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Exponential Reproduction: Coaching Small Group Leaders to Mentor, Motivate, and Move on at Woodside Church

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This ministry focus paper entitled

EXPONENTIAL REPRODUCTION: COACHING SMALL GROUP LEADERS
TO MENTOR, MOTIVATE, AND MOVE ON AT WOODSIDE CHURCH

Written by

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

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EXPONENTIAL REPRODUCTION: COACHING SMALL GROUP LEADERS
TO MENTOR, MOTIVATE, AND MOVE ON AT WOODSIDE CHURCH

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

DOUGLAS C. HOGLUND
NOVEMBER 2014

ABSTRACT

**Exponential Reproduction: Coaching Small Group Leaders to
Mentor, Motivate, and Move on at Woodside Church**
Douglas C. Hoglund
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2014

To begin transforming Woodside Church into a disciple-making movement, this project focuses on exponentially reproducing small groups. A pilot program of coaches will train small group leaders to mentor apprentice leaders, motivate members to invite new members, and move on to start new groups. The project is divided into three parts.
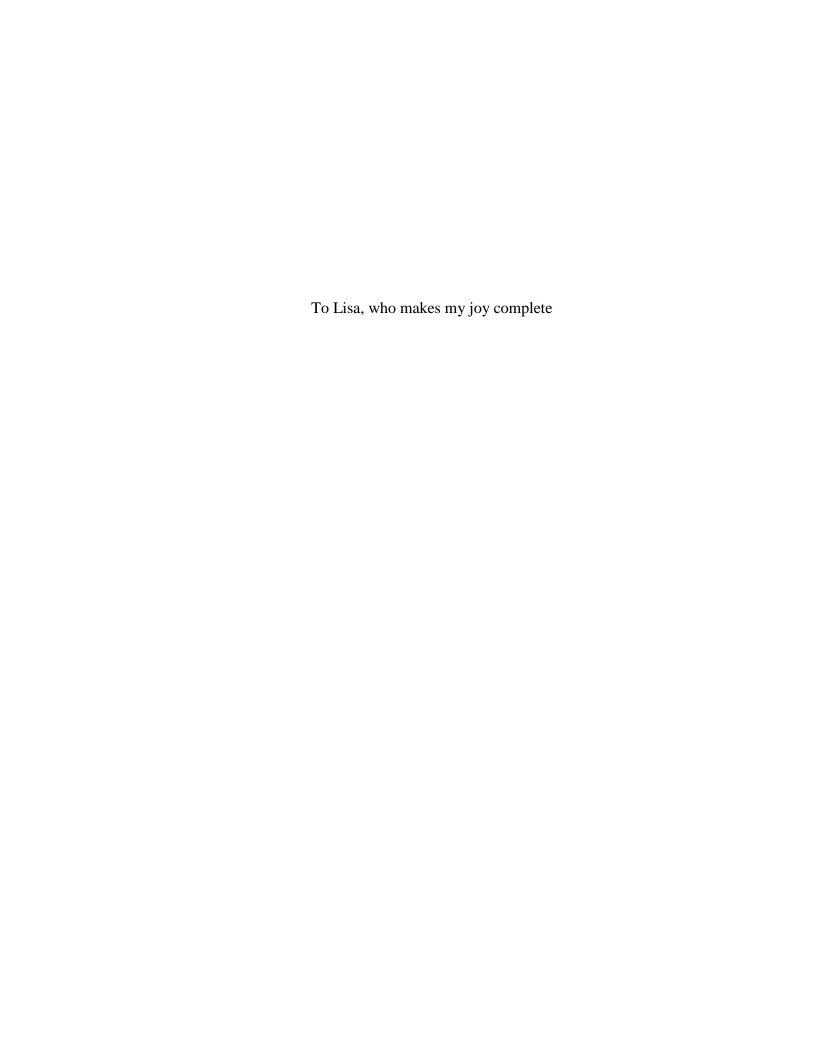
The first part studies the community and Woodside's unique ministry. An examination of demographic, financial, religious, and extracurricular data reveals the successful, stretched, and stressed culture of Lower Makefield. To share the Gospel with this community, Woodside evolved from a traditional congregation with committees to a community of small groups and teams. The church's responses to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in 2001 and 2008 document the effects of this change. The review concludes by examining the barriers it must break to become a reproducing church.

The second part explores the biblical and theological foundations for reproducing small groups by studying the spontaneous expansion of the Apostolic, Reformed, and Missional movements. These principles are applied to a decentralized small group network. A theology of the Church reveals that a network of communities, mirroring the inner life of the Trinity, is a preferred ecclesial paradigm to a clergy-dominated institution. This section concludes with a theology of reproducing small groups, which focuses on the way Jesus, Paul, and twenty-first-century churches apprentice and deploy leaders to reproduce Spirit-led communities.

As a catalyst for an exponential network of small groups, the third part presents a pilot program of coaches who supervise small group leaders. The goal is for leaders to embrace the biblical call to reproduce small groups. Leaders will be coached to multiply groups by raising up leaders. Observations, interviews, and questionnaires will assess what facilitates or inhibits reproduction, so these discoveries may be used to coach other small group leaders.

Content Reader: Randy Rowland, DMin

Words: 300

To Lisa, who makes my joy complete

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I am deeply grateful to the staff, elders, deacons, and members of Woodside Church for all their love, support, and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. They patiently listened to my discoveries and put flesh on them in ways I could not imagine. I am blessed beyond belief.

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:3-6).

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INTRODUCTION

A broadband company proudly advertises it operates one or two hours a week. A cell phone gives excellent service but only at home. A smart phone offers room for four apps and does not email, text, or take pictures. A social networking site allots space for five friends. A browser decides which website the user will view from a pre-selected list of ten. One of those ten is an online encyclopedia in which every article is written by one or two trained experts. All these services feature a complicated procedure for signing up.

One does not need Google to guess that all these products will fail. They share a common fatal flaw: restrictions. Each service imposes a limitation. Some only work at a specific time or location. They offer a narrow list of functions or a predetermined number of participants. A small group of controllers and gatekeepers define both the nature of the content and the connections. These same managers, however, are completely mystified as to why the number of users keeps declining and no one new signs up.

Technology is opening the door to unparalleled access. The hand-held smart phone can now download an unlimited library of information, communicate with the other side of the globe, and view the farthest known stars in the universe. What once was science fiction is now non-negotiable. If a device cannot connect clearly and consistently with the full features of the web, it is time to upgrade or switch.

The failing services above are not scenes from the information industry. They are a parable of the twenty-first-century Church in the United States. Like the internet, the Church is a web of connections. To put it another way, the Church is foundationally

relational. Jesus' commands to "love the Lord your God" (Mt 22:37),[1] "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39), and "make disciples" (Mt 28:19) all depend on relationships. The New Testament images of the Church as the Body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 4:11-16), the people of God (Rom 9:25-26; 1 Pt 2:9-10), the household of faith (Eph 2:19), and the holy temple (Eph 2:20; 1 Pt 2:4-5) depend on connections with the Lord and with one another. Each congregation is a network of relationships.

Misconnections and breakdowns between a congregation and its community are due to the explicit and implicit restrictions placed on that network. The Church is called and sent to offer a life-saving connection with God and his people. While preachers may proclaim God is available at all times, there is sometimes an unstated expectation that the best place to make that connection is an hour on Sunday morning in a sanctuary. While a congregation may describe itself as a friendly church, its code words, cliques, and cultural preferences can form an invisible barrier to visitors. While a small group may say it is open to new members, newcomers may find it hard to break into its circle of long-standing friendships and few people are invited to join the group. Even when a congregation states its goal is to grow, its structure and procedures may discourage innovative ideas which would make it easier for people to connect with the Body of Christ. If a cell phone company limits when, where, how, and with whom one can connect, it will not take long for that company to close. If twenty-first-century churches

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[1] All Scripture quoted is from *The Holy Bible, New International Version,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

place similar restrictions and limitations on their people, they will likely face the same fate.

The way forward is to first look back. The history of Christianity can be told in terms of the way the Church mirrors the structural paradigm of any given period. During the Byzantine Empire and the Middle Ages, the Church arranged itself in the image of the Roman Imperial hierarchy. Julius Caesar and Constantine the Great both held the title of *Pontifex Maximus* before it was applied to the Pope.[2] The Reformed churches patterned themselves after democratic councils in Europe and America. In order to create a holy commonwealth in Geneva, Calvin "scrupulously respected the political sovereignty of the councils. . . . The elders were chosen by and from the Genevan councils."[3] In twentieth-century America, the success of the military and large corporations passed on a structure of national denominations, committees, and task forces.[4] All these structures continue to endure in the Church to this day. Unfortunately, as the culture shifts to a new paradigm, a church, such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PCUSA), which clings to an archaic committee model finds itself outdated and decreasing in membership. Yet this trend is no longer limited to mainline denominations. Church leaders cannot avoid the facts:

> Today, fewer than 20 percent of Americans attend church regularly. Half of all churches in America did not add one person through conversion last year. Every week, forty-three thousand Americans are leaving the church for good. One

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[2] Roland Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and its Impact on Western Civilization,* vol. 1 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 94.

[3] Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 366-367.

[4] Carmen Fowler LaBerge, "The PCUSA 2012: How We Got 'Here,'" http://www.layman.org /Files/how-we-got-here-updated.pdf (accessed September 11, 2014).

hundred years ago, there were twenty-eight churches for every ten thousand Americans, and today there are only eleven churches per ten thousand.[5]

The problem lies in the paradigm. No single structure is the approved biblical arrangement. The key is to use the paradigm of the culture one seeks to reach. The structural paradigm in the age of the internet is not an imperial hierarchy, a representative democracy, or a corporate bureaucracy but a decentralized network. This model offers the hope of reawakening the explosive vitality of the pre-Constantinian Church. When Jesus empowered and deployed a tiny band of apostles from Jerusalem, they did not have sanctuaries, seminaries, denominational structures, or even a complete set of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, within a few generations they exponentially expanded into a movement that overwhelmed the mighty Roman Empire.

The same Lord is building his Church today. The weakness is not in Jesus' message but our model. The old building-based congregation of Christendom is reaching fewer people. This is why Alan Hirsch, a prophet of the missional movement, and Dave Ferguson, a leader of the multisite revolution, point to a new vision. Together, they "sense something immense happening in our day. Like a phoenix arising from the dying embers of Christendom, something essentially new and yet as ancient as the faith itself is emerging. It is the birth of apostolic movements again in the West."[6] According to Hirsch and D. Ferguson, this is a Spirit-inspired movement to meet the challenges of the sixty/forty split in our culture. They claim only 40 percent of American culture is open to

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[5] Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential: How You and Your Friends Can Start a Missional Church Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 14.

[6] Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 17.

the traditional or the contemporary congregational model. Even the best efforts of the

megachurches will not reach the 60 percent of the population who, for a variety of

reasons, refuse to affiliate with any church. Since this segment is projected to rise in the

coming years, the Church must find a way to share the Gospel with these people through

networks that are free of restrictions and limitations.

Jesus called the first disciples to leave their work with nets to form a network (Mk

1:17-18). After training this original small group of twelve, he sent them out in pairs to

make connections in the communities he would soon visit (Lk 9:1-6). Following the first

deployment of the twelve, he sent out a larger mission of seventy-two to more villages to

prepare the way for his arrival (Lk 10:1-20). With the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20),

Jesus returned to Galilee to launch the disciples. Their mission would be to use his

principles and pattern to apprentice and reproduce disciples of all nations. He then

ascended and left them leaderless in the physical sense. After Pentecost, they depended

on the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles to unite and advance

what soon became a dispersed, diverse, decentralized network of Christian communities.

Essential to the growth of this network is the ability to exponentially reproduce.

All congregations are a network of relationships. The weakness lies in their failure to

create new relationships and connections. A body will die if it does not reproduce its

cells. The same is true for congregations in the Body of Christ. Ori Brafman and Rod

Beckstrom describe this cardinal rule as "the network effect."

> The network effect is the increase in the overall value of the network with the
> addition of each new member. Each additional telephone or fax machine makes
> all the other phones or fax machines in the world more valuable. Often without
> spending a dime, starfish organizations create communities where each new

member adds value to the larger network. Every new site on the World Wide Web makes the whole network richer with information.[7]

A congregation's goal is to remove restrictions from its network of relationships so the Spirit can organically, exponentially add new members as he did in the very beginning.

This final project makes the case that part of the answer lies in catalyzing a network of small groups, which can deliver discipleship anywhere, anytime, by anyone. Since joining the Doctor of Ministry program in 2008, the congregation I serve, Woodside Church, has become more structurally decentralized, organically led, outwardly focused, and missionally engaged. Discipleship, though, continues to be a challenge in a culture where over-stuffed schedules leave little time for spiritual growth. Woodside's forty small groups provide spiritual community and growth. Since they fit into busy schedules and do not require church membership, they are effective at both evangelism and discipleship. Eventually, however, these groups focus inwardly, seldom welcome new members, and rarely reproduce new groups.

To break through this inward inertia and to begin transforming Woodside Church into a lay-led, disciple-making movement, this doctoral project focuses on exponentially reproducing small group Bible studies. This will be accomplished through a pilot program of coaches who each train and supervise three small group leaders to launch new groups. The first part of the project explores Woodside's unique ministry to its surrounding community. A study of demographic trends, financial issues, religious affiliations, and extracurricular activities will reveal that Lower Makefield is a suburb

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[7] Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Portfolio, 2006), 202-203.

stressed for success. To share the Gospel with this community, Woodside evolved from a traditional committee structure to a community of multiple small groups, teams, and worship services. The members' responses to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey[8] in 2001 and 2008 document the effects of this change. The review concludes by examining the barriers it must break to become a more reproductive movement.

The second part explores the biblical and theological foundations for reproducing small groups. This begins with a rediscovery of the revolutionary practices of the first-century apostolic movement, the sixteenth-century reforming movement, and the twentieth-century missional movement. The principles of these movements are then applied to a decentralized small group network. A theology of the Church proposes that a network of disciples and communities that love, grow, and share mirrors the relationships at the heart of the Trinity. This ecclesiology leads to a theology of reproducing small groups which focuses on the way Jesus, Paul, and twenty-first-century church movements apprentice and deploy leaders to reproduce Spirit-led communities.

As a catalyst for an exponential network of small groups, the third part presents a pilot program of coaches who each supervise three small group leaders. The goal is for leaders to understand and enthusiastically embrace the call to reproduce small groups by mentoring apprentices, motivating members to invite new members, and moving on to start new groups. Observations and evaluations will assess what facilitates or inhibits reproduction, so these discoveries may be used to coach other small group leaders.

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[8] U.S. Congregational Life Survey (Louisville, KY: PCUSA Research Services, 2008). www.uscongregations.org.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

STRETCHED AND STRESSED FOR SUCCESS:
LOWER MAKEFIELD, PENNSYLVANIA

Fiona Havlish sat in the lobby of Woodside.[1] Worry lined her face. Tears

reddened her eyes. It is not unusual to see an anxious parent of a three-year-old start to

well up on the first day of school at Woodside Christian Preschool. The cries of

separation, an expected annual ritual during the first week, do not all come from the

children. The school, a ministry of Woodside Presbyterian Church, provides the church

with an unparalleled opportunity to interact with and impact the community. This was

Fiona's first encounter with Woodside. Her tears, it turned out, had little to do with the

first day of school.

The Demographics of Lower Makefield

In many ways Fiona's family mirrors the demographics and culture of this

Pennsylvania community on the banks of the Delaware River in the Philadelphia

Metropolitan area. They are among the 89 percent White segment of a town, which also

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[1] Fiona Havlish, interview by author, Lower Makefield, PA, September 12, 2001.

includes 7 percent Asian families and 2 percent African American.[2] Fiona and her

husband Don belong to the 69 percent of the population that is married. Since this is not

the first marriage for either of them, she may originally have been in the 8 percent of

households headed by a single female.[3] Fiona is close to the median age of forty-two

years.[4] Don is fifty-three. They live in a typical bedroom community in which 78 percent

of the households are families.[5] Yet a suburban culture is a relatively recent phenomenon

in this community of eighteen square miles.

Lower Makefield is rooted in the earliest history of the United States. Its name is

an alteration of Macclesfield in Cheshire, England from which Richard Hough departed

in 1683 to receive a grant of five-hundred acres from William Penn.[6] In 1692, Hough's

holdings became Makefield, one of Bucks County's original communities. It was divided

into Upper Makefield and Lower Makefield in 1737. The borough of Yardley, surveyed

in 1682 by the Yardley family, is surrounded on three sides by Lower Makefield. When

Lower Makefield residents are asked where they live they usually say, "Yardley." The

Yardley, Hough, and Penn families attended the same Society of Friends Meeting House.

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[2] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Demographic, Population by Race," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 13, 2013).

[3] Ibid., "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Social, Household by Type," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 13, 2013).

[4] Ibid., "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Demographic, Demographic Summary," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 13, 2013).

[5] Citymelt, "Percent of family households in Lower Makefield Township, Pennsylvania," http://www.citymelt.com/city/Pennsylvania/Lower+Makefield+Township-PA.html (accessed June 15, 2013).

[6] The Township of Lower Makefield, "History of Lower Makefield Township," http://www.lmt.org/information.php#history (accessed June 20, 2013).

The strong tradition of Quakerism was the foundation of William Penn's "Holy Experiment" in Pennsylvania which made the colony open to people of all faiths.[7] This land along the Delaware River also served as the stage for Washington's desperate crossing on Christmas night 1776. George Washington's victories at the Battles of Trenton and Princeton gave him the momentum to continue the rebellion against royal taxation and tyranny.

Aside from these historic markers, Lower Makefield remained a rather quiet rural community for most of the next two centuries. Despite the twentieth-century urbanization in nearby Trenton, New Jersey and Morrisville, Pennsylvania and the explosion of post-World War II housing a few miles away in the nation's second Levittown, Lower Makefield only had 3,211 residents by the mid-century U.S. Census. The population boom came in the 1980s as farms were converted into housing developments. The 1990 census documented a 45 percent population rise to 25,083 residents followed by a 30 percent growth to 32,681 at the turn of the millennium.[8]

Several factors combined to fuel Lower Makefield's rapid residential expansion. Its location near Interstate 95 and Route 1 and its proximity to the Amtrak and New Jersey Transit rail stations in Trenton make it an ideal bedroom community for New York

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[7] Quakers in the World, "The Holy Experiment, in Pennsylvania," http://www.quakersinthe world.org/quakers-in-action/8 (accessed July 22, 2014).

[8] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, Census Population, Population Count," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 20, 2013).

City, Princeton, and Philadelphia. Don was among the 635 people[9] who travel to

Manhattan each day. Many residents put up with this long commute due to the lower

housing costs on the Pennsylvania side of the river. The average value of a home in

Lower Makefield is $415,689 while across the river in Hopewell, New Jersey it is

$530,122.[10] Taxes are also lower in Pennsylvania. Lauren Wanko reports:

> Of the 194,000 people who moved out of New Jersey between 2009 and 2010, more than 20 percent went to Pennsylvania. Realtor Martin Millner said more than 90 percent of people who are willing to consider both Pennsylvania and New Jersey and see the opportunities choose to buy in Pennsylvania. New Jersey has the highest property taxes in the nation, averaging $7,759 in 2011, up 20 percent in the last two years.[11]

The desire for more space is not the only driver in the decision to settle in Lower

Makefield. Its cost of living is lower than the state and nationwide averages, yet its

median family income of $136,638 and median household income of $121,708[12] make it

one of the wealthiest zip codes in Pennsylvania.[13] The violent crime rate is lower than the

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[9] Ibid., "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, CTPP (Employment), By Place of Residence in year 2000," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 22, 2013).

[10] Ibid., "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Housing, Housing Summary," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 22, 2013).

[11] Lauren Wanko, "PA Offers Homeowners Haven From High Property Taxes," NJToday with Mike Schneider, entry posted on March 12, 2012, http://www.njtvonline.org/njtoday/video/pa-offers-homeowners-haven-from-njs-high-property-taxes (accessed June 22, 2013).

[12] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Economic, Economic Summary," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/ DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 23, 2013).

[13] City_Data.com, "Wealthiest Zip Codes in PA," http://www.city-data.com/forum/pennsylvania/ 1827975-wealthiest-zip-codes-pa.html (accessed June 25, 2013).

national average by 88 percent.[14] While there are no factories in Lower Makefield, a

number of office buildings were constructed during the last decade on tracts along

Interstate 95. Lockheed-Martin built a large aerospace research facility in the town on

land it purchased from an extension campus of Holy Family University. During the same

period local and state officials pushed to preserve open space and maintain some of the

bucolic farmland which attracted residents to this beautiful countryside. Many of the

citizens who do not make the rail commute tend to drive to work in the pharmaceutical

industry in New Jersey at Merck, Pfizer, Janssen, Johnson and Johnson, and Bristol-

Myers-Squibb. Thus, the unique culture of Lower Makefield is a product of being close

enough for a commute to high-paying careers in metropolitan areas, yet far enough to be

affordable.

The Priority of Children

When one puts together all the benefits of the community—low crime, lower cost

of living, lower taxes, and more home for the money—it is not difficult to see why Lower

Makefield is a great place to raise children. Families with one or more members under

eighteen-years of age comprise 36 percent of the households.[15] The average family size is

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[14] Cityratings.com, "Lower Makefield Township Crime Rate Report (Pennsylvania)," http://www. cityrating.com/crime-statistics/pennsylvania/lower-makefield-township.html#.UdcOYb7D9Ms (accessed June 25, 2013).

[15] The Association of Religion Data Archives, "2006 Social Explorer Estimates for ARDA, Census Tracts 1057," http://old.socialexplorer.com/pub/ReportData/htmlresults.aspx? ReportId= R10517504&TablesPerPage=50 (accessed June 26, 2013).

3.2 people.[16] Second marriages and blended families seem common in the community. It is not unusual for couples, like Fiona and Don, to have teen children from a previous marriage plus a preschooler like their three-year-old daughter, Michaela. Desiring a strong educational start for their daughter, they chose Woodside Christian Preschool. Established in 1989, this state-licensed school has maintained a waiting list due to its excellent reputation in the community. At kindergarten, children enter the Pennsbury school district which has a total enrollment of 10,887 students and is "recognized by Standard & Poor's for well above average student results and exceptional above average AP courses."[17] Some families also elect to send their children to competitive private schools in the area. This emphasis on learning is not surprising. Among Lower Makefield residents, 37 percent achieved a bachelor's degree and another 35 percent earned a graduate degree, making it the most highly-educated town in Bucks County.[18]

In addition to school, Lower Makefield children work hard at their play. Sports, the arts, and a multitude of other extra-curricular activities fill up the calendars of many families. Parents and children frequently spend most of their time together shuttling between practices and games in a van. It is also common for one child to be on several teams. Moreover, these games are increasingly played on Sunday mornings, causing a

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[16] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ASC Social, Social Summary," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/ DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 26, 2013).

[17] Pennsbury School Board, "Pennsbury on a Page," http://www.pennsbury.k12.pa.us/pennsbury/ About%20Pennsbury/Pennsbury%20on%20a%20Page (accessed June 26, 2013).

[18] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Bucks County, Lower Makefield, 2007-2001 ASC Social, Educational attainment," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/ DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed June 27, 2013).

conflict with worship and Sunday school. A prime example of the power of soccer is the

Yardley Makefield Soccer club's annual Epic Tournament. During the most recent

tournament, 270 girls' soccer teams competed in 443 games running from Friday night to

late Sunday night.[19] Incredibly, this mammoth competition is held every year on

Mother's Day weekend, thus proving that soccer trumps even motherhood. After many

years of running his three children to countless soccer games, Woodside member Robert

Broeze lamented, "We worshiped the soccer god for far too long."[20] While soccer is not

the only culprit, it does reveal how Lower Makefield families lead overscheduled lives.

The Drive for Success

Michaela was a happy surprise for Don and Fiona. She was Fiona's third child but

Don's first. "My husband was never so happy," Fiona said, "as when he found out he was

having a child."[21] Now Don faced the challenge of carving out more family time by

cutting back on business trips and getting home earlier. Ironically, Lower Makefield's

blessings are also its bane. Desiring to give their children a larger home in a safe,

affordable community with good schools and recreation, many parents must commute

long distances to the higher-paying careers which make such a lifestyle possible.

Consequently, they have less time to be with their children. It also makes them vulnerable

to unemployment when recessions cause companies to slash higher-paying positions.

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[19] Yardley Makefield Soccer, "YMS 2013 Epic Tournament," http://ymssoccer.net/epic (accessed June 27, 2013).

[20] Robert Broeze, "My God-winks" (sermon, Woodside Presbyterian Church, Yardley, PA, June 17, 2012).

[21] Havlish, interview by author, September 12, 2001.

Beginning with the Recession of 2008, Lower Makefield unemployment figures rose

from 2.5 percent to remain between 4.5 to 6 percent.[22] The burden of debt does not make

this any easier. Among homeowners with a mortgage, 32 percent also have a home equity

loan and an additional 6 percent have a second mortgage.[23]

While violent crime is not a concern, drug abuse, particularly among young

people, is rising. Don Hentosh, a Lower Makefield resident and Vietnam Veteran cites a

2008 report from the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) which reports that, among

the 681 deaths due to drug use in the Philadelphia area,

> Bucks County's share was 56 deaths and six drug-related suicides. That's a little over one death each week from drugs in Bucks County—and it does not take into consideration deaths from accidents or other health problems caused by drugs. One death per week in a population of over 621,000 may not seem like an epidemic, but considering that the 10-year-long Vietnam War resulted in a total of 133 Bucks County residents' deaths (one per month), it is an alarming rate of death.
>
> There were six homicides in Bucks County in 2010. Imagine the uproar if that number reached the one-per-week rate of drug-induced deaths. Yet, it remains as a "secret" to be hidden. The stigma attached to death by drugs remains as strong as the perception that it only happens to others. This persists in spite of the fact that almost everyone knows, in some way, at least one of the casualties of this war on drugs. They are our children, parents, siblings, friends, next-door neighbors and coworkers.[24]

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[22] Economagic, "Unemployment Rate Lower Makefield Township, PA; Percent; NSA," http://www.economagic.com/em-cgi/data.exe/blsla/lauct42071003 (accessed June 27, 2013).

[23] Citymelt, "Mortgage Status (Lower Makefield Township, Pennsylvania 2009)," http://www.citymelt.com/city/Pennsylvania/Lower+Makefield+Township-PA.html (accessed June 28, 2013).

[24] David J. Hentosh, "Suburban Battlefield: We are Losing the War on Drugs," PhillyBurbs.com, entry posted June 17, 2011, http://www.phillyburbs.com/news/local/courier_times_news/opinion/guest/suburban-battlefield-we-arel-losing-the-war-on-drugs/article_e1b9a90d-104d-549c-84b0-a39ba49692f7.html (accessed July 18, 2013).

In 2009, DAWN reported the number of drug-related deaths increased to sixty-one.[25]

Medications such as Benzodiazepines (e.g., Xanax and Klonopin), which are prescribed

by psychiatrists to deal with anxiety and mental illness, were high on the list of drugs

leading to abuse, overdose, and death. Many children, youth, and adults in the community

take prescription antidepressants and other drugs for anxiety, depression, attention deficit,

bipolar, and other disorders. These may be an indicator of the pressures placed on

families by the long workdays, distant commutes, and overstuffed schedules. The literal

and figurative drive for success leaves many households stretched and stressed.

