Tucson. In this particular neighborhood crime had increased, but there were middle and upper-middle class people who were raised there, but refused to move away, staking a claim to the neighborhood they loved and committing to raise their children there. He explained that this runs counter to the ways most people make decisions about where to live. We then each shared why we chose to live in the homes and neighborhoods where we lived. Reasons given for the neighborhoods chosen to live in included quality of schools, affordability, close to traffic arteries, and close to where a spouse grew up. One colleague lamented about his lack of connection to his neighbors, and he told the story about how he missed the only neighborhood outdoor gathering of the year because he had travelled to San Diego to participate in a Moving Back into the Neighborhood conference. We concluded this discussion as one colleague discussed the nature of how NPC is a citywide church, yet it exists in a particular neighborhood. He wondered about exploring ideas of getting NPC members to meet other members who live in their neighborhoods, and though he was not a parish system advocate, he wondered about some kind of parish system of connecting church members together.

These conversations reveal pastoral leaders who care deeply about the church and shepherding followers of Jesus. For the most part, pastors at NPC have had the roles of leading programs and projects for church members to participate. There is awareness that continually offering programs will not be an adequate way of training leaders for the church. Similar to the imaginations of the focus groups, the church as it gathers together is seen by the pastors as the primary location of God's activity. I believe there is a desire among the leaders for the church to be bolder in crossing boundaries into the neighborhoods, but there is bias towards ecclesiocentricity that makes this difficult to imagine.

Ongoing Actions and Observation of Group Members

As the two groups completed their twelve week exercise of action learning and dwelling in scripture, I continued to observe the participants to determine if any new praxis was developed which would lead to missional innovation and participation. Although the groups struggled to understand the missional activity of crossing boundaries into their neighborhoods, something else was beginning to happen in the life of NPC that had caught the attention of some of the group members. The Bethesda African fellowship had begun meeting on the NPC campus on Sunday afternoons during the same time frame at the action learning teams had been forming and beginning to meet.

The African refugees meeting at NPC and asking for direction had not been a planned ministry program of the staff or Session. Yet, their presence was significant in that a few of the action learning group members were led to intentionally interact with them. One married couple in particular, worshipped regularly with Bethesda on Sunday

afternoons, visited with some of the refugee families in their homes, as well as hosted

some of the refugees to visit with them in their home. Another group participant who was

involved with the women's ministry at NPC invited some Congolese women to a

women's ministry event and dinner, to meet other women at NPC. I invited the pastors of

the Arabic and African fellowships to share in leading communion in worship on World

Communion Sunday, as they each led their part of the liturgy in their own languages.

Other group participants returned to involvement with church activities and programs.

One couple, who had expressed frustration for difficulties connecting at NPC for them

and their children, eventually decided to attend a different church.

The couple who had begun to interact more deeply with the African refugees

asked if they could start an action learning team which combined learning about how to

minister and interact with refugees along with a *lectio divina* dwelling in the word study

of 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 about the interdependent parts of the body of Christ. They

invited others they knew were interested in ministry with refugees to be a part of that

team and began to pray about ways NPC could support and include refugees in its life.

After several months, I met again with this couple for coffee to hear what they

were learning about their crossing boundaries with new immigrant neighbors. They had

been to almost all the homes of the immigrant refugees who worshiped with Bethesda.

They also had hosted some of the families to meals in their home. While they had grown

somewhat tired of hospitality as they had wrestled with it in the action learning team, I

was surprised to hear that they wanted to talk more about hospitality. In their continuing

relationships with the refugees and in the necessity to both give and receive hospitality,

they realized how their action learning group had never discussed what they were

realizing now to be the most critical part of Luke 10:1-12. They really wanted to share

with me what they had been reflecting on in Luke 10:4a. They realized their action

learning group never in their twelve weeks together discussed the phrase, "Carry no

purse, no bag, no sandals." "Verse 4a forces people to be dependent on God and people,

and in this case, strangers," they explained. In a follow-up email to me after our

conversation, they continued,

> Verse 4a also assures that the disciple is connected to the local culture and
> community, and not in a missionary compound or property that is set apart, like
> even the church property. We have been interacting with some folks from
> [another church in Tucson with a refugee ministry] who were discussing how they
> could get out of an African family's hospitality. They even mentioned refusing
> bottled water, so I don't think it was a germ issue. I'm guessing from my
> own earlier feelings that this is related to a discomfort of people with less means,
> treating you so well. The problem with not accepting another's generosity means
> that one is keeping the other at arm's length and is not really entering into a
> reciprocal interdependent relationship. It's especially interesting because [that
> other church] … has thought carefully about not fostering dependence. In my
> opinion, this is only going half way. God calls us to be interdependent. I asked the
> [other church] group to reflect on how they "needed" this family. I have not
> gotten a response so far. Verse 4a is asking us to go empty-handed except for the
> gospel and God himself. This sets us up for interdependence as described by Paul
> in 1 Corinthians 12. It also assures our connection to the culture and community
> to which we are being sent. [My husband] thinks that the [other church] group
> isn't ready to accept hospitality because they don't really want to be in a real
> relationship. The relationship is pragmatic and limited to a short time (3 months).
> He also pointed out that this type of behavior also takes away their opportunity to
> show their own worth or pride. When that is rejected, you are devaluing them and
> treating them as children.[5]

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[5]Group participant, e-mail message to author, March 26, 2012.

PART THREE

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 5

ENGAGEMENT OF FRAMEWORKS

This research project is about engaging in a process of practical theology towards

a deepening awareness and understanding of leadership praxis in a particular

congregation. In particular, the central thesis of this project is that missional

transformation at Northminster Presbyterian Church can be initiated as action learning

team members engage neighbors, identify adaptive challenges, and disrupt typical church

ministry and mission habits. As has been discussed, leadership for missional change is

not a linear process. Leadership consists of "getting on the balcony" to understand the

context, planning action, executing the actions, conducting critical analysis and reflection

of those actions, and documenting what has been learned, so that the cycle can begin

again as future action is planned. While are not part of the plan for missional

transformation, these can contribute to learning. Leadership successes as well as

mistakes, failures, and missed opportunities are opportunities for learning and important

for leadership transformation.

Chapters One and Two describe the current praxis and cultural landscape of

Northminster Presbyterian Church as well as barriers to missional life as it is located in

the community of Tucson, Arizona. Chapters Three and Four identify the design, implementation and analysis of a research project of inviting people into a process of action learning, dwelling in Scripture, and theological praxis of hospitality and crossing borders into the neighborhood. Chapter Five is a critical reflection and engagement on the data developed in the research with a focus on systems, theological, contextual and leadership frameworks. This reflection will concentrate on current inadequate system praxis and the revelation of adaptive work needed to innovate praxis within the congregation. Chapter Six imagines some future opportunities and recommendations for ongoing praxis. As an exercise in practical theology, this reflection represents a best effort at this time given my current understanding of recent praxis and learning from actions taken. This is a next step in the ongoing rhythm of the church's engagement and reflection led by the Holy Spirit, by which the people of God are invited to wake up.[1] The following is a description of personal leadership learning and the developing awareness of God's initiatives and directions towards missional life.

Local Christian communities are the prime authors of theology, as it emerges through the recognition of the process and struggle of smaller groups to describe their faithful and Spirit-led action in the light of scripture and communal reflection.[2] The theological reflection that follows is an endeavor to serve as "the poet, the prophet, the teacher" in order to interpret the influences and consequences of the themes that have

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

[2] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 16.

arisen in this research. All of this is in service to assessing the missional readiness of the congregation to engage others in the neighborhood.[3]

Systems

This project was conducted along the periphery of congregational life, as a way to open the system to imagine a different future as sign, foretaste and instrument of the in-breaking reign of God. What follows is an analysis of the focus group activities and the learning about the congregations systems pertaining to missional, spiritual, and social formation.[4] Action Learning methodology is evaluated in terms of its contribution to shifting missional and congregational imagination of the group participants.

Social Formation

Social formation refers to the ways that a congregation nurtures its covenant life together in the gathered and scattered dimensions of church life, joining in worship and participating in God's mission. The focus group conversations revealed that people referred to the church as a location where people associated voluntarily, based in their individual choice in order to receive fulfillment; a perspective deeply rooted in the modern social imaginary.

While the learning groups were energized in shaping their work together, and this had certain benefits, the benefits were largely individualistic and focused on their fragmented understanding of seeking fulfillment. This bias prevented them from imagining that the purpose of their covenant practice of dwelling in scripture was to both

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 62.

create generative dialogue as a community of believers, and for encouragement for the difficult tasks of crossing boundaries into their neighborhoods through their communal exercise of practicing hospitality. As the church establishes its life from the crucified Jesus, it understands that the fullness of its life together stems from death, as it anticipates losing its life.[5]

A reason the focus groups did not offer hospitality to neighbors was because they saw no benefit to the risks involved in opening their lives to others. As I explained the concept that God was not just located on the NPC campus but also in the neighborhoods where we live, I received affirmation and agreement from everyone in the groups. Yet, because of suspicion, cynicism, guilt, or busyness, the group members were not able to imagine that hospitality would be received well by neighbors, or that it was their responsibility in the first place to make connections with neighbors they did not know. They could not imagine the ways the reign of God could be sensed in the neighborhood. They enjoyed each other in the group, and they enjoyed having the discussion, but the purpose of their social formation in the group to practice hospitality was deemed too difficult. They did not believe the trouble it would take, or the trouble they would receive would be worth the effort.

