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PRACTICING COMMUNITY:  
NAMING, CLAIMING, AND PRACTICING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S SENDING OF A  
CONGREGATION IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE INTO AN OPEN FUTURE

by

REV. MEGHAN K. GAGE-FINN

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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2019

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## ABSTRACT

*Practicing Community: Naming, Claiming, and Practicing the Holy Spirit's Sending of a Congregation in the Midst of Change into an Open Future*

by

Rev. Meghan K. Gage-Finn

This project utilized social science research, through a transformative, mixed-methods strategy, to investigate a thriving, downtown Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation's missional awareness and response to change, disruption, and chaos in their midst during a major building expansion and movement into new spaces. This study explored in what ways members of the congregation relied on or adjusted their patterns of engaging in spiritual practices as a result of a change in their surroundings. This research shows how a greater missional understanding developed for members of the congregation because of a movement through a season of modification to both their building and access to it, and the ways in which they were able to gather and practice their faith.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I give thanks to God, now and always, for my family, for Matt and our dear Ellis, Asher, and Larkin. Matt, you have been a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in challenge, and a companion in joy. You never hesitated in the face of my desire to pursue this degree, and always offered the patience and support I needed. Ellis Kathleen, Asher John, and Larkin Elizabeth, thank you for keeping me laughing, playing, and learning right alongside you these last four years. Much love!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Axial Codes
AD	Axial Code for Dwelling in the Word
AE	Axial Code for Easter Vigil
AR	Action Research
CML	Congregational Mission and Leadership
DPC	Downtown Presbyterian Church
FC	Focused Codes
IBM SPSS	International Business Machines Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
ITC	Immunity to Change
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ODOF	<i>Open Doors Open Futures</i>
PC (USA)	Presbyterian Church (USA)



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## CHAPTER ONE

### PRACTICING COMMUNITY

Downtown Presbyterian Church (DPC)<sup>1</sup> has been a leading congregation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination (PC (USA)) and its downtown community, where it has been situated for over 160 years. It is the only house of faith located on one of the major business, residential, retail, and transit arteries through the city. The congregation, with a membership of just over 3,100 individuals, draws from 484 zip codes, 253 of them outside the state, including Canada and Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup> The highest concentration of membership is in the church's own zip code. Many people are longtime members of the congregation, where generations in the same family have worshipped for decades; others are young, professional transplants to the city; still others come from an older generation retiring to downtown living.

DPC is in the midst of a five-year capital campaign, *Open Doors Open Futures* (ODOF),<sup>3</sup> and recently completed a major two-year building project, during which on-site parking was increased, space was created for ministries to be enhanced, a dedicated, on-site partnership was established with a local non-profit, and a tithe of the campaign was directed toward local and global mission. The leadership of the church spoke of this

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<sup>1</sup>A pseudonym is being used here for the name of the congregation.

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from Downtown Presbyterian Church Database Records, August 18, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *Open Doors Open Futures* was the name of the campaign to raise funds for new and renovated building spaces. There was also a 10% commitment to mission locally and globally as part of the campaign.

as planning for the next century of the congregation's life and witness in the city. The congregation asked itself how the new building could be used as mission and outreach to further peace and justice in the city. DPC is uniquely situated as a thriving, urban congregation and, during the time of research, was at a pivotal moment of turning from old to new. It was a moment worth considering and investigating through many lenses!

ODOF came into being through a period of significant change and disruption to the church's building and the community's way of being church together. The construction project caused the demolition of two existing, privately-held buildings next to the church, the loss of all on-site parking for nearly two years, the temporary closure of church kitchens, and reduced meeting spaces within the church.

Church leadership framed this two-year period with the congregation as "Creative Time," in order to shift a focus toward growth, imagination, and agility, and away from loss, interruption, and disorder.<sup>4</sup> The hope was that the Creative Time journey might be one where the faithfulness of the Holy Spirit would be realized and trusted, and that a change of space and rhythm would push a traditional congregation to try new things outside the comforts of the walls of the church. It was a covert operation of missional proportions!