A Growing Religious Diversity

Tension often leads people to seek a spiritual solution. The openness of Bucks

County's Quaker founders to other faiths resulted in a historic diversity of religious

groups. In 2010, 69 percent of the residents of Bucks County were adherents of seventy

different denominations. There are 394 congregations in the county.[26] While the

overwhelming majority of congregations are Christian, there are Muslim, Hindu,

Buddhist, and Jewish congregations as well. In fact, this last group is well represented in

the area by Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox traditions. The

Philadelphia Metropolitan area is the nation's fourth largest Jewish community, and

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[25] Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, "DAWN Report 2009, Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD: Bucks County, PA" http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k11/DAWN/2k9DAWNME/HTML/162_PA_Bucks_County.htm (accessed July 18, 2013).

[26] The Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, "Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Religious Traditions 2010," http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/42/rcms2010_42017 _county_name_2010.asp (accessed July 19, 2013).

many of the families that once lived in the city moved to the suburbs. Lower Makefield has Conservative, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, and Messianic congregations.

Catholicism is the largest religious body in Bucks County with 321,963 members accounting for 51 percent of all county residents. The next largest group is Mainline Protestant at 61,154 adherents, followed by Evangelical Protestant with 29,486 adherents. The PCUSA, to which Woodside belongs, has a long history in the county going back to the founding of Bensalem Presbyterian Church in 1705 during William Penn's lifetime. According to the 2010 religious census, there were 10,112 members or sixteen adherents for every thousand county residents.[27]

While the number of religious adherents in the county seems to have grown from 61 percent in 1990 to 69 percent in 2010, this growth may be due to a change in the way membership is counted among some denominations.[28] The number of "unclaimed" county residents is 195,306 or 31 percent of the population. This unaffiliated group is probably larger than reported due to an increasing disconnection from organized religion. Decreasing enrollment recently led to the closure of one of the township's parochial schools. During this same twenty-year period Mainline Protestants experienced a net loss of 16,044 members, while Evangelical Protestants witnessed a 4,736 member gain.

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[27] Ibid., "Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Religious Traditions 2010 2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study," http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/42/ rcms2010_42017_ county_name_2010.asp (accessed July 20, 2013).

[28] "In an effort to better match the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies standards for adherents, a few religious bodies changed the way their adherents were reported in 2010, including the Catholic Church, Amish groups, Friends groups, Jewish groups, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Non-denominational Christian Churches, and the United Methodist Church. The change in methodology can distort assessments on growth or decline between 2000 and 2010 for each of these groups." Ibid., http://www.thearda.com/rcms2010/r/c/42/rcms2010_42017_ county_name_2010.asp (accessed July 20, 2013).

There is a rising preference for fashioning your own faith. Contributing factors to this trend appear to be a general mistrust of religious institutions, the increase of work, shopping, and recreation on Sundays, and the conviction that one can have a relationship with God apart from any denomination. Claiming to be "spiritual" rather than "religious," a growing number of residents seem to combine vestiges of their childhood faith tradition with Eastern religions or New Age beliefs and practices. Fiona was raised with the Anthroposophical teachings of Rudolf Steiner[29] and favors the writings of Eckhart Tolle.[30] Although Don was the son of a Presbyterian elder, he did not belong to or attend a congregation. Believing it was important for Michaela to receive a good education and some religious training, they chose to enroll her at Woodside Christian Preschool. Since the little three-year-old had not been to any church or Sunday school at that point, Don and Fiona told her new teacher during fall orientation that Michaela would not know who Jesus is. She may need some help understanding the Bible stories.

A National Tragedy Strikes Close to Home

Fiona's tears on the first day of school revealed she and Michaela would need all the help God could provide. The day was Tuesday, September 11, 2001. Don Havlish worked for AON Corporation on the 101st floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center. When the plane hit the North Tower, he left a message on their home answering machine. "Hi, sweetheart. It's Don. I just wanted to call you and tell you that you will be

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[29] For information about Rudolph Steiner see http://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com.

[30] For information about Eckhart Tolle see https://www.eckharttolle.com.

hearing about an explosion in the World Trade Center. And that it was in Building 1 and I am fine. I will talk to you later and try and get you on your cell. Bye."[31] That was at 8:51 a.m. At 9:03 a.m., United Flight 175 crashed into the South Tower. When it took off from Boston's Logan airport its captain was Victor Saracini, another Lower Makefield neighbor. In all, the community lost nine residents in the terrorist attacks—the most of any town in Pennsylvania.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, Fiona joined with other September 11 widows and family members to create the Garden of Reflection. This Lower Makefield park, commemorating the eighteen victims from Bucks County, was designated as the official Pennsylvania Memorial of September 11. Each year, news cameras focus on the remembrance ceremonies which toll the bell at the hour of each plane's impact. In that first year Fiona also became one of seven Bucks County families in a $101 billion lawsuit against Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. "'I needed some way to direct my anger,' said Havlish. 'And it seemed to me I needed to direct it against the people who did this to me and my family.' Plain and simple, the families want to bankrupt bin Laden and any group or country that supports him."[32]

Stretched, Stressed, and Searching

Woodside embraced Fiona and Michaela in the dark days following the tragedy. There were two memorial services for Don. The first was two weeks after the attack. The

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[31] Ralph Vigoda, "Yardley Family Struggles with Loss of Father," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 16, 2001.

[32] Jennifer Lin, "Widows in Bucks Take on bin Laden with a Lawsuit," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 20, 2002.

second came a year later after the FBI recovered and identified some of his remains.

Thrust onto this unexpected and unwanted journey, Fiona turned it into a time to search

for God. Her return to faith was documented in an article by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

> By her own admission, Havlish was a dilettante when it came to religion, a longtime spiritual explorer. She was brought up attending the Christian Community Church in Devon, Chester County. But in her college days at Widener University, she and her roommate liked to test a different church a week. She dabbled in the teachings of Hindu gurus. She read the Koran. She even gave the Baha'i movement a try. "Nothing ever quite fit," she said. Then she stopped trying. "Deep down, I believe," Havlish said. "But I ignored religion for a long time." Since Sept. 11, she has missed only two services at Woodside Presbyterian. "I didn't go to church for 20 years, and now I can't stop going," she said with a little laugh, almost surprised by her renewed piety. "I began to question things on Sept. 11," Havlish said, "You either believe or you don't. And the bottom line for me is it was more comfortable to believe. I need it very much."[33]

Fiona's search for spiritual meaning, comfort, and support among a community of

believers is a prime example of the spiritual journey others undertake. While they may

not deal with so great a personal and national crisis as Fiona, Lower Makefield's stressful

lifestyle leads some to seek a spiritual solution among God's people.

Unfortunately, church groups and many of the organizations which once tied

communities together are disappearing. In his landmark work *Bowling Alone: The*

Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam documents the sharp

decline of civic engagement in America. Putnam argues a crucial ingredient for the health

of a community is the presence of "social capital."

> By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital—tools and training that enhance individual productivity—the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college

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[33] Jennifer Lin, "Clerics Reaching Out to Those Questioning Their Own Faith," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 23, 2001.

education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.[34]

Social capital is expressed through civic engagement such as voter turnout, attendance at town and school board meetings, serving on civic committees or political parties, and collaborative efforts to solve community problems. Putnam notes the decline of all these sectors in the last quarter of the twentieth century parallels the drop in attendance at school groups, labor unions, professional societies, fraternal groups, veterans' groups, and service clubs. The title of the work refers to the revealing phenomenon of a decline in bowling leagues during a period when the number of bowlers actually increased. Americans are involved individually and independently.

Leaders of township committees, fraternal clubs, and school organizations in Lower Makefield do lament the lack of participation in the community. They frequently complain that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. One might assume that a 58 percent decline in attending club meetings[35] simply means people are spending more time with family and friends. Yet Putnam also shows the number of families who respond "definitely" to the statement "our whole family usually eats dinner together" is down to 34 percent. Inviting friends over for dinner decreased 45 percent.[36]

According to Putnam, religious affiliation is by far the most common place where people associate. While Putnam observes that America still remains a "churched" society,

[34] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 18-19.

[35] Ibid., 61.

[36] Ibid., 98-100.

he reiterates that both membership and worship attendance have declined since the mid-1960s. "The bottom line: While for many boomers privatized religion is a worthy expression of autonomous moral judgment, institutionalized religion is less central to their lives than it was to their parents' lives."[37] This is a serious loss.

> Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America. . . . As a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context. So how involved we are in religion today matters a lot for America's social capital. Regular worshipers and people who say that religion is very important to them are much more likely than other people to visit friends, to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and to belong to (community groups). . . . About 75–80 percent of church members give to charity, as compared with 55–60 percent of nonmembers, and 50–60 percent of church members volunteer, while only 30–35 percent of nonmembers do.[38]

Advances in technology over the last three decades may be eating up some of this civic engagement by keeping people at home in a private world of entertainment. If one totals up the time spent working, commuting, shopping, and driving to sports practices and games, it is no surprise that Lower Makefield families have no time for each other let alone church or community groups.

For many residents the new normal of suburban life is not just "bowling alone" but living alone. Couples accommodate themselves to the separation that comes from frequent business travel and long commutes. It is not uncommon for a husband or wife, who works at a company several states away during the week, to only be home on the weekend. Feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression are indicated by the number of

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[37] Ibid., 74.

[38] Ibid., 66-68.

families who mention taking prescription antidepressants and visiting counselors. While these suburbanites appear to have it all, there is a lack of contentment and a longing for community. Like Fiona, they are seeking to connect with others and with God, or at least a higher power or purpose, which gives meaning to the confusion and chaos that occasionally invades uninvited.

Longing to Belong

Small groups are one way to relieve loneliness, find meaning, build community, and explore spirituality. Putnam indicates that one countertrend to a loss of social capital is the growth of small groups.[39] Sociologist Robert Wuthnow reports, "At present, four out of every ten Americans belong to a small group that meets regularly and provides caring and support for its members."[40] Wuthnow adds that about half of these groups are Sunday school classes, prayer fellowships, Bible study groups, and other church-related groups. Small groups, he argues, are tacitly transforming America.

> When I say that the small-group movement is effecting a quiet revolution in American society, therefore, I mean that it is adding fuel to the fires of cultural change that have already been lit. The small-group movement may be providing community for people who feel the loss of personal ties and it may be nurturing spirituality in an otherwise secular context. But it is not succeeding simply by filling these gaps. It is succeeding less because it is bucking the system than because it is going with the flow. . . . It provides a kind of social interaction that busy, rootless people can grasp without making significant adjustments in their lifestyles. . . . It also provides a form of spirituality that is thoroughly adaptable to the complex, pluralistic world in which we live.[41]

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[39] Ibid., 149.

[40] Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 4.

[41] Ibid., 24-25.

While small groups are not the total solution to the stretched and stressed lifestyle in Lower Makefield, they can offer a supportive community to those who are longing to belong. Joseph Myers outlines four descriptive patterns of belonging based on the work of Edward Hall. To achieve a sense of belonging people generally need connections in four spaces: public, social, personal, and intimate.[42] Public space involves the largest number of connections such as people who cheer for a sports team or worshipers attending a service. The depth of these relationships is not very great. Social space is where people get to know others and let others know them by sharing information.[43] Co-workers, soccer clubs, and book groups fall into this category. The social space has fewer connections than the public but more than the personal space which is reserved for one's "closest friends."[44] This is where people open up and talk about experiences, feelings, and thoughts. The fewest relationships are found in the intimate space where one shares the most private information.

Small groups belong to the social space. They provide a place where five to twenty people can tell their stories, form new friendships, and care for one another. Myers points out that people need relationships in all four spaces, that no space is more essential than the others, and that the spaces are interrelated.[45] One feels a sense of belonging to the larger public space if one builds relationships in the social and personal

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[42] Joseph Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 42.

[43] Ibid., 43-44.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 45.

spaces. He also strongly cautions churches to avoid making a "master plan" in which leaders engineer a method of moving people from one space to another. The four spaces are more "descriptive" than "prescriptive."[46] They describe how people naturally and organically connect, rather than prescribe how they should connect. Myers encourages churches to "create environments and spaces that encourage the patterns of belonging and allow people to connect naturally in all kinds of ways."[47]

Small groups are a fertile environment for the busy lives of Lower Makefield suburbanites. They satisfy the longing to belong. A large network of small groups is able to provide various types of groups—such as singles, couples, men, women, seniors, youth—and various times of meeting. In this way, they also avoid some of the obstacles which prevent residents from participating in other community groups. A broad selection makes it possible for people to choose a group which meets their interests and fits into a busy schedule.

Small groups are often open to newcomers and do not require church membership. Many groups have members from various congregations or no affiliation at all. This overcomes the growing mistrust some have of religious institutions since one can belong without being a church member. Small groups are an excellent place for faith exploration. They are also a key venue for sharing the Gospel. In the larger public space, such as a worship service, a preacher is the sole communicator while the congregation remains silent. Small groups, on the other hand, level the playing field. While there may

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 47.

be a facilitator, everyone can participate in the discussion if they wish. This reduces the objection many have to being "talked at" by religious authorities. Moreover, members may feel it is safe to ask difficult faith questions in this smaller forum built on trusting relationships. Small groups function as a pressure relief valve for the stress of suburban life. Since people tend to join groups composed of members from the same demographic and life-stage, they often receive understanding nods when they express their feelings. Small groups are also an ideal support network in which participants help one another navigate the difficult passages of their lives. When a member goes through a crisis, the other small-group participants often arrive before the pastoral staff with care, meals, and assistance.

Above all, small groups are an excellent place for spiritual growth. They are not a replacement for other spiritual disciplines such as corporate worship or private prayer. Nevertheless, small groups allow disciples of Jesus to worship and pray together, study the Word, practice Biblical hospitality, and serve the congregation and community. If small groups avoid the temptation to become closed and inwardly focused, they can be the means by which social capital increases through community mission projects.

In a town that is stretched, stressed, and searching to belong and believe, small groups are one of the crucial doorways that lead into the life of a congregation and the life-changing embrace of Jesus Christ. Don and Fiona were concerned their daughter Michaela would not know who Jesus is. As *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, that all changed in just one day through the community of Woodside Church.

On Wednesday, September 12th, Michaela asked her mother, "Is Daddy at work?" "No," said Fiona Havlish, choosing her words carefully. "His building isn't there

anymore. We don't know where Daddy is." Mikki, she said, has picked up on her mother's sadness. "I told her that Daddy will always love you, and you have to keep him in your heart. She said, 'But Jesus Christ is in there.'"[48]

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[48] Vigoda, "Yardley Family Struggles with Loss of Father."

CHAPTER 2

BRANCHING OUT: THE WOODSIDE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Almost eight years to the day after Michaela's first day of preschool, Lower Makefield marked another milestone. Unlike September 11, it did not receive national attention. It was not a time for sorrow. A year of disruption and construction finally gave way to a celebration. On September 13, 2009, Woodside Church dedicated its new, expanded facility to the glory of God and the service of Jesus Christ.

George Gallup, Jr., the guest preacher that day, delivered a message entitled, "Let Revival Begin." A keen observer and analyst of the Church in America for a half century, Gallup laid out several roadblocks to revival he encountered through his surveys. Among them is "a failure on the part of churches to reach out to the very margins of society. Church people do wonderful work within their comfort zones. But where is the hand of mercy when it comes to working with the so called outcasts of society: drug addicts, the homeless, persons with AIDS, and the like?"[1] The irony was inspiring. As Woodside celebrated the creation of a new fifteen thousand square-foot box, God sent a prophetic

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[1] George Gallup, Jr., "Let Revival Begin" (sermon, Woodside Presbyterian Church, Yardley, PA, September 13, 2009).

call to go beyond it. Gallup went on to challenge the congregation to move into the community and be a blessing in Jesus' name. It was time for the tree of Woodside to branch out even more.

Roots to Fruit: The Growing History of Woodside

Jesus once said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade" (Mk 4:30-31). Woodside Presbyterian Church began life in 1883 as a tiny mustard seed planted by a small group of Christians.[2] They worked the farms surrounding the little village of Edgewood nestled within the bounds of Lower Makefield Township. Like other Bucks County villages which sprang up at the crossroads of two colonial thoroughfares, Edgewood had a tavern, a blacksmith shop and livery, two competing country stores, a grange hall, a public school, an orphanage, and a dance hall.

> In the 19th century, a minor tourism industry developed that allowed local farmers to supplement their incomes by taking in boarders. First by stage and horse traffic, then after 1876, by the nearby Reading railroad, city dwellers arrived to vacation in the healthful farm air. Most successful during the 1890s, the village declined and faded to a commercial backwater by the middle of the 20th century.[3]

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[2] The Woodside Church, "Roots to Fruits: The Growing History of Woodside Church," http://www.woodside-church.org/ourhistoryhome.rhtml (accessed July 25, 2013).

[3] The Township of Lower Makefield, "History of Lower Makefield Township," http://www.lmt.org/information.php#history (accessed June 26, 2013).

For years the residents could not decide if they wanted to be known as Edgewood or Woodside. Both names still appear on various maps for this portion of Lower Makefield. During this heyday in the late nineteenth century, the forbearers of Woodside met on Sundays in their homes to worship God. No church building was available to them. It was difficult to travel by horse and buggy to the nearby Newtown Presbyterian Church. Eventually, "a chapel was built near the site of the present intersection of Edgewood and Langhorne-Yardley Road for about $1,200. The land for the chapel was once part of an apple orchard. . . . The deed is dated April 2, 1884. The session minutes of the Newtown Church even authorized the sale of the apples to support the congregation."[4]

Although the chapel was Presbyterian, it served all the people of Edgewood regardless of race, nationality or creed. With moveable pews, the chapel performed double duty as sanctuary and social hall. It was the center of community life. Before they could afford to call a pastor, the pulpit was often filled by lay leaders of the congregation. From 1917 to 1953, Princeton Theological Seminary provided seminary students to pastor Woodside for one or two years. "The chapel became known as 'the training post for Princeton Theological Seminary Pupils.' Seminarian Arthur Miller, who served Woodside in 1924, was elected Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in 1959. The tiny chapel was also proud of the fact that many of these student pastors went on to mission work around the world."[5]

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[4] Woodside Church, "Roots to Fruits."

[5] Ibid.

After World War II, the area served by the chapel began to gradually change. U.S. Steel built the Fairless Steel Works ten miles away. Levittown sprang up nearby. While Edgewood was still a farm community for several more decades, its population was slowly rising. Charles Brackbill, Jr., a Mennonite who later became Presbyterian, was the student pastor at the time. He urged Woodside to become a chartered congregation even though it could not afford a pastor. "On Sunday evening, April 28, 1946, with eighty charter members, the Woodside Presbyterian Church was organized as the 171st church in the Philadelphia Presbytery."[6] Three men were elected elders for the new Session. Within six months, Woodside "took the progressive step of electing its first woman elder: Sara Bond."[7] At that time there were few women elders in the denomination.

In 1953, Woodside called Jerold B. Ellison, "its thirty-second seminary student to be its first full-time ordained pastor."[8] In its sixty-eight years of life, Woodside has had five head pastors. With each pastor the tenure increased. These longer than average pastorates resulted in healthy, stable leadership and growth. In addition, each pastor oversaw a construction project. A manse was added behind the chapel in 1953. The congregation constructed a Christian Education building and offices in 1959 on five acres it purchased across the street. After building a larger sanctuary next to it in 1968, Woodside sold the little chapel in 1972. A fellowship hall was added in 1983, four classrooms and a music room in 1999, and finally a large multi-purpose worship and

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

fellowship building in 2009.[9] These stages of growth are not only a response to the expansion of the congregation, but also a sign of the transformation of Edgewood and Lower Makefield from a sleepy rural crossroads to a suburban bedroom community. As mentioned in chapter one, the completion of Interstate 95 through the town in the 1970s led to a boom in housing in the 1980s and 1990s. Two shopping centers, built next to Woodside's property, converted the old Edgewood Village into the new center of Lower Makefield. Once again, the congregation is at the heart of the community.

Woodside's pastors have led the congregation from one side of the theological spectrum to the other and back. Jerrold Ellison (1953-1956) was described by one member as being conservative to the point of fundamentalism. John McConaughy (1956-1963) held to a more centrist position. As the country journeyed through the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, George Hollingshead (1964-1978) advocated a liberal position. Steven Janssen (1979-1992) reversed this trend to the center-right position by emphasizing evangelism and church growth. With an increasing number of children in the community, Janssen's Doctor of Ministry dissertation argued that church-based schools are an effective way to reach out and welcome the community into the church. "After much planning, the Woodside Christian Preschool, a fully state licensed, Christ-centered nursery school, opened its doors in September, 1989."[10] Many members still identify the preschool as their first point of contact with Woodside. "On June 30, 1992, Steve Janssen drew to a close his thirteen year pastorate over which time Woodside paralleled the rapid

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

growth of Lower Makefield from quiet farm land to busy suburbs."[11] During the interim

period, the congregation dissolved the Board of Trustees and transferred its

responsibilities to the Session. When I became pastor of the congregation on January 10,

1994, Woodside had a unicameral structure with committees headed by elders.

This tour through Woodside's history reveals several features of the

congregation's culture. It is rooted in small groups which met for worship, prayer, and

Bible study in homes before there was a building. The congregation was by the people

not another church or the presbytery. While it honors its past, the members are not bound

by it. This is demonstrated by their willingness to sell the original chapel when it no

longer served the needs of the ministry. The congregation is open to diverse forms of

leadership including lay preachers, seminary students, and female elders. The members

are also willing to try new ideas such as forming the preschool and dissolving the Board

of Trustees. Woodside enjoys a pattern of steady growth in membership, worship

attendance, and buildings. This is due, in part, to its long term pastorates. Throughout its

history, Woodside has been a focal point of the Lower Makefield community. Finally,

from the very beginning, the pastors and people of Woodside have made spiritual growth

and renewal a high priority. During his final year of service at Woodside, Brackbill, the

seminarian who motivated the people to become a chartered congregation, wrote,

> The year that lies before us is the most challenging one that we shall face. In it we
> have the opportunity to continue as we are, or to advance. We cannot go back, we
> must go forward. 1948 could be the best year in the history of our church. God
> puts the challenge to us and stands ready to help us, but we must do the work. It
> will mean that every member accepts the challenge. It will mean that every

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[11] Ibid.

member becomes a good steward of the things God has given – time, abilities, money. Let us pray for God's forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings. Let us ask him for a spiritual awakening among our people in 1948.[12]

It would be another sixty-one years before Brackbill returned to Woodside for the dedication of the new building in 2009. He was amazed at how the little mustard seedling grew into a large tree with many sheltering branches.

The Family Tree of Woodside: A Demographic Portrait

The people who find shelter under the branches of Woodside Church mirror, in many ways, the makeup of the Lower Makefield community. The majority, 84 percent, take ten minutes or less to travel to worship.[13] They are 90 percent Caucasian, 3 percent Asian, 2 percent African American, 2 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent other races. Married couples make up 74 percent and 62 percent live in a household with two adults and children. Like the community, it is an educated congregation with 48 percent holding a bachelor's degree and an additional 28 percent having a graduate degree. In age distribution, the membership is slightly younger than the community:

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[12] Charles Brackbill, *The Annual Report of the Woodside Presbyterian Church* (Yardley, Pennsylvania, 1947).

[13] U.S. Congregations, "US Congregational Life Survey: Woodside Presbyterian Church," (Yardley, Pennsylvania, 2008).

Table 1. Comparison of Population by Age between Woodside Church and Lower Makefield

Age	Woodside[14]	Lower Makefield[15]
25 and under	16%	16%
26-45	27%	26%
46-55	29%	23%
56-65	13%	18%
Over 65	14%	16%

Hidden within the twenty-six to forty-five year-old group is the twenty-six to thirty-four year-old group which is the smallest population both in the church (11 percent) and in the community (8 percent). Since it is very difficult for this group to purchase homes in Lower Makefield, it is unlikely there will be a large young adult community in the town and the church.

A diversity of theological views is present in the congregation, but overall the majority of Woodside falls on the center-right position of the theological spectrum.[16] Those who describe their theological views as very conservative make up 5 percent, conservatives are 41 percent, centrists are 39 percent, liberals are 13 percent, and those who say they are very liberal are 2 percent. Woodside is reaching unchurched people. While 62 percent report they participated in another congregation before attending here, 32 percent did not. Of those who came from other congregations, 35 percent were Presbyterian, 15 percent Catholic, 14 percent Methodist, 7 percent Baptist, and 6 percent non-denominational.

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[14] Presbyterian Church (USA) Statistical Report, "Woodside Presbyterian Church, Yardley, Pennsylvania," (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA) Research Services, 2012).

[15] Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, "Lower Makefield, 2007-2011 ACS Demographic, Population by Age," http://www.dvrpc.org/asp/DataNavigator/default.aspx (accessed July 30, 2013).

[16] Ibid., "US Congregational Life Survey: Woodside Presbyterian Church," (Yardley, Pennsylvania, 2008).

The people of Woodside are stretched and stressed for success just like their neighbors. Long commutes and frequent business trips make it difficult to find time for the family. Children are signed up for multiple sports and activities. Driving in a van from one practice to another has replaced the dinner table as the principle time the family is together. The stress often manifests through such issues as eating disorders, ADHD, cutting, drug abuse, drinking, and other addictions. With such overscheduled lives, Woodside's goal was not to add more activities to an already overstuffed calendar. The mission was to become a community of love, growth, and sharing. To reach this end, Woodside needed to return to its beginning.

Six Successive Waves of Transformation

Many of the features that were present when the seed of Woodside was planted—small groups, lay leadership, creative ideas, releasing the past, and restructuring for the future—lay dormant under the surface in 1994. These are what Hirsch calls, "the forgotten ways" which need to be reawakened.

> All God's people carry within themselves the same potencies that energized the early Christian movement and that are currently manifest in the underground Chinese church. Apostolic Genius (the primal missional potencies of the gospel of God's people) lies dormant in you, me, and every local church that seeks to follow Jesus faithfully in any time. We have quite simply forgotten how to access and trigger it.[17]

At the time, Woodside mirrored many typical mainline congregations with about a hundred people in worship. There was one traditional worship service. The committees

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[17] Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 22.

were led by elders. It offered a Sunday school and various choirs from nursery school up to adults. There was one Bible study. In terms of stewardship, the church was spending more than it received for several years and was unable to give anything to mission or fix critical property issues. One bright spot was the preschool which had full classrooms and long waiting lists. The church's focus was internal rather than external. Its goal was simply to survive. The rediscovery of the dormant, lay-led missional movement which first planted the seed of Woodside came through six successive waves of transformation.

The first wave transformed worship from a single traditional service to three diverse styles. As in many Protestant churches, there was a traditional worship service led by a choir and organist at 11:00 a.m. Nevertheless, nine months after my arrival, the elders were willing to start a contemporary worship service at 8:30 a.m. This signaled their openness to new and creative ideas. In 2001, the service moved to 9:00 a.m. and soon passed the traditional service in attendance. The growth in worship attendance was so great that, in 2005, Woodside started a third service called "Higher Ground" on Sunday evening. Instead of copying the earlier style, the staff asked the youth to design and lead the service. Despite some occasional tension, Woodside is able to avoid conflict between these diverse worship services due to the worship leaders' respect for the integrity of each service's style and culture.