Group members referred metaphorically to the church as "family," revealing positive sentiments of interactions with other church members. While the family metaphor denotes positive sentiments from those who saw themselves as a part of the church family, for those coming from the outside, families can prove to be difficult

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[5] Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith,* 180.

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systems to enter.[6] The greater degree of family closeness that a church senses it has the

more difficult it may be for others to integrate into the system. If everyone gets along

well already, there is no felt need to change or make accommodations for the differences

of others. The presence of outsiders may even threaten the perceived stability in the

system and cause people to become reactive toward anyone who may represent disorder.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is a corporate activity which takes place in groups attending to

God, learning about God's activities and character, and participating in God's life and

initiatives.[7] The action learning teams were invited into a three month practice of *lectio*

divina, reading Luke 10:1-12 together. While all the participants had participated in Bible

studies before, never before had anyone read one text continuously over such a period of

time. The Bible study approach that most were accustomed to involved extracting

meaning applicable to life. As the participants engaged the *lectio divina* exercises, they

noticed different words or phrases at each reading, but many participants "figured out"

what the passage was about within the first several weeks. A perspective of several

participants was that dwelling in Scripture for twelve weeks was too long.

The thrust of modernity to intellectually interact with texts to extract pure

meaning for technical application was the theoretical basis for what most group

participants expected from Bible study. While this theory to action practice functions

well to provide individuals with a sense of fulfillment, no real transformation for mission

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[6] Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, 103-104.

[7] Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 62.

action takes place. A reflexive praxis of dwelling in scripture texts and participating in experiments identified as participating in the initiatives of God in the community allow for a greater depth of spiritual transformation. The difficulty of the action learning groups to enter into this reflexive process of spiritual formation highlights a significant adaptive challenge at NPC. For a church that has approached spiritual formation as participation in education programs, the challenge is to adapt spiritual formation for participation with the *missio dei.* This adaptation would amount to transforming an expectation of an inner and disconnected spiritual journey to both an inner and outer journey of transformation.

It is important to make explicit the interpretive motivations of the community who gathers around the Bible. Without realizing the implications, most Americans search for the relevance of the Bible to their individual lives. Habits of Bible study which communally are centered around seeking the Holy Spirit's direction of how the community is relevant to the work of God, are formational in the realization that the community is being formed to be sent as an embodiment of the gospel in the local context. This praxis of spiritual formation is never completed since ongoing reflection and action is essential to identifying a missional and confessional life in Christ. Missional churches need to develop missional structures which provide a framework for learning Christian beliefs, practicing Spiritual disciplines (inward journey), participating in missional activity (outward journey), and reflecting on the journey in community.[8]

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[8] O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures,* 13-14, 43-45, 66-78.

Missional Formation

Missional formation, concerns the centering of a congregation's identity and agency on God's initiative, rooted in the *missio dei* at work and moving in the community among people and powers.[9] Ultimately, the community is recognizing itself as God's instrument for the Kingdom of God, and a missional praxis develops in the dynamic movement between reflection and action. When the focus groups were challenged to cross boundaries in the neighborhoods through practicing hospitality, this activity was labeled a counter cultural activity which would be received by others with suspicion. Repeatedly, participants valued their homes as a location of sanctuary and respite from stress related to work, church, and family life. Neighborhoods for the most part were seen as locations for their homes to provide for their refuge, safety, and security.

In spite of an unwillingness to invite neighbors to share hospitality, participants still expressed a desire to interact with their neighbors (and others in their families and workplaces) on a deeper level, particularly as agents of the gospel, sharing God's shalom. Participants lamented that their neighborhoods were not ideal. Given their life stresses, they seemed to feel powerless to do anything to change their neighborhood. While guilt was shared about being so busy that they could not engage more in neighborhood life, this was rationalized in light of their busyness and stress. The guilt felt about their inattentiveness to the neighborhood was not as great as their guilt felt at not fulfilling family obligations and commitments to engage and support activities and programs at NPC.

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[9] Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 62.

Some of the focus group members reported having experienced a significant change in attitude when encountering others, noticing they were more patient and understanding with people. However, having the right attitude about encountering others, and being more aware of listening does not constitute a missional posture of intentional practice. This perspective locates God's activity in the agency of the individual. Instead of intentionally practicing hospitality with others, seeking to discern God's activity in unfamiliar spaces, the participants looked for "naturally occurring" opportunities where it was dependent on them for God to be present. Instead of seeing God's shalom at work and joining in, they saw it as their responsibility to inject peace into situations that needed it. This perspective reduces the chance that God's initiatives will ever be surprising, unsettling, or destabilizing. However, for people who live in a context of fear, this way of encountering others means that they can control more variables of the interaction.

Lesslie Newbigin describes how in mission, the Holy Spirit converts both the congregation and the context as a result of engaging in God's mission. In unanticipated ways, the Sprit goes before the people, inviting them to leave the comfort of life as it is into mysterious places of uncharted territory. "At this point the church has to keep silence. It is not in control of the mission. Another is in control, and his fresh works will repeatedly surprise the church, compelling it to stop talking and to listen. Because the Spirit himself is sovereign over mission, the church can only be the attentive servant."[10]

Traditional patterns of Presbyterian mission have been influenced from the perspective of a denomination located in Christendom. From this perspective, mission is

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[10] Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, 61.

always something that is done "over there" in a location far from home, whether it be a local mission located across town, or a global mission located overseas. The Mission Committee has had responsibility for NPC mission as a program supervising various projects and relationships, though other groups also have initiated mission activity like the Deacons, the Men's ministry, the Women's ministry, and some crafting and quilting arts groups. One of the pastors serves as the primary leader in directing and interpreting the work of the mission committee, chaired by a church member. The dominant form of mission activity that NPC is engaged in involves the raising of funds for outside organizations, supporting missionaries in the field, going on short term mission trips, as well as having promoted local work days for building, cleanup, or renovation. Recently, the Deacons opened a food pantry at the church which is open one day per week to give out a bag of groceries (limited to one per month). Within the past few years, a new Social Action Ministry (SAM) team was formed to respond to a growing number of NPC members who were passionate about issues of social justice. Subgroups of SAM have differentiated to coordinate efforts for human trafficking, local neighborhood outreach, and refugees.

Action Learning

Group A was enthusiastic about the action learning process that gave them agency to pursue learning in ways that were relevant to the problem as they understood and reframed it. The group reported that the tension they experienced in working through the issues, how they were going to approach the problem as a group, and the process of action and reflection had the effect of deepening and personalizing the learning. Group A

reflected that the greatest learning from the action learning and dwelling in scripture was that hospitality was not rote or contrived activity, but rather an attitude which governed interpersonal activities in all aspects of life.

Group A chose to reframe the action learning problem from, "What is God up to in the neighborhoods and communities where you live and how might you join with God?" to "How do we extend shalom (defined at the peace/security of God) to places where we live and work?" They shifted the focus of the question from perceiving the agency and activity of God and joining with God as a focus of their action, to a focus on their own agency of extending peace to others. This decision exposed the underlying captivity of western culture to modernity.[11] In rejecting the practice the covenant practice of hospitality and the simple sharing of a meal, they yielded to expressive individualism. Instead of seeking how to participate as a community in ways that God may be calling forth new possibilities for relationships in their neighborhoods, they saw their activities of "extending peace" and being a "healing presence" in instrumental rational terms, hoping to offer a therapeutic experience to others. In enjoying their experience of fellowship and personal growth in the group, they enjoyed a certain commodification of religious experience rather than a participation in and formation as an eschatological people of hope in expectation of Christ's Reign to become manifest in their midst. While shifts in attitudes are important in responding to adaptive challenges, the way the group talked about their attitude of "biblical hospitality" was more of a way of talking about their own sense of fulfillment in being able to be more present to people around them. No

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[11] Alan Roxburgh, "Missional Engagement in North America," (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November, 2002).

significant changes in routines or actions of crossing of geographic or relational

boundaries resulted with this perceived change in attitude.