*Missional* is a word that can take on a variety of meanings and connotations, but in this context for Downtown Presbyterian Church, the concept of being missional had specific import. Creative Time, and the eventual movement into new building spaces,

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<sup>4</sup> Creative Time was the term used to describe the two-year period of construction during which the congregation and community lost access to all on-site parking, kitchens, meeting spaces, and the regular rhythm of programs. Most weekday and evening meetings and studies moved off-site to people's homes, neighboring churches, and community meeting spaces. The congregation relocated not once, but twice during the period of construction, as they were welcomed by two partnering congregations for major, midweek programming.

invited the congregation to pay attention to what God was doing in, among, and through them and the church, the building and the people. Creative Time invited them to find ways to respond to that sense of movement. The Spirit was inviting them to be the church in new and challenging ways because of their circumstances and to participate in what God was initiating.

Members of the congregation gathered in various partner congregations for meetings, education, and fellowship, met in one another's homes and in community spaces, and worshipped in parks and neighborhoods all across the metro area. Through Creative Time, they had the chance to see God at work in the neighborhood, sending them out to join God's work in the world. Even with a positive public relations campaign, the project was dusty, imposed limitations, and stretched the congregation and staff outside of comfortable norms. All of this led me to engage the specific research question:

*How might action research interventions involving communal practices affect the missional identity of a congregation in the midst of disruption?*

As defined by Rubin and Rubin, action research seeks to change the status quo through a process of identifying the state of the problem, while also investigating proposed solutions.<sup>5</sup> The specific research design I used was a transformative, mixed-methods approach with a baseline quantitative survey, followed by two interventions, each with a qualitative focus group, and concluding with an end line quantitative survey. According to Kathy Charmaz, "mixed methods typically combine qualitative and quantitative approaches including their respective perspectives, analyses, and forms of inference to gain breadth and depth of understanding and to corroborate the findings of

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 32.

each method.”<sup>6</sup> Using Charmaz’s coding method follows a process in which the research question leads to data collection. The qualitative data are initially coded word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident. Initial codes lead to a smaller number of focused codes, which are then put into related subcategories, called axial codes, “to build a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category.”<sup>7</sup> The final step is to create an integrated set of theoretical codes to tell an integrated story that conceptualizes the data.

The first of the two interventions I offered was an Easter Vigil, and the second was a developing practice for the congregation, *Dwelling in the Word*. I conducted a census of the population involved in the study which were members of the congregation, and specifically those who are currently serving on one of the church’s boards (Deacons, Elders, or Trustees), or those who have served on those boards in the past. In a Presbyterian Church, the Deacons are typically involved in leading the caring ministries of the congregation. The Elders serve on Session, the main decision-making body of the congregation. Some congregations have a board of Trustees, as DPC does, and these individuals oversee property and finance matters of the church. The independent variables with action research (AR) interventions were as follows: the disruption to the physical space, and thus the disruption to the life of the church, as experienced by members during construction (Creative Time); moving into new spaces; and the communal practices engaged in by the congregation. I introduced two specific communal practices: *Dwelling in the Word*, and an Easter Vigil. Both will be explained more fully in the course of this thesis. I explored how the congregation adjusted in the midst of

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<sup>6</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 323.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

disorder and change. Did the congregation try to find balance by reverting to old ways and traditions? Are there practices that helped the congregation grow more missional through this time and into the future?

In *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation*, Craig Van Gelder asks what it would look like for a congregation to develop a capacity for forming missional leadership.<sup>8</sup> Van Gelder goes on to describe cultural shifts that challenge the church in America in its context (an increase in immigrant churches, the rise of mega-churches, churches being established on lines of generational division). “In our encounter with our changing world, we need to continue to engage in the study of the church: to explore its nature, to understand its creation and continuing formation, and to examine carefully its purpose and ministry.”<sup>9</sup> Downtown Presbyterian has been in the midst of its own shifts, imbedded in the larger, cultural ones. This study sought to explore the nature, creation, and reforming, purpose and ministry, of DPC while helping to uncover its missional identity and potential for greater missional leadership. As Mark Lau Branson writes, “A church’s missional life is at the core of God’s gospel engagement in the world”<sup>10</sup> and thus its identity. Creative Time sent DPC members out into the world because of lack of space, and the new building brought them back. In their return they had new experiences of the Spirit’s sending out and gathering in of the people of God, and of the church’s witness to the world. These changes and disruptions offered new ways of Gospel

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<sup>8</sup> Craig Van Gelder, “Introduction, in *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Culture and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 38.

engagement with the world, and the opportunity to examine this congregation's missional identity.