In the next wave, Woodside transitioned from central control to a permission-giving culture. This began in 2000 when the Session studied William Easum's concept of the permission-giving church in *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers.* Easum makes a forceful argument that the clergy guild and committee structure of most churches is more

concerned with making decisions and controlling what happens than making disciples. Moreover, representative democracy, a highly revered sacred cow in the PCUSA, is actually ill-equipped to handle the rapid, discontinuous change of the Quantum Age. Easum states, "Church leaders in the Quantum Age must do everything they can to slaughter the sacred cow of control. Tightly controlled organizations and institutions will not do well in the Quantum Age. The top-down oppressive approach of bureaucracy is on its way out."[18] The staff and elders realized there was a need for a culture shift. The goal changed from requiring permission and approval to giving away ministry and developing leaders.

The main obstacle to this shift was the committee structure. It was unable to handle the day-to-day decisions of a growing church. It tended to muzzle rather than multiply ministry and leaders since it required multiple approvals before action. The staff and elders began searching for a way to surrender central control and become a permission-giving church. Easum states, "Permission-giving churches believe that the role of God's people is to minister to people, in the world, every day of the week, by living out their spiritual gifts instead of running the church by sitting on committees and making decisions about what can or cannot be done."[19] The leadership of Woodside was mostly in favor of the concept, but it had no model for how to implement the change.

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[18] William Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers: Ministry Anytime, Anywhere By Anyone* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 28-29.

[19] Ibid.*,* 51.

The third wave of transformation replaced Presbyterian committees with purpose-driven teams. In 2004 Woodside participated in "40 Days of Purpose."[20] This spiritual growth campaign from Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church helped the congregation discover five biblical purposes: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, and Mission. Once members became familiar with these values it was an easier process to transition to the model described in Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church*.[21] At the start of 2005, Woodside replaced its committees headed by elders on Session with staff members leading teams for one of the five purposes. The entire mission of the church changed from running programs to developing disciples. Each staff member works with a different subculture: the community, the crowd, the congregation, the committed, and the core. Since they are engaged in the common goal of training disciples, collaboration among the staff on a daily basis replaces the former competition among committees. Instead of running ministries, elders became "overseers" (1 Tm 3:1-7) who pray, seek God's vision, tend to personnel, financial, and legal issues, and keep the peace in God's household.

One organic change sparked another. In the fall of 2005, Woodside experienced a fourth transformation when it transitioned from being a church with small groups to a church of small groups. During the 1990s attempts were made to grow the Sunday morning adult education program by offering three or four electives while the children and youth were in class. This had limited success and never reached more than sixty

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[20] "40 Days of Purpose," http://www.saddlebackresources.com/40-Days-of-Purpose-C561.aspx.

[21] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

adults in attendance. At the same time, the number of small groups began to increase.

Many adults were studying God's Word and receiving discipleship outside of traditional

adult education. Small groups met at times which were convenient to the participants.

They formed according to a particular affinity such as men, women, couples, singles,

youth or seniors. Adult electives on Sunday tended to be a class of individual students,

while small groups became a community of supportive relationships.

Nevertheless, one lesson learned from adult education was the value of organizing

small groups into semesters. Leaders were asked to start and stop their studies four times

a year so all the resources of the church could be used to promote and encourage

members to get into groups. Currently there are about forty groups for teens and adults.

This network of groups is now the culture of Woodside. It is common for people to ask

not just, "Which service do you go to?" but also "Which group are you in?" In 2008 each

group was challenged to select a mission. Surprisingly, several came up with causes not

on the suggested list, such as prison and recovery ministries.

As small groups started to engage in mission, the church went through a fifth

wave of change from internal focus to external mission. The goal switched from

attracting people into the building to launching the church into the world. What started as

one youth mission trip in the summer of 1994 grew into two trips to Haiti, one to the

Dominican Republic, three to the Bahamas, and one to Appalachia in 2013. All of these

were lay-led. What began as a few small groups adopting some community projects

became multiple groups engaged in mission throughout the week. The disciples at

Woodside started to view the church not as a building but a people, not as a place or a

program but a process of discipleship, not as a destination but a movement and a mission. This community of faith was becoming what Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson describe as an "externally focused church."

> They are inwardly strong but outwardly focused. They integrate good deeds and good news into the life of the church. They value impact and influence in the community more than attendance. They seek to be salt, light, and leaven in the community. They see themselves as the "soul" of the community. They would be greatly missed by the community if they left.[22]

In the fall of 2010, following the example of other churches, Woodside created a spiritual-growth campaign called "Living Outside the Box." The goal was to get the congregation out of the box of the church building to bless the community. As with other campaigns, sermons, worship services, small group studies, and daily devotionals all focused on the same themes and passages for eight weeks. The plan was to make this a collaborative effort of the members and friends of Woodside. Small groups were encouraged to meet in public places.

The centerpiece of "Living Outside the Box" was a Sunday in November when the church left the building. There were no morning worship services. Instead, after a brief gathering for prayer in the parking lot, groups left to engage in a variety of mission projects. To further emphasize the collaborative nature of this effort, the church asked community leaders, small groups, and individuals for mission project ideas. In addition, each person was encouraged to invite a friend, family member, or coworker to join them on that day. This multiplied the number of servants and gave non-members an

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[22] Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2004), 12.

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opportunity to experience what it is like to be part of God's work force. At the end of the day the work teams returned for a meal, worship, communion, and a slide show of what was accomplished that day. There were eighteen projects and more than 270 participants.

Despite feeling the joy and power of the Holy Spirit, Woodside was not satisfied just to repeat this campaign. The leadership wanted to share what they learned with other congregations and be a catalyst for a missional movement. In 2011, five churches from Lower Bucks County left their buildings to bless their communities. The following year the number of congregations grew to seventeen. In the fall of 2013, twenty-seven churches from two states representing Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ denominations participated.

Finally, the sixth wave of transformation moved Woodside from a single location to multiple campuses. Before expanding its facility in 2009, Woodside's leadership considered moving to a larger property. Despite its prime location at the heart of Lower Makefield, the congregation's five acres did not allow for much growth. When the leadership discovered there were no larger tracts available in this highly developed suburb, they resolved to make the most of the current location. At the same time, they began to consider a new vision: one church in multiple locations. Limiting the gathering of God's people to a single site limits the church's ability to expand. The building becomes a bottleneck to growth. Moreover, the leadership realized if a congregation is able to attract more attendees, the result will be more time, money, and energy invested in building larger buildings rather than in fulfilling the Great Commission.

In 2012, the staff and elders began to explore the multi-site church movement. In *The Multi-site Revolution,* Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird predict that thirty-thousand American churches will be multi-site in a few years.

> Churches are learning new ways to multiply and extend their ministry without having to pour millions of dollars into new buildings. They are moving . . . across town into theaters, schools, and empty warehouses. They are becoming "one church, many congregations," reaching hundreds and even thousands of unchurched people they might never have reached had they not branched out.[23]

After sending the staff to attend an Exponential Practicum led by Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois, Woodside launched a campus in a nearby town on Easter 2013. It met first in the banquet hall of a bar and restaurant and quickly relocated to a warehouse owned by a church member. Since the campus was not tied to a single location, it was able to adapt to this unexpected change and continue to fulfill its mission. Its location in a non-traditional space for churches also removes the discomfort some unchurched people might feel when entering a traditional sanctuary. Nearly all the members of the worship band that leads the service had no connection to a church prior to the launch of the campus.

These six waves over the last two decades transformed Woodside from a single traditional service to a diversity of worship styles, from an organization of committees to a network of organic teams, from a Sunday-only education hour to a variety of discipleship groups meeting at different times and places, from a focus on internal institutional concerns to a catalyst for energizing congregations to bless their

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[23] Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 11-12.

communities, from a land-locked location to a multi-site movement. While most mainline churches are witnessing a decline, these changes yielded an increase in several key indicators. Over the ten years from 2002 to 2012, membership grew steadily from 469 to 673, average worship attendance increased from 276 to 376, and total giving rose from $396,750 to $975,190.[24]

Woodside's Participation in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey

External measurements, such as the worship attendance, the number of small groups, the offerings, and the hours of mission engagement, are easier to quantify than how people think or feel about personal and congregational spiritual growth. The leadership gained some insights into these key factors through Woodside's participation in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey[25] in 2001 and 2008. The pivotal change from elder-run committees to staff-led teams occurred midway through this period. A comparison of the results from these two surveys documents the impact of the shift to a flatter, decentralized, group-based community. In the following table, Woodside's responses in 2001 and 2008 are categorized into ten strengths. The numbers are percentile scores when compared with all other participating congregations. A score in the eightieth percentile is considered a congregational strength. The third column is the percentile change from 2001 to 2008. Woodside's strengths are ordered from high to low according to the 2008 scores.

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[24] Presbyterian Church Mission Agency, "Ten Year Trends: Statistical Snapshot for Woodside," http://apps.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/8103/ (accessed July, 20, 2013).

[25] U.S. Congregational Life Survey, http://www.uscongregations.org.

Table 2. Change in Strengths between 2001 and 2008 from U.S. Congregational Life Survey of Woodside

Strengths	2008	2001	Change
Looking to the Future	96	71	25+
Empowering Leadership	89	82	7+
Welcoming New Worshipers	89	80	9+
Caring for Young People	86	97	11-
Meaningful Worship	81	65	16+
Growing Spiritually	78	41	37+
Having a Sense of Belonging	71	47	24+
Focusing on the Community	65	80	15-
Sharing Faith	42	19	23+
Participating in the Congregation	26	25	1+

The congregation reported strengths in the areas of worship, ministry to children and youth, welcoming newcomers, empowering leaders, and looking to the future. More significantly, the shift from a traditional, committee-based structure to a decentralized, team-based network yielded positive change in such areas as growing spiritually, looking to the future, having a sense of belonging, and sharing faith. In 2008 the congregation expressed a positive view about itself and the future. A majority agreed or strongly agreed that "This congregation is always ready to try something new" (76 percent), that they "have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future" (88 percent) and that "In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister" (96 percent).

The greatest benefit of this survey is the guidance it provides for future direction. It identifies nine growth goals which are not listed in any specific order: help people develop personal daily devotions, grow the prayer ministry of Woodside, deepen the sense of awe and God's presence in worship, improve participation in worship, leadership, and stewardship, improve the sense of belonging through small groups, increase the church's impact and influence in the community, give more opportunities for

people to share their faith and invite people, focus on how to welcome the first-time

visitors and returnees, help people find their gifts and passion and get into leadership. As

a result of this valuable feedback, the staff and elders decided to develop a new

description of what God is calling the congregation to be and do.

A New Statement of Woodside's Mission and Values

For many years, Woodside emphasized three priorities: worship, spiritual growth,

and service. Like the three legs of a stool, all are essential. If one is missing, the

congregation falls down. To lead a balanced spiritual life, new members were encouraged

to do something in each of these areas. These priorities served as the DNA of the

congregation since all three actions may be pursued by individuals, groups, ministries,

and the whole congregation. The leadership felt it was important to align these three

priorities with the five biblical purposes, which formed the basis of the church's

structure, and to add a sixth one: prayer. The staff and elders did not want to craft a

paragraph-long mission statement with ecclesiastical words which do not make sense to a

biblically-illiterate culture. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger counsel a church to simplify its

mission by concentrating on four essential elements: Clarity, Movement, Alignment, and

Focus.

> Clarity is *the ability of the process to be communicated and understood by the people*. . . . Movement is *the sequential steps in the process that cause people to move to greater areas of commitment*. . . . Alignment is *the arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process*. . . . Focus is *the commitment to abandon everything that falls outside of the simple ministry process*.[26]

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[26] Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2006), 70, 72, 74, 76.

Based on this model, the mission statement needed to be clear, simple, memorable, and easily repeatable. After much discussion the elders and staff approved the following mission for Woodside Church: "Love God, Grow in Grace, Share with Others." Through worship and prayer believers express their love for God. They grow in grace as they participate in fellowship and discipleship. Christians engage in ministry and mission when they share with others their spiritual gifts, their financial gifts, and the gift of salvation. The statement is based on the benediction pronounced at the end of every worship service: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Rainer and Geiger suggest the steps in the discipleship process should be arranged in a linear pattern of movement that leads to greater levels of commitment. The three actions in Woodside's mission statement, however, are connected as three interlocking circles. Rainer and Geiger seem to assume that disciples first believe in God, next belong to a church, and finally become servants. This mission statement recognizes that people can start at any one of the circles and work their way around to the other two. One might enter Woodside through a small group (Grow in Grace), decide to attend worship (Love God), and eventually serve in a mission (Share with Others). Another person may participate in a mission trip, come to a worship service, and then join a Bible study.

Building on the mission statement, the elders and staff created a values statement that is simple, clear, and biblically-based. It incorporates the nine growth goals drawn from Woodside's 2008 U.S. Congregational Life Survey. In addition, the statement asks a series of questions which encourage members to engage in six spiritual disciplines. When

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we love God we value worship and prayer. Believers are invited to pray daily and gather weekly with others in worship. To grow in grace we need to value people and God's Word. Christians are challenged to welcome and love new people as Jesus does and to study God's Word in a small group. When we share with others we value giving and service. Disciples are called to give their spiritual and financial gifts. They serve the physical and spiritual needs of others and invite them to follow Jesus. The mission and value statements became the covenant which members are asked to affirm. As the DNA of individuals, groups, worship services, and campuses at Woodside, these statements allow the leadership to promote ministries which align with the church's discipleship process and to abandon ministries which are not. With this clarity about the church's mission and values, the elders and staff next sought God's vision for Woodside.

A New Vision for Woodside: Exponential Reproduction

With every gusting March wind, countless whirling seed pods scatter from a maple tree. They land in the grass, the garden, and the gutter. Given time, they begin to root and grow. Without the constant vigilance of a homeowner, these seedlings will become a forest. The secret is multiplication. Every branch takes part in the scattering of the DNA. Each new tree continues the reproductive process.

Until recently, the tree of Woodside grew by addition. One program, ministry, or worship service was added to the list of offerings. Growth was slow and steady. It took several years before a second small group was added to the one led by me. When the congregation offered spiritual growth campaigns and promoted groups through a semester system, the number of groups began to multiply. Nevertheless, for several years

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the congregation has stalled at four hundred in worship and forty small groups. The

breakthrough requires multiplication. Every level—small groups, ministries, worship

services, campuses, and congregations—must learn how to reproduce. It is easy for a

church to resist reproduction. Congregations can focus inwardly. A church activity, such

as a small group Bible study, becomes an end in itself. Over time, the group becomes a

closed system which rarely admits newcomers who could bring new perspectives and

vitality. A group may become a club or a clique. This inward focus even yields the

counterproductive result of separating believers from unbelievers and seekers with whom

they might share the Gospel.

A reproducing culture takes the opposite approach. It sees each ministry as an

opportunity to reach those outside the faith with the good news. While this can be done

by the addition of members to an existing group, it can be a slow process since few new

people feel comfortable joining a long-standing fellowship. Multiplication of groups

produces exponentially greater growth, since there are more groups for new people to

attend and new people are more likely to join a new group. Perhaps the greatest

opposition to reproducing small groups is the fear that it will "split" the group. Nelson

Searcy and Kerrick Thomas offer a model that is counterintuitive. Conventional wisdom

suggests the best way to increase the number of small groups is to split existing groups.

Searcy and K. Thomas state, "Through the semester-based system and the practice of

apprenticing, you can multiply groups naturally by multiplying leaders."[27] The goal is to

raise up leaders, not split up groups.

The vision for Woodside's next wave of transformation is to become a church that

reproduces naturally and organically at every level. This doctoral project will focus

specifically on how to coach small group leaders to mentor apprentice leaders, motivate

members to invite new members, and move on to start new groups. The goal is not to

grow a bigger church but to release more believers and groups into the community who

will scatter the seeds of good news and good deeds in Jesus' name. This is the challenge

Gallup offered at the end of Woodside's dedication service.

> Revival can start anywhere. It takes only a spark. It can start here with your new building which can be a place of transformation as people seek to walk still closer with Jesus Christ.
> The good news is that sainthood is alive and well countering the lukewarmness we sometimes find in the church and knocking down the roadblocks to revival. Just think of what benefits there would be for society if in the next 10 years we were able to increase the percentage of everyday saints for 10 to 15 percent.
> Great things lie ahead. Indeed we can be sure that God longs for a deep and resounding response on the part of the American people. Meanwhile America waits to see what truly transformed people can do to truly transform the populous.[28]

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[27] Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, Activate*: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), 72.

[28] Gallup, "Let Revival Begin."

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christianity has no holy ground. There is nothing in the New Testament that hints

at a sacred shrine similar to the Kaaba in Mecca, the Parthenon in Athens, or the Temple

in Jerusalem. Although believers have made pilgrimages to holy sites throughout the

history of Christianity, the rejection of a supreme sanctuary goes back to the very

beginning of the Church. Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin on the charge that "this

fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have

heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs

Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:13-14). Far from denying this accusation, he

proclaims that "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48-

50). Such a radical notion earns Stephen a swift and violent end.

In spite of this objection to physical edifices, the New Testament employs rich

architectural analogies to describe the Church. Paul solemnly warns the Corinthian

Christians: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit

dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for

God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16-17). Later he

reminds the Ephesians Christians that they are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:20-22). Peter affirms this when he writes: "As you come to him, the living Stone— rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a temple of the Spirit to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:4-5). For Paul and Peter the sacred role of the Temple as the place of meeting between God and His people is transferred to Jesus and, by extension, His followers. The Church becomes the Temple.

The significance of this shift is explosive. No longer tied to a single region or slice of real estate, the Church is free to expand into every land and adapt to every culture. Released from the sacrificial system and the priestly caste, it launches from Judea as a popular movement led by people who possess little education or training (Acts 1:8; 4:13). Without designated shrines it spreads as a living organism which reproduces exponentially as it attempts to stay under the radar of state-sponsored persecution (Acts 17:6-8). Even the apostles are not critical to the spontaneous expansion of the movement (Acts 11:19-21). Their execution by the Romans does not stop the growth of the Church. Hirsch points out that between AD 100 and AD 310, the Church "grew from 25,000 to 20 million in 200 years!"[1] Ironically, the Roman authorities eventually find a way to curb and control the Christian movement. A process of domestication begins with the

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[1] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 19.

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tolerance of Christianity in AD 313 by Constantine the Great. A new structural paradigm

for the faith arises with the creation of the Christian state in AD 380 by Theodosius I.[2]

Imperial Rome remakes the Church in its own image even to the point of employing the

basilica, a pagan Roman public building, as the architectural template for the new

sanctuaries.[3] The temple becomes the Church. Congregations are identified by these

shrines and connected to a hierarchical system which mirrors the imperial administration.

The movement is institutionalized or, to put it another way, housebroken.

    This building-based, institutional paradigm of the Church prevails for the next

seventeen-hundred years. Like many Christian movements, the Reformation was an

attempt to recover the original, dynamic mission of Jesus and the apostles by removing

all Church traditions not based on the Word of God. Nevertheless, the following literature

review will demonstrate that some of the Reformation's values, such as the priesthood of

all believers, are not fully developed in the clergy-dominated Church of the sixteenth

century. Karl Barth's ecclesiology advances the reforming movement by emphasizing the

outward mission of the Church and the ministry of each disciple. This leads to a twenty-

first-century paradigm that is decentralized, organic, networked and exponential.

Reawakening a Reforming Movement

    True to its name, the Reformation seeks to re-form or return to the original form

of the Church led by the apostles. John Calvin gives systematic expression to this mission

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[2] Bainton, *Christendom*, 103.

[3] *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* s.v. "Basilica," http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?
id=1560 (accessed October 25, 2014).

in his influential work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin, however, is not entirely able to break away from the institutional paradigm of Christendom. Consequently, in the centuries following Calvin, the reforming movement solidifies into the Reformed tradition. The reforming impulse will not be reawakened until the twentieth century.

The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV by John Calvin

It may be surprising for some to learn that Calvin passionately teaches his followers to embrace, not break, with Mother Church. The opening chapter of Book IV on the Holy Catholic Church is entitled "The True Church with Which as Mother of All the Godly We Must Keep Unity."[4] In line with such Church Fathers as Cyprian and Augustine, Calvin asserts,

> I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goals of faith. "For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder" [Mark 10:9 p.], so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.[5]

In saying this, Calvin refers not to the invisible church of the elect known only to God but to the visible church which can be readily seen by all. It is essential for God's children to maintain this bond with their Mother since there is no salvation outside the Church. On this point Calvin adds, "Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah [Isa.37:32] and Joel [Joel 2:32] testify. . . .

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[4] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1011.

[5] Ibid., 1012.

By these words God's fatherly favor and the especial witness of spiritual life are limited

to his flock, so that it is always disastrous to leave the church."[6]

The mission of Calvin, Luther, and the other Reformers is not to leave but to

restore Mother Church to her biblically defined form. The Roman Church claims its

authority is founded on the rock of an unbroken papal succession from the Apostle Peter.

It is a defense based on persons, places, and polity. Calvin rejects the whole edifice in

much the same way Stephen attacks the Temple.

> For the Lord nowhere recognizes any temple as his save where his Word is heard and scrupulously observed. So, although the glory of God sat between the cherubim in the sanctuary [Ezek. 10:4], and he promised his people that this would be his abiding seat; when the priests corrupt his worship with wicked superstitions, he moves elsewhere and strips the place of holiness. If that Temple, which seemed consecrated as God's everlasting abode, could be abandoned by God and become profane, there is no reason why these men should pretend to us that God is so bound to person and places, and attached to external observances, that he has to remain among those who have only the title and appearance of the church [Rom.9:6].[7]

For Calvin, the Church is neither an earthly shrine nor an episcopal succession. His

definition centers not on place or polity but on preaching and the practice of the

sacraments.

> The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.[8]

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[6] Ibid., 1016.

[7] Ibid., 1044.

[8] Ibid., 1025.

As the break with the Temple, priesthood, and sacrificial system in the first century frees the Church to become a decentralized, multinational movement, Calvin's simple definition of the Church catalyzes the creation of a loose network of Reformed congregations in Switzerland, France, Romania, Holland, Germany, England and Scotland. In summarizing Calvin's ecclesiology, Wilhelm Niesel writes: "Thus the church is not a rigid institution but a living organism, a fellowship of mutual service and helpfulness."[9]

The rapid expansion of this reforming movement is soon limited, nevertheless, by the Christendom assumption of a division between clergy and laity. While Calvin affirms with Luther the priesthood of all believers,[10] he applies this to the direct, unmediated access each Christian has to Christ but not to the ministry of every believer. Calvin does reject any notion of a church hierarchy. In commenting on Paul's description of the Church in Ephesians 4, Calvin argues, "There he not only mentions no ministerial head, but assigns particular functions to each member [Eph. 4:16], according to the measure of grace bestowed upon each [Eph. 4:7]."[11] Ordination, however, is not for everyone. Calvin retains the distinction between clergy and laity in order to protect the priority of preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and exercise of church discipline. He states this at the beginning of his discussion on the calling, authorization, and ordination of ministers.

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[9] Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 188.

[10] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.15.6; IV.1.12; IV.19.28.

[11] Ibid., 1111.

> But while "all things should be done decently and in order" [I Cor. 14:40] in the holy assembly, there is nothing in which order should be more diligently observed than in establishing government; for nowhere is there greater peril if anything be done irregularly. Therefore, in order that noisy and troublesome men should not rashly take upon themselves to teach or to rule (which might otherwise happen), especial care was taken that no one should assume public office in the church without being called.[12]

Thus, due to a concern for order and a concentration on the holy assembly, the reforming movement of the sixteenth century does not break free from the institutional paradigm of a building-based, clergy-controlled Christendom.

Church Dogmatics, Volume IV by Karl Barth

The task of reawakening the reforming movement falls to another theologian working in Switzerland four centuries after Calvin is laid to rest in Geneva. Barth's monumental thirteen-volume *Church Dogmatics* proclaims a Christocentric vision of Reformed theology that is, at once, ancient and modern, orthodox and radical. A prime example is Barth's doctrine of the Church. Though he agrees with the traditional Reformed definition of the marks of the Church as pure preaching and sacraments,[13] Barth perceptively critiques the inward focus of this ecclesiology. As the Body of Christ, the Church, like its Savior, exists not for itself but for the world. Barth asks, "Is the Church, then, an end in itself in its existence as the community and institution of salvation?"[14] Barth points out that Calvin's emphasis on preaching and the sacraments in

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[12] Ibid., 1062.

[13] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation,* vol. 4, part 3.2 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. Bromiley and T. Torrance, trans. G. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 766.

[14] Ibid.

the holy assembly during the sixteenth century led to self-centered congregations in the following century.

> The classical doctrine of the Church suffers from the same "holy egoism" as we had occasion to deplore in our critical consideration of the classical doctrine of man's vocation. The fact that the Church exists for the world and not for itself does not appear at all, let alone the fact that it does so originally and essentially. Was it for this reason that in the 16th and 17th centuries the Protestant world was characterised by that pronounced lack of joy in mission, and even unreadiness for it, which we had occasion to notice at the beginning of this third part of the doctrine of reconciliation?[15]

Barth reminds the Church of its original and sole mission: to be with the world and for the world as Jesus was. The true community of Jesus Christ is sent into the world by God. It exists for the world. The Church is obligated to share the Gospel with the world. It must do this, not in conformity to the world, but in solidarity with the world.

> Solidarity with the world means that those who are genuinely pious approach the children of the world as such, that those who are genuinely righteous are not ashamed to sit down with the unrighteous as friends, that those who are genuinely wise do not hesitate to seem to be fools among fools, and that those who are genuinely holy are not too good or irreproachable to go down "into hell" in a very secular fashion.[16]

The mission of the Church, for Barth, is not primarily to draw people into holy assemblies but to be incarnate in the world. The Church shares with the world the message of salvation won for humanity by the Word, who was also incarnate in the world. In Barth's mind there can be no other direction for the Church. "How can it boast of and rejoice in the Saviour of the world and men, or how can it win them—to use

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[15] Ibid., 767.

[16] Ibid., 774.

another Pauline expression—to know Him and to believe in Him, if it is not prepared first

to be human and worldly like them and with them?"[17]

In addition to recovering the primal mission of the Church, Barth also revives the

original meaning of ordained ministry. He criticizes the clergy-laity division as a

medieval relic that should not have survived the Reformation.

> Either way, the community is divided into two subjects, a smaller, superior, active
> and directly responsible, and a greater, subordinate, passive and only indirectly
> responsible, the mediaeval scheme being thus revived in a new clergy and laity. In
> other words, a theological basis is found for the misunderstanding which is still so
> fatefully powerful even to-day, causing countless people not to think of
> themselves when they speak of the Church but only of the parsons and
> theologians and other leading members. It ought never to have been even
> admitted, let alone dogmatically formulated, that by the Church we are to
> understand, as *in parte pro toto,* certain person or bodies which are exalted above
> the rest and particularly prominent and to that extent representative in its activity,
> both internally and externally. The Church may never in any tolerable sense be
> identified with a rank of pastors and other ecclesiastical dignitaries.[18]

To break the hold of the clergy caste system on the Church, Barth identifies baptism as

the moment when every believer is ordained to the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ.

While it is not defined as a sacrament in Reformed theology, ordination is reserved for

the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. This creates a division between ordained and

non-ordained Christians and subtly fosters the hierarchy of superior, active leaders over

subordinate, passive members. Barth sees the identification of baptism and ordination as

the way to level this hierarchy.