As the leader who invited these individuals to participate in this group, I had

naively expected that the groups would take advantage of the opportunity to intentionally

cross boundaries into their neighborhoods. While I tried to challenge the group's

assumptions at the mid-point meeting, they were already convinced otherwise, and

advocating for a type of hospitality that would not involve crossing significant

neighborhood boundaries. I felt the tension between the freedom I had given to the group

to plan their own actions and the explicit instructions of the hospitality guide. I had also

naively expected that the *lectio divina* reflections of Luke 10 would allow for the

scripture to call their present attitudes and practices into question, and generate a

willingness to practice hospitality with neighbors. It seemed that while the scriptural

reading did give them the capacity to see the differences between western culture and the

practice that Jesus was sending his followers to engage in, they were not compelled to

change their current life practices. While comments were shared about whether the point

of the exercises was to "turn the tables on things as they are," these observations were

drowned out by what I perceived to be the stresses of others in the group who were

already dealing with guilt about not being present to their families and friends, let alone

strangers. I was even told that the group could have come up with the same realization

within six weeks, and that twelve weeks was too long.

There was a fundamental disconnect between what I had expected of the group's

actions and what the group members themselves were willing to imagine themselves

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doing. While the action learning framework was liberating for them, they did not live into all of the conditions for an action learning group to succeed. The problem of seeking God's activity and to joining with it through the practice of hospitality was not of sufficient urgency and importance, and I could not detect a commitment to avoiding advocacy in the group. The conversations about whether or not to invite neighbors for a meal had generated significant heat among the group when I was not present. I was wary of challenging the group too hard for my own fear of their resenting me for what could be understood as an override of their group's process, of which they were supposed to have ownership. I struggled in my own responses to the group to balance my own gratitude for their willingness to help with the project, and that their participation in the group was contributing stress in their lives. While the group participants were trying to help me, it also became clear that they expected participation in a small group like this to be personally fulfilling and a way to make and deepen friendships and connections with others at NPC. I became concerned as I heard the levels of stress that they shared in the groups, and their concerns that to do this project as designed would be overwhelming. I realized too late that in the freedom I had given them to decide their own actions, they would interpret that to avoid the work which was essential for my being able to assess the difference that crossing boundaries would make to them and their understanding of God's initiatives.

Group B did not choose to reframe the action learning problem that was presented to them, though they felt that the practice of hospitality should be an activity shared with people who were already known to them. A couple of surprising events were occasions

for deeper reflection about the ways neighbors relate to each other, and some of the barriers to relationship. While some people had invited neighbors for a meal in their home, these were not reported as engagements where God's activity was made apparent; though they were appreciative of the peace they felt of not having an agenda with people and content to just be present to them. As one of the participants described how her neighborhood could no longer be called safe, the experience of violence was an opportunity to understand that hospitality was not about her action, but being ready to discern the Spirit's leading to be an agent of peace and healing. This led to an awareness of a particular fear in the community that should be engaged in a positive way. By the end of the meetings, most every person in Group B shared a desire to "get to know my neighbors better" beyond just a "nodding acquaintance." A key acknowledgement that reflected the comfort of homogeneous groups was, "We tend to hang with people like us who think like us."

The role of the coach to keep action learning teams acting according to the rules to avoid advocacy and keep the process moving through questioning and dialogue is critical. Those who I trained to be coaches did not follow the expectations I had for them, and they defaulted to leading groups the way they were accustomed to. As the leader who initiated the project I should have ensured that the coaching role was faithfully implemented. Either I should have participated in the groups as the coach, or I should have made the coach training more explicit and required accountability to performing the role adequately. Action learning is clearly a powerful tool for humanizing the agent-subjects in the group, but accountability of group members to the process,

maintained by the coach is essential. In the mist of angst that developed in the group, if I had the role of the coach, I could have more easily identified the groups' tendency to advocate for certain positions and abstract the actions to be taken. As fear or frustrations surfaced, asking questions to probe the underlying issues of pain could have led to the identification of awareness of the adaptive challenges at the heart of the angst. Awareness is the very first step in identifying adaptive work toward missional change.[12]

Leadership

This section is a reflection on interpretive, relational, and implemental leadership[13] in my role as one of the associate pastors at NPC, in the leadership of the action learning teams, and in the ongoing interactions with staff colleagues, and action learning team members. As an associate pastor without primary authority in the church organization, I have had latitude to create holding environments along the edges of the church system in which to form the focus groups. "Getting on the balcony" to observe the various actors and dynamics at work has revealed data for significant reflection toward system and personal learning.[14]

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[12] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 84.

[13] Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context*, ed. Craig Van Gelder, Missional Church (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 118-124.

[14] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 51-74.

Personal Leadership Learning

In my practice of leadership, I've become aware of the ways that church members, the church staff, and I have reductionist expectations of spiritual formation and church life more informed by "measureable success" than by supporting people for the formation of a holistic life based in knowing, desiring, and taking action according to wisdom. [15] Even as I have studied and increased awareness of the ways modernity has deeply influenced the way western people think and act, more thorough understanding has been elusive until being confronted with concrete experiences. Over the two years since this project was begun I have realized the significant challenges to leading missional transformation. These challenges are attributable to my own gaps in understanding and practice of leadership, the system I serve in, and the context of the church and her people.

This process of action and reflection in itself has been a humanizing process for me as I have not only awakened to the ministry context, but some of my own personal habits which functioned to preserve stability in the very system I was seeking to disrupt for missional purposes. These kinds of self-defeating habits will continue to be a point of ongoing conversion as I develop deeper commitments to leading for missional innovation. Parallel to learning about my own leadership habits and capacities, I have also come to learn about other personal issues which have created obstacles to my work and personal life. Difficulty with organizing and synthesizing the material in this project led me to seek guidance for help with structuring the work. Through this inquiry, I

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[15] Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry,* 80-82.

discovered that I have cognitive processing deficits which make it more difficult to maintain focus and attention in everyday situations and in completing tasks. Adverse tendencies, however, can be overcome by approaching tasks differently and by creating a more structured environment to facilitate work and process information. A predisposition towards perfectionism, rooted in anxiety and fear of criticism has led to a tendency to please others and meet their expectations (and my own high standards). This can undermine missional leadership efforts when a significant part of leading adaptive change is disappointing people at a rate that they can manage. A tendency towards inattentiveness and distractibility can lead to anxiety in regards to approaching large projects, and feeds a tendency to cycle between procrastination and hyper-focusing. An important skill to continue developing is breaking large projects into distinct parts, with intentional time management. Awareness of these tendencies has gone a long way towards understanding some of my patterns of behavior in the past, and towards recognizing the need to be proactive about not only what I am doing, but how I go about my actions.

A balance to life and leadership is essential for those who lead adaptive change.[16] As a believer in Jesus Christ, this balance is found spiritually in finding anchors of spiritual practices, relationships with confidants and family members, and in restorative practices such as exercise and eating well. Developing this life balance has become a significant focus as I have continued to develop this project, and has contributed to

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[16] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading,* 163-236.

greater self-awareness. This has also contributed to greater awareness in my practice of leadership as a pastor.

Interpretive Leadership

Interpretive Leadership is a way of identifying and sharing meaning for a developing community of interpreters within its given context, including an understanding of what God is doing, what scripture means, and the congregational and community contexts.[17] The "village cook" has the task of leading theological reflection from local ingredients of culture and context.[18]

I missed an opportunity to provide much better interpretive leadership, as I naively expected dwelling in scripture would challenge their assumptions about context. In the initiation of the action learning groups, I spent significant time recruiting participants, explaining the time commitment, giving an introduction to the concepts of Biblical hospitality and action learning, and explaining the use of the hospitality workbook. However, I did not spend the necessary time with the groups in dialogue toward helping them gain awareness of the ways that the culture informed their initial impulses as well as church practices. The language and concepts of missional church and contrast society were foreign. A better understanding of the purposes of the research project could have been conveyed, if I had arranged to meet with them regularly.

Educators have a critical hermeneutical role in shared praxis methodology both in meeting students where they are, and in employing hermeneutics to challenge

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[17] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church."

[18] Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity,* 14.

assumptions about Bible texts. Neglecting this interpretive work made it less likely for participants to learn the biblical concepts and exercise agency as interpreters by committing to action.[19] Without intending it, I continued to propagate a system in which the group participants continued as dependent objects of their faith in the world, rather than as agent-subjects, empowered with a role and responsibility in seeking the fullness and flourishing of the in-breaking of God's reign.

The groups in their interactions with Luke 10 believed that they had done good interpretive work, and they were energized by their reflections on the text. They lacked the cultural awareness to identify that much of their interpretation was rooted in perspectives colonized by modernity, with preferential defaults to abstract frameworks and ideals stemming from anti-materialist mistrust of local learning to be found in the neighborhood.[20] Group A's interpretation of Luke 10 led them to notice that the hospitality shown in the passage was not the central activity of the disciples, and that announcing peace, healing and proclaiming the gospel were what the passage was about. As they employed a technical rational hermeneutic, it was clear that the group was looking at the scripture for techniques to apply to their lives. Once the group made its conclusions, they grew tired of continuing reading of it and lacked the ability to see new things in the text which could challenge their assumptions. They thought the invitation to invite neighbors over for a meal was fundamentally opposed to what they believed the text to be about. Although they were correct in their observation that those sent two by

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[19] Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry,* 227-235.