The dependent variable was the missional identity of the congregation. At a baseline measurement, how well did the congregation articulate an understanding of the work and agitation of the Spirit during this time set apart? Did they speak of a God who is active, who sends, reshapes and reimagines, and who participates in the lives of the faithful? Similar to Daniel Anderson's discussion of the emerging church in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Downtown Presbyterian's Creative Time put the congregation in a state of *movendi*, which Anderson says can mean "'to move or set in motion,' but it can also mean 'to disturb, to change, to dislodge, to begin.' It can mean 'to affect, to influence, to provoke.' In a reflexive form it can mean 'to dance.'"<sup>11</sup> Downtown is certainly in motion, it was disturbed and dislodged, but something began through the season of construction and continued to be provoked. "A missional church—co-missioned with God—moves with God into the world to disturb, change, dislodge, begin, affect, influence, and provoke to redemption and reconciliation. As a church created by the Spirit's *imago Trinitas*, . . . we move with God, with one another, and with the other for the sake of God's mission in the world."<sup>12</sup> This research examined to what extent change fatigue was contending with the movement of the Spirit through the season

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Anderson, "Church Emerging: A Missional View," in *Created and Led by the Spirit: Planting Missional Congregations*, ed. Mary Sue Dehmlow Dreier (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 143.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.



of chaos and disrupted spaces. How did action research help a community understand its own immunity to change<sup>13</sup>, in order to name and maintain missional momentum?

At an end line measurement, after the congregation moved into new spaces post-construction, and began to establish new patterns and practices together, I asked how well the congregation connected with and shared in the work of a missional God to be a missional church because of practicing through chaos and disruption. I do think the two independent variables are related to one another, in that communal practices changed due to the challenge and opportunity of Creative Time and will continue to change as the congregation lives into new spaces and a new identity. It was more difficult to practice together as a community during construction. Creative Time reset the rhythms of practicing together and possibly fueled a temptation to hold fast to old ways and traditions, instead of holding fast to that which is and can be new. I believe there is a relationship between the congregation's missional identity, and even its ability to name it as such, and the disruption and communal practices they have experienced and will experience.

I chose several lenses through which to view this research, the first being a lens of *Chaos, Change, and Disruption*, drawing primarily on the work of Margaret Wheatley, and Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey. A second theoretical lens was that of *Practice*, in order to understand the congregation's aptitude or proclivity to practice as a body, because of the congregation's experiences throughout Creative Time and its ending. I explored both theoretical and theological views of practice, including, but not

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<sup>13</sup> Term used by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, in their text *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization (Leadership for the Common Good)* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009).

limited to, the work of Malcolm Gladwell, Angela Duckworth, Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, Craig Van Gelder, and Don S. Browning. In concluding thoughts, I found the work of Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Peter Block to be helpful. I also looked through lens of *Space* to understand how physical place and surroundings, secular and sacred, affect individuals and communities, with contributions from Nancy DeMott, Tim Shapiro, and Brent Bill, as well as Michael Welker, Jürgen Habermas, and Martin Heidegger. Space served as a both a theoretical and theological lens. Building on God's mission in the world, *missio Dei*, I employed a final theological lens of the *Social Trinity* to understand the movement and relational nature of God at work in the world. Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, David J. Bosch, Darrel Guder, and Michael Welker, among others, were helpful in framing this lens. In bringing together conclusions at the close of the research, I involved the work of Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal to address missional leadership specifically. Biblical lenses I included for this research were *creation and chaos* in *Genesis 1*, Jesus as intervening in the midst of disruption on the Road to Emmaus in *Luke 24*, and the initial patterns and practices of the first followers of the risen Jesus in *Acts 2*. These lenses and the literature will be explored in future chapters.

There are several intervening variables that I took into account. One was the overall timing of the construction. Delays or unanticipated disruptions affected people's perceptions and experiences of the completion of construction and satisfaction with movement into new spaces. Two additional intervening variables were if the long-anticipated parking did not work well, or if there were other interferences during the congregation's experience of being church together again in their building. Both of these

may have continued to fatigue their spirits and diminish the sense of the Spirit's momentum. A last intervening variable to be considered was that there may have been intentional or unintentional communal practices the congregation engaged in as a result of Creative Time that were not widely known to the researcher, and thus are not accounted for. It should be noted that the disruption affected the entire congregation and wider community, but I chose to study only a particular population of leaders, all of whom were eighteen years of age or older. As this research relates to ethical considerations, I followed Institutional Review Board compliance and there were not any anticipated risks for participants. No participants were part of any vulnerable or special populations, or classes of subjects. Subjects are not identified by name and the data will be stored in a locked cabinet for three years in my office, and in a password protected electronic file on my computer. The methodology and research process will be more fully developed in chapter four.