> The baptism from which he comes was as such a consecration or ordination to
> take part in the mission which is committed to the whole Church. In passing, it
> might be noted that this renders superfluous and indeed forbids the consecration,

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[17] Ibid., 775.

[18] Ibid., 765-766.

ordination, or dedication which customarily relates to a specific form of this mission, as though it were the affair of an ecclesiastical hierarchy.[19]

While recognizing that pastors, elders, deacons, and bishops have special roles in the wider mission of the Church, Barth argues that "all those baptized as Christians are *eo ipso* consecrated, ordained and dedicated to the ministry of the Church. . . . He who has ears to hear, let him hear (and not just in the Roman Catholic world)!"[20] Barth does more than simply fulfill the goals of the Reformation. In essence, he reawakens the reforming movement by recovering the missionary character of the apostolic age. In so doing, he becomes a harbinger for a missional ecclesiology in the third millennium.

Awakening Apostolic Genius in the Twenty-First Century

If, as Barth argues, the Church is for the world, then mission is not one of many tasks for the Church alongside worship, Christian education, and prayer. Mission is the only calling of the Church. Jürgen Moltmann states, "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."[21] This Copernican shift is the foundation of the missional conception of the Church. The advocates of this theological stream in the new millennium look to Lesslie Newbigin as their guide.

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[19] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation,* vol. 4, part 4 of *Church Dogmatics,* ed. G. Bromiley and T. Torrance, trans. G. Bromiley (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 201.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64.

The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission

by Lesslie Newbigin

A child of the Church of Scotland and Reformed Theology, Newbigin spent most

of his ministry as a missionary in South India. As a leader in the formation of the Church

of South India, this Reformed pastor became one of its first bishops. Newbigin was also

deeply involved in the ecumenical movement and served as an Associate General

Secretary for the World Council of Churches.[22] The breadth of his experiences gave him

a unique perspective on the nature and purpose of the Church. According to Newbigin,

the Gospel is a precious treasure which belongs to the Lord. Using one of the most

common metaphors in the New Testament, Newbigin believes the Church is a steward

and servant of this treasure, which he calls "the open secret."

> It is the open secret of God's purpose, through Christ, to bring all things to their
> true end in the glory of the triune God. It is open in that it is announced in the
> gospel that is preached to all the nations; it is a secret in that it is manifest only to
> the eyes of faith. It is entrusted to those whom God has given the gift of faith by
> which the weakness and foolishness of the cross is known as the power and
> wisdom of God. It is entrusted to them not for themselves but for all the nations. It
> is Christ in them, the hope of glory.[23]

This summary ties together several themes of Newbigin's ecclesiology. For Newbigin,

God is the primary actor. The open secret is God's purpose and therefore God's mission.

God is at work in humanity and in creation to fulfill this mission. The Church does not

own the Gospel or control the mission. As the community of believers which has come to

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[22] Michael W. Goheen, "The Significance of Lesslie Newbigin for Mission in the New Millennium," *Third Millennium* 7, no.3 (2004): 88-99, http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/slnmnm_g.pdf (accessed October 3, 2014).

[23] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 188.

see and believe in the Gospel through the gift of faith, the Church bears witness to and participates in what God is doing in the world. Newbigin grounds this mission in the Triune nature of God. "The fundamental belief is embodied in the affirmation that God has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Spirit. I shall therefore begin by looking at the Christian mission in three ways—as proclaiming the kingdom of the Father, as sharing the life of the Son, and as bearing the witness of the Spirit."[24]

The first dimension of mission is faith in action. Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the reign of his Father (Mk 1:14-15) over all humanity and creation. The Church is sent to tell the world that God is the source, meaning, and end of the universe. God's mission is to ultimately reconcile all things together in Christ (Col 1:20). In a world where the power of darkness reigns and so much stands in opposition to God's sovereignty, this belief requires faith. The secret of God's victory is both revealed and hidden in the weakness and foolishness of the cross. The Church is the community that receives the eyes of faith to see the triumph of God's kingdom in the death and resurrection of its Savior. Newbigin writes:

> By faith they know that the reign of God has conquered the powers of evil. Their calling is to proclaim that fact to all the nations. They will themselves proclaim it, but even more powerful will be the proclamation of the Spirit, who takes their faithful enduring of rejection as the occasion of his witness.
> Mission, seen from this angle, is faith in action. It is the acting out by proclamation and by endurance, through all the events of history, of the faith that the kingdom of God has drawn near. It is the acting out of the central prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to use: "Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as in heaven."[25]

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[24] Ibid., 29.

[25] Ibid., 39.

The proclamation of the reign of the Father is complimented by the second

dimension of mission: the presence of the Son which is manifested as love in action.

Departing from what might be considered the traditional Protestant emphasis on the

Bible, Newbigin focuses rather on the presence of Jesus which continues in the

community of believers.

> The new reality that he introduced into history was to be continued through history in the form of a community, not in the form of a book. . . . It is not simply the continuance of a teaching. . . . The presence of the kingdom, hidden and revealed in the cross of Jesus, is carried through history hidden and revealed in the life of that community which bears in its life the dying and rising of Jesus.[26]

Newbigin admits this is a bold statement when one considers that the history of this

community is frequently characterized by sin and conflict. Moreover, the Church must

not be identified with the kingdom, nor does it possess the kingdom. Rather, through the

power of God, the Church is called and enabled to bear the love of Jesus, which is present

in its midst, to all people.

The proclamation of the Father's universal reign over all creation and the

presence of the Son's kingship in the Church would, however, be incomplete without the

third dimension of mission: the prevenience of the kingdom through the power of the

Spirit. Newbigin emphasizes that mission is the work of the Spirit not the Church.

> The active agent of mission is a power that rules, guides, and goes before the church: the free, sovereign, living power of the Spirit of God. Mission is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes both the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey. It is therefore not enough to speak of

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[26] Ibid., 52.

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[26] Ibid., 52.

the proclamation of the kingdom and of the presence of the kingdom; we must also speak of the *prevenience*, the previousness of the kingdom.[27]

In analyzing the Book of Acts, Newbigin notes the apostles seem to be chasing the Spirit as it breaks one boundary after another. The conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile follower of Jesus, is a critical example. The Spirit forces Peter to surrender his conception of who is unclean in order that he may enter the house of a Gentile and share the Gospel. With the conversion of a Gentile, Newbigin points out, the Church is also converted. It can never return to being simply a sect of Judaism. In following the Spirit, the Church receives hope and shares hope with the world. Using a Pauline term, Newbigin describes the Spirit as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Eph 1:14). Yet this inheritance, according to Newbigin, is not only salvation for believers, but the completion of God's mission to reconcile humanity and the whole cosmic order.

> By proclaiming the reign of God over all things the church acts out its faith that the Father of Jesus is indeed ruler of all. The church, by inviting all humankind to share in the mystery of the presence of the kingdom hidden in its life through its union with the crucified and risen life of Jesus, acts out the love of Jesus that took him to the cross. By obediently following where the Spirit leads, often in ways neither planned, known, nor understood, the church acts out the hope that it is given by the presence of the Spirit who is the living foretaste of the kingdom.
> This threefold way of understanding the church's mission is rooted in the triune nature of God himself. If any one of these is taken in isolation as the clue to the understanding of the mission, distortion follows.[28]

After defining his theology of mission, Newbigin uses it to evaluate and critique several movements of his day including the Church Growth Movement founded by fellow missionary Donald McGavran. Newbigin agrees with McGavran that the mission

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[27] Ibid., 56.

[28] Ibid., 64-65.

stations of the nineteenth century removed converts from their native cultures, cut off their ability to share the Gospel with their communities, and made them second-class citizens of the missionary's culture. Nevertheless, Newbigin opposes McGavran's emphasis on numerical growth of disciples as the measuring stick of successful missions. In spite of references to the explosive growth of the Church in the early chapters of Acts, Newbigin does not see this as the end of missions. "In no sense does the triumph of God's reign seem to depend upon the growth of the church."[29] Though McGavran sought to avoid the attractional mistake of the mission station, his emphasis on numerical growth produces similar results in his disciples in the Church Growth Movement. One of McGavran's followers, Peter Wagner, uses attractional measurements such as membership, worship attendance, and Sunday school attendance as indicators of a successful growing church.[30]

Nevertheless, one of the limitations of Newbigin's theology is his tendency toward universalism. While Newbigin does not teach that God will save everyone, this is one implication of his perspective. The ultimate effect of universalism is a lack of urgency in sharing the Gospel and making disciples since, as some may assume, God will reconcile all things in the end. From personal experience of visiting with the denominational leadership of the Church of South India and Newbigin's former parish in 1999, I witnessed a lack of enthusiasm for evangelism and growth which mirrors the stagnation of mainline churches in America. There is a need to unite the missional

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[29] Ibid., 125.

[30] Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 69.

perspective of Newbigin with a passion for living out the Great Commission in the twenty-first century.

On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church
by Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson

For a time, the advocates of the incarnational-missional movement, which looked to Newbigin as their patriarch, were at odds with the devotees of the attractional Church Growth Movement. The former experimented with creative ways to send the churched into the world. The latter employed strategies to draw the unchurched into their buildings. More recently, Hirsch, a prophet of the missional approach, and D. Ferguson, a megachurch pastor and leader of the multisite approach, united to call attention to "a new thing" (Is 43:19) the Spirit is doing in the Church. Their book *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* claims the church in the West is on the threshold of a new apostolic movement. "What were once conflicting approaches to church (such as incarnational *or* attractional) are beginning to seriously interact. Each informs the other, and it's only now becoming clear what is emerging."[31] The motivation for this fusion is partly practical. Hirsch and D. Ferguson point out that the seemingly successful megachurch is an expensive, irreproducible model which only reaches about 40 percent of the North American population. In addition there are cultural shifts, such as the rise of digital technology, which are impacting and reconfiguring the twenty-first-century

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[31] Hirsch and D. Ferguson, *On the Verge*, 25-26.

Church in the same way the invention of the printing press sparked the Protestant

Reformation.

> The new digital democracy that technology ushers in is also realigning the way
> we organize ourselves. Things are getting more fluid, less centralized, more
> interpersonal. We celebrate this as an opportunity, because in many ways it puts
> us much closer to the radical, people-oriented movement of the New Testament
> church: The priesthood of all believers and the ordination of ordinary people.[32]

This observation echoes Barth's insistence that all believers, through their baptisms, are

ordained to ministry. Hirsch and D. Ferguson are not simply seeking to be pragmatic or

innovative. Their desire is to dethrone the institutional paradigm of the Church inherited

from Constantine and awaken "a more fluid, adaptive, reproducible, viral people-

movement."[33]

The authors advocate a recovery of an ancient paradigm that lies dormant in all

churches. Hirsch calls this "apostolic genius." After studying the explosive expansion of

the underground Chinese Church Hirsch writes:

> The only conclusion I could reach was that the full possibility of movement *was
> already there in the system.* All that was needed was something to activate it.
> Apostolic Genius, the name of the phenomenon which encodes apostolic
> movement in what I call (missional)DNA, is latent in the church but is largely
> dormant because it's buried under the more institutional forms and blinded by the
> predominant mindset.[34]

Hirsch and D. Ferguson propose awakening this latent missional DNA through what they

call "the verge paradigm." It is the creative synthesis of three conceptions of the Church:

Church Growth theory, exponential thinking, and incarnational missiology. Instead of

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[32] Ibid., 31.

[33] Ibid., 32.

[34] Ibid., 44.

discarding the Church Growth approach as hopelessly attractional, institutional, and

consumer-driven, the verge paradigm embraces its best practices and combines them with

the incarnational-missional impulse expressed in missional communities and with the

exponential systems which birthed the multisite phenomenon and the Church Planting

Movement. Verge churches are at the convergence of all three church systems. To

summarize this with a simple formula, Hirsch and D. Ferguson state that an apostolic

movement arises from the multiplication of church plants filled with people on mission in

every sphere of their lives.

> A missional church will always express itself as a reproducing church that
> multiplies new sites and churches. A missional people involves Christ followers
> sent as agents of good news in every sphere and domain of life (work, play,
> politics, economics, education, and so on). When you add those two together, you
> have the missional equation of an apostolic movement.[35]

The authors hasten to add there is no silver bullet, single program, or simple solution to

awaken an apostolic movement. It requires a process of imagination, assimilation, and

innovation. Like the turning of a fly wheel, which gradually picks up speed, a

congregation must go through this cycle of renewal again and again until the movement

eventually, exponentially takes off.

Igniting an Exponential Small Group Movement

To awaken an apostolic movement, churches need to reimagine every aspect of

congregational life under the guidance of the Spirit. This literature review concludes with

an examination of one dimension: small groups. The Church began as a small group of

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[35] Ibid., 251.

twelve disciples. While an apostolic movement will encompass more than just small

groups, it is unlikely the Spirit will ignite such a movement without them.

The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes that Hinder It

by Roland Allen

After years of serving as a missionary in China, Roland Allen came to see a

fundamental flaw in the missionary methods of Western churches. Like Newbigin and

McGavran, Allen points out that Western assumptions of cultural superiority create an

unhealthy paternalism in missions, which actually stifle the spread of the Gospel. New

converts and congregations become dependent on Western leaders and funding. The

missionaries tend to consider these new believers too immature to lead congregations,

fund their own missions, and train the next generation of ministers. In opposition to this

approach, Allen argues for the spontaneous expansion of the Church.

> I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of
> individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they
> have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible
> attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn
> to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to
> share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by addition of new churches.[36]

Allen arrives at this discovery by comparing modern missionary methods with the work

of Paul. The Apostle does not appeal for funds from the sending church, stay for years at

a single mission post, or set up seminaries to train pastors. He preaches the Gospel, places

the church in the hands of trusted converts, and moves on. Paul is so confident of the

effectiveness of this method he tells the Romans, "So from Jerusalem all the way around

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[36] Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It*
(Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 7.

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to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ," to the point that "there is no more place for me to work in these regions" (Rom 15:19, 23). Allen compares Paul's work over ten years with the comparatively small yield achieved by a century of highly funded, staffed, and organized modern missionaries. Even from a strictly numerical perspective, Western agencies cannot possibly mobilize enough missionaries to equal the effectiveness of a spontaneously expanding indigenous church. "Our missionaries must aim at laying such a foundation that India may be evangelized by Indians, China by Chinese, Africa by Africans, each country by its own Christians."[37]

Allen faced stiff opposition for his iconoclastic views. Critics charge that congregations led by recent converts will lead to heresy and immorality. Allen counters that the measuring stick for doctrinal and ethical purity used by the sending agencies is entangled with Western notions of cultural superiority. It is simply another attempt to control new converts. Allen's critics also reject his notion of an unorganized church. These missionary leaders argue that a congregation needs paid clergy and a building. Allen views this as a glaring example of our cultural blindness.

> The erection of buildings, the management of property and the creation of an army of professional preachers is to us at this moment of the world's history the natural and obvious method of carrying on our work. This kind of organization suits our capacities, appeals to our sense of fitness, satisfied our eyes. But an elaborate material machinery for the propagation of ideas seems to most of those to whom we go almost absurd. You do not want buildings and machinery to propagate ideas or a faith: you want ideas and a faith.[38]

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[37] Ibid., 29.

[38] Ibid., 113.

Buildings and pastoral staff may come later, but they are not required to share the Gospel.

They often are distractions which slow spontaneous expansion. Allen concludes with a

prophetic call for simplicity.

> The spontaneous expansion of the Church reduced to its elements is a very simple thing. It asks for no elaborate organization, no large finances, no great numbers of paid missionaries. In its beginning it may be the work of one man, and that a man neither learned in the things of this world, nor rich in the wealth of this world. The organization of a little church on the apostolic model is also extremely simple, and the most illiterate converts can use it, and the poorest are sufficiently wealthy to maintain it.[39]

It is not difficult to see how Allen's perspective applies to a spontaneously

expanding small group network. Some pastors discourage the formation of small groups

from the fear that false teaching or factions may spread in the congregation. They may

also fear losing control of the congregation. Some members do not feel sufficiently

knowledgeable about the Scriptures or theology to lead a small group. Allen dismisses

these fears as obstacles which prevent the spontaneous expansion of the Church.

> No one, then, who feels within himself the call of Christ to embark on such a path as this need say, I am too ignorant, I am too inexperienced, I have too little influence, or I have not sufficient resources. The first apostles of Christ were in the eyes of the world 'unlearned and ignorant' men. . . . What is needed is the kind of faith which, uniting a man to Christ, sets him on fire.[40]

Although Allen's call for an indigenous, spontaneously-expanding network of churches

was ignored during the heyday of centralized, institutional Christendom, his bold vision

is being rediscovered by church leaders in the organic, decentralized, post-modern world.

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[39] Ibid., 156.

[40] Ibid.

Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry:

An Integrational Approach by Gareth Icenogle

Gareth Icenogle begins his comprehensive work on the biblical grounds for small

groups by arguing that the turning of the millennium is also a hinge of cultural history.

> We live during a unique period in history when large bureaucratic institutions are downsizing and integrating intentional face-to-face circles of empowerment and ownership. . . . The major themes of business and the institutional church have been "management" and "control." We are now emerging out of this darker and more controlled world where our organizations, including the church, were functionally structured so that each member knew his or her place and did a specific job.
>   We are beginning to catch a glimpse of an emerging new world, "a new paradigm," where power is shared and work is accomplished through partnerships and networks of colleagues and coworkers. We are moving quickly into an age of small group empowerment. We have moved from the pyramid to the circle, from power down to power around, from bureaucracy to organic structures that enable a group to serve one another as well as the world.[41]

Icenogle, a Presbyterian pastor, sees small groups as the key to this shift from institutions

to organic networks. This is not a new discovery, but the recovery of a foundational

reality that begins in the heart of the Trinity and extends through human history.

To lay down the biblical foundations for small group ministry, Icenogle takes the

reader on a guided sojourn through the Scriptures from creation, through the covenant

with Israel, the ministry of Christ, the commissioning of the apostles, and the launching

of the Church. In each stage of salvation history, he identifies the presence of relational

communities which provide the theological support for small groups. Icenogle states the

Triune nature of God demonstrates that divinity exits in community from all eternity. "In

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[41] Gareth Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 9-10.

human history God has revealed this community of Being as Father, Son and Spirit, an

eternal small group, a Trinity of Being and relationship, around whom the greater

community of eternal beings is gathered, both angelic and resurrected."[42] When God

creates humanity as male and female and invites them into fellowship with himself, the

result is the primeval small group. Nevertheless, humans break this community with one

another and choose to live apart from God. Through the gift of his covenant, God seeks to

restore the divine-human community, first with Israel and then with the nations.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate movement of God's efforts to reconcile and restore the

divine-human community, since he embodies in his person both God and humanity.

> Jesus surrounded himself with small groups of men and women who looked to
> him as the Lord and model of One who builds divine-human community. The
> small group who lives and walks with Jesus discovers how humanity can live with
> God and live with one another in shalom and sabbath. Jesus reconciles, restores
> and completes the purpose of the primeval small group.[43]

The Spirit unites these small groups into a new community with the resurrected Christ. In

this context, Icenogle uses the biblical term *ecclesia* not to describe a top-down,

hierarchical institution, but a microcosm of the divine-human community in which two or

more people gather in Jesus' name. Through the *ecclesia* the Spirit of Jesus reconciles

people to the Triune God and brings forgiveness, healing, and maturity.

> The ecclesia are small groups of Christians who are scattered around the world,
> bound together by a common Spirit. Meeting in all arenas of human systems and
> organizations, these ecclesia are networked together in multiple groups of various
> numbers and configurations. . . . The network systems and institutional bonds are
> structures of flexibility to enable and enact the service of the Spirit. . . . The
> Christian small group is the microcosm and agent of God's continuing

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[42] Ibid., 370.

[43] Ibid., 372.

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transformation and reformation of human community, organization, institution and system.[44]

Icenogle is not opposed to institutional connections, but when they become established, static, and resistant to the wind of the Spirit they are idols in need of reformation.

Returning to the paradigm shift he identifies at the opening of his work, Icenogle sees an expanding network of small groups as an apostolic movement resurrected from the tomb of Christendom in the twenty-first century.

> The movement from "representative democracy" to "participative democracy" suggests republican governmental systems (like the Presbyterian Church USA) may collapse in the face of members' hunger for hands-on decision-making (small groups). The disintegration of "hierarchies" and the emergence of "networks" sounds like a historic turn from Christendom and a return to the interconnections of apostolic ecclesia (small groups).[45]

As with Allen, Icenogle attributes the rapid and spontaneous expansion of the first-century Church to the Spirit-led, decentralized network of house churches. "The foundation of small group ecclesia 'wherever two or three are gathered' was the first miracle of the post-resurrection establishment of the realm of God on earth."[46] In spite of his passion for small groups, Icenogle wisely cautions against installing a pre-packaged small group program in an established congregation. As an organic work of the Spirit, small groups must be planted and nurtured in the unique culture of the church and allowed to grow up within and alongside existing structures.

> The newly changed institution which incorporates small groups must be grounded in the reality of ministry that has worked in that place before and the reality of

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[44] Ibid., 373.

[45] Ibid., 361.

[46] Ibid., 355.

ministry that will work in the future. It is the art of preserving old wine in old wineskins and making new wine in new wineskins. This takes a new vineyard steward who knows the old ways, but risks developing new ways.[47]

This literature review reveals the Spirit is preparing new wineskins for a new millennium (Mt 9:17). The objective is not to return to the Church of the first century, to follow a trendy church-growth strategy, or to sign up for the latest school of ecclesiology. Together, these works are the growing reverberation of Stephen's original challenge to the established religious institution of his day. They are a call for the Church to arise from the slumber of Christendom and throw off the restraints of institution. They critique and, in some cases, reject the need for church buildings, professional clergy, and denominational structures. They point to a reawakening of an apostolic movement that is decentralized, networked, organic, missional, and spontaneously reproductive. While this movement can take many forms, one key incarnation will be an exponentially-growing network of small groups.

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[47] Ibid., 369.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

On one Sunday in the fall, Woodside Church cancels morning worship services

and goes out to bless the wider community. Instead of "going to church," the

congregation is challenged to "be the church" by serving at twenty to thirty projects

which address issues such as poverty, homelessness, addiction, and hunger. Each year,

Woodside invites more congregations to join the movement. In 2013, there were twenty-

five churches from different denominations in two states. It is inspiring to watch the

Body of Christ rise up, go out, and accomplish so much for the Lord in a single day. To

build momentum during the six weeks before they leave their buildings, the churches

focus worship, personal devotions, small group Bible studies, and missional service on

the theme of following Jesus into the world. This day of service is not intended to be a

gimmick, a program, or a one-time event. Leaders from these congregations are

encouraged to view this as a new way of being the Church. This chapter will explore the

ecclesiology behind "The Church Has Left the Building" and other initiatives which are

transforming Woodside Church into a decentralized, outwardly-focused, organic

network.

Love, Grow, and Share: God's Trinitarian People

In *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity,* Miroslav Volf

observes, "Today, the thesis that ecclesial communion should correspond to trinitarian

communion enjoys the status of an almost self-evident proposition."[1] While this

correspondence is rooted in theologians as ancient as Origen, Cyprian, and Tertullian,

Volf claims the possibilities and limits of this analogy have not been properly defined in

the present day. In opposition to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, which

identify the Church with the sacraments and the episcopal succession, Volf sees baptism

"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19) as the way

the Spirit of God constitutes the Church. This sacrament initiates believers into

communion with both the Trinity and the Church.

Volf also critiques his own Free Church tradition, which tends to be

individualistic and congregationally independent. The unity in multiplicity of God's

Triune nature, Volf argues, promotes an ecclesiology which recognizes the presence of

the Church simultaneously in the multiplicity of individual local congregations and in the

universality of the Body of Christ. He writes:

> The correspondence between the trinitarian and ecclesial relationships is not
> simply formal. Rather it is "ontological" because it is soteriologically
> grounded. . . . The already obtaining communion of the church with the triune
> God . . . implies that the correspondence between Trinity and church is not purely
> formal and that it involves more than a certain relationship between the one and
> the many. The relations between the many in the church must reflect the mutual
> *love* of the divine persons.[2]

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[1] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 191.

[2] Ibid., 195.

As previously noted in the literature review, Newbigin also employs a Trinitarian framework in *The Open Secret* to describe the mission of God. In obedience to this mission, the Church is sent into the world to proclaim the kingdom of the Father, share the life of the Son, and bear the witness of the Spirit. Based on these insights, this section will demonstrate it is appropriate to view the Church, in both its local and universal expressions, as a people who are saved, sanctified, and sent by the Triune God to love, grow, and share. The biblical foundation for this conception is Paul's closing benediction to the Corinthians: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Love God: The Greatest Commandment

There are many biblical adjectives which describe the nature of God: just, almighty, wrathful, merciful, and gracious. Yet the New Testament selects one above all others: love. With three simple, monosyllabic words, the Apostle John reveals the most profound truth: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:16). The New Testament invests *agapē*, a word that bears little distinction in Classical Greek, with supreme significance. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* observes, "In the NT love is one of the central ideas which express the whole content of the Christian faith (cf. Jn. 3:16). God's activity is love, which looks for men's reciprocal love (1 Jn 4:8, 16)."[3] In Scripture, the Lord is the lover who seeks his beloved. John reminds believers, "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). God begins the restoration of his relationship with

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[3] *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* s.v. "Love."

humanity by calling Abraham and his family to be the means by which he will bless all the nations (Gn 12:1-3). This love is reaffirmed in his election, formation, and deliverance of Israel to be his covenant people (Ex 15:13). Among his parting words before they enter the Promised Land, Moses gives the Israelites a commandment which becomes their creed down through the ages: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Ex 6:4-5). In the writings of the prophets, God remains faithful to his beloved despite Israel's waywardness and spiritual adultery. Through the life and proclamation of Hosea, God says of Israel, "I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God'" (Hos 2:23). God's love is steadfast and sacrificial. No obstacle is too great to overcome; no cost is too high to pay for his beloved.

In the fullness of time, the God of love takes on flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. His baptism gives a glimpse of the love which is the inner life of the Trinity. "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Mk 1:10-11). Jesus, the beloved Son, immediately begins to preach and practice the nearness of his Father's kingdom. "In the Synoptic tradition the main emphasis falls on the preaching of the kingdom of God and of the new way of life which breaks in with Jesus himself. . . . Jesus' activity among men thus reveals the mercy and love of God: Jesus himself is the one who truly loves, and takes to himself the poor,

the sick and sinners."[4] When the Pharisees ask his opinion on the single greatest command in the Torah, Jesus selects two which begin with love: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mt 22:37-40). Jesus gives more than they request. These are not simply the greatest commandments. They are the lens through which the entire Word of God must be viewed. According to the first commandment the primary response to God is not fear, reverence, or even obedience, but love. Such a love involves one's entire being. Moreover, by selecting not one but two commandments, Jesus demonstrates the dual dimension of love. It must always be vertical and horizontal. Jesus is unique among the rabbis of his day, not only in teaching his fellow Jews to call God "Father" (Mt 6:1,6,9,18), but also in extending the love of neighbor to the foreigner (Lk 10:25-28) and the enemy (Mt 5:43-45). Indeed, he states that such radical love is how one is known as a son or daughter of his Father in heaven.

The ultimate revelation of love is enacted in the cross and resurrection. The Apostle John states,

> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. (1 Jn 4:9-13).