[20] Alan Roxburgh, "OD737 Missional Contexts & Local Churches" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. January 12, 2010).

two to the villages were not the ones extending hospitality, I missed the opportunity to challenge them to consider the possibility that an equally or perhaps more difficult practice is to receive hospitality, particularly as most Americans are functional guests in their own neighborhoods. I misinterpreted the degree to which their cultural captivities would lead them to justify that not extending hospitality to neighbors was a more authentic biblical practice. The group members were not willing to insert a new practice into busy lives of their own design. Perhaps, to engage in this practice of hospitality would be an indictment on their preferred lifestyle which they had worked hard to create. Reducing hospitality to being a peaceful and healing presence in natural situations meant that they could avoid a disruptive practice that might cause them to examine their lifestyles. By participating in the group reflection meetings and not intentionally engaging others in their neighborhoods, the participants ensured that "natural" interactions only occurred with those whom they safely chose to engage with.

Similar to Group A, Group B also struggled to identify and understand the purpose of practicing hospitality in the neighborhood as a practice for seeking to identify ways God might be using them to join in redemptive and Kingdom work. Even as they agreed that God's presence is not limited to the church property, they did not grasp the concept of crossing neighborhood boundaries, as missionary activity. Even for those who invited neighbors to their home for dinner, they viewed the activity as an end itself, rather than as about learning and attending to the stories of others and the neighborhood, with a view towards what God might be calling forth as a witness in the neighborhood. Perhaps because of their default assumption that outreach is defined as bringing others to church,

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the statement in the workbook that said, "practicing hospitality is not about witnessing, evangelism, or inviting to church," they lacked any imagination that God's work could happen any other way.

Changed attitudes were seen by some participants as proof that they had done good biblical work, and one person even acknowledged that hospitality could not be reduced to a church program and marketing tool. However, their imagination of hospitality primarily had to do with what happens on the church campus to welcome newcomers. The group experience was valued as being true to life and integral and relevant for their everyday encounters. Practicing hospitality was interpreted by some as manipulative and incongruent to typical life patterns, rather than as an opportunity to discern the ways God wants to "mess" with what is going in the neighborhood so as to break in and demonstrate the reign of Christ. Rather than identifying ways scripture is relevant to our lives, the real task is to discover if we are relevant to God's activity.

It took several months before a couple of the group members, through their interactions with African refugees were able to identify what the groups had missed. While it was commented that it was not "our job" to create relationships where they did not already exist, it became clear through the one couple's commitment of engaging these strangers that "carrying no purse or bag" meant the absolute necessity for one crossing boundaries to be dependent upon God and the stranger. This one couple's experience of crossing boundaries into an African refugee family, and reflecting on that experience in light of scripture, has led to an awareness of significant ways that American culture needs

to be challenged to permit the formation of an environment where transformation can take place.

<center>Relational Leadership</center>

Relational leadership develops and maintains connections with people as the church is an interconnected and interdependent Body of Christ; a community of diverse spiritual gifts and calls for missional engagement. The fruit of this action is development of significant friendships based in love, caring, health, accountability, courage in crossing boundaries, and synergism and coordination of the people.[21] Relational leadership is critical for leading for adaptive change as no leader can "go it alone."[22] The recent awareness of my tendency to please others in order to avoid the anxiety of receiving criticism provides insight in evaluating ways I have provided or avoided relational leadership. I can see instances where withdrawal from opportunities to challenge the status quo was justified in efforts to not upset colleagues, the session, or action learning group participants. This kind of retreat undermines a leader's and the system's chances for missional transformation and living into the prophetic calling to the church.

In spite of my recognition of the importance of my role as a leader in turning up the heat of a holding environment in order to help people find motivation for adaptive change, my own bent towards avoiding conflict and not disappointing others made it difficult to gauge when I needed to exert more influence in challenging the assumptions and directions of the groups. Over the course of study in the missional leadership cohort,

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[21] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church."

[22] Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, 75-84.

through interviews and instruments, I have learned that while others in the church do trust me, I have at times lacked courage to tackle problems or to say what needs to be said.

Significant theological resources and Christian practices provide tools to place these problems with distractibility and anxiety in tension with my faith in Jesus Christ and the call of the Holy Spirit towards deeper transformation and reliance. The prophets provide examples of people who were called and empowered by God to share a dangerous message with God's people. Their courage waned, yet they found boldness from God's Spirit to demonstrate the strength and holiness of God. If I am not willing to limit the being and work of God to abstract notions and sentiments, then I need to view the other areas of my life with a critical consciousness. Institutional life in modern society has the effect of objectifying people to be what the system requires that person to be to bring stability. To live into my own "ontological vocation" as a subject who acts upon and transforms the world, I discover this liberation as I root my own concrete being and doing in the concrete being and doing of God.[23] Spiritual practices of daily prayer, Bible study in community, expressing hospitality, gratitude, and generosity are key ways I am becoming more aware of God's gracious call and vocation. Deeply connecting at this point is the importance for me and others in this late modern context to live into this "narrative ethic" embodied in my own practice of the Christian life in community, and rooted in the eschatological hope of the resurrection of Christ.[24] As a leader of leaders, I

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[23] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

[24] McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume 1,* 329.

must be attentive to both my freedom for leadership and to liberation of elders and lay leaders towards their own discernment of calling and vocation.

Related to the personal leadership factor of personal courage is the way as a leader I help the community discern a communal missional vision and equip people to integrate into the missional community as they discover their own vocational calling. As a leader, I need to be a more active partner in framing and exchanging within a dialogical framework with those I am inviting to participate with me. Since people are not accustomed to dialogue in leadership, I have a critical role in inviting this practice with leaders I serve alongside at NPC.

Focus group participants struggled in the tension between wanting to help me with the project and protect their autonomy. Part of the participants' willingness to take part in the group was because of their desire to affirm me and my educational program. In spite of wanting to be helpful, a subtext of our interactions was that they felt awkward in resisting the direction of the actions which I asked of them. While the groups appreciated the freedom and empowerment of the action learning framework, they bristled against the main challenge. The holding environment of the groups was a space I had the authority to "turn up the heat" in such a way, so that in the midst of the discomfort, the participants could find motivation for difficult work. It was becoming clear to me at the midpoint interviews that the groups had not grasped the concept of practicing hospitality as a covenant spiritual practice. To them, it seemed like an obligation that they did not want to do, did not have the energy for, and which they would be resentful of. They trusted me enough to support my project, but they did not trust in the safety of the practices I

challenged them to inhabit they became too uncomfortable. Staying with the group meetings and coaching the groups myself would have given me the important opportunity to be a part of the dialogue and setting the appropriate environment to cultivate readiness for boundary crossing.

Implemental Leadership

Implemental leadership[25] is the process of developing strategies and structures for missional life among the covenant community of faith. Communication is critical so people may learn how to participate, not in church programs, but in the initiatives of God and the community. Implementation is the work of synthesizing the aspects of interpretive and relational leadership into a plan for inviting God's people to integrate fully into the ongoing work of God's mission in and through the church. I have already described ways that implementing the action learning groups could have been done differently from the perspectives of implemental and relational leadership. It is critical for church members to see themselves as agents of God's mission with meaning, investment, and passion, rather than as objects who passively participate in activities for the purposes of self-fulfillment. A critical aspect of implemental leadership for adaptive change is cultivating a holding environment in which the group is supported and empowered to use creativity and take risks to learn through experimentation. The action learning framework offered both flexibility and direction so that groups would neither be overwhelmed nor bored with the activity. Action learning proved to engage the focus group participants as they took ownership of the learning process, and cared about the learning and outcomes.

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[25] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church."

As the groups began, they were a little unsure of what the "program" was, yet the energy and agency that they brought to the action learning process generated a positive and energizing experience, though this was not a desired outcome. One group redefined the problem I initially gave them, and the new focus of the group's learning had functioned to reduce the discomfort of offering hospitality to neighbors. Because of my concerns about how the group members would react to my insistence that they follow the workbook more closely, I did not increase the heat level. One of the important skills of leaders is to discern when too much is really too much, or whether it is not enough. In this case, I now understand that my unwillingness to risk pushing these friendly group volunteers too much was a failure of nerve. The groups made the observation that typical church programs do not change attitudes, but their ministry praxis led to what they reported as a deepening awareness and attentiveness of God's presence in their interactions with others. This abstract sentimentality, focused on the self and not on God's activity, revealed their location within the modern social imaginary and an over contextualization of their actions within it. My not offering enough guidance, instruction, and accountability to the coaches and not being present to the groups to provide better interpretive leadership were both gaps in implemental leadership. I realized too late that a desire for greater relevance of the practice to their life was a signal that they did not comprehend what I intended the groups to accomplish. A critical aspect of implemental leadership is for pastors to be conscious and aware of the dialogue that is shared so that the process is not lost or derailed.