Demographic variables that were considered were gender, age, level of education attained, zip code of residence, vocational identity, length of time of involvement in the congregation, and level of leadership in the congregation. Previous quantitative investigation of the congregation for earlier Congregational Mission and Leadership (CML) work allowed me to ask a small sample of the membership questions about their experiences up to that point with Creative Time. The time period of that earlier research was February 2017, just shy of a year into construction, but still with almost a year to go before completion. I found in asking the members of the decision-making body of the church, the Elders on Session, that they felt overall more positive about Creative Time than did their peers who served in other leadership capacities. The Elders had been best

informed and most invested in the decision-making processes and communication leading up to and into the capital campaign. At the time of the survey, many were in their fifth or sixth year of a six-year period of service and had the anticipation of Creative Time at the center of their service on the board. They discerned over the course of years, and they ultimately cast the votes to determine the financial realities into which the congregation would enter as part of the campaign. Those Elders selected an on-site community partner who shares space full-time in the new building, and approved the parameters of the mission title of the campaign. They approved building designs and the scope of the project, and were on the forefront of helping the congregation understand and embrace *Open Doors Open Futures*. Additionally, I believe they had a sense of the leadership role that was required of them as the congregation moved through the remainder of construction and Creative Time, and into welcoming the community into new spaces and the expansion of our ministry and outreach.

I was left wondering if those who had been more at the center of the process, who felt more of the full weight of the responsibility of making decisions and more ownership over the outcome, were more invested in Creative Time? As a group they had the opportunity to engage together in a small group Bible study, a new practice for some, Dwelling in the Word.<sup>14</sup> They prayed together as a group throughout this discernment process. They shared meals and worshiped in new spaces during Creative Time in ways

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<sup>14</sup> Dwelling in the Word is a method of small-group Bible study and exploration, which begins with prayer, and invites participants to wonder and wander through a text. The Spirit guides listening for a word or phrase that resonates with an individual, and each person shares what their partner heard, what questions they would like to ask, what connections they see to other passages and to their context. More information is available through Church Innovations, a research, consulting, and leadership organization which has developed Dwelling in the Word, <http://www.churchinnovations.org/>.

that others did not. They *practiced* Creative Time together. Was the very practice of leading within and through Creative Time an intervening variable?

I have presented the introductory framework for this thesis and research. In the next chapter I will offer a bit more of an historical background and foundational information to ground Downtown Presbyterian in its own and the wider context. I will also offer discussion on the theoretical lenses I utilized for this transformative, mixed-methods research, along with a theoretical argument for this endeavor.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL LENSES

In the last chapter I offered an introduction to the research topic and question, and the methodology and variables. I also provided a broad overview of the theoretical, theological, and biblical lenses. In this chapter I will lead into the context of Downtown Presbyterian's over 160-year history. This is the framework which built the theoretical basis of this research. I will focus on the theoretical lenses of Chaos, Disruption, and Change, and Practice.

#### **Historical Background**

Downtown Presbyterian Church was a small congregation of eight people of Scotch, Welsh, and Irish heritage when it was founded in 1857. This group of founders raised \$2,000 and built a church. As the city quickly grew, so too did the congregation, and a new and larger Downtown Presbyterian Church was constructed and opened in March of 1883. Unfortunately, this building was heavily damaged in a fire in 1895 and the congregation was forced to move five blocks to a new site. The congregation prepared to rebuild again, broke ground on DPC's current site in 1896, and the congregation has been meeting there since 1897.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are being used. Information here is from the congregation website. (accessed August 4, 2015).

The congregation has long been oriented toward justice and working for the rights of the marginalized and disadvantaged. After the Civil War, women's mission societies grew across the United States and the women of DPC set about raising funds for outreach. "They sought to serve the Native American population, sponsoring students in school and sending clothes and books. They also focused on the unique challenges facing women in the 1880s, such as the Mormon practice of polygamy and the effect of alcohol on family welfare."<sup>2</sup>

A second important ministry of the church in its early years was the welcome and care of Chinese Americans. These individuals found themselves in the city as immigrants but were denied the rights of citizenship and the freedoms to establish livelihoods for themselves. In 1882, Downtown Presbyterian established a Chinese Sunday School, which continued until the late 1950s.