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[4] Ibid.

John reminds believers, through these verses, that the love at the heart of the Trinity

means the Lord is a seeking, sending, and saving God. The Father seeks humanity which,

like the adulterous Gomer and the prodigal son, is not in love with him. He sends the Son

into the world to be the atoning sacrifice, which delivers people from sin to life in the

Son. Believers are saved to become the Father's beloved as they live in Christ his beloved

Son. This is the work of the Spirit, which not only fills them with love for the Father, but

also for one another. A primary goal of God's love is the creation of this loving

community. Indeed, John emphasizes there is no genuine love of God if there is no love

of others: "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever

does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they

have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love

their brother and sister" (1 Jn 4:20-21).

This community of love is called to join God's mission to bless the nations. Israel

is not replaced, but expanded to include "disciples of all nations" who are baptized in the

name of the Triune God (Mt 28:19). Using language borrowed from Hosea, Peter teaches

the diaspora of believers about their mission when he writes: "But you are a chosen

people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare

the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you

were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy,

but now you have received mercy" (1 Pt 2:9-10; cf. Hos 2:23). As resident aliens, Peter

challenges them to let their light shine in this dark world by declaring God's praises.

Worship, then, is one of the primary ways the community expresses its love to and for

God. This is why the word *agapē* became a term for their "love feasts" or worship

gatherings (Jude 12). It is not accidental that the greatest definition of love in the New

Testament, the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, is the centerpiece between his call for

unity in the Body of Christ in chapter twelve and his directions on how to worship the

Lord in chapter fourteen. When love unites the community, unbelievers attending their

worship gatherings will exclaim, "God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:25). It is in the

context of worship at the Last Supper that Jesus tells his disciples, "A new command I

give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this

everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34-35). It

is this love that the community models for the world. It is this love that the community

bears to the world. It is by this love that the community is made one with the Father, the

Son, and the Spirit.

<div align="center">Grow in Grace: The Greatest Commitment</div>

The Apostle Peter ends his second letter with an imperative call for commitment:

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be

glory both now and forever! Amen" (2 Pt 3:18). As Jesus commands his followers to love

his Father, Peter directs them to grow in the Son. If God the Father's love leads to one's

justification (Ti 3:4-7), Peter teaches that growth in the grace of the Son brings one's

sanctification:

> Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to
> be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient
> children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.
> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written:
> "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Pt 1:13-16; Lv 11:44,45; 19:2)

While justification is a single event, sanctification, the process of becoming holy, is an

ongoing transformation from conformity to sobriety and from ignorance to awakening.

Grace, or *charis*, is likewise a major theme in the letters of Paul.

> For Paul *charis* is the essence of God's decisive saving act in Jesus Christ, which
> took place in his sacrificial death, and also of all its consequences in the present
> and future (Rom. 3:24 ff.). . . . In Christ, therefore, God's grace is given as a
> precious gift (1 Cor. 1:4). Apart from him there can be no talk of grace (cf. 1 Cor.
> 1:30 f.; see also Jn. 1:14, 16f.). But this also means that grace can never become a
> quality which an individual may possess in his own right, nor may it ever be
> placed at his disposal. . . . Paul understands the whole movement of the Christian
> life from beginning to end as grace (2 Cor. 6:1-9; Rom. 5:2; cf. also Jn. 1:16).[5]

As with love, growing in grace is first an act of God which calls forth a disciple's

response. It occurs in three dimensions. At each level, the goal is to grow more into the

image of the Son (2 Cor 3:18; 1 Jn 3:2).

The first dimension of growth is in the life of the individual disciple. Peter

commands all disciples to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Knowledge

in the New Testament is both intellectual and relational. "The knowledge of God's truth

is of equal importance with experiential profession of the Lord."[6] Growth seems less

about the accumulation of information and more about the elimination of spiritual

obstacles. In the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-20), Jesus warns his followers to watch out

for the challenges which frustrate the growth and fruitfulness of the Word planted in their

lives. Paul likewise enjoins believers not to gratify the sinful nature but to live by the

Spirit (Rom 8:1-17; Gal 5:16-21), to grow the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-26), and to use

the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-11). These are the manifestation of the grace the Holy

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[5] Ibid., s.v. "Grace."

[6] Ibid., s.v. "Knowledge."

Spirit grows in the life of the believer. Paul even ties acts of loving and growing together: "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (2 Thes 1:3). It is by "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ" (Eph 4:15).

This verse leads us to a second dimension which is the growth of the Church. Paul continues: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph 4:16). Just as the health and growth of a human body depend on the collaboration of all its parts and systems, the growth of the Body of Christ is the outcome of the interdependence of each member under Christ, who is the Head. As human bodies are composed of many cells and organs, so a congregation is made up of a multitude of smaller groups which encourage growth in grace. The relationships within these small groups are the place for practicing the many "one another" passages in the New Testament. Carl George tabulates fifty-nine such passages and then points out that "the Holy Spirit officially commissions *every* believer into a ministry of caring for one another. After all, *none* of the following commands are restricted to a particular title (such as elders only) or a particular gender (such as men only)."[7] In fact, attachment to a particular leader threatened the unity and growth of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-9). Paul firmly reminds the fractious Corinthian Christians that growth is God's gracious work, regardless of who does the planting and watering. Later in the same letter, Paul describes the growth of the Body as a

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[7] Carl George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 129-131.

work of the Trinity: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor 12:4-6). Believers do not manufacture church growth through their state-of-the-art programs and strategic plans. It develops organically as members of the Body of Christ humbly serve God and one another using the gifts the Trinity graciously supplies.

Nevertheless, the growth of the Church is not the ultimate goal of God's mission. Jesus' parables about seed, fruit, and harvest point to the third dimension: the growth of the kingdom of God. Jesus follows the parable of the sower with two more comparisons between growing seeds and the kingdom of God (Mk 4:26-34). In the first, the farmer seems nearly unnecessary for the growth of the harvest. Jesus says, "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head" (Mk 4:27-28). In the same way, the second parable about the mustard seed describes expansive growth which is free of any human agency. The tiny seed yields a large plant which offers shade and shelter to a variety of birds. All three seed parables in this chapter indicate that the growth of the kingdom is a work of God, which develops from small beginnings to great outcomes over a period time. Jesus' teaching on the various soils (Mk 4:13-20) indicates that human effort can even frustrate rather than foster this growth. Workers, however, are needed to bring in God's harvest (Mk 4:29; Mt 9:37-38). It is impossible to grow in the grace of Christ without serving in the world.

Share with Others: The Greatest Commission

Growing organisms reproduce. It is, therefore, not surprising that Jesus commissioned his disciples to pursue a reproductive mission. As God first sends Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gn 12:1-3), so now he sends the disciples to scatter the seed of the Gospel among the nations. "The Great Commission" is so essential to Christ's mission it is repeated in some form in all four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8). The Gospel cannot be contained. The seed must be sown, the salt shaken, and the light shone. Jesus' followers are light not for themselves but for the world. It is foolish to hide such a light under a basin when it could be guiding the way for everyone who is in the dark. "In the same way," Jesus teaches, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). While love leads to the justification of believers and growth produces their sanctification, sharing brings glorification, not to the disciples, but to their Father in heaven. The *agapē* of God the Father and the *charis* of God the Son are completed by the *koinōnia* of God the Spirit. *Koinōnia* is often translated as "fellowship" which may convey the sense of a closed circle. This term, however, also means "giving" and "sharing"[8] which add an outward focus.

Jesus commissions his disciples to share with others in two equal and essential ways. In his inaugural sermon at his hometown synagogue, he uses the words of Isaiah to define his mission as both preaching good news and proclaiming deliverance for the imprisoned, blind, and oppressed (Lk 4:16-21). His neighbors respond positively to this

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[8] *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* s.v. "Fellowship."

message until he adds that his mission includes Gentiles as well as Jews. The sudden

reversal of opinion leads to an attempt on his life (Lk 4:23-30). His mission is,

nevertheless, a continuation of God's calling for Israel to be a light and a blessing to the

nations. Jesus makes a new covenant with humanity which replaces the Temple and the

animal-based sacrificial system with two new sacrifices. The writer to the Hebrews states,

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit

of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share

(*koinōnias*) with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (Heb 13:15-16). Like

two hands, sharing good news and good deeds compliment and cooperate with each

other. One is not a prelude to the other. It is not sufficient to do one and neglect the other.

Both require disciples to make sacrifices.

Jesus specifically mentions good deeds as the way his followers shine the light in

the world (Mt 5:16). In saying this, he echoes Isaiah's convicting words on what the Lord

considers a true sacrifice of fasting.

> Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and
> untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it
> not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with
> shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your
> own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your
> healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the
> glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will
> answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the
> yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend
> yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
> then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the
> noonday (Is 58:6-10).

Isaiah and Jesus challenge the religious tendency to substitute empty ritual for restorative justice and to pursue personal holiness apart from social righteousness. James reinforces this emphasis on good deeds when he asks,

> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (Jas 2:14-17).

Although some view James' focus on good works as an attack on Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, Paul actually lifts up this balanced approach between faith and works when, regarding the rich, he tells Timothy to "command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share (*koinōnikous*). In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life" (1 Tm 6:18-19).

As with James, Paul teaches, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal 6:10). Sharing begins within the community of Jesus' followers. It is the natural outcome of loving God, loving one another, and growing in grace. This is powerfully portrayed in the description of the *koinōnia* of the Church following Pentecost in Acts 2:42-47. They share meals in their homes, sell their possessions, and share their material resources with anyone in need.

> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared (*koina*) everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold

them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need (Acts 4:32-35).

As with loving and growing, sharing is first a gracious work of God. The power of God moves them to open their hands and freely share with one another. It is, moreover, in the context of this radical sharing that the apostles are able to witness to the resurrection of Jesus with great power. Sharing with the needy is not an alternative to or a distraction from sharing the good news. It is the incarnation of that good news.

The other sacrifice of the new covenant, sharing good news, is an invitation to salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a call to surrender to his Lordship over all. The word for Gospel or good news, *euangelion,* enters the New Testament from the Hellenistic world with specific political implications. An inscription from 9 BC, found in the province of Asia, used this word to designate the birthday of the Emperor Augustus as the beginning of time. It lauds him as the savior of the world, who makes wars cease and brings order to the empire.[9] It is, therefore, a revolutionary act for the apostles to take a term from the imperial cult and apply it to one who was executed by the state. These missionaries declare the good news that salvation for the world comes not through the might of Rome but through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of a Jewish Messiah. This set the peaceful Jesus movement on a collision course with the powerful imperial administration. According to Mark, Jesus begins his mission with a proclamation: "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mk 1:15). To believe the Gospel is not only to

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[9] Ibid., s.v. "Gospel."

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receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It also involves entering the kingdom of God which Jesus announces. His followers must decide which king they will worship and obey, for "no one can serve two masters" (Mt 6:24).

Sharing the good news is an invitation to follow Jesus as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and as a resident alien in the kingdom of this world. As with love, grace, and growth, the sharing of the Gospel is God's work first. The Gospel is not just information about Jesus. It has the power to bring faith. Paul writes, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom 1:16-17; Hb 2:4). Sharing the Gospel also offers the gift of hope. Peter reminds believers, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pt 3:15). The good news which believers share is a living hope that Jesus, the true and reigning Lord, will deliver this world from subjugation to the thrones, rulers, powers, and principalities of this age (1 Pt 3:22; Rom 8:37-39; 1 Cor 15: 24-28; Eph 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15). A verbal witness to this hope is essential. Yet it is offered with gentleness and respect in response to the inquiry of others. It is also accompanied by a life of purity, humility, and charity that incarnates this good news (1 Pt 2:12).

Above all, the Gospel is shared with love. Paul uses parental images when he describes the means by which he shared the Gospel with the Thessalonians:

> As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. . . . For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory (1 Thes 2:6b-8, 11-12).

These familial descriptions reveal that the good news of God's love is best shared through personal relationships. It requires one to be vulnerable, nurturing, encouraging, and comforting. This contrasts with methods of evangelism which deliver information about the Gospel without any personal commitment to or involvement in the life of the recipient. The good news is a gift of faith, hope, and love from the God who became flesh in Jesus Christ. It is an invitation to abundant life in this world (Jn 10:10) and eternal life (Jn 3:16; 17:3) in his kingdom of glory.

The Church is called to love God, grow in grace, and share with others. Like three legs of a stool, all three dimensions are essential to the health, growth, and mission of God's people. When this fellowship, gathered and empowered by the Spirit, fails to share with others it becomes insulated from and irrelevant to the world. When the Body of Christ ceases to grow in grace, it becomes divisive as it lapses into immaturity and intolerance. When the children of the Father do not worship and love God, they lose their identity and become just another earthly institution. The call to love, grow, and share must be lived out at every level from the individual believer to small groups, congregations, denominations, ecumenical associations, and the Church universal. Each dimension also offers a doorway through which seekers may enter the Body of Christ. Traditionally, worship services were the first place visitors encountered a congregation.

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Today, a person might make a first connection through sharing with others in a mission project or growing in grace through a small group before they set foot in a sanctuary. When a disciple enters through one of these three doors, the pastors and leaders may then encourage the person to experience the other two dimensions. The more individuals and congregations practice this balanced, threefold mission, the more they will become a living incarnation of the apostolic blessing: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Presbyterian Church (USA): Structural Control Without Core Beliefs

One of the hallmarks of the Reformed tradition is an emphasis on the ordered life of the Church, which balances individual and congregational freedom with denominational unity and accountability. In his book *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, John Leith begins his chapter on polity by asking, "Why have Reformed Christians regarded church polity, or the organized life of the church, of crucial importance? The first answer must be the very deep conviction that God calls the Christian to a life of obedience in and through the polity of the church. The ultimate basis for the organized life of the church is not human wisdom but the will of God."[10] The hallmark of Reformed Christians, from Calvin to the present day, is drawn Paul's direction to the Corinthians: "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40). Half of the PCUSA constitution is *The Book of Order*.

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[10] John Leigh, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 145.

The Reformed tradition, however, does not necessitate a Presbyterian polity. Leith observes, "While Reformed theology has been overwhelmingly associated with presbyterian polity, it has thrived at times with congregational polity and has lived with *functional* and *jurisdictional* episcopal systems."[11] Even Calvin argues there is no single divinely preferred polity when he writes: "But we know that church organization admits, nay requires, according to the varying condition of the times, various changes."[12] Many Presbyterians tend to view their polity of representative democracy as a middle way between the hierarchy of episcopalianism and the democracy of congregationalism. Presbyterians seek to avoid the tendency to top-down control in the former and the threat of divisive chaos in the latter.

While there may be many expressions of Presbyterianism, there are generally four distinctive features to this polity. First, the unity of the church is maintained by a graded series of representative assemblies and courts. Unlike episcopal polity, these assemblies and courts are composed of elders elected by the people. In distinction from congregational polity, churches are not independent but under the authority of these assemblies. Second, there is parity among the pastors. In the French Confession of 1559 Calvin states, "We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have equal power and authority in the exercise of their office under one head, the only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ. For the same reason, no church should presume to claim

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[11] Ibid., 152.

[12] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1134.

authority or sovereignty over another."[13] Third, pastors are elected by the congregation

with the oversight of the Presbytery. Calvin states, "We therefore hold that this call of a

minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created

by the consent and approval of the people; moreover, that other pastors ought to preside

over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness,

through evil intentions, or through disorder."[14] This sharing of power between the local

congregation and the pastors of the Presbytery reveals the Reformed community's

intention to preserve local autonomy while preventing fragmentation and schism. Fourth,

the elders who govern are drawn from both the clergy and laity. Both are ordained to

equal but distinct ministries. *The Book of Order* states,

> Ruling elders, together with teaching elders, exercise leadership, government,
> spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a
> congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships.
> When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the
> session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders
> participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are
> eligible for any office.[15]

In this way the Presbyterian system appears to elevate the calling and ministry of the laity

and place it on par with pastors.

It would seem that Presbyterian polity would be an excellent context for the

balanced mission to love, grow, and share. Despite the intention to balance freedom with

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[13] John Calvin, *The French Confession*, *Article 30*, trans., Ellen Babinsky, The Fellowship of Presbyterians, http://www.fellowship-pres.org/wp-content/uploads/French-Confession.pdf (accessed January 10, 2014).

[14] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,*1066.

[15] *The Book of Order 2013-2015*, G-2.0301.

accountability and to promote the priesthood of all believers, over the last century the

PCUSA has evolved into a structure of control which limits creativity, avoids a clear

definition of core beliefs, and favors clergy over laity. While Calvin fought to reform the

Church, he retained the Christendom distinction between clergy and laity. Following his

example, the Reformed tradition places a strong emphasis on the seminary education of

its clergy. No pastor may be ordained without graduation from an accredited seminary.[16]

No matter how highly the church regards the ministry of the laity, they still remain in a

distinct and subordinate class to the clergy. Even the ordination of elders and deacons

often means that a small minority of lay leaders performs the majority of the ministry.

A second factor that controls and limits ministry is the committee system which is

the structure of nearly all Presbyterian congregations. While *The Book of Order* does not

require congregations to form committees or elders to lead them, these deliberative

bodies tend to be the natural byproduct of a representative democracy. Whether they are

at the local, presbytery, or national level, committees can easily become a bottleneck to

ministry since decisions must pass through them for approval before they are turned into

action. As the basic unit of Presbyterian structure, committees generally function as

regulatory gatekeepers. Committee members often spend more time in deliberation than

in liberation of disciples into mission. This is largely due to the fact that more time is

invested in meetings than on the mission field. Consequently, they produce more minutes

than ministers. Despite Calvin's aversion to hierarchies, the graded representative

assemblies and committees of the PCUSA evolved into a top-down control of the most

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[16] *The Book of Order 2013-2015,* G-2.0607c.

crucial decisions affecting a congregation: the formation of new congregations, the

preparation and ordination of pastors, the search for and calling of a pastor, and the

ownership of property. LaBerge writes:

> By 1950 Presbyterianism in the US had changed significantly. One manifestation of that change was structural. The denomination adopted a corporate paradigm, a leadership structure modeled after the prevailing business culture. In this model, the historical Presbyterian sense of a bottom-up denomination was inverted and congregations began to be perceived as serving the denomination instead of the other way around. Upper levels of leadership within the denomination gained increasing power.[17]

While the representative democracy of the PCUSA aligns well with the speed of

the modern, corporate, industrial age of the twentieth century, it is ill-equipped to handle

the rapid pace of the post-modern, organic, networked world of the twenty-first century.

Easum argues that such a structure is a sacred cow that must be sacrificed in order to

recover a church that is, at once, closer to the Biblical norm and able to serve in this fluid,

connected world.

> Nowhere is the worship of the sacred cow of control more visible than in established churches' passion for standing committees, nominations and elections to church offices, building consensus, popular vote, representative democracy, equal representation, and parliamentary procedure.
> However, the church has not always had this passion. The first two centuries of congregational life were organized around the various spiritual gifts of the individual members. These gifts are given by God to individual members to be used on behalf of the Body of Christ. Each member is free to use his or her gifts as God leads them. Each gift and the way it was exercised was evaluated by what Paul called the "more excellent way" of love (1 Corinthians 12:31).[18]

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[17] LaBerge, "The PCUSA 2012: How We Got 'Here.'"

[18] Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers,* 59.

Churches that maintain control inevitably set up bureaucratic bottle-necks which slow down decisions and limit who can lead. This discourages all the people of God from pursuing the mission to love God, grow in grace, and share with others.

During the same century the Presbyterian Church tightened its structural control, it loosened its core beliefs. LaBerge points out,

> In 1910, the General Assembly adopted a set of five "essential and necessary" doctrines for Presbyterian ministers. These became known as the Five Points. The Five Points included: 1. the inerrancy of the Bible, 2. the virgin birth of Christ, 3. Christ's substitutionary atonement, 4. Jesus' bodily resurrection, and 5. the authenticity of miracles. This marks the last time that our branch of mainline Presbyterianism in the United States proved itself willing to enumerate a list of essential tenets.[19]

The so-called "Fundamentalist-Modernist Debate" of the 1920s reversed the adoption of the Five Points and removed any requirement for pastors and elders to adopt certain core beliefs. Thus, despite still requiring every pastor, elder, and deacon to "sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets"[20] the denomination progressed into an ever-widening theological ambiguity. It continues to refuse to define any theological tenet as essential. Tighter structural control and looser theological convictions in the first half of the twentieth century may be key causes of membership decline in the decades of the second half. Since 1966, the PCUSA has witnessed a dramatic loss of adherents. The Presbyterian Mission Agency recently reported:

> At the end of 2013 (our most recent data), there were 10,038 congregations and 1,760,200 members in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) — a net loss of 89,296 members from 2012 (-4.8 percent) and a net loss of 224 congregations. The current membership reflects a net loss of 645,111 members, or about 26.8 percent,

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[19] LaBerge, "The PCUSA 2012: How We Got 'Here.'"

[20] *The Book of Order 2013-2015*, W-4.4003c.

over the last 10 years. There were 11,064 congregations in 2003, 1,026 more than in 2013.[21]

While the PCUSA elected to increase structural control and decrease theological clarity, non-denominational and charismatic churches chose the opposite journey. In *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in a New Millennium,* Donald E. Miller studies the explosive phenomenon of non-denominational and charismatic churches such as Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard Fellowship. Miller views these "new paradigm" churches as a revolution, perhaps even the beginning of a second Protestant Reformation in American.

> Like upstart religious groups of the past, they have discarded many of the attributes of establishment religion. Appropriating contemporary cultural forms, these churches are creating a new genre of worship music; they are restructuring the organizational character of institutional religion; and they are democratizing access to the sacred by radicalizing the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers.[22]

Unlike the PCUSA, new paradigm churches do not require pastors to go to seminary. Pastors are mentored while doing ministry and then released to launch a new congregation. To avoid dependency on a denomination, each pastor is expected to raise support. Growth occurs through a decentralized network of cell groups. These churches empower everyone, not just the leaders, to engage in ministry. While they hold limited structural control over their congregations, new paradigm churches emphasize high

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[21] Presbyterian Mission Agency, "The Top 10 Most Frequently Asked Questions about the PC(USA)," https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/research/10faq/#2 (accessed October 7, 2014).

[22] Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

accountability to core doctrines of the faith. In one survey, Miller compares the responses

of new paradigm clergy about key theological beliefs to those of Presbyterian pastors.

> Presbyterian clergy—and I assume many other pastors of mainline churches—reveal an ambivalence about the truth of their message, in contrast to the conviction of new paradigm pastors. . . . They possess a strong, experientially based belief structure that contrasts sharply with secular culture. In contrast, Presbyterian clergy have accommodated their views to a pluralistic culture and its competing truth claims.[23]

Although Miller is an adherent of a mainline church, he perceptively identifies that a

tightly controlled ministry, combined with a loosely defined message, is a formula for

institutional stagnation and decline. He concludes:

> If the mainline churches are going to regain their leadership, they must do two things that the new paradigm churches already have mastered: first, they must give the ministry back to the people, which implies creating a much flatter organizational structure; and, second, they must become vehicles for people to access the sacred in profound and life-changing ways.[24]

The denomination's shift toward higher institutional control and lower theological

standards led the Woodside Church to follow Miller's guidance and adopt the lay-led

collaborative approach of non-denominational churches. This shift yielded a new

structural paradigm which combines the streams of Reformed theology and the new

open-source world.

The New, Open, Networked World

As the Roman Imperial hierarchy was the structural model for the Catholic and

Orthodox churches and the committee structure of corporate America was adopted by

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[23] Ibid., 127.

[24] Ibid., 187.

Protestant denominations, so the internet can serve as the organizing paradigm for the twenty-first-century church. According to Brafman and Beckstrom, flat, leaderless, decentralized networks are "starfish organizations." A starfish has no head and therefore no leader. The limbs function as a collaborative network. Cutting off a leg will not stop the starfish. In fact, the leg will regenerate. Brafman and Beckstrom point out that starfish organizations, such as Apache tribes, Alcoholic Anonymous, and Al Qaeda, are powerful and nearly unstoppable since they do not have a head or a headquarters.

The authors identify rules for starfish organizations. Among these is the power of networks. "The network effect is the increase in the overall value of the network with the addition of each new member."[25] Instead of limiting leadership or controlling through committees, starfish organizations increase their influence and effectiveness by involving as many participants as possible in a flat network. They exercise as little control as possible in order to encourage collaboration and creativity among the participants. Indeed, as an open-source organization, they thrive on the input of everyone. Brafman and Beckstrom note: "Not only do people throughout a starfish have knowledge, but they also have a fundamental desire to share and to contribute."[26] While a starfish movement can seem chaotic, values give it unity, purpose, and direction. "The Values *Are* the Organization. Ideology is the fuel that drives the decentralized organization. Take away the ideology, and the starfish organization will crumble."[27] Finally, the leaders of starfish

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[25] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider,* 202.

[26] Ibid., 204.

[27] Ibid., 208.

are not controllers but catalysts. They might form circles within the movement, make suggestions, and then let go and move on. It can be hazardous to the health of a starfish organization for a catalyst to settle into the role of CEO.

The lessons learned from starfish organizations correspond with Miller's prescriptions for reinventing American Protestantism. The PCUSA can thrive again if it decentralizes into a flatter structure that allows everyone to participate in ministry and if it recaptures the unifying power of its essential tenets. Pastors and elders will continue to have a role but only as catalysts not as controllers. This is why it is imperative to jettison the ineffective committee structure in favor of a network of reproducing small groups that love God, grow in grace, and share with others.

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY OF REPRODUCING SMALL GROUPS

The worldwide Christian movement begins as a small group (Mk 3:13-19). Jesus trains the twelve not in a classroom but in a community on the move. He mentors this original small group by modeling his teachings and then sends them on brief training missions (Mt 10:1-16). Before departing, he commissions them to reproduce communities of disciples in every nation (Mt 28:18-20). They, in turn, catalyze a network of small groups which expands exponentially across the empire without denominations, sanctuaries, or copies of the New Testament (Rom 1:8; 15:23-24). The authorities cannot stop this decentralized movement. Persecution only spreads this wildfire. The Roman Empire finally controls the Jesus movement by joining it. This domestication of the Church has prevailed from Constantine until now. The demise of Christendom and the rise of a networked world make the twenty-first century an unparalleled opportunity to recapture Jesus' original theology and practice of reproducing small groups.

It Begins with Twelve: Jesus' Method of Mentoring and

Reproducing Disciples

Before they are called Christians, the followers of Jesus are known as the people

of the Way (Acts 19:9, 23: 22:4; 24:14, 22). The Greek word *hodos*, which appears a

hundred times in the New Testament, may also be translated as a walk, a road, a journey,

a course of conduct, or a way of thinking.[1] Such a term captures not only Jesus' ministry

and mission but also his pedagogical method. The majority of his ministry does not occur

in buildings but on the byways of Palestine. All four Gospels begin with John the Baptist

who comes to "prepare the way for the Lord" (Lk 3:4; Is 40:3). Jesus asks his disciples

important questions (Mk 8:27-30) and reveals crucial truths (Mk 10:32-34) on the road.

The second half of all the Synoptic Gospels focuses on the Messiah's final journey to

Jerusalem and the Cross. In Acts, after the outpouring of the Spirit, his disciples scatter to

invite others to join the Way. Even Saul, who seeks to arrest those belonging to the Way,

becomes an apostle of the Way after he is struck down on the road to Damascus.