As a part of a pastoral staff whose style is to implement episodic ideas with little concern for continuity, it is difficult to initiate "leading up" in an attempt to identify adaptive challenges and ways that the gospel speaks to the practice of leadership. As I discussed leadership and learning with pastoral colleagues, there was shared concern about being too church focused in activity and about the lack of reliability of programs to produce or sustain growth. Yet, the dominant tendency is to answer anxiety about decreasing attendance and finances to focus energy and commitment to worship services and programs. Applying the Three Zone Model of Missional Leadership,[26] this is descriptive of a congregation in the upper reactive zone, which tries harder and harder to return to performative zone stability, by increasingly seeking to control and regulate the system by replacing old or declining programs with new ones.

Theology

This section is an analysis of theological themes which arose out of the research, put in conversation with biblical texts, and Presbyterian theological resources of John Calvin, and selections from the Book of Confessions. It was clear that safety and security was a primary concern among the participants in the focus groups. This was evident from their housing and neighborhood choices, to how they interpreted Scripture, to how some chose to think of the practice of hospitality as an abstract awareness instead of an intentional practice. These perspectives echo the anti-materialist notions of the Enlightenment which through the development of the modern social imaginary has led to

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[26] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 40-60.

an emphasis within Christian faith on abstract and sentimental, and away from the local and embodied.

As a Christian community living in late modernity, it is critical to identify who the subject is in the sentences we use to describe our relationship with God. If the individual is the subject and God is the object, then God exists for the meeting the material and therapeutic needs of the individual. As Christian faith has become about the meeting of personal or family needs, it is one among many options in the pluralism of the increasingly globalized context whereby free individuals are able to cobble together a collection of choices toward self-definition. While the Bible is clear in its witness of God's love, care, and provision for people, the initiative does not lie in individual dictates or demands. The church must recover a theological richness that places its identity as the elect, and agency in discerning the initiatives of the Triune God, whose purpose is the reconciliation and redemption of all things. As theologian Ray Anderson explains, there is an eschatological pull of the Spirit that calls the church into the future.[27] It is this eschatological reality that is celebrated in the Lord's Supper, as we both share in a sacred memory of the Lord's death, and as we live in anticipation until he comes.

Group participants who were skeptical that their neighborhoods or their neighbors would be a good place to seek the initiatives or activity of God faced a number of pressures in their lives. In the face of the fears and anxieties of group members, God was referred to as one who offers peace and security, and calls forth the same of his followers.

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[27] Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 120-121.

God was not referred to as the sovereign Lord who longs to transform people and the social order, for the purpose of bringing all things into right relationship.

Opportunities arose to wrestle with the theological implications of serving a God who sends people as embodied ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Reflecting on her experience with the family of the slain young man who had been left in her neighborhood, one woman saw her role in the neighborhood like the woman who Jesus met at the well in John 4, and then told her town about all the things Jesus had said. She was becoming aware that she had a specific role to play for the transformation of her neighborhood as one who is open to the Holy Spirit's leading and direction. More important than her house's presence in the neighborhood, was her presence in the neighborhood as an outpost of the Spirit's work.

Only after the focus group ended and one couple had begun to cross boundaries into the home of African refugee families, did they realize the critical importance of Jesus' imperatives to "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals." They were beginning to learn that in interactions with strangers, it is important to only rely on God and the gospel in order to be truly present to the other. To be dependent upon God and the other is not valued by a culture of independence and self-reliance. Yet, in this space, they were able to honor the other, receive their hospitality, and enter into a reciprocal and interdependent relationship. Typical mission relationships in churches keep recipients of aid and support at arm's length. While much good is done in responding to material needs, modern Christians have little desire to enter into long-term interdependent relationships. Yet, the *missio dei* is calling forth risk from those who follow Jesus Christ, to be a loving,

gracious, and sacrificial presence embodied in the places we live, work, and worship. The church is the embodied presence of Jesus, sent to accomplish his Kingdom's work. It is also in the stranger, where the church will find Jesus (Matthew 25). This will mean that the fear of "stranger-danger" will need to be overcome and defeated if the church is to live into its calling to be God's transforming presence.

During conversations among my pastoral colleagues, it was noted that usually the incarnation refers to the way that Jesus was God, fleshed with humanness. The observation was shared that incarnation tended not to be thought of in terms that the incarnate Jesus then was subject to living all the contingencies of life, including the task of living and participating with neighbors in the neighborhood. This tendency to think more abstractly about theological concepts was noticed, and likely attributable to the emphasis in seminary placed on studying systematic theology in a de-contextualized manner. If the spiritual life is limited to an imagination that places it in abstract terms, faith founded on this theological reflection will be spiritual, but not practical. It matters intensely that in the incarnation, Jesus is "God with us." Yet the modern evangelical reduction of the gospel to say that Jesus came simply to die on the cross for the sins of the world misses the point of the biblical witness of Jesus a contingent human being placed in a particular context, with a ministry of revealing the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. This perspective is also rooted in the Enlightenment suspicion of the local, the mysterious, and the material.

In addition to the regional fears found among those living in Tucson, NPC faces anxieties related to having an aging congregation, decreased attendance and offerings,

cultural pressures on morality, the changes in the socio economic makeup of, and

concerns around maintaining an aging physical plant. Some people look to the church for

refuge and stability. Yet the church is making changes in order to be relevant to attract

newcomers, and to be relevant to God's purposes for NPC and its members who are into

the neighborhoods in the city. While discontinuous change happens in the culture, and

changes are made in the church to compensate, little is done to address the emotional

struggles of people going through the experience of transition.[28] The Reformed tradition

was birthed in a high risk context of change and transition, and is well suited to assist

those in adaptive systems in its commitment to being "reformed and always reforming."

John Calvin and the Reformation of Refugees

Reformed theology has its origins in a people who were decentered from society

and traumatized by persecution and violence against them. John Calvin's theology was

not developed in an environment of societal balance or stability. It seems that Calvin's

theology fits better in a late- or post-modern world of fragmentation and chaos than in the

modern world of stability and rationality. Calvin's theological and social innovations

were well suited for communal life on the frontier, and it's been observed that as

communities in the Reformed tradition became established settlements, the common

discipline needed to preserve group identity in an antagonistic world, gave way to the

pursuit of personal purity and private predestination.[29] To reclaim the doctrines of

election, providence, and predestination from the sphere of private, is to provide an

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[28] Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World*, 53.

[29] Oberman, *John Calvin and the Reformation of the Refugees,* 61.

assurance of God's holy sovereignty in the midst of anxiety and fear. For the Genevans

who suffered and survived the deaths of loved ones, they were comforted, not by the

knowledge of their freedom, which they did not have, but by faith in the sovereignty of

God the Father which Calvin would not let them forget. Reflecting on the original

solidarity of all humanity created in the image of God, and the common fall of humanity

into sin, Calvin wrote that neighbors include anyone to whom we could be useful to, even

enemies and people very far away.[30] Calvin's words have been a hallmark of Reformed

teaching, and are particularly poignant given the culture of self-interest.

> If we, then, are not our own but the Lord's, it is clear what error we must flee, and
> whither we must direct all the acts of our life. We are not our own: let not our
> reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let
> us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us… Conversely,
> we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his
> wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions… For, as consulting our self-
> interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole
> haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves
> but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.[31]

Book of Confessions

While most church members would not expect or desire lectures about the

theological confessions of the church, these are rich theological resources. Modernity

tends toward future bias and prefers a nostalgic view of history. As the church has been

colonized by this perspective, confessional documents read separate from an

understanding of their context become irrelevant. As members of missional churches gain

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[30] Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Calvin and the Church Today: Ecclesiology as Received, Changed, and Adapted," *Theology Today* 66, (2009). Calvin is referenced from the Latin 1536 edition of *Institutes of the Christian Religion.*

[31] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.7.1.

understanding of their role in participating in the initiatives of God, nostalgia about the past can be replaced with a sense of rootedness. Learning the theology of the church's confessions and understanding the concrete locations of their formulation leads to an awareness of how God's people in one age interpreted Scriptural texts as Christian praxis. If the confessions are a set of local theologies, then the church today can use them as guides for informing the task for today.

The Reformed tradition was birthed in a high risk context, and seemed to be particularly suited to adaptability in its commitment to being "reformed and always reforming." The following is an analysis of Presbyterian confessional documents regarding relevant project themes. Brief attention will be given to the contexts of the cited confessions. The purpose of such an analysis is to find points of connection between the past articulations of Reformed faith, and the current task finding resources for confessing a local theology in a high risk context.

The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are ancient affirmations of faith which most Christians affirm, and were formulated in response to heresies and theological disagreements. Both creeds articulate a clear Trinitarian framework which is essential for a missional theology. The Nicene Creed articulates the four marks of the church, "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church."[32] Each are seen as gifts for the church which represent the values of unity in relationships in Christ, holiness as set apart to witness to Christ's love, universal as Christ bonds the church around the world, and

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[32] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1: Book of Confessions*, 1.3.

apostolic as the church is sent into the world to share the gospel of redemptive acts in

Christ.