In recent years, the center for mission and outreach at DPC has focused upon affordable housing initiatives. While the congregation is active in other social justice ministry areas, such as hunger ministries, community partnerships, racial-justice, and eco-justice efforts, the congregation is unique in its commitment to providing affordable housing in the city. The current development that is underway is to create housing for those who face high barriers in finding a place to live, especially men who are coming out of a time of incarceration. Downtown Presbyterian Church is also committing support to build ninety units of housing in close proximity to both the church and the County Medical Center for medically fragile adults who are homeless or precariously housed. A more recently completed affordable housing effort is a building of forty-two units of

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from a historical record of the congregation, prepared for its sesquicentennial celebration in 2007.

single apartments south of Downtown for youth who have experienced homelessness, or those aging out of the foster care system. This apartment building opened in 2011 and includes a small neighborhood bakery and restaurant that provides employment for some residents. A second development is a building of forty-six units of ultra-sustainable affordable housing just blocks from the church. Downtown Presbyterian soon will reach a benchmark of developing more than 150 units of affordable housing in a single decade.

Downtown sees itself as a leader in the denomination, but the church has long identified with the city, and the identity of the congregation is closely linked to its placement in the city. The end of the church's mission statement, to be "A Telling Presence in the City," guides what the church does and how the church understands itself and its call to be the people of God at this particular time and in this particular place. The ministries of the church are not limited to the boundaries of the city, or the larger metropolitan area; rather DPC has three global partnerships with congregations and organizations in Cuba, Cameroon, and Bethlehem, Palestine. Leaders from the congregation make regular partnership visits for prayer, study, and discernment together, and leaders from the partnership churches come to Downtown Presbyterian for the same. DPC is also deeply committed to interfaith dialogue and service in the city, nurturing strong relationships with other downtown interfaith leaders.

For the people of Downtown Presbyterian Church, God is present and active in their lives and the life of the world. They talk about a God who brings, participates, ordains, moves, creates, and opens up for community to happen. They also see the connectional nature of the church beyond just the neighborhood that Downtown Presbyterian Church inhabits.



## Theoretical Lenses

### Chaos, Disruption, and Change

The first theoretical lens I explored in my research was that of Chaos, Disruption, and Change. Downtown continued to be a living, breathing, worshipping, gathered, and sent congregation in the midst of the demolition of two private buildings next to the church before site construction began. For two years, members and staff experienced dust, noise, spaces that became increasingly restricted, and a total lack of on-site parking in a busy corner of downtown. The building construction and constriction coincided with prolonged city construction on one of the city's main thoroughfares, right out the church's "front doors," and consistent disruptive construction to, and closures of, the city streets surrounding the church. Additionally, before the end of construction, a four-year construction project began on major sections of the Interstate leading into and out of downtown, thus people's routes to and from church had to be dramatically redirected. Many in the congregation expressed fatigue from the changing and disruptive political landscape in our nation leading up to and following the 2016 election cycle. DPC also experienced the inevitable staff transitions that occur in a large-staff context, including the retirement of one, longtime Associate Pastor and the transition of a second Associate Pastor to another congregation. DPC has a total staff of about seventy-five people, forty-five of them three-quarter to full-time, and six full-time pastors.

Lastly, within days of the church opening its new building spaces, the city it serves was host to the Super Bowl, just blocks away. The NFL, their fans, business entities, and everything that goes along with a major, ten-day sporting event descended

upon the church's neighborhood. For some, it felt like after finally reaching the promised land of post-construction, more upheaval and imbalance was all around.

The first source I drew from was Margaret J. Wheatley's work on chaos in the context of science and leadership. In her books, she uses scientific principles to help identify new relationships and gain new understandings of how the changing world works, and the role of chaos in all of it. Wheatley asserts, "chaos can't be controlled; the unpredictable can't be predicted. Instead, we are being called to encounter life as it is: uncontrollable, unpredictable, messy, surprising, erratic."<sup>3</sup> She describes a system as chaotic when "it becomes impossible to know what it will do next."<sup>4</sup> For many who have been a part of the life of Downtown, especially over the last several years, they may be able to relate to this definition of a chaotic system. Just when members became accustomed to the latest closure of part of the building, or restriction on use, things changed and new surprises were encountered.