The Way conveys a picture of a movement, not an institutional religion. Jesus'

movement begins with apprenticing. He trains student by walking and living with them.

They hear his preaching, watch him perform miracles, and assist him as he feeds

multitudes. Apprenticing on the road is common among first-century rabbis. They travel

about teaching Jewish law or *halakha*, which means "the walk" or "the way to go."[2]

Nevertheless, despite similar methods, these two ways are foundationally different. For

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[1] *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "Walk."

[2] Ibid.

the Pharisees and rabbinic Judaism, the heart of *halakha* is the Torah. Jesus, however, does not merely teach a way. He is the Way. He reveals this on the night before his crucifixion when he says, "'You know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (Jn 14:4-6). Jesus is the way. He is the way believers come to love and be loved by the Father. Jesus is the truth. As disciples grow in his grace, they come to know that truth is not a body of laws or doctrine but a person. Jesus is the life. As followers imitate his example of sharing with others, they begin to live the life he did. The Gospels present Jesus' four-step process of apprenticing and reproducing people of the Way.

The first step is to form the community. Jesus begins his mission by returning to Galilee and announcing, "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mk 1:15). Immediately after this, he begins forming a community of twelve. The invitation to join the group includes a brief vision of its mission: "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people'" (Mk 1:17). Icenogle points out that the formation of this first small group is a continuation of God's mission to restore his intimate relationship with humanity. Since its exile from Eden, humanity longs for communion with God, but all its attempts at creating such a community, even those formed by God's chosen people, fall short. With the arrival of Jesus, the time has finally come. Icenogle writes:

> Then came Jesus, the man who was the face, presence and community of God
> incarnated on earth. He was the man who drew others into intimacy with the

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"Father" as the "Son" in the "Spirit." Jesus was the long-awaited leader who would bring a small group together and demonstrate the immediate nearness of God's presence in divine community. Jesus called this demonstration of God's rule in community the "kingdom" of God. . . . This was the purpose of the coming of Christ and the calling of the Twelve: to make God's full nature, character and purpose visible and active "on earth as it is in heaven."[3]

This first small group is a model, a foretaste, and a catalyst of the kingdom. It is the seed, the yeast, the salt, and the light Jesus wants to scatter, shake, and shine in this world. The first group is so essential that Jesus prays all night before selecting its members.

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor (Lk 6:12-16).

Surprisingly, Jesus includes in his small group natural enemies such as Matthew the tax collector and Simon the zealot. Education is not a pre-requisite. A third of the members are unschooled fishermen. It is entirely a lay movement since no one is identified as a priest or Levite. Jesus even invites his betrayer to join.

One glaring omission is the presence of women. While this is consistent with the practice of rabbis at the time, even here Jesus breaks the rules. Luke reports,

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Lk 8:1-3).

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[3] Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 117.

These few verses reveal a glimpse of the kingdom Jesus inaugurates through this first

community. It is a movement of men and women following their Master over an entire

region. Their mission is to invite people to participate in the kingdom, to drive out the

presence of Satan, and to restore physical and spiritual wholeness. The first small group

is a vision of the good news of God's love for humanity. Icenogle writes: "This is a core

value for the development of small group ministry—the calling together of a group to

experience the intimacy of Jesus' vulnerable relationship with Abba God."[4] The

community learns to love God as Jesus does. If it only focuses on this first step, however,

it will become a closed group of mystics.

The second step in Jesus' apprenticing process is for the disciples to follow the

Master. The original small group learns to grow in grace by imitating Jesus. Although the

Greek word for disciple, *mathetēs,* can be translated as "student" or "learner," the

disciples do not receive their lessons in a lecture hall but on the lanes and pathways of

Galilee. Mark describes the calling and purpose of the first small group when he writes,

"Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to

him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to

preach and to have authority to drive out demons" (Mk 3:13-15). He calls them to be with

him in order to model the mission of preaching and deliverance he will soon bestow on

them. There are times, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), when he calls them

apart for a special teaching. These chapters reveal what it means to grow in the grace of

Jesus. They outline the values, characteristics, and practices of those who belong to his

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[4] Ibid., 117.

new kingdom. Yet Jesus also trains his small group by confronting them with challenging situations, as when he tells the cash-poor disciples to feed a crowd of over five thousand (Mt 14:13-16). He models prayer for them (Lk 11:1-4), demonstrates how to face opposition (Mk 2:15-17), and resolves conflicts between them (Mt 20:20-28). They learn how to preach by listening to him. They receive from him the power to heal and deliver people from diseases and demons (Mt 10:1). He models so much for them that Peter even attempts to follow Jesus onto the waves (Mt 14:22-33). Icenogle summarizes Jesus' pedagogical method of modeling by stating,

> Jesus beckoned the Twelve into a new purpose and new relationships, with new values, new perspectives and new character. He welcomed the Twelve to himself —to walk with him, watch him, imitate him, learn with him and take on his character. He became their future, their center of hope, their model of faith and their source of love. His community with "the Father" became their community with "the Father." His community with each of them became their community with one another.[5]

The first small group learns to grow in the grace of Jesus by imitating him. This is not just for their personal improvement. From the beginning, Jesus' purpose is to train them to go out and minister to others as he did.

The third step in the apprenticing process is field testing. In the early chapters of his Gospel, Matthew presents three chapters on Jesus' teachings (Mt 5-7) followed by two chapters of miraculous healings (Mt 8-9). He concludes this first portion with a summary of Jesus' ministry, which transitions to the third phase of small group development.

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[5] Ibid., 142.

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt 9:35-38).

Following this announcement, Jesus practices what he just preached. After naming the disciples, Matthew writes:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Mt 10:5-8).

Mark's account mentions the disciples go out in pairs. The goal is to heal the sick, drive out demons, and invite their hearers to join Jesus' kingdom movement. They are to rely on the hospitality of strangers. If they are not welcome, they simply move on. By depending on the kindness of strangers, the disciples scatter the seed of the Gospel in the field of each village. If it takes root, a new community of the kingdom is formed. Despite bringing the blessing of healing and deliverance, Jesus prepares the disciples for opposition. He speaks of times in the future when they will be brought into courtrooms, stand before governors, and endure punishments. Even family members will turn believers over to the authorities. In all this, Jesus counsels them to remain calm, stand firm, never retaliate, and rely on the Spirit (Mt 10:17-21).

In Luke's account of this mission, the twelve return for debriefing and take a retreat (Lk 9:10). Following the first deployment of the twelve, Jesus sends out a larger mission of seventy-two disciples to prepare the way for his arrival in more villages (Lk 10:1-20). They also return to give a report of their progress (Lk 10:16-20). These

examples of field testing reveal several key features of Jesus' movement. It oscillates between gathering and scattering. Rather than staying in a single synagogue or village, it spreads out over an entire region. Its goal is to plant communities of believers in the homes of those who welcome the disciples. The movement depends on apprentices who learn by observing and practicing the actions of their Master. The network grows exponentially through the reproduction of disciples from twelve to seventy-two to multitudes. The ministry occurs in any location, since there is no divide between sacred and secular space. It is an entirely lay-led movement, which is often opposed by established religious and governmental authorities. Above all, the mission is to peacefully share with others the blessings of God's love, healing, and deliverance. If these blessings are not welcomed, the disciples simply move on and share them in the next village. Even before Pentecost, Jesus hints that they will rely on the power of the Spirit to share the good news. This third step in Jesus' training program depends on the first two. If Jesus did not form them into a community that loves the Father and train them to grow in grace by following the Son, the disciples would have nothing to share with others.

The final step in the apprenticing process involves finding new followers. The movement launched by Jesus quickly spreads beyond the borders of Palestine and the boundaries of Jewish ethnicity. Peter's baptism of Cornelius (Acts 10), Paul's mission to the Gentiles (Gal 2:1-10), and the Council of Jerusalem's full acceptance of Gentiles (Acts 15) are crucial steps in the transformation of the Way into a multinational movement. After the resurrection, "Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

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baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you

always, to the very end of the age'" (Mt 28:18-20). The circle is widened from Israel to

all nations. Baptism, not circumcision, becomes the way people are welcomed into the

community of the Triune God. The mission is to make new followers of Jesus "from

every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rv 7:9). To accomplish this goal, the disciples

are equipped with the teachings of Jesus and the presence of Jesus through the power of

the Spirit. They also carry with them the training method of Jesus. By forming

communities of disciples, teaching disciples to follow the Master's commands, and

sending disciples into new fields to repeat the process, the kingdom movement of Jesus

reproduces exponentially from Jerusalem to Rome in a single generation. This is not a

clever marketing scheme. It is the work of the Spirit.

<div align="center">

Racing to Catch Up with the Spirit: The Spread of

Apostolic Communities

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Before the Great Commission there was a great assumption. In the Book of Acts,

the disciples ask Jesus one last question before his Ascension:

> Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going
> to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the
> times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power
> when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
> and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

The disciples still labor under an assumption common to Jews at that time. Many believe

the Messiah will establish and elevate the kingdom of Israel. Based on the prophecy in

Isaiah 2:1-5, they expect all nations to come to Jerusalem and learn the ways of the God

of Israel. Jesus reverses the direction. The disciples are not to sit and wait for the nations to come to them. With the power of the Holy Spirit, he sends them to the nations. The description in Acts 1:8 is their roadmap. For the rest of the Book of Acts the apostles race to catch up with the Spirit.

<div align="center">Random Acts of Community</div>

The firestorm of Pentecost instantly ignites a movement. Icenogle writes: "The movement of God's Spirit in the world is a decentralizing and empowering flow through leaders who build new communities and call those communities to a pervasive priesthood, mediating God's presence to others."[6] This is evident from the moment of birth. After three thousand are baptized into the community, Acts states,

> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

This brief glimpse reveals the three priorities of Jesus' training method. The Jerusalem community loves God through temple worship, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. They grow in the grace through devotion to the apostles' teachings, fellowship in their homes, and common meals. They share with others by selling their possessions, giving to anyone who has need, and welcoming into the community those who are daily added by the Lord. They oscillate between gathering in the temple courts and scattering to their homes.

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[6] Ibid., 116.

The Jerusalem church rapidly expands from one hundred-twenty (Acts 1:15) to three thousand (Acts 2:41) to eight thousand (Acts 4:4).

The portrait of the Jerusalem Church is often considered an ideal description of the Church. Surprisingly, Neil Cole views it as the poorest model among the churches mentioned in Acts. He labels it as a "homogeneous attractional congregation"[7] which plateaus and then fractures due to its growing legalism and its lingering refusal to fully accept Gentiles. Cole points out that Jesus promises them explosive power for the purpose of spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

> The Jerusalem church, and especially the apostles, were given very clear instructions. God held up His end by providing the power, but the disciples never left Jerusalem. By Acts 8:1 the book says: "On that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."
> After a short time of great blessings in Jerusalem but without any mission beyond those borders, God had to force them out. In what may be the most ironic words in the Bible, it says that everyone spread out in Judea and Samaria *except the sent ones* (the apostles)! . . . We tend to miss the obvious humor, even sarcasm, found in the verse. But it is there. Any first-century person that read the original language would pick it up immediately.[8]

From this point forward, the apostles must race to keep up with the Spirit as he forms, what appear to be, random acts of community. Although these new gatherings of the Way may seem arbitrary and unpredictable to the apostles, they are actually the Spirit's plan to break down cultural barriers, boundaries, and prejudices. In Acts 8, the Spirit plants a community among the once-hated Samaritans, which forces Peter and John to leave Jerusalem and give their approval (Acts 8:4-25). The Gospel is then shared with an

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[7] Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 103.

[8] Ibid., 102.

Ethiopian official (Acts 8:26-40), an enemy of the faith who builds up an existing community in Damascus (Acts 9:1-22), and a Roman centurion and his family in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-48).

The conversion of a Gentile shatters so many religious and cultural barriers that even Peter, the chief apostle, must defend his actions to the leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-18). The evidence of the Spirit wins over the opposition.

> "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:15-18).

While Cornelius may be the first officially sanctioned Gentile disciple, Acts reveals an earlier mission to the Gentiles following the martyrdom of Stephen.

> Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:19-21).

The Spirit spreads the Gospel and forms communities through nameless disciples who are not apostles, do not originate from the home territory of Palestine, have no official standing or sanction, and refuse to stay within the acceptable cultural boundaries. To keep up with the Spirit, the hierarchy in Jerusalem dispatches Barnabas to Antioch to investigate. Far from reining them in, Barnabas, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24), encourages them to continue spreading the Gospel. He even invites Paul to join him in a congregation that is quite different from Jerusalem.

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The church in Antioch becomes the first purposefully missional congregation. It begins as a multiethnic community, which ministers to the needs of those beyond its fellowship. It even sends financial support to the believers in Judea (Acts 11:28-30). Cole points out that "the second-, third-, and fourth-generation churches actually have a view outside of themselves that results in a healthier church than the actual mother church. The Antioch church ultimately changed the shape of church for the future and turned the world upside down by being the first to intentionally send out missionaries to reach the nations."[9] In response to the Spirit (Acts 13:1-3) this church boldly sends its most famous leaders to plant new communities. While the Jerusalem Church becomes a regulatory body, dependent on aid from younger Christian communities, the mission to the Gentiles forms a network of exponentially reproducing house churches in urban centers throughout the empire.

The Spirit always stays ahead of Paul and directs his path. On one missionary journey, the Spirit prevents Paul's team from entering Asia or Bithynia in order to force them to cross over into Europe (Acts 16:6-10). Even in Rome there is a strong Christian movement before Paul arrives. Cole writes, "In Rome you have a network of organic churches meeting across the sprawling city in various houses with leaders that were a part of each community. It is possible that Paul greeted up to fifteen churches, each with specific leaders. There is no indication of a centralized office or headquarters."[10] It is unclear who planted this community. Perhaps Roman Jews and converts, who received

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[9] Ibid., 106.

[10] Ibid., 109.

the Spirit in Jerusalem on Pentecost, brought the Gospel home with them (Acts 2:10-11).

Paul's greeting in Romans 16 indicates that many of his "fellow workers" went ahead of

him to build up the church in the capital city. Ultimately, the church in Rome is another

of the Spirit's random acts of organic, decentralized community.

Equipping All the Saints

Just as Paul depends on the Spirit to ignite a movement of small groups, he also

relies on new believers to reproduce these groups. The church in Ephesus is an excellent

example of this practice. Paul teaches daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This may be

his school for training disciples to spread the Gospel since Acts states, "This went on for

two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the

word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Cole observes,

> This is a much more rapid, reproductive form of church that can saturate a region
> in a short time, and even start similar works in other nations. Because it is not
> dependent on a centralized leader, ordinary people spread the movement, even
> new converts (Rom. 16:5). The churches were simple churches that could meet in
> homes or even public businesses (Acts 19:9; 20:20). They had to be simple; it is
> the only way to explain rapid multiplication by these new disciples.[11]

Years later, Paul writes from prison to remind all the Ephesian believers of their common

calling: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were

called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and

through all and in all" (Eph 4:3-6). The scattered gatherings of the Ephesian Church are

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[11] Ibid., 110.

not united by institutional control or a clerical hierarchy but by the Spirit and this simple Trinitarian creed.

While there are leaders overseeing the church, their role is not to regulate and control but to train and equip every believer for ministry. Paul writes: "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13). The Greek grammar in this passage allows for two diverse interpretations. If a comma is placed between the clauses "to equip his people" and "for works of service," then the special offices mentioned in verse eleven perform both tasks. The result is a distinction between the clergy, who equip believers and do works of ministry, and the church members, who passively receive the services. Markus Barth reveals the problems with this translation.

> This interpretation has an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavor; it distinguishes the (mass of the) "saints" from the (superior class of the) officers of the church. . . . Yet two implications of this interpretation are inescapable: (1) the laymen are ultimately only beneficiaries, and (2) the benefits of the clergy's work remain inside the church—though people and power outside the church may witness the clergy's successes and failures.[12]

On the basis of exegetical grounds, M. Barth rejects this reading in favor of a translation which makes it clear that the saints are equipped for the works of service.

> All the saints (and among them, each saint) are enabled by the four or five types of servants enumerated in 4:11 to fulfill the ministry given to them, so that the whole church is taken into Christ's service and given missionary substance,

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[12] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6*, vol. 34A of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 479.

purpose, and structure. This interpretation challenges both the aristocratic-clerical and the triumphalistic-ecclesiastical exposition of 4:11-12. It unmasks them as arbitrary distortions of the text.[13]

This translation and interpretation, according to M. Barth, prevents church members from turning into passive, spiritual consumers. It reminds the Church that it exists not to bless itself but others. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers exist as servants of the servants of God, who support from below instead of lead from above. Even ordination to ministry is not restricted to these special roles. All the saints are ordained to serve through their baptism. M. Barth states, "Baptism in the biblical sense of the term is ordination for participation in the church's ministry."[14] The organic and exponential reproduction of the church in the province of Asia, and throughout the Roman Empire, depended on the principle that every believer can be trained and equipped to serve Christian communities which build up the Body of Christ.

The Power of Apprenticing

One of the arguments in favor of institutional control by clergy is the safeguard it affords against unbiblical teachings and heresy. This did not seem to be a concern for Paul. He states that if the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers equip and train the people for ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ, "then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming"

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[13] Ibid., 479.

[14] Ibid., 482.

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(Eph 4:14). Thus, the crucial factor is not central control but equipping and training through a process of apprenticing.

As Jesus originally apprenticed and deployed the twelve, so Paul calls Silas, Titus, and Timothy to learn from him and then to lead missions. A single verse reveals Paul's strategy for apprenticing and reproducing. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tm 2:2). D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson identify four levels of apprenticing: "First Generation: Paul. Second Generation: Instructs Timothy. Third Generation: to invest in 'reliable men.' Fourth Generation: 'who will also be qualified to teach others.'"[15] Apprenticing is not simply the transfer of biblical or doctrinal knowledge. With both Jesus and Paul, it is life-on-life mentoring, modeling, and practicing ministry until the apprentice is ready to lead and mentor the next generation of apprentices. Paul first reminds Timothy of the ministry he modeled for him when he writes: "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them" (2 Tm 3:10-11). Then Paul charges Timothy to faithfully follow the Scriptures and the lessons he learned: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise

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[15] D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson, *Exponential*, 62.

for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tm 3:14-15). In Paul's apprenticing

strategy these lessons are reproduced and multiplied with each generation.

Among his final instructions, Paul directs Timothy to "Preach the word; be

prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience

and careful instruction. . . . Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work

of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Tm 4:2, 5). The Church

does not exist for itself but to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. The work

of an evangelist is to proclaim the Gospel, to invite others into a saving relationship with

the Lord, and to welcome them into the fellowship of believers. Exponential reproduction

is only possible if all the saints are equipped to invite others to follow Jesus.

It is also crucial for leaders in each generation to release their apprentices to lead

and apprentice others. This prevents an unhealthy dependency of the apprentice on the

mentor. Paul never settles in one place for very long. He plants churches, selects leaders,

and moves on to new fields of mission where he repeats this pattern. A Spirit-led network

of apprentices can replicate without limit. The network does not depend on buildings,

denominations, or seminary-trained pastors. A decentralized movement can thrive and

spread even in the face of persecution. In these cases, the Spirit works through leaders

who mentor apprentices, motivate members to invite new members, and move on to start

new groups.

Learning from Movements of the Spirit in the Twenty-First Century

The Spirit continues to ignite renewal movements in the third millennium. Many

of these are built on the reproduction of small groups and house churches in various

nations around the globe. One example is the dramatic explosion of the Pentecostal and

Charismatic movements. From its humble origins in a Kansas Bible School and the

Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles at the opening of the twentieth century, the

Pentecostal movement has grown to four hundred million disciples worldwide. It is now

the single largest category of Protestantism. "If currently Roman Catholics are the largest

Christian group, then classical Pentecostals are now the second largest and gaining fast.

Catholics now number about one half of all Christians, while Pentecostals make up

almost a quarter."[16]

Pentecostalism eventually entered established churches through the Charismatic

movement. Yet Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen cautions that Pentecostal ecclesiology is difficult

to define. "Understandably, Pentecostal ecclesiology is of an ad hoc nature which leaves

much room for improvisation. Since most Pentecostals emphasize the spiritual, thus

invisible, nature of the church, much of their writing has been on ecclesiastical polity that

is characterized by the restorationist desire to go back to apostolic times."[17] To recover

the original apostolic movement, Pentecostal congregations promote the expression of all

charismatic gifts and the active participation of all members of a local fellowship. They

are able to reproduce Christian communities more rapidly since they do not require

seminary-trained pastors to lead them. Moreover, the Pentecostal movement exemplifies

Allen's view that churches spontaneously expand when they are intentionally indigenous.

Kärkkäinen notes the remarkable growth of Pentecostal churches in the Third World may

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[16] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 69.

[17] Ibid., 73.

be due their ability to root themselves in the culture, instead of attempting to westernize

converts as missionaries did in the nineteenth century. On a trip to India in 1999, I

witnessed a Pentecostal Church planting movement which formed congregations of

twenty-five baptized believers led by a native lay pastor. In one year, this movement

established nine thousand house churches.

Another remarkable story of unexpected and exponential growth is unfolding

among the underground congregations in China. When Mao Tse-tung began his

systematic purge of all religious leaders and institutions, there were about two million

Chinese Christians. With the passing of Mao and the lifting of restrictions, one might

expect to find a broken and demoralized church. Instead, Hirsch points out there was a

vibrant, flourishing movement of sixty million Christians which has grown to around

eighty million today. He illustrates how the church organically and exponentially

reproduced during the years of persecution with an ironic story about a meeting between

Michael Frost and three Chinese leaders who were smuggled out. When asked about

prayer concerns, the underground leaders mentioned three issues.

> They were still not allowed to gather in groups of more than fifteen people, and
> when they grew beyond that they had to split and start a new church. Could the
> Westerners please pray about that? . . . They were not allowed to have church
> buildings and were thus forced to meet in homes, cafes, karaoke bars, and social
> clubs. Could the Westerners please pray that they could build churches as well?
> They were forbidden to develop separate organizations where they could
> collectively train leaders; they were forced to train leaders in the local church.
> Michael, himself a vice president of a seminary, has often said that in all good
> conscience he simply could not pray for them in this way, because he . . . realized
> in many ways the Communist state was forcing the church to remain more true to
> itself.[18]

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[18] Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 189.

In this story Hirsch identifies the ingredients for an organic, decentralized, incarnational, missional movement. Indigenous lay leaders are locally trained and deployed to pastor small groups which meet in the community and reproduce on a regular basis.

The Church Multiplication Associates (CMA) is a similar movement which began in Southern California. Cole, the leader of this organic church planting network, writes: "CMA's mandate is clear and simple: to reproduce healthy disciples, leaders, churches, and movements to fill the earth with God's Kingdom. We have developed some very simple ways to release the power of multiplication at each of these levels of Kingdom life and growth."[19] Their congregations, which average about sixteen people, are purposefully small. They meet in homes, cafes, parks, and other public places. Since the complex systems and needs of the average building-based congregation are difficult to run and reproduce, CMA keeps things simple. Cole states,

> We started articulating this profound goal for CMA: "We want to lower the bar of how church is done and raise the bar of what it means to be a disciple." If church is simple enough that everyone can do it and is made up of people who take up their cross and follow Jesus at any cost, the result will be churches that empower the common Christian to do the uncommon works of God. Churches will become healthy, fertile, and reproductive.[20]

Their most basic unit is not an organic church of sixteen, but a Life Transformation Group (LTG) of two or three disciples who challenge one another to live for Christ by reading Scripture and answering accountability questions. This network of organic churches is united, not through an overall structure, but through what Cole calls DNA. As

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[19] Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 27.

[20] Ibid., 26-27.

DNA in each cell provides the code for how the body will form and grow, so Cole says

three factors develop and unite the Body of Christ: divine truth, nurturing relationships,

and apostolic mission. These are the simple, yet essential ingredients at the foundation of

every level of the church from the small LTG to the large network gathering. These three

core practices are similar to the three priorities discussed in the previous chapter on

ecclesiology: love God, grow in grace, and share with others. Cole reports, "We have

spread from a handful in 2000 to tens of thousands across forty-plus states and thirty-five

nations in nine years."[21]

    These three movements demonstrate that the Spirit continues to ignite a spreading

wildfire of decentralized, lay-led, small groups and house churches in the twenty-first

century, just as he did in the first century. To join the work of the Spirit, Woodside seeks

to become a church that reproduces naturally and organically at every level. As a first

step toward that goal, this theology of reproducing small groups will form the foundation

for a ministry plan to coach small group leaders to mentor apprentice leaders, motivate

members to invite new members, and move on to start new groups.

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[21] Cole, *Church 3.0*, 71.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

GOALS AND PLANS FOR REPRODUCING GROUPS

This is a tale of two seas. Both are fed by the same river. One provides abundant

life. It yields nets of fresh fish, waters the surrounding fields, and satisfies the thirst of

countless families. It makes possible the fertile, reproductive potential of the region. The

other sea is so lifeless it has an infamous name: dead. At 1,401 feet below sea level, the

Dead Sea is the lowest place on the surface of the earth. The Jordan River flows in and

never leaves. Some do enjoy hanging out around it. They sun themselves, bob like a cork

on the water, and enjoy skin treatments from its mineral-rich mud. It cannot, however,

support life. The salt concentration is almost ten times the salinity of the ocean. No fish

live in it and few animals can survive in the barren, moon-like landscape that surrounds

it. The Sea of Galilee, by contrast, provides much of the water which makes life possible

in Israel. It lives because it receives and releases the Jordan River. It is also, of course,

the heart of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. By its shores, he formed the first small group, gave

them instructions to follow, sent them to field test his teachings, and released them to find

new disciples (Mt 28:16-20).

Small groups can be like the Dead Sea or the Sea of Galilee. Both receive the

Holy Spirit's river of living water (Jn 7:37-39). The first type keeps this spiritual

nourishment to itself. These groups are not really dead. People are certainly blessed by

them. The second type, however, has a mission to refresh and revive the lives of those

around it. This chapter presents goals and plans for channeling the theological stream of

Jesus' kingdom movement into organic small groups that naturally reproduce.

Theological Implications for Reproducing Small Groups at Woodside

One of the first terms used to describe the Church is *koinōnia.* It is often

translated as "fellowship." In Acts 2:42-47, *koinōnia* is expressed through the sharing of

meals, prayers, teachings, resources, worship, and mission. A close, intimate bond

develops. Nevertheless, this sharing is not exclusive, since the passage states, "And the

Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Paul also

uses the term to describe his partnership with the Philippian Christians in sharing the

Gospel (Phil 1:5). The goal of many small groups is *koinōnia.*

Unfortunately, a group may suffer from a condition called *koinonitis.* Peter

Wagner, who coined the term, writes:

> But in some churches, people enjoy fellowship so much that it becomes the
> exclusive focus of their attention and participation in the life of the church. When
> this happens, the church suffers from "fellowship inflammation," which is not a
> blessing, but a disease. People become so focused on one another that they lose
> any vision they might have had for reaching the lost of their community.
> Koinonitis causes evangelistic myopia.[1]

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[1] Peter Wagner, "Overcoming Small Church Barriers of 200 People," in, *The Everychurch Guide to Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow,* eds. Elmer Towns, Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer (Nashville: Broadman and Hollman Publishers, 1998), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1063-1066.