The Scots Confession was formulated in 1560 by John Knox, a converted

Catholic priest who led the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. International politics,

abuses in the Catholic church, and ruthless national leaders created oppressive conditions

for the people in Scotland. The Protestant message of grace had a liberating effect upon

the converted. John Knox himself was captured and chained to an oar for 19 months as a

galley slave on a French ship. His preaching against the legalism of the Catholic mass

forced him to flee to Geneva on two occasions. In Geneva, Knox was steeped in

Reformed praxis as he studied with Calvin, pastored English speaking refugees, and

translated the first version of the Bible into English (the Genevan Bible). Efforts to quell

the Scottish Protestant uprisings produced martyrs, and with English help, France

withdrew from Scotland. The new Scottish Parliament adopted the confession which had

been articulated in the context of oppression, abuse, suffering and sacrifice.[33]

For the Scots Confession, discipline is required in order to maintain following the

call of Christ's election in the midst of incredible odds. This battle is understood to be a

hardship unique to the true kirk as it maintains allegiance to the mission of God.

> The cause of good works, we confess, is not our free will, but the Spirit of the
> Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God
> has prepared for us to walk in… Thence comes that continual battle which is
> between the flesh and the Spirit in God's children…Other men do not share this
> conflict since they do not have God's Spirit, but they readily follow and obey sin
> and feel no regrets, since they act as the devil and their corrupt nature urge. But
> the sons of God fight against sin; sob and mourn when they find themselves

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[33] Jack Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds: A Guide to the Book of Confessions*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 79-95.

tempted to do evil; and, if they fall, rise again with earnest and unfeigned repentance. They do these things, not by their own power, but by the power of the Lord Jesus, apart from whom they can do nothing.[34]

This perspective grates against modern evangelical pietistic and individualistic sensibilities which seek a religion that is pleasant, prosperous, and pure. The Scots Confession with its emphasis on God's grace also describes that there are two kinds of works which are counted as good before God. "The one is done to the honor of God, the other to the profit of our neighbor." The Scots used the word "profit" to describe the task of adding value to the lives of neighbors.[35] Neighbors include more than those who share the same class, from the nobility to the powerless and oppressed. Christians honor God by adding value to the lives of neighbors, who are people located at all levels of society.

The Heidelberg Catechism was drafted in 1563 in the Palatinate region of Germany to provide a summary course of Calvinist Reformed doctrine as debates between Calvinists, Zwinglians, and Lutherans persisted. Heidelberg was unique in its personal style directed to individuals. As the debates in Europe between Catholics and Protestants continued, the political stakes were high as to what governors and priests personally ascribed to in their doctrine. The emphasis on right doctrine had an effect of personalizing the catechisms so as to provide for clear determination of the orthodoxy of leaders, as well as the agreed upon method for teaching in the Reformed churches.

The three structural themes of Heidelberg are sin and misery, redemption and freedom, and living a life of gratitude to God in obedience to God's commands. It is out

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[34] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1: Book of Confessions*, 3.13.

[35] Ibid., 3.14.

of gratitude that though we are "prone to hate God and our neighbor" (Q. 5.), we have

been redeemed so that by our behavior we might "win our neighbors to Christ" (Q. 86.),

"show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him," "prevent injury

to him as much as we can" (Q. 107.), "work for the good of my neighbor," "help the poor

in their need" (Q. 111.), and "defend and promote my neighbor's good name" (Q. 112.).

Though the catechism is addressed personally, the subjects of it are the love and honor of

God and neighbor. Reading Heidelberg in today's culture of individualism risks

attributing the focus of the catechism on the personalized faith of the reader, rather than

on God who is the focus of personal faith.

Among the contemporary confessions in the Book of Confessions, the Confession

of 1967 is the only one written in response to specific social conditions in the United

States. The Confession is based in the truth that "God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ

embraces the whole of man's life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific

and technological, individual and corporate."[36] To this end, the church is called to be

reconciled to God and one another, to be advocates for peace and justice, racial equality,

gender equality, and to battle "enslaving poverty."[37] The Confession of 1967 lifts up the

necessity of relying on God's action and grace, and at the same time a commitment to

action based in the eschatological hope of God.

> The kingdom represents the triumph of God over all that resists his will and
> disrupts his creation. Already God's reign is present as a ferment in the world,
> stirring hope in men and preparing the world to receive its ultimate judgment and
> redemption… With an urgency born of this hope, the church applies itself to

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[36] *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1: Book of Confessions*, 9.53.

[37] Ibid., 9.46.

present tasks and strives for a better world. It does not identify limited progress with the kingdom of God on earth, nor does it despair in the face of disappointment and defeat. In steadfast hope, the church looks beyond all partial achievement to the final triumph of God.[38]

Context/Environment

In the sixty years since NPC was started in a culture of stability, the culture has gone through discontinuous change, and the church has become disembedded from the culture along with a collapse of coherent frameworks of religious and ethical meaning.[39] This section is an analysis of the focus group data toward a better understanding of the local culture.

The language shared in the focus group interviews revealed salient insights. Group A referred to the church as a place entered from the outside. Most of the group members had positive memories of being warmly welcomed as outsiders, and some even experienced "close knit" friendships. Metaphors of church as a "family" and "home" revealed a sentimental view of church relationships. Pastors were valued positively for their biblical orthodoxy, senses of humor, health of relationships, and therapeutically as warm and personable. One person noted the lack of "psychological hang-ups" among the staff and leadership, which may be an observation that NPC has a higher proportion of people with "self-actualized" qualities. Certain intangible benefits came from "going to church" including being filled up, having positive experiences with people and receiving

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[38] Ibid., 9.54-9.55.

[39] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 135.

friendliness, acceptance, friendship and fellowship. In the church, care referred to interpersonal relationships of personal sharing and listening.

Group A participants tended to see themselves as outsiders in their neighborhoods, with distance from neighbors and lack of engagement. Isolated stories were shared of neighbors who added value to the neighborhood. Group members' interactions with neighbors were limited to brief encounters. Reasons given for their lack of engagement included lack of time due to commitments with church, work, and family activities, and that neighborhoods lacked adequate "public space" for interaction. Some neighbors "cared for others sacrificially" especially those who had lived together in the neighborhood for long periods of time. Care was also hostile as homeowner associations "cared for rules" and not for people. Some group members felt nostalgic about the past. Memories were shared of feeling safer ("we didn't lock doors"), of family members who practiced open hospitality ("to my grandmother, food was positive, and she was always inviting people to pull up a chair"), and community customs ("as a boy, it was rude to not look at people on the street and say hello").

Group A rejected the practice of inviting neighbors to share a meal on the basis that to do so, would be a contrived activity. It was important for hospitality to occur naturally with people who were already known. Group members were suspicious of the practice of hospitality of others and they perceived the cultural barriers to offering hospitality in their homes to be too great. Suspicion and fear of inviting neighborhood strangers into the home was mentioned as reason for rejecting the practice. The notion that relationships with others should happen "organically" as opposed to "contrived"

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suggests a romantic view that hospitality should happen naturally if it is meant to be. This also suggests a fear that others with unknown perspectives or motives may bring instability or harm to family systems, which already are burdened with high levels of stress. One verbal exchange illustrated the tension that was felt. One person said, "Would we do this [offer hospitality by inviting others to the home for a meal] if we were not in this group?" A reply came, "Yes, but aren't we supposed to turn the tables on these things as they are?" Group members described weariness from having so many superficial relationships in their lives, that they were suspicious that their action of hospitality could foster genuine connections with others.

Since Group A was meeting in a home, they had appreciated the hospitality of the hosts, but they made note that this experience of hospitality was "natural, and not contrived or manipulated." This contributed to feelings of "openness" and "joy" in relating to each other as fellow church members. One person felt extending peace to others was better than their tendency toward judging, fixing, and directing. Another struggled to locate with clarity his identity in the home or neighborhood, compared with the workplace.

In talking about the church, Group B tended to describe it as a place to go to have physical and spiritual needs met, accomplish tasks, and find fulfillment. The metaphor of "family" was used sentimentally to describe how the church met the felt need of connection to other people. The church's biblical focus and life application of biblical study were described as keys to "changing people's lives" and fostering personal growth. Church activities and projects were described as fulfilling and important, yet many

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experienced this involvement as all-consuming and tiring. Intangible qualities of the church included "positivity," "caring," "willing to help," and "sense of community." The group was adamant that the church needed to increase participation in worship, Bible study, and church projects as keys to fulfillment; while at the same time, several were experiencing fatigue and burnout from church, family and work life.

Group B described how they were disconnected from their neighborhoods, but very "plugged in" at work and at church. Neighborhoods were mostly described as places of protection ("safety" and "security") and beauty. Neighbors were people known mostly at a distance, but not as friends, lacking much in common with each other. Participants were much more relationally involved in workplaces and at church than with neighbors. Nostalgia surfaced in remembering neighborhoods that had once been a safe place where neighbors were good friends and well acquainted, but had changed over three decades to a place of high property crime and more transient neighbors.