This theoretical lens challenges the thinking on this time of chaos, disruption, and change, that we might see there was something more positive, beneficial, and holy to it. "Chaos has always partnered with order—a concept that contradicts common definition of chaos."<sup>5</sup> Wheatley also notes, "if we look at such a [chaotic] system over time, it demonstrates inherent orderliness. Its wild gyrations are held within an invisible boundary. The system holds order within it, and reveals this self-portrait as a beautiful

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2007) 125.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*. 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2006) 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

pattern, its strange attractor.”<sup>6</sup> One strange attractor she identifies is that of a three-winged bird, a secular and scientific image to be sure, but one which, in my mind, lends itself to Trinitarian interpretations.



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Image 1. Three-Winged Bird<sup>7</sup>

This is an image of a chaotic system's behavior plotted by a computer over millions of iterations. This shape emerges from information being fed back in on itself, while it is changing in the process. This process succeeds in creating something new because it takes place in a system that is non-linear. Wheatley explains that the system appears to wander in a chaotic fashion, with a constant display of behavior that is new and different. Studying it carefully over time reveals a deeper order and a shape. This order and the shape of chaos is inherent to the system, and while always present, it is not revealed until the chaotic movements are mapped by a computer over time and in multiple dimensions. Wheatley also describes the infinitely complex patterns of fractals, both the geometric forms computers generate as an expression of information from non-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., first picture plate.

linear equations, and those found as naturally occurring, such as in a head of broccoli.<sup>8</sup> Fractals help us not to focus on a singular moment, which may seem chaotic and disconnected, but to take in the whole shape and context. “Deep inside the details, we cannot see the whole. Yet to understand and work with the system, we need to be able to observe it *as a system*, in its wholeness.”<sup>9</sup>

It is only natural for us to look for linear patterns and sequences in our lives, especially in the midst of a long and dramatic church construction project. We may hope to approach our lives and the world in a linear fashion, but as scientist Ian Stewart notes, “life is relentlessly non-linear.”<sup>10</sup> Presbyterians are inherently people of order, doing things “decently and in order,”<sup>11</sup> and preferably through the work of a task force, a committee, and a council. The polity, the system of decision-making based on checks and balances in PC (USA), is laid out in the *Book of Order*, but society has not ever, and certainly is not now, following any manual of order, nor do most find order in our personal lives. Mental health struggles, financial realities, strained relationships with family members, job loss—any one of these can leave people feeling tossed about in the waves of tumult. This is all without a construction project happening in the place of spiritual refuge and gathering.

In the context of chaos, disruption, and change, Wheatley’s strange attractors point toward wholeness and new meaning. Wheatley cites that often chaos, especially on a personal level, brings with it a sense of loss, and that our sense of value or meaning is

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 106, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>11</sup> This phrase is a longstanding watchword of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

challenged. She says, “As we reflect on the times when we personally have descended into chaos, we can notice that as it ends, we emerge changed, stronger in some ways, new. We have held in us the dance of creation and learned that growth always requires passage through the fearful realms of disintegration.”<sup>12</sup>

This research was designed to investigate the “strange attractors” and “fractals” that became naturally occurring through individual and congregational practices over time. What inherent order developed out of the disorder, and what of that order continues in constant motion into the new life of the congregation and community? My research explored what orderliness could be found within the obvious chaos and disruption the congregation experienced and how engaging in that time as a practicing community allowed for a sense of order in the midst of change. Viewing things through this lens led to seeing the presence and leadership of the Trinity, while beginning to embrace missional leadership as a framework from which the congregation works and is sent.

Missional leadership is responsive to the work of the Spirit in and through the outer context, but also brings into the setting an overall leadership matrix. This includes the person of the leader, the larger and changing culture, and the dynamics of the system or organization, chaotic as they may be. As Lovett Weems summarizes, an interactive approach is one that is both at the same time “attentive to the leader’s own identity and values, and is responsive to the needs and interests of others.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say that this “missional stance requires us to begin with the unique ministry situation that is

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<sup>12</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Lovett H. Weems, *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 5.

ours.”<sup>14</sup> Within its unique and changing ministry situation, Downtown Presbyterian Church has experienced disruption and challenge, but it has also been sustained, grown, and creatively adapted to the opportunities outside factors provided. It has examined its identity and values, while trying to remain responsive to the needs and interests of others. As Anthony Robinson defines leadership, it “builds capacity and sustainability within a congregation as it mobilizes a congregation to engage and make progress on its deepest challenges.”<sup>15</sup> The aspects of building capacity and sustainability, of mobilization and engagement, speak to the process of leadership in a congregation and in an individual, while making progress on the deepest challenges addressing the contextual nature of congregational leadership and missional identity.