An entire congregation can be afflicted with *koinonitis*. The focus turns inward. The members believe the church exists to serve their spiritual and social needs. It often becomes difficult for visitors and new members to break into the fellowship. A church with *koinonitis* usually plateaus, since it does not place a priority on reaching new people.

Small groups can also suffer from *koinonitis*. This is common when members view their group as an end in itself, rather than a means to mission. The main purpose of the group, they feel, is to meet the spiritual and social needs of the members. Often, the primary activity of the group is simply to hold the meeting. The participants study and assimilate biblical knowledge. The members may also develop close, supportive relationships and frequently help each other through difficult circumstances. Nevertheless, this intimacy can cause the group to be insulated and isolated. It begins to function as an invisible barrier to newcomers. Some groups become officially closed to prevent outsiders from disrupting the closeness of the community. Other groups that claim to be open rarely welcome new members. They tend to reach a plateau around twelve participants since, beyond a dozen, it is harder for all members to share. Groups afflicted with *koinonitis* might also resist coaching from pastors or other leaders. Small groups, like congregations, rarely stay on a plateau. Without a cure for *koinonitis*, they often decline to a smaller size or disband. A theology of reproducing small groups can provide some therapies to reverse the effects of *koinonitis* and redirect a group's focus from inside to outside.

Begin with Balanced DNA

The theology of the Church presented in this project centers on three interlocking actions. All levels of a congregation, from the individual believer to the small group, worship service, ministry, and campus, are based on the mission to love God, grow in grace, and share with others. This serves as the DNA of the movement. Discipleship is lived in three dimensions: upward in worship and prayer, inward in fellowship and discipleship, outward in ministry, mission, and evangelism. All three are essential to keep the Body of Christ balanced and healthy. Cole states, "Just as the DNA is exactly the same in almost every cell of a body, the DNA is the same throughout the Body of Christ, for all its members and in every cell. The DNA is the pattern of Kingdom life, from the smallest unit (the disciple in relationship to Jesus and others) to the largest unit. The pattern is the same and its expression remains constant."[2] While not exactly the same, Cole's definition of DNA—divine truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission— is similar to the threefold mission outlined in this project.

A small group suffering from *koinonitis* emphasizes the secondary, inward dimension of the DNA over the other two. The group may pray before and after the study and discussion. The members may occasionally participate in a mission project beyond the regular group meeting. These groups may even devote an entire meeting to worship and prayer. The most glaring omission, however, is a lack of passion for sharing the Gospel with others, for inviting new members to join, and for launching new groups. Bill Tenny-Brittian observes,

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[2] Cole, *Organic Church*, 115.

> Small groups generally gather for (1) Bible study; (2) prayer; or (3) some shared interest. However, these groups often suffer from a genetic abnormality—they have a myopic mission gene (short-sighted mission). . . . They've subconsciously concluded that they exit for the group's sake. The church doesn't exist for itself, it exists to do the works of Jesus (Jn 14:12): to heal, cast out darkness, and share the gospel. When a group suffers from a myopic mission gene they spend their time edifying and educating themselves to the exclusion of the ultimate purpose of the church.[3]

Human cells and bodies require a healthy set of DNA to naturally reproduce. It is imperative that small groups also start with healthy, balanced DNA including a conviction that the group exists to share the good news with others and to launch new groups.

Mentor Apprentices

Training apprentices is a second essential implication of the theology of reproductive small groups. Jesus apprenticed his disciples by forming the first small group, inviting them to follow and imitate his kingdom lifestyle, field testing them by sending them out on mission, and then commissioning them to find other followers. Paul also practices apprenticing by training Timothy and then directing him to pass on his teachings "to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tm 2:2). Apprenticing is not simply the transference of biblical knowledge. It is modeling and practicing leadership until the apprentice is ready to lead. According to D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson, a reproducing church is only possible if every leader has an apprentice.

> Though we didn't fully realize it at the time, I cannot overstate the significance of insisting that every small group begin with a leader and an apprentice leader.

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[3] Bill Tenny-Brittian, "Cell Biology for the Church: Why Small Groups Don't Multiply," Small Groups.com, http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2006/cellbiologyforthechurch.html (accessed July 7, 2014).

> Looking back, that one decision was foundational in establishing us as a reproducing church. . . . *As I look back, I am convinced that insisting every small group begin with a leader and an apprentice leader was one of the most important choices we ever made.*[4]

Leaders train apprentices, who go on to lead the next generation of small groups. This is how healthy, balanced DNA is passed on to new groups.

The Lord also provides coaches to oversee and train leaders. These are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who are sent "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). This is not a hierarchy but a flat network for training and accountability. Coaches remind leaders to build groups and train apprentices on the basis of the whole DNA. Without coaching, groups are liable to default to an inward focus and develop a case of *koinonitis*. The coaching method, however, must remain simple and supportive, rather than complicated and controlling. Complicated lessons will not transfer from coach to leader to apprentice. Controlling management will stifle the organic nature of the groups. In keeping with Allen's view that spontaneous expansion depends on indigenous leaders, it is preferable that small groups be led by lay leaders instead of pastors or staff. This prevents an unhealthy dependency of the group on a seminary-trained professional.

Motivate Members to Invite Members

Jesus begins his ministry by saying, "Come, follow me and I will send you out to fish for people" (Mt 4:19). He completes his earthly ministry in nearly the same location when he says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). From that

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[4] D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson, *Exponential*, 24.

Galilean hilltop, Jesus launches a missional movement to invite people of all nations to join his kingdom. In this age of increasing skepticism toward institutional religion, a personal invitation to a small gathering in a public place or a friend's home may be easier for a newcomer to accept, than an invitation to a church building. Since small groups are more interactive than worship services, they are a more effective forum for discipleship and fellowship. The groups meet at various times and days of the week and, therefore, provide more opportunities for spiritual growth than a worship service which only meets on Sunday morning. Moreover, since many groups do not require membership in a particular church, people of any denomination, any faith, and no faith may feel more comfortable affiliating with the group. In speaking about her small group, Woodside member Tracy Thomas states, "The membership has grown from friends inviting friends, new members looking for a group as well as people looking for a particular topic."[5]

If the leader, apprentice, and members of a group make it a priority to regularly invite new members to join the group, over time the group will increase to a threshold of twelve to eighteen. Cole calls this a family unit since "it contains enough diversity to meet a number of needs and yet is small enough to maintain a high level of intimacy. It is easy for all of its members to keep track of everyone's health. It can accommodate breaking off into small groups and yet remain intact."[6] When membership grows beyond this size, the group dynamics change. Based on research, George reports, "In a ten-person group the number of interpersonal signals to detect exceeds 5,000! Thus some churches,

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[5] Tracy Thomas, e-mail message to author, July 7, 2014.

[6] Cole, *Church 3.0*, 146.

including some of the beyond-huge ones in Korea, feel that even ten is too large."[7] As group membership grows, intimacy begins to suffer. Some members often hesitate to participate or attend. The group reaches a steady state where members may come and go, but attendance stays at or below twelve.

A group leader may, however, use this growth limit as the trigger to start a new group. A survey of group leaders at Woodside reveals that one group became the parent and grandparent of seven groups. Several leaders in this family tree report a decision to start a new group when they reached around eighteen members. One daughter group reached this size and did not birth a new group. T. Thomas, the leader of the group, writes: "Our Friday group has been steady at about 15-18 people. At the most, we've had 12 in the room. . . . The membership ebbs and flows."[8] Other leaders report their motivation to offer a new group was to reach a different population, such as preschool moms, working women, or people dealing with anxiety. Every time the group leader proposed starting a new group, the members reacted negatively. They did not want to "split" the group.

Move On

This fear of group divorce leads to a fourth implication of the theology of reproducing small groups. For a group to naturally reproduce another group, either the leader or apprentice must move on. After three years, Jesus ascended to heaven and left his apostles to make disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul planted numerous

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[7] George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future,* 126.

[8] T. Thomas, email message to author, July 7, 2014.

congregations and apprenticed many leaders as he moved from one city to another on his missionary journeys. He tells Titus, "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (Ti 1:5). He does not advise Titus to settle down in one town but to move around the island and finish assigning leaders. Thus Titus is able to accomplish more through a network of leaders than he could by himself. The elders understand it is their responsibility to shepherd their congregations.

Movements must move. Staying in one location invites stagnation. Nevertheless, when group members grow close, they fear the loss of their leader or the division of their group. No matter how the merits of reproducing a new group are presented, the members feel it is a break up of their family. Cole points out,

> For instance, for a time in small-group training it was taught that every group starts with a leader and an apprentice. As the group grows and reaches fifteen people, the apprentice is to take half the group and leave to begin a new group. This has been taught as multiplying, but in fact it is division. . . . People will probably only let you do this one time. After that they will resist, because from a group's perspective it feels more like a divorce than reproduction.[9]

Group reproduction is more natural when it comes from within an existing group. One of the seven Woodside small groups in the survey arose from two women who felt called to offer a group for mothers of preschoolers. These leaders did not have preschool children and they continued to lead their current group as well. Group leader Linda Marr writes:

> Our intent from the start was to get the group going and help a leader rise up and NOT stay with the group. About 1/2 way through the first year another woman named Maria joined in helping us lead. She and I then took over co-leading the group, I pulled back after a year or so and Maria led on her own for a year. She then felt called to step aside and wrote the most eloquent, faith filled letter to the

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[9] Cole, *Church 3.0,* 155.

group explaining her reasons for leaving. The group has flourished, raising up new group leaders as well as leaders in children's ministry.[10]

Since the two leaders did not leave their previous group, there was no fear of loss or splitting even though they did, in a sense, move on to start a new group. Once a new apprenticed leader was in place, they moved on again. The previous group, however, has caused them some frustration. Marr writes:

> Our Friday group has fluctuated up and down with as many as 20 fairly active members at a time. When we were getting 16-18 pretty regularly we did decide to offer 2 different studies. We did that about 2 times I think. NO ONE wanted to split. At the moment Karen and I feel at somewhat of a crossroads. Now we have about 12 fairly active members, with anywhere from 4-10 showing each week. Our group is awesome at fellowship—we are a great support for each other and members feel safe and loved. We have tried various ways to have others lead which has been somewhat successful but are now thinking we have made it too easy for everyone to just show up. We've enabled dependency![11]

The leaders hoped to birth two groups from the one, but the members resisted this move. There is deep intimacy in their fellowship but also dependency. Over time, the group settled down to a smaller size.

The original parent group also faced this challenge. It successfully transitioned to two groups by appointing leaders for each group and allowing for a time of transition. Dawn Wills, the leader of the original group, writes: "The group grew quite large—18-20 on the list, but no one wanted to 'split' so we decided to host two concurrent studies on Friday mornings with different topics with the idea that after each session you could re-group if you wanted to. This would also allow people to see each other socially as the

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[10] Linda Marr, email message to author, July 8, 2014.

[11] Ibid.

groups gathered."[12] As it turned out, the groups met separately in the church building and did not socialize as they planned. Since each group had a team of leaders drawn from their own membership, new bonds developed in these two daughter groups. New members, who were not part of the original group, also joined the new groups. After partnering with a new co-leader for a time, Wills left the Friday morning group and, with another member of the Friday group, moved on to form a Monday night group.

A delivery always starts with labor. It takes work to birth a new group. Careful coaching through the process can lead to a celebration rather than a catastrophe. The preceding illustrations suggest a few guidelines for a healthy delivery. First, they demonstrate that apprenticing leaders is the key to reproduction. Searcy and K. Thomas say it is essential to "multiply groups by identifying leaders."[13] Once an apprentice is trained and ready, the leader can start another group while the apprentice takes the lead of the original group or the apprentice can start the new group. If the leader initiates the new group, it is helpful if she or he also continues with the existing group during the time of transition as the group bonds to the apprentice. Once this apprentice becomes the leader, he or she should immediately choose an apprentice. Second, leaders and apprentices must have a passion for starting new groups. These leaders know a new group reaches more people with the good news than a crowded existing group. Third, group members must not be forced to move, though some may naturally follow the leader or apprentice to the new group. A different time, topic, or type of group may cause members to willingly join

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[12] Dawn Wills, email message to author, July 1, 2014.

[13] Searcy and K. Thomas, *Activate*, 75.

the new group. Fourth, it is easier to launch a new group with new people than to change an existing group. It is more difficult to birth two groups from an established group, since this requires overcoming the power of the fellowship bonds and perhaps even a case of *koinonitis.* Finally, size often triggers the decision to start a new group. These leaders report their groups felt full when they reach fifteen to eighteen members. Intimacy begins to wane. A decision is unavoidable. If the leader or apprentice moves to form a new group, more people will become disciples of Jesus. If a leader elects to do nothing, the group will often settle into a status quo position of twelve members or less. Thus, when a group reproduces a new group it not only reaches more non-Christians it also maintains the intimacy of the original group.

It is a difficult decision for leaders, apprentices, and members to let go of what is familiar and form a new group. Nevertheless, Jesus did say one of the conditions of discipleship is a willingness to let go. He taught the principle of saving by losing when he said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35). This applies as much to small groups as it does to individual disciples. Thus, the preferred future this project seeks is a network of organically and exponentially reproducing small groups. Each group contains and transmits the healthy, balanced DNA of loving God, growing in grace, and sharing with others to new groups. Group leaders in this network are coached to mentor apprentices, motivate members to invite new members, and move on to start new groups.

Goals

To grow a network of naturally reproducing small groups, this project begins with a pilot program of coaches who each mentor three small group leaders. Jesus chose twelve for his first small group, but he took aside Peter, James, and John for special mentoring (Mk 9:2). Coaching is not control. It is intended to bring out the best in the leader. The pilot program will aim at five goals.

First, coaches will help leaders develop and maintain a balanced DNA in their groups. The health of a group depends on more than just intimate fellowship and in depth Bible study. Despite the benefits of these practices, they can actually prevent a group from reaching up in worship and reaching out in mission and evangelism. A primary goal of this project is to build groups on a solid foundation of loving God, growing in grace, and sharing with others. If this occurs, the desire to launch a new group will come from within the group.

Second, small group leaders will understand and passionately pursue the call to make new disciples by forming new small groups. Everything rises and falls on leadership. A group can overcome the inertia of status quo and recover from *koinonitis* if the leader guides them to launch a new group. Leaders must appreciate the value and possess the vision of making disciples through a new group in order to guide the group through the process.

Third, small group leaders will find and mentor an apprentice to lead a future group. Groups rightly fear and resist "splitting." For this reason, leaders, not groups, are the ones who truly start new groups. It is easier for an apprentice, who is trained on-the-

job, to launch a new group, than for a group to divide in two. Through the mentoring process, a leader provides continuous care for the existing group while, at the same time, preparing for the leader or apprentice to launch a new group.

Fourth, small group members will eagerly invite and welcome new members. Groups, like all living beings, continually change. Even closed groups evolve as members leave or pass away. New members bring new relationships, fresh perspectives, and spiritual gifts. Inviting and welcoming new members is an effective way to fulfill the Great Commission. As groups grow to fifteen to eighteen members, they also reach a threshold where the leader can suggest launching a new group.

Fifth, leaders will understand the signs and take the steps to move on and form a new group. Coaches help leaders determine when an apprentice is ready to lead and when a group reaches critical mass and is ready to launch a group. Coaches can advise the leader on how to form a new group in a way that feels like a birth announcement rather than divorce proceedings. As these goals become a reality, Woodside Church will shift toward an reproductive culture.

Content

Most small group leaders at Woodside operate independently. There are annual or semi-annual information meetings. Leaders are notified by email of upcoming events, sermon studies, and spiritual growth campaigns. All groups are advertised four times a year at the beginning of each semester. Each group, however, is free to decide whether to participate in these church-wide studies or go its own way. Thus the development of a network of coaches for small group leaders may be viewed as an attempt by the pastor

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and staff to take control of the groups. If pushed to decide, many leaders feel more

loyalty to their group members than to the goals of the church leadership. This is why

small group leaders would rather keep their groups together and happy than attempt to

launch a new group and risk revolt. Since most leaders and groups at Woodside do not

seem eager to reproduce groups, it is unwise to make every leader join the network of

coaches. It would be nice if the solution to groups that do not reproduce "is simply to

reeducate the group or the group leaders," Tenny-Brittain notes. "But I'm a realist. . . . I

believe it's more effective to start new groups with healthy DNA that multiply than to put

much energy into fixing the unfixable. Don't disband them, just leave them be."[14] To

develop a network of reproductive small groups, this strategy will start small with a two-

prong approach. One coaching group will work with current small group leaders who are

ready and willing to reproduce new groups, yet need guidance on how to shepherd their

groups through the process. The other coaching group will train new leaders to begin new

groups with healthy, balanced DNA that reproduces groups.

<div align="center">Coaching Groups for Current and New Leaders</div>

As the survey of some current Woodside groups demonstrates, there are already

leaders who understand and embrace the call to reproduce groups. They understand that

more people are reached with the Gospel in seven groups, than in the original one alone.

At the same time, they take seriously the group's fear of "splitting." These leaders will

benefit from the guidance of a coach who is an experienced group leader, who

understands group dynamics, who reproduced a group in the past, and who has a passion

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[14] Tenny-Brittian, "*Cell Biology for the Church.*"

for helping more groups reproduce in the future. The coach will meet once a month with three group leaders. The pastor and the director of discipleship will serve as coaches for the first two groups of three. The coaching sessions focus on four goals. They will encourage groups to be balanced in terms of the DNA of loving God (worship), growing in grace (nurture), and sharing with others (mission). Leaders will choose apprentices and train them to be future group leaders. Groups will regularly invite new people to join the group. Finally, at the appropriate time, the leader or apprentice will move on to form a new group.

These coaching sessions do not only focus on multiplying groups. They also care for the needs of leaders. Coaching is not just supervision or administration. Coaches seek to bring out the best in leaders. Small group coaches Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman write: "Even the best leaders need a coach. . . . Leaders need someone to offer a gentle course correction when they stray from the fundamentals. They need a safe environment to process the challenges of leadership, to celebrate the victories, and to determine what actions to take next."[15] During the sessions, Donahue and Bowman recommend that coaches discover the personal and spiritual needs of the leaders, develop the leaders' skills to effectively lead their groups, and dream with the leaders about God's vision for their groups and for all groups at the church. In addition to the monthly meeting, coaches will communicate individually with the leaders. It is also beneficial to have all leaders in coaching groups meet once or twice a year for encouragement and planning.

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[15] Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman, *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders: A Comprehensive Guide for Developing Leaders of Groups & Teams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 15.

When introducing an innovation, it is easier to start with new groups than to change established groups. The second type of coaching group will launch new groups which begin with the DNA for multiplication. This can be done by training new leaders in a turbo group. D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson write: "A 'turbo group' is started in which all members are apprentices, and they all are released to start new small groups."[16] The goals of this coaching group are similar to the group for existing leaders. In addition to developing leadership skills, apprentices will learn how to begin groups with a balanced DNA, find and mentor an apprentice, motivate members to invite new members, and learn how to let go of the group and move on to form a new group. The difference between the coaching group for current leaders and the turbo group is the time frame. A turbo group lasts until the apprentices are trained and deployed to start new groups. Once the apprentices become leaders of new groups they then join a coaching group for leaders. Turbo groups can last from three to six months.

Coaching Groups and the Semester System

Woodside's small groups follow the semester system outlined in *Activate* by Searcy and K. Thomas. In many churches, small groups function with an open-end time frame. Semester-based groups are time bound. Following the rhythm of a school year, they meet for ten weeks and then take a break for three or four weeks. During the hiatus, a group does not initiate a new study. It may hold a social gathering, do a mission project, or simply take time off for a holiday. Many groups meet for three semesters during the school year and take off the summer. Others meet year round. During the break times, all

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[16] D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson, *Exponential*, 97.

groups are advertised at worship services and on the website. New members are invited

to join. Current members can recommit to their group or sign up for a new one. Searcy

and K. Thomas list seven advantages to semesters for groups:

> (1) A clear beginning and end date (2) Easier for people to make short-term commitments (3) Allows time for groups promotion and sign-ups (4) Easier for people to get into a group when everyone is starting at the same time (5) More group options—new topics offered each semester (6) Matches the academic calendar year (7) Allows for the growth that comes through a stress-and-release cycle.[17]

There are specific tasks for groups to accomplish during the cycle of each semester such

as filling the group with members, choosing study topics, and forming new groups with

new leaders. These tasks can easily become overwhelming for the leaders. Coaching

groups will help leaders stay on track. It is also good to do a turbo group each semester

with the goal of releasing the apprentices to start new groups in the next semester. During

the semester, each apprentice can choose an apprentice to join the turbo group so the new

groups are launched with the leader and apprentice in place.

The formation of a network of reproducing small groups represents a new

paradigm for Woodside. To help coaches, leaders, and apprentices understand God's call

to reproduce new groups, it is critical to study books which present this vision. Searcy

and K. Thomas' book *Activate* provides an excellent blueprint for the semester-based

small group system. D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson's work *Exponential* presents a strong

case for the development of an apprenticing and reproducing culture at all levels of

church life. Cole's *Organic Church* unveils a vision of a decentralized network of

reproducing small groups and house churches united by the three-fold DNA of divine

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[17] Searcy and K. Thomas, *Activate*, 33.

truth, nurturing relationships, and apostolic mission. Donahue and Bowman's *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders* is a helpful workbook for coaches and leaders to use during their meetings. Steve Gladen's *Leading Small Groups with Purpose* helps leaders evaluate and promote the health of their groups using the purpose-driven model. Joel Comiskey's *Home Cell Group Explosion* derives essential principles for group reproduction from his study of the fastest-growing cell churches. Finally, George, the father of the Meta-Church model, provides an indispensable resource for developing reproducing cell groups in *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Ministry*. It may be wise for coaches and leaders to alternate between books which focus on the big picture of a reproducing network and books which develop small group leadership skills.

Target Audience

The strategy for developing an organic, reproducing network of small groups starts from below instead of above. Innovative ideas sometimes die premature deaths when a pastor forces them on a church. It is rarely productive to take a ministry which works in another congregation and install it, like a computer program, in a different church. To shift the culture of a faith community, one must start small and allow the new approach to take root and grow. Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird state, "We've got to do the long-term work of building a nursery—that is, a culture—in which these future leaders can thrive. We've got to commit ourselves to a long-term organic approach of life-on-life ministry that unleashes authentic kingdom values into people's

lives."[18] Instead of assigning all Woodside's small group leaders to a coaching group, this strategy begins by planting a few mustard seed groups (Mk 4:30-32).

The first stage of this strategy involves sowing the seeds of the network by inviting a few leaders to participate in either the coaching group for current leaders or the turbo group for new leaders. Since leadership is critical for launching groups, members of the first coaching groups should possess qualities which encourage the formation of new groups. It is essential that they understand and embrace the call to reproduce groups. Joel Comiskey surveyed over seven hundred small group leaders in the fastest growing cell-based churches around the world. From his findings, he develops a list of factors which affect small group reproduction. Comiskey eliminates the following factors which have no impact on cell-group reproduction:

> The leader's gender, social class, age, marital (civil) status, or education. The leader's personality type. *Both introverted and extroverted leaders multiply their cells.* The leader's spiritual gifting. *Those with the gift of teaching, pastoring, mercy, leadership, and evangelism equally multiply their cell group. This is surprising because many, including David Yonggi Cho, teach that only leaders with the gift of evangelism are able to multiply cell groups.*[19]

The leadership factors which, according to Comiskey, do affect reproduction will be discussed in the next chapter on implementation. The director of discipleship and I will coach these leaders to mentor, motivate, and move on.

As leaders in the turbo group and the current leader groups launch new groups, the second stage will expand the branches of the network by training new coaches and

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[18] Robert Lewis, Wayne Cordeiro, and Warren Bird, *Culture Shift: Transforming Your Church from the Inside Out* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 16.

[19] Joel Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2002), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 171-174.

form new coaching groups. The goal is to maintain the three leaders to one coach ratio. A good source for coaches will be leaders who were trained in the initial coaching groups. As the network grows, the director of discipleship and I will then oversee three coaches who each work with three leaders. As the network continues to multiply, directors of coaches can be added so the span of care for any person in the network remains at the manageable ratio of three to one.

A spiritual growth campaign is an excellent opportunity to promote the reproduction of new groups. At least one semester a year, Woodside asks all its groups to follow the same study, which is linked to the sermons in worship. These campaigns often occur in the fall as small groups resume. The studies are usually based on a book of the Bible and follow a fairly simple study guide. The format makes it easier for new leaders to start a new group. At the same time, the church-wide promotion draws more people into groups than at other times of the year. Thus, the campaign is a key moment when leaders can launch a new group.

An expanding network of reproducing groups will eventually influence the culture of the congregation. Since not all leaders and groups are committed to the mission of reproducing groups, this cultural shift will likely lead to curiosity and conflict. In this third stage of development, the director of discipleship and I can shepherd the congregation through this time by reassuring existing groups they are free to remain as they are. At the same time, the staff and I will publically affirm groups which launch new groups. In sermons and conversations, I can lift up stories and testimonies of people in the new groups whose lives are transformed by Christ. If the network is successful in

shifting Woodside to a reproductive culture, existing group leaders who want to learn how to launch a group may be admitted to a coaching group. In this fourth stage, the lessons learned from the growth of the coaching network may be applied to all small groups. In addition to reproducing new generations of small groups, it is hoped this network will decrease, or even eliminate, the threat of *koinonitis.*

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

This final chapter outlines the implementation of a pilot project in which the director of discipleship and I each serve as a coach for three existing leaders. We will also work together to coach a turbo group of three new leaders. The leaders in all these groups will be trained to find an apprentice and to practice mentoring, motivating, and moving on with a goal of reproducing a new group in six to twelve months. To train coaches for the leaders of new groups, an apprentice coach will also participate in each of the three original coaching groups.

Timeline

The chapter on the theology of small groups identified four movements in Jesus' training of the twelve: forming, following, field testing, and finding new members. The timeline of this pilot project follows this pattern. The formation of two coaching groups for existing leaders and the first turbo group (turbo group A) begins with prayer in August 2014. The director of discipleship and I will ask the Lord for wisdom and discernment in the calling of candidates to participate in the pilot program. They will

seek leaders who are open and teachable, who are available to commit the time to the coaching sessions, and who embrace the mission of making disciples by reproducing new groups. Each leader will receive a job description and be asked to sign a one year commitment. The two coaching groups for existing leaders meet once a month in addition to the weekly meetings of their small groups. Turbo group A meets weekly for three to four months, since they do not have the additional responsibility of leading a group and will need more training in group leadership than the veterans. To model apprenticing, the director of discipleship and I will invite one apprentice coach to participate in each of the three coaching groups. These apprentices will become the coaches for leaders of the new groups when they begin. This practice supports the expansion of the coaching network and provides an opportunity for a leader to develop a relationship with a future coach.

Leadership training—the following phase—begins in September 2014 and runs for three months. During this time, leaders in all three coaching groups learn ideas and skills for developing a balanced DNA in their groups. A crucial task for the leaders during this period is the selection of an apprentice. The leader will provide a prospective apprentice with a brief job description and explain that the apprentice will be trained to eventually lead the current group or launch a new group. In turbo group A the leaders in training will invite their apprentices to join the group. Coaches will also provide leaders with ideas to motivate their members to invite new people to the group. In the group for current leaders, each leader and coach will work out a plan for how the leader or apprentice will move on to form and begin a new group. During this transition, the leader and the apprentice, who will become a leader, each select an apprentice. This ensures that

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every group always has a leader and an apprentice. In turbo group A, the coach will work with each leader and apprentice to design a launch plan for the new group.