The use of language reveals the locations of thought, and the words we use convey the way we understand reality.[40] The focus groups responded with hesitancy to the challenge to cross neighborhood boundaries and interact with neighbors through the practice of hospitality. Overwhelmingly, the home was referred to as a private space for family refuge and security, and neighborhoods were valued for the protection they offered. This was true for both suburban and urban contexts (except for the instance of the murdered man being disposed in the urban neighborhood). In accepting the cultural

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[40] Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 95.

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assumption that neighborhoods are not meant to be a place for interaction, but rather for refuge, the groups demonstrated they were over contextualized to the cultural context. Most interactions with neighbors that people could remember had something to do with out-of-the-ordinary situations or problems in the neighborhood, like ambulances being called, a wildfire being extinguished, power going out, or issues related to homeowner associations.

In spite of the resistance to cross neighborhood boundaries, there was also a voiced desire that neighborhoods look and feel different, as if the context dictated how they were to act. The desire that the neighborhood "feel like a neighborhood" expressed a subjective sentiment based on previous life experiences in neighborhoods. A sense of paralysis was shared by many about not being sure about what actions to take to change their neighborhoods. Given the high activity level of most participants, other priorities seemed to supplant the chances of these desires being transferred into concrete actions, even as the practice of hospitality was given to them as the initial challenge.

Two specific neighborhood encounters prompted reflective insights about the relationship between the individuals and their neighborhoods. During the community power outage, it was observed that technology played an active role in "taking neighbors away from each other." Without the comforts of air conditioning, television, and computers, neighbors had little choice but to go outside where they could not avoid encountering each other, and having opportunities for conversation that typically were not there. This spoke to the degree to which modern society with its reliance on

technology and connectedness actually has the effect of disconnecting neighbors from each other.

In the instance of the dead body being disposed in the neighborhood, the individual reflected on the act as a clear disregard for human life. The neighbors reacted to this tragedy in unpredictable and surprising ways, as some were fearful, and others were caring. Those in the neighborhood assumed to be less caring, responded to the grieving family setting up the shrine with empathy. Others, perceived as engaged in neighborhood life, acted coldly and threatened by the presence of strangers. The group participant, in light of the reflection in Luke 10 was compelled to engage personally with this family as an expression of care and witnessing to the healing power of prayer. These reflections based in concrete experiences in the neighborhood created opportunities to think deeply about their roles in the neighborhood, not merely as neighbors, but as missionaries. Yet, this reflection was in response to event in the neighborhood that called for care for strangers who did not live in the neighborhood, rather than an intentional decision to take initiative to cross boundaries and form relationships with strangers who lived in the neighborhood.

Most participants in the focus groups shared that their busy lives were lived at a frantic and frenetic pace that for the most part, removed them from their homes and neighborhoods. While maintaining these busy lifestyles, there were repeated expressions of burnout and weariness, and a desire to live at a slower pace. Work environments were described as sometimes difficult, harsh, and competitive. For suburban dwellers in particular, there was a sense that most neighbors felt secure in their context. As the one

group interpreted hospitality as extending peace and security, it seemed irrelevant to relate in this way to people who were already secure. In reading their contexts, the workplace seemed like a more appropriate place to practice hospitality because of the greater sense of insecurity and dis-ease. There is incongruity in these perspectives because there is a lack of connection to the notion that people who live in the neighborhood might also participate in similarly oppressive workplaces, and thus be a prime place to discover God's initiative to bring transformation. Yet, the projection of security over the residential landscapes meant the dominant expectation is that these domains were off limits to boundary crossing for fear of being exposed to the dangers and issues of the unknown strangers.

The emphasis of the groups in identifying safety and security as key values revealed the extent to which they live in a culture of fear. One participant expressed guilt that they had not reported that they value people more than safety, but it was explained that past experiences as a victim of crimes influenced the response. This culture of fear was not only due to the threat of physical violence. One of the focus groups identified that in this society "the stranger" or "the other" was everyone that they came into contact with. Simply talking about strangers prompted the phrase, "stranger danger." It was telling that the participants interpreted that their primary activity of action learning would be extending peace and security to others as a safe person. In this way, the group was reading the context and attempting to re-contextualize their activities based on a commitment to be a part of God's shalom in chance interactions with strangers. As there was fear about inviting strangers into their home for a meal, they decided the appropriate

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context for social interactions with strangers was in the relative safety of public spaces, the workplace, or on the church campus.

The later observation of Luke 10 that came from a couple of the initial group participants demonstrated an awareness that interactions with neighbors, particularly as relating with the Christian African refugee families, demanded not only crossing boundaries into their homes and lives, but that it demanded depending upon these strangers to begin to establish trust and mutual respect and love. This was a radical change in perspective that developed along with a conviction from 1 Corinthians 12, that the different parts of the body of Christ need each other.

The house of language of most in the focus groups was located in the social imaginary of modernity. An important task of missional leadership is to facilitate the moving of followers of Jesus Christ from the language house of the social imaginary of western modernity to the language house of a new social imaginary based on the biblical narrative of God's initiatives of creation, redemption, and transformation. This happens as people dwell in Scripture, participate in God's ongoing work, and learn a new language to describe this new missional praxis. Participants did not move into a new language house as a part of this experience, though an increasing level of awareness of the unsettledness of people in relationship with their neighborhoods is significant.

Culture of Fear

Endemic to a culture of fear is the avoidance of risk. Among the developments of the modern social imaginary was a safe society, needed for the development of trade and commerce. An unintended consequence though, was that much of the good that came

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with risk was lost, particularly from among those who would heroically aspire beyond the status quo.[41]   The temptation to live by fear makes safety, self-preservation and security into idols.[42]

Relatively few cultural voices say that risk is more important than safety. Yet, the Harry Potter novels are about children and adolescents who take risks and face dangers, and in testing their courage, they grow in capability and confidence.[43] Risk is not just unavoidable, but it brings a certain kind of good. Calvin wrote about how knowledge of God's providence and the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit relived fears and anxieties brought on by the fear of this world.[44] God's providence and election direct the church to trust that there is a great calling and purpose for the people of God. The Bible repeatedly tells of accounts there the fearful are exhorted to not be afraid. 1 John 4:18 reminds us that "there is no fear in love." The church more than any people is empowered to come alongside those who are fearful and anxious with the spiritual resources of love and courage. To live most humanly, those living in a restored relationship with God must witness to the world God's plan for restoring human relationships and all of creation. In the light of the prevenience of the Holy Spirit's action that goes before, the church is called to a biblical faith to follow Jesus and to not fear. Fear can lead to beliefs and practices that are counter (suspicion, preemption, and accumulation) to the biblical

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[41] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 180-181.

[42] Scott Bader-Saye, *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 28.

[43] Ibid., 12.

[44] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.17.10-11.

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practices of the Christian community (hospitality, peacemaking, and generosity).[45] In Luke 9:24 (and synoptic parallels Mark 8:3 and Matthew 16:25) Jesus says, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." An ethic of security and safety can turn people away from God with the temptation to love safety more than God or neighbor.

<div align="center">Missional Readiness</div>

In the midst of the captivity of the staff towards control and employing techniques for attracting people to NPC, there are ways that the needs of the community are becoming more apparent to several members who are increasingly concerned about the poverty, schools, and suffering that are witnessed, without clear awareness of the challenges and how to respond to them. Living into biblical patterns of life and practice provides opportunities for the church to form communities of dialogue which place the anxieties of life in this late-modern age with all its fragmentation, inconsistencies, contradictions, and expressive consumerist individualism in conversation with scripture.

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[45] Ibid., 29.

CHAPTER 6

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE PRAXIS

Northminster Presbyterian Church and Tucson, AZ have grown together for the

past sixty-one years. It may be more accurate to say that from the favorable culture

context of its birth that NPC and Tucson have grown apart. Yet, there are many

opportunities for future missional praxis, as NPC learns to participate in the initiatives of

God in the community. The last section of this study is an exploration of the opportunities

for appropriate next steps in continuing praxis of missional innovation and diffusion in

the congregation. This qualitative study has analyzed one particular season of praxis,

which is an ongoing process meant to continue building upon learning and actions taken.

Hence, looking to next steps is more appropriate than a conclusion.[46] The following is a

consideration of the opportunities for ongoing adaptive work in my own leadership

praxis, and ministry praxis in the areas of the overall church system, spiritual formation,

and developing relationships with refugee immigrants.

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[46] Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 113.

Personal Leadership

The culture of fear that is a part of late-modern western culture threatens to be an idol that determines the activities and mission of the church more that discerning the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul's words to Timothy are instructive here:

> For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God (2 Timothy 1:6-8).