Leaders and apprentices will begin inviting new members to join their groups from mid-November to early December 2014. They will spend time praying for the Holy Spirit to reveal names of prospective members. As names arise they may be added to an invitation list. The director of discipleship can suggest names of people who are not currently in a small group. Members of the current groups will be offered the opportunity to join the leader or apprentice in launching the new group, but no one should be coerced to join. Above all, it is crucial for leaders and apprentices to invite acquaintances who are unchurched. The goal is to make new disciples, not to simply reshuffle the membership of existing groups. During this same period, the director of discipleship and I will pray, seek, and recruit new leaders to form turbo group B. All groups take a break during the celebration of Christmas and the New Year.

The target date for leaders of all three coaching groups to launch new groups and field test what they learned is early January 2015. With the opening of the New Year, Woodside will commence a church-wide spiritual growth campaign based on an overview of the Bible. Since many in the congregation would like to know and understand the Bible better this will likely draw more people into groups. It is often easier for new people to join new groups since they do not need to break into a circle of relationships in an existing group. During this month, the apprentice coaches will take the lead of new coaching groups for the leaders of the new groups. At the same time, the director of discipleship and I will start turbo group B with two apprentice coaches. One

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coach-in-training will go on to coach the leaders of turbo group B when they start their groups three months later in the spring after Easter. The other apprentice coach will be trained to run future turbo groups.

Toward the end of the school year in June 2015, the director of discipleship and I will assess the effectiveness of the pilot program through a variety of evaluations which will be discussed later in this chapter. The feedback from this assessment will be used to make adjustments to the process and changes to the curriculum. I will share in sermons the stories and testimonies of new people who were brought to Christ through the new groups. The focus will be on the church's ability to reach more people due to these groups' willingness to reproduce. I will also publically acknowledge and applaud leaders and apprentices who reproduce new groups. More existing group leaders will be invited to join coaching groups. Leaders who are successful at reproducing groups will be invited to become coaches. During the summer, the director of discipleship and the coaches will use lessons garnered from the pilot project to plan the next phase of the coaching network's growth. As Jesus sent the disciples to find new disciples, so this pilot project will continue to seek to find new coaches, leaders, apprentices, members, and groups.

Leadership Selection and Development

Jesus invests a significant portion of his ministry in the calling, selection, and development of the twelve disciples. There is a period of time between the calling of the fishermen (Lk 5:1-11) and the selection of the twelve from among all his disciples (Lk 6:12-16). Perhaps Jesus uses this time to discover who among his followers possesses the qualities to lead his kingdom movement. Prayer is also essential in this decision, since

Jesus spends all night communing with his Father before selecting the members of the first small group. The selection of leaders for this pilot program must be supported with prayer from beginning to end. It also involves determining if a person possesses some of the qualities and spiritual gifts of a leader who will reproduce groups.

The Discovery of a Multiplying Leader

In his survey of seven hundred small group leaders from the fastest growing cell-group churches around the world, Comiskey presents a list of leadership qualities which encourage the multiplication of groups. At the top of the list is the amount of time the cell leader spends alone with God. "Those who spend 90 minutes or more in devotions per day," Comiskey notes, "multiply their groups twice as much as those who spend less than 30 minutes."[1] It is also essential for the leader to pray daily for the members of the group and to prepare for the meeting in prayer. He claims this is more important than preparing the actual lesson. The leader who sets goals for the group and shares them with its members increases the probability of multiplying the group from 50 to 75 percent. A key component of this is setting a date for group multiplication. Comiskey writes: "Cell leaders who set specific goals for giving birth consistently multiply their groups more often than goal-less leaders."[2] Training is another factor which helps small group leaders rapidly multiply, although training does not prove to be as crucial as the prayer life and goal orientation of the leader.

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[1] Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion,* 174-175, Kindle.

[2] Ibid., 177-179, Kindle.

Leaders who frequently invite people to join the group increase the likelihood of group multiplication. Comiskey finds that "leaders who contact five to seven new people per month have an 80 percent chance of multiplying the cell group. When the leader visits only 1 to 3 people per month, the chances drop to 60 percent. Leaders who visit eight or more new people each month multiply their groups twice as much as those who visit one or two."[3] Leaders can also encourage reproduction by reminding members to invite friends. The number of visitors to the group directly affects the group's ability to reproduce. Selecting an apprentice is a key factor in group multiplication. Comiskey says, "Those leaders who gather a team double their capacity to multiply the cell."[4] The unity of the group is strengthened by the leader's pastoral care for the members and by the number of social gatherings and other activities outside the normal group meeting. Contrary to popular belief, the leader's biblical knowledge and skill as a teacher are not essential to the health and multiplication of groups. Comiskey comments that "effective cell leadership is more of a Spirit-led adventure than a Bible-study technique."[5]

This profile of a multiplying leader will guide coaches as they select participates for the pilot program. Comiskey provides the following summary: "Factors essential to multiplying groups are leadership devotions, leadership outreach, group outreach, and building a team. Praying for team members and setting goals are primary in the first-time multiplication of a cell group. Leadership training and social meetings are necessary for

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[3] Ibid., 180-183, Kindle.

[4] Ibid., 185-186, Kindle.

[5] Ibid., 189-190, Kindle.

continuous multiplication."[6] While a prospective leader may not possess all these practices, coaches can work on developing them in the life of the leader.

This summary serves as the basis for a job description. A group leader is always training an apprentice, daily seeking the Lord by reading Scripture and praying for members of the group, weekly leading the group with the apprentice, continually inviting new members to join the group and encouraging group members to do the same, monthly meeting with the group coach, and periodically setting goals with the apprentice and coach to launch a new group. The apprentice follows a similar job description since she or he is preparing to become a leader. A coach is always training an apprentice coach, daily seeking the Lord by reading Scripture and praying for leaders, apprentices, and groups, continually seeking and suggesting names of people the leaders may invite to their groups, monthly leading a meeting with the group leaders, monthly meeting with the pastor and director of discipleship for supervision and planning, and periodically setting goals with the leaders and apprentices to launch new groups.

<div align="center">The Development of a Multiplying Leader</div>

Leaders who respond to the invitation and commit to join a coaching group will participate in a ten session training program. Turbo group leaders will do this weekly during a single semester. Since the two groups for current leaders only meet monthly, the principles of group reproduction are covered in the first six sessions so leaders can start new groups about half-way through the program. The second half of the course focuses

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[6] Ibid., 191-193, Kindle.

on general principles of group leadership. Each session is supported by readings from four key texts on small groups: *Activate* by Searcy and K. Thomas, *Exponential* by D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson, *Home Cell Group Explosion* by Comiskey, and *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* by George and Bird.

The first session emphasizes the importance of beginning the group with balanced, reproductive DNA. Leaders will learn the foundation of a healthy group is loving God (worship and prayer), growing in grace (fellowship and discipleship), sharing with others (ministry, mission, and evangelism). While a group may start by emphasizing fellowship and discipleship, the coach will teach how a group can move toward practicing all three. Developing an evangelistic mindset is crucial if the group is to fulfill the mission of reproducing a new group. The reading for this session is *Exponential*, Chapter Six: Reproducing Groups (D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson 2010, 87-102).

The second session explains the role of the semester system for groups. As mentioned earlier, Woodside's groups follow a four semester calendar. The groups meet for about ten weeks and then take a break for three to four weeks. During this pause, all groups are advertised. People are invited to commit or recommit to a group for the next semester. Four tasks are accomplished each semester. Leaders focus their plans for future groups, form new groups, fill out the membership of groups, and facilitate the meetings of the groups. This session helps coaches, leaders, and apprentices understand and contribute to the rhythm of each semester cycle. The reading is *Activate*, Section One: Rethinking Small-Group Methodology (Searcy and K. Thomas 2008, 10-27).

The third session focuses on how to find and mentor an apprentice. The multiplication of groups depends on the training of new leaders. A coach will help leaders identify and train an apprentice using five steps. George and Bird write:

> How does an apprentice learn best? On-the-job training works best through a combination of joining you in action and receiving behind-the-scenes debriefing in the process. Here's how the sequence works: 1. I do, you watch, we talk. 2. I do, you help, we talk. 3. You do, I help, we talk. 4. You do, I watch, we talk. 5. We each begin to train someone else.[7]

This simple process moves the apprentice from observation to action with the support of the leader. Coaches teach leaders the importance of going through all the steps. It is also essential to spend a few minutes debriefing with the apprentice after every meeting. The readings for this session are: *Exponential*, Chapter Four: Reproducing Leaders (D. Ferguson and J. Ferguson 2010, 58-70) and *Home Cell Group Explosion*, Chapter Six: Raise Up New Leaders (Comiskey 2002, 463-634, Kindle).

Motivating members to invite new members is the topic of session four. Healthy groups welcome new people. Small groups are also an effective way to make disciples. All this depends on the passion of the leader, apprentice, and members to invite their acquaintances to the group. Coaches will share some practical ideas on how groups can share the Gospel with others. The readings for this session are *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Six: Key Three: Invite Newcomers to Your Group (George and Bird 2013, 1213-1392, Kindle) and Chapter Eleven: Key Eight: Win the World as Jesus Would (George and Bird, 2013, 2501-2720, Kindle) and *Home Cell*

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[7] Carl George with Warren Bird, *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership: How Lay Leaders Can Establish Dynamic and Healthy Cells, Classes, or Teams* (Taylors, SC: Center for the Development of Leadership for Ministry, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1095-1099.

Group Explosion, Chapter Seven: Attract Visitors, Chapter Eight: Reach Out as a Team, and Chapter Nine: Evangelize by Meeting Needs (Comiskey 2002, 635-890, Kindle).

In session five, leaders discover how to prepare the way for the healthy delivery of a new group. Leaders and apprentices will learn how to birth new groups without disrupting relationships in the current group. The healthiest delivery of a new group occurs when the leader or the apprentice begins the new group and invites some of the existing members to assist. The leader of the new group is encouraged to continue meeting with the existing group to facilitate this time of transition in leadership. The coach will help the leader and apprentice identify critical moments for reproduction. One of these is the size of the group. Comiskey says, "Cell church experts agree that a group must be small enough for all members to freely contribute and share personal needs. . . . Many believe that the perfect size lies between eight and 12 people."[8] When a group grows beyond this size it is time for the leader to plan the delivery of a new-born group. Time is also a factor in reproduction. Comiskey's research indicates "in many of the most rapidly growing cell churches around the world, it takes an individual cell about six months to multiply."[9] The readings for this session are *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Five: Key Two: Recruit a Leader in Training (George and Bird 2013, 791-1213, Kindle) and *Home Cell Group Explosion*, Chapter Ten: Prepare for a Smooth Delivery (Comiskey 2002, 891-989, Kindle).

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[8] Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion*, 920-921, Kindle.

[9] Ibid.*,* 965, Kindle.

Setting goals for growth is the subject of session six. Leaders that work with a group to set a goal and a date for the birth of a new group are more likely to accomplish this mission. It is also crucial for the director of discipleship and the coaches to identify where they lack groups for segments of the church and community, such as young married couples, singles, or seniors. The small group leadership can then recruit leaders and apprentices who will form groups to meet the needs of these audiences. As the coaching network develops, the overall leadership can set goals for how many new groups will be reproduced each semester. The reading for this session is *Home Cell Group Explosion*, Chapter Five: Set Goals (Comiskey 2002, 375-462, Kindle).

The seventh session emphasizes the crucial factor of the leader's prayer life. As previously noted, Comiskey found the prayer and devotional life of the leader is the primary factor in the multiplication of new groups. The reproduction of groups is the work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer allows the coach, leader, and apprentice to access the power of the Spirit for group leadership and pastoral care. It is also essential for the leaders to pray every day for the members of the group. The readings for this session are *Home Cell Group Explosion*, Chapter Four: Pray! (Comiskey 2002, 235-374, Kindle) and *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Twelve: Seek God's Renewal as You Meet Him in Secret (George and Bird 2013, 2721-2908, Kindle).

The theme of session eight is "Loving God." This meeting looks at worship in the small group as well as the group's connection to the gathered worship service. After Pentecost, the new-born Church cycled between meeting in the Temple courts and in homes (Acts 2:46). This pattern continues today with celebrations occurring in large

gatherings and cell-group discipleship happening in small gatherings. In the future small groups may replace Sunday worship as the front door of a congregation. For this reason, it is crucial for group leaders to encourage new believers in the group to make a connection with the larger faith community through worship. Woodside is working to strengthen the cell-celebration bond by writing small group curriculum based on the Scriptures covered in the sermons. Group leaders will also receive ideas for how to strengthen worship and prayer times in the small group setting. Groups are even encouraged to spend an entire session in worship and, occasionally, to hold a love feast and communion. The reading for this session is *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Nine: Bring Your Group to Worship (George and Bird 2013, 2087-2243, Kindle).

Session nine examines the inward dimension of "Growing in Grace." Coaches will equip leaders with tools for discipling their members. Every leader benefits from acquiring and sharpening group leadership skills. Leaders can learn how to prepare the lesson, facilitate discussions, help newcomers to feel welcome, draw out quiet members, manage domineering members, and increase the level of caring among members. In this session leaders can present case studies and role play possible solutions. Small groups are not just a Bible study. They are a community of faith where the many one-another relationships mentioned in the New Testament become a reality. The readings for this session are: *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Seven: Key Four: Prepare Yourself to Lead the Meeting (George and Bird 2013, 1393-1715, Kindle) and

Chapter Eight: Key Five: Meet Together for One-Another Ministry (George and Bird 2013, 1716-2087, Kindle).

Finally, session ten challenges the leader and group to "Share with Others" through ministry, mission, and evangelism. The focus of this curriculum, and these coaching groups, is the reproduction of groups. At the same time, small groups are also sent by the Spirit to bless the congregation through ministry and the community through mission. The DNA of Woodside calls for every small group to select and engage in a mission project. Coaches will encourage leaders and apprentices to select a third person in the group who has a heart for mission. This member will be the connection between the group and the chosen mission. This person is free to focus on the mission, to communicate its needs to the group, and to schedule days for the group to work with the mission. A fourth person can be the group's ministry coordinator. This role helps group members serve a particular portion of the church, such as single moms, or a ministry of the church, such as the welcome team or the youth group. The reading for this session is *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership*, Chapter Ten: Key Seven: Serve the Group and Others Beyond (George and Bird 2013, 2244-2500, Kindle). This is an initial outline for the coaching curriculum, which will be reviewed at the end of each semester and refined for the next semester.

Resources

A network of small groups will not reproduce organically and exponentially if there is too much control or complexity. These coaching groups will be more effective if they can meet anywhere and be led by anyone with as few resources as possible.

Although some coaching groups may meet in the church building, most will be encouraged to gather in homes or public places, such as coffee shops, to give leaders and apprentices a vision of the incarnational nature of the small group network. Coaches will ask leaders and apprentices to purchase a few books since this investment will demonstrate their commitment to the group. Some funds may be set aside for those who cannot afford books and for childcare if it will make it possible for a parent to participate. The only other cost will be for copies of handouts. Projection equipment and a room will be reserved for annual or semi-annual gatherings of all the coaches, leaders, and apprentices participating in the pilot program. The total annual budget for the pilot program should be five hundred dollars or less.

In addition to the director of discipleship, the director of communication will facilitate interactions between participants through the church management software. This database arranges groups in a coach, leader, apprentice, member structure. Participants can email one another, share ideas and resources, and post needs. It is also possible to track the attendance of individuals in the groups and print reports. The financial administrator's role is to reimburse individuals and record expenses. Other pastors, staff, and elders will be informed about the nature, progress, and outcomes of the pilot program. They may participate as they are able.

<center>**Assessment Plan**</center>

The evaluation of the pilot project of coaching groups will focus on its ability to reach its five stated goals: the groups will be built on a balanced DNA, small group leaders will understand and pursue the mission to form new small groups, small group

leaders will find and mentor an apprentice, small group leaders and members will invite

and welcome new people, small group leaders and apprentices will understand the signs

and take the steps to move on and form a new group. To measure the effectiveness of the

project, the director of discipleship and I will use direct observation, interviews, and

surveys as assessment tools.

As the director of discipleship and I coach the leaders in the two coaching groups

for current leaders and in turbo groups A and B, they will make direct observations of

certain quantifiable changes. They can see if a leader chooses an apprentice, if new

people are joining the group, if a certain optimal size and length of time tend to trigger

the formation of a new group, if a leader sets a goal and a date for the birth of a new

group, if a new group is born, and, ultimately, if there is a net increase in the number of

groups. It is just as important to note when these steps are delayed or do not happen. The

purpose is not to judge or criticize the leader but to observe if any obstacles prevent these

steps. To discover the factors which encourage or discourage the process of group

reproduction a second assessment tool is needed.

The coaching group format allows the director of discipleship and I to be in

constant communication with the leaders during the pilot project. Nevertheless, it is also

beneficial for a coach and leader to periodically meet one-on-one for an assessment

interview. This permits the coach to gather cognitive, affective, and behavioral

information from the leader. Through a face-to-face interview, the coach will discover if

the leader understands the key steps in reproducing a group (cognitive) and how the

leader, apprentice, and group feel about the process (affective). The leader can report on

what activities demonstrate the group is living out a balanced DNA (behavioral). The coach can inquire about the quantity and quality of the group's worship and prayer time (love God). The leader might share how the members help each other through crises and how they put into practice biblical teaching (grow in grace). Are they engaged in a mission project and open to launching a new group (share with others)? Since the prayer life of the leader is essential for reproducing a group, the coach can ask about the leader's devotional practices. The leader can give the coach feedback about the content of the coaching group by suggesting which sessions were helpful and clear and which were unnecessary or confusing.

Most importantly, the coach will inquire about the leader's training of the apprentice. Are they following the five steps and debriefing after every session? If the leader skips steps or abandons the process, it is critical to understand why this is happening and how it might be corrected. Finally, the coach and leader can discuss the feelings of the members about the idea of launching a new group. The departure of a leader or apprentice can cause strong emotions which might obstruct or derail the process. An interview will help the coach and leader develop a plan that leads to a celebration at the birth of the new group. These interviews, however, only yield the leader's perspective. A third tool is needed to round out the assessment.

Two surveys will be used to gather feedback from group members. The first questionnaire is directed at small groups which birthed a new group. It will ask how the members feel about starting a new group. Members can report if the process was clearly explained and whether they feel joy or sorrow about it. The survey can inquire how the

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members participated in the formation of the new group, how the group is helping them follow Jesus, and how the fellowship is growing closer and deeper. The members can indicate if they participated in a mission project with the group and if they invited any new members to join the group. The questionnaire should include the name of the group but not the name of the member.

The second questionnaire is for those groups in the pilot program that did not birth a new group. The survey can ask if the mission of starting a new group was presented to the current group. If so, the members may then share how they felt about it. They can also mention any obstacles or objections which prevented the birth of the new group. On a more personal note, the survey will ask how the group is helping the members to follow Jesus and how the fellowship is growing closer and deeper. The members can share if they participated in a mission project with the group and if they invited any acquaintances to join the group. As with the first one, this questionnaire should include the name of the group but not the name of the member. These questionnaires can be distributed, collected, and tabulated in June 2015, so the results may be used to make changes and develop plans for the growth of the coaching network in the fall.

After gathering information from direct observations, interviews, and surveys, the director of discipleship and I will report the findings and future plans to the elders, staff, coaches, leaders, and apprentices in the pilot project. This information may also be used to affirm the achievements of leaders and groups that reproduced new groups and to invite more current group leaders to join the coaching network.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union was poised to make a great leap into the modern world. Having routed the czarist forces which kept the nation shackled to the past, the revolutionary leaders set about constructing a workers' paradise from the ground up. One of the tools they used to modernize the vast Russian empire was technology. In one case, however, they made a fatal mistake and installed the wrong equipment. While Western nations invested in the infrastructure for new telephone networks, Brafman and Beckstrom recount how the leaders of the Soviet Union opted for a different communication innovation: loudspeakers. All across the nation, they mounted speakers which delivered party speeches and directives to the masses.

> The Soviet government failed not only to recognize a new technology but also to see that the world was rapidly changing. The czarist mentality of the previous century still prevailed. The Soviets focused on technology that reflected imperial values: higher-ups telling the common people what to do. But in the twentieth century, communication between individuals was far more important for economic growth than communication between governmental authorities and the masses.[1]

When the Soviet Union collapsed seven decades later, there were still far fewer phones among its republics than in Europe and North America. This misstep illustrates that the real limitation resides not in the machinery but in the mind.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the world is changing more rapidly than anyone could imagine. Brafman and Beckstrom demonstrate that "the forces of decentralization have created a new set of rules. This change has been so rapid that

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[1] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 200.

industries and governments have found themselves employing outdated strategies."[2] The same may be said for the Church. The problem lies in the minds of many denominational leaders, pastors, and members. Many conceive of the church as a building. Those who can distinguish between a church and its building still feel it is essential for a church to have a building. Some consider church a time of the week. Church is what they go to on Sunday morning. Some associate church with a seminary-trained pastor. Like the Soviets leaders speaking to the masses through loudspeakers, these Christians may feel one cannot have a church without a pastor delivering a sermon to people in pews. Mainline churches have the mindset that their congregations must be tied to a denomination. The majority of mainline pastors and leaders also cannot imagine running a church without committees. In a sense, committees, clergy, and church buildings are pieces of technology. They were effective in spreading the good news in the world of Christendom. Unfortunately, this conception of what a church should be prevents believers from seeing what the Church could be. Instead of embracing the interactive network of the telephone, churches are opting for one-directional loudspeakers.

This was not the mindset of first-century Christians. It need not be the mindset of twenty-first-century Christians. The Church was born as a decentralized, Spirit-led movement of lay people. It spread rapidly across the Roman Empire ahead of the apostles and, sometimes, in spite of them. It was not distracted or restricted by concerns about building repairs, committee meetings, ordination exams, denominational polities, or stewardship campaigns. Without all these encumbrances, it was free to focus on its

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[2] Ibid., 201.

mission to love God, grow in grace, and share with others. While some church leaders

feel threatened by the rapidly changing post-modern world, others, such as Hirsch,

D. Ferguson, and Cole, consider the new decentralized, network paradigm of the twenty-

first century to be an unparalleled opportunity for the Spirit to resurrect an apostolic

movement.

It is not the first time the Spirit renewed the Church by a movement with a

different mindset than the hierarchy. The Monastics, the Franciscans, the Reformers, and

the Methodists all started outside the established Church. All of them challenged the

status quo. All of them were ultimately co-opted and converted into institutions. A case in

point is the Medieval Celtic Church. George Hunter describes the incredible story of how

Celtic missionaries evangelized Europe, not once but twice, during the waves of

barbarian invasion. "Through several generations of sustained mission, Celtic

Christianity thus reevangelized Europe, helped bring Europe out of the Dark Ages, fueled

Charlemagne's Carolingian Renaissance, and ushered in the 'Holy Roman Empire.'"[3]

Unlike the Roman model that presented the Gospel, invited people to believe, and then

welcomed them into the fellowship, Hunter shows how Celtic missionaries spread the

good news through communities. "(1) You *first* establish community with people, or

bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith. (2) Within fellowship, you

engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship. (3) In time, as they discover that

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[3] George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West…Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 39.

they now believe, you invite them to commit."[4] By this communal model, Celtic

Christianity dominated Europe until the Synod of Whitby in AD 664, when the Roman

Church enforced its will on the Irish leaders. Hunter believes the decline of traditional

Christianity in the twenty-first century indicates the time is ripe, once again, for the Celtic

way of evangelism.

A movement of spontaneously reproducing small groups may be the way the

Spirit will reach this generation with the good news. These gatherings of twelve or less

provide the type of community where seekers and skeptics can safely explore the faith

before they believe or commit. They meet around the Word in the context of the world.

They are not restricted to a sanctuary, a sermon, or a Sunday morning. These

communities can meet anytime, anywhere, with anyone. The only factors which slow the

spontaneous expansion of the Church, according to Allen, are the restrictions church

leaders place on it. To be free from this mindset, it seems appropriate to conclude this

study by summarizing the principles it uncovered about reproducing groups.

When it comes to group reproduction, everything depends on leadership. If there

is no passion to reach new people by starting a new group, the leader will default to

simply leading the existing group. In this case, the group will become an end in itself and

koinonitis will set in. This is why it is crucial for the leader to build the group with a full

string of DNA. A group that shares with others, in addition to loving God and growing in

grace, will support the leader's mission to make disciples by launching a new group. The

members can assist by inviting their unchurched acquaintances to the group and by

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[4] Ibid., 53.

setting a goal, with the leader, for the launch date of the new group. In no case, however, should the leader suggest that the group split. On this point, the survey of Woodside group leaders confirmed the experiences of other small group experts. Dividing a group is difficult and painful. People resist being forced to leave the intimate fellowship of their group. A more effective method is to multiply new groups by raising up new leaders. This is why it is essential for every leader to train an apprentice. Using the five step process mentioned in the study, the leader mentors the apprentice over a three to six month period. When the apprentice feels ready to assume leadership, the moment arrives for either the leader or apprentice to move on and start the new group. Members of the parent group may then be offered the invitation to help form the new group. While this is often a difficult step, the leader, apprentice, and members can remember Jesus' teaching that discipleship does involve saving by losing and letting go (Mk 8:35). The transition may be easier if those starting the new group continue attending the parent group for a few weeks or months.

This study discovered that group size plays a role in group reproduction. Whenever a group reaches sixteen members, it is too large for everyone to participate. Thus when a group rises above twelve, it is time for the leader and apprentice to begin discussing the launch of a new group. Avoiding this decision is still a decision. Groups that hit the eighteen-person ceiling usually settle back down into a status quo of twelve or less members. Above all, this study reveals that coaches are essential for a healthy, exponentially reproducing small-group network. When coaching small group leaders, it is important to strike the right balance between freedom and accountability. Coaches that

are too controlling will stifle the organic nature of the network and create resentment among the leaders and groups. Coaching must be clear and simple. Complex lessons are difficult to pass on to leaders, apprentices, and members. The coach is a catalyst who must motivate, not meddle, in the group. It is better for pastors to be coaches instead of group leaders. This prevents a group from thinking it needs a seminary-trained professional to lead the group. Coaches also provide a connecting link with the congregation. For all their emphasis on a decentralized network, Brafman and Beckstrom promote the value of a hybrid organization which is "*a centralized company that decentralizes internal parts of the business*."[5] While Cole promotes complete decentralization, D. Ferguson, J. Ferguson, George, and Comiskey still advocate for the connection between centralized worship gatherings and decentralized cell groups. This is the hybrid congregation of the twenty-first century. The main front door of the church for visitors may eventually shift from the large worship gathering to the small group.

Finally, prayer is the ultimate connection for an expanding, reproducing, small-group network. Comiskey discovered the prayer and devotional life of the leader was the principle factor affecting small-group reproduction. It was more important for the leader to pray for the members and the meeting, than to prepare the lesson for the meeting. This is a crucial principle. It reminds coaches, leaders, apprentices, and members that all this is God's work. It is the Spirit that connects our branches to the Vine of Jesus Christ. If small groups remain in this vital network they will bear much fruit. "Apart from me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

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[5] Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 175.

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