If I am timid about engaging in the Spirit's work of being sent as a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God, then I have missed being attentive to both the initiatives of and empowerment by the Spirit. The repentance required is to both trust in the sovereignty of God, and be attentive to the discipline of prayer rooted in biblical reflection. Courage is offered to the faithful who scorn shame and join in suffering for the gospel. God's election in Christ of the church for salvation and service brings the church into joyful participation in the Spirit's work. In place of fear, God offers power, love and self-discipline, which are all important resources for pastoral work. Maintaining the daily office is important for remembering both I and the time I have really belong to God. Scripture reflection is important so that I remember the source of the revelation of my salvation though the Holy Spirit. Prayer is critical for me and others, so that I remember whose power I must rely on in all of life. These rhythms help maintain a sense of balance to be non-anxious in a sometimes frantic ministry environment. For my leadership to be most effective and life-giving, intentional practices of observation, listening, planning,

studying and taking action will all be part of maintaining a deep reflection on the praxis of ministry.

Disseminating the ways that our culture resists the gospel will be an ongoing task for me as long as I am alive. This involves balancing my inner and outer journey with God, as well as my inner and outer work as it relates to what work I do in the church. As my awareness of the dehumanizing aspects of Western culture has deepened, so has my compassion for struggling people.

As I wind down the activities of study for a theological degree, I expect to maintain the disciplines of reading and writing for the purpose of communicating the missional call and purpose to Christians and the church. Newsletter articles, blog posts, devotional writing and sermon preparation have taken on a deeper sense of vocation for me as I sense the deep need to articulate the ways that Scripture addresses deep cultural pressures. The biblical witness and theological heritage provides a wealth of resources to understand the courage needed for these times. In particular, as I have been convicted by my own ignorance of the church confessions, I have developed a desire to both continue my study of them and seek to continue to gather ingredients for clear articulation of a local theology and confession for today. An adaptive challenge for me to wrestle with is how I communicate not just in a one-directional monologue through writing and preaching, but I how seek to engage and attend to the give and take of communication within the NPC system and the community as a mutually supportive dialogue.

During the year 2013, I am serving as moderator of the presbytery of which I am a member. In this role, I will have access to leaders and pastors of churches and ministry

teams in a variety of ways across the presbytery, state, and denomination. All of these

leaders and churches are asking question about what faithful congregations and councils

can do in this era of discontinuous change. The voice I bring to these conversations is one

I hope is compassionate, informed, and prophetic in challenging leaders to be open to

identifying adaptive challenges they face in participating in God's reign.

Spiritual Formation Ministry

To really love the people I serve with in my congregation means that I must both

let go of their expectations of me and, without allowing for a break in relationship, invite

them to allow a process to unfold by which we may discern together the structures and

life of the community of faith energized around God's future. Through dialogue, I can

leverage the trust people have in me, and be bold to challenge assumptions. Through

dialogue and covenant practices with other elders and lay leaders in my ministry area of

directing the ministry of spiritual formation, I will be able to provide quality interpretive

and relational leadership so that they can begin to gain awareness of our context. This

interpretive and relational leadership is in tension but held together by a commitment to

covenant practices. Using an equipping framework, it becomes critical to enact a

covenant with the community of leaders, as a bounded set, who become the front of

developing apostolic identity in our approach to spiritual formation.[47] For praxis to

happen, ministry teams whom I lead will be invited to imagine leadership and education

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[47]Alan J. Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 208-214.

as problem posing and dialogue.[48] As a covenantal group "lives into and incarnates the missional, covenantal future of God's people," we can demonstrate a way of inviting others to do so in a similar way.[49] In spite of the fact that the Lord sent only one person to Gordon Cosby in the beginning of the formation of the Church of the Saviour, he chose to invest all he had in loving them and believing in the people God sent him.[50] I want to be mindful of the people God is sending me as leaders, so that I can honor them, and invest in them to nurture a covenant community centered in the practices of discovering missional life.

A key adaptive challenge will be to move from a ministry model of offering programs for spiritual formation which are separate from programs the church has for mission, to developing praxis engagement around mission. Assumptions about what constitutes mission and what constitutes spiritual formation and education will need to be named, deconstructed, and only reconstructed as a community commits to live in new patterns of action and reflection.

Learning more through initiating mission engagement experiments with action-reflection groups will help us determine better structures for spiritual formation which is not primarily centered on the inner journey. Given what I have learned about the critical role of coaching the groups to resist advocacy and get stuck in assumptions that do not challenge the status quo, I plan to invite others to experiment with crossing neighborhood boundaries, mapping the neighborhood, and attending to neighborhood stories, all

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[48] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 80-82.

[49] Roxburgh, "Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission," 212.

[50] O'Connor, *Servant Leaders, Servant Structures*, 12.

towards the goal of joining with God in the neighborhood. Like the focus groups for this research, there is an opportunity to intentionally invite people to participate in these groups around the periphery of NPC's programmatic church life. This learning will contribute to the ongoing work of the Grow in Spiritual Formation ministry group of three elders that I lead, and will inform the ongoing task of identifying a systemic approach to spiritual formation at NPC.

Immigrant Refugees

The presence of immigrant refugees represents a tremendous opportunity for NPC to both learn through theological praxis. The cross-cultural challenges at play require an adaptive approach which means learning and sharing from all perspectives. For the past two years the Bethesda fellowship which worships at NPC has experienced conflicts and schism. Yet, the leaders seem ready and open to trusting a mutual partnership of learning through educational praxis. Commitment to covenant practices and prayer will be essential. Most African immigrant congregations in the U.S. face the challenge of adequate leadership, as most pastors and lay-leaders are in the U.S. for reasons apart from planting churches. These congregations and the credentials of their leadership are not recognized by many of the churches that host them. Additionally, many immigrant pastors lack formal theological education, and the congregations lack finances to pay them adequately.[51] In the near future, NPC has the opportunity to form a gathering of

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[51] Elieshi A. Mungure, "African Christianity and the Ne-Diaspora: A Call for a Cross-Cultural Pastoral Care Approach and Its Challenges," in *African Christian Presence in the West: New Immigrant Congregations and Transnational Networks in North America and Europe*, ed. Frieder Ludwig and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011), 445.

leaders from NPC to journey in theological praxis towards continuing to identify the reasons God has brought Bethesda into a relationship with NPC, and how NPC can be for them what God is calling us to be. An action learning framework will guide our praxis along with scripture reflection as we actively engage in meaningful learning activities with the Bethesda leaders and congregation. The team will be authorized and approved by the Session, and frequent reports will keep the other leaders informed of the learning.

Significant pastoral care needs exist among the immigrant refugees who are a part of the Bethesda fellowship, the Middle Eastern Presbyterian Fellowship, those who have joined NPC, and others who have yet to be identified through the SAM refugee ministry team. If we continue to believe that God has brought these immigrants to NPC for a reason, another significant adaptive challenge will be how NPC can offer pastoral care and support as a part of learning how to welcome and show hospitality.

John 15 – The Vine and the Branches

The vine and the branches, a metaphor from NPC's theme verse of John 15:5 since its founding, has come to emphasize the importance of members connecting to Jesus Christ and his body, in order to bear fruit. Several verses later in John 15:16-19 we hear Jesus describe his choosing of his disciples, his explanation that they can anticipate being hated by the world. God's election is the basis and source of being connected Christ and other believers for the purpose of fruitful service. The body of Christ is commanded to love one another and participate in what God is doing in the world, all the while living an ethic of sacrificial love as an alternative to the ways of the world.

Several years ago, the NPC Session adopted a new mission statement: "Through Jesus Christ, planting seeds of hope, branching out in faith, and bearing fruit in love. All for the glory of God!" It was inspired by John 15 and I Corinthians 13, using an agricultural metaphor which fit well with the vine and branches identity of NPC. I was sceptical of the metaphor since the church is in an urban setting, and I thought it was a concept fairly removed from the recent experiences or lifestyles of most people at NPC. I did not see the relevance of such a poetic statement, nor did I think it would help anyone clarify what NPC is really about as a church.

However, I have new hopes for the agricultural metaphor and its use at NPC as it relates to the adaptive challenge of leadership as a long term commitment to cultivating the community environment for missional life to sprout from.[52] As NPC has grown out of touch with its neighborhood and community it is urgent that church members learn how to read and understand the local environment. This will not happen through demographic surveys, or by door to door canvassing. Just as a farmer must become aware of the conditions and timing for planting, nurturing, and harvesting a field, season by season, so must church leaders be in relationship with the community life external to NPC life, so that soil conditions may be discovered, and so that missional planting, branching, and bearing fruit may occur. This can only be done through a covenant to live according to habits and practices which seek not to control, but to be invited into the mystery of God's activity in this present context. These are important skills and habits to develop in this world which was unthinkable just a short time ago.

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[52] Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition*, 182-188.

Jesus commands, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." The field and the harvest belong to the Lord. The Lord is in need of workers. May I have the courage and love to be willing to labor in the Lord's field, even as a lamb among wolves.

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