I also explored the theory of *nepantla*, as a process that is transformative because of chaos and creative destruction, returning to Daniel Anderson’s article.<sup>16</sup> His framing of James Maffie’s and Lara Medina’s writing on *nepantla* is as a “balance between two cultures . . . to exist on the border, on the boundaries of cultures and social structures, where life is in constant motion, in constant fluidity.”<sup>17</sup> Without intending to appropriate the idea of *nepantla* as a transculturation concept in Anderson’s work, the chaos, disruption, and change in the culture of Downtown may have been a middle place of movement and growth, but also of waiting and reduction. There was a border and boundary between the new and the old spaces, the way things were and the way things

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony B. Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 84.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel R. Anderson, “A Theory of Transculturation.” *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy*, January 2015, 117.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 117-118.

were going to be. There was both movement forward in the progress of construction, and stagnation in the anticipation.

Maffie and Medina write of *nepantla* in the context of the Nahua people. The Nahua are a Middle American Indian population of central Mexico. The best-known members are the Aztecs of pre-conquest Mexico. Nahua is the language of the Aztecs, and all Nahua speak it in a variety of dialects.<sup>18</sup> James Maffie, in his article, “The Centrality of *Nepantla* in Conquest-Era Nahua Philosophy,”<sup>19</sup> portrays the religious beliefs of the Nahua as having the characteristics and practices of *nepantla*. That is to say, it is between Christianity and Nahua religion, neither one nor the other, but some of both. Maffie cites that *nepantla* is one of the most important concepts in Nahua philosophy, characterizing it as “a particular kind of process or activity: one consisting of middling mutuality and balanced reciprocity. I call such processes ‘nepantla-processes.’”<sup>20</sup> Maffie describes these as, “dialectical, transactional, and oscillating; centering as well as destabilizing; and abundant with mutuality and reciprocity. They situate people or things... ‘in the middle’ of—or ‘betwixt and between’—two endpoints. [They] are also simultaneously destructive and creative, and hence, transformative.”<sup>21</sup>

Maffie further develops the concept of these processes and shows them to be relational and transactional, involving dialogue and reciprocity, or shared mutual interactions. It sounds like these processes, according to Maffie’s illustration, could also

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<sup>18</sup>Encyclopedia Britannica Editors, 2008. “Nahua: People,” July 23. Accessed December 1, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nahua>.

<sup>19</sup> James Maffie. “The Centrality of *Nepantla* in Conquest-Era Nahua Philosophy,” *The Nahua Newsletter*, 44 (2007): 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

be described as practices for this context of the experiences of the people of Downtown Presbyterian Church. Maffie makes the point, however, that in the midst of these *nepantla* processes there is instability and ambiguity in the social space. In its ill-defined state, it causes both construction and destruction. This pairing of creation and destruction, the mixing of one and the other, mutual co-creation in the process of becoming something else while leaving behind the old, sounds like an apt description of the chaotic, creative context of Downtown Presbyterian Church. This research sought to find the beautiful, Spirit-led strange attractors that emerged out of the oscillations of Creative Time, much like Wheatley's chaotic systems finding order.

Here there is some value in looking directly at academic work on Change Theory, in exploring Chaos, Change, and Disruption, as a lens. As a congregation over 160 years old, a lot has changed for Downtown PC and its people in the last more than century and a half, but a lot has stayed the same. With the Creative Time experience as a model, how did the congregation as a whole understand their faith development through this chaos, disruption, and change, and how are they in the process of being changed? How (if at all) might the culture of Downtown be shifting? The setting was well-arranged for a broader conversation as the community moved through the end of Creative Time and prepared to move into new spaces and new rhythms and realities. In Robert Kegan's and Lisa Laskow Lahey's work on Deliberately Developmental Organizations, they suggest a model in which the importance of developing the capabilities of individuals is valued so that the culture itself is structured in such a way that it "immersively sweeps every member of the organization into an ongoing developmental journey in the course of



working every day.”<sup>22</sup> They speak of business and corporate cultures and organizations, but the principles can be applied to Downtown’s context. The need remains for developing new skills and new concepts to continue to be a missionally-focused and aware community, but that is not enough. “People will need to change their mindsets, not just their skill sets.”<sup>23</sup> This research sought out the “hidden and self-protective commitments”<sup>24</sup> that exist within individuals and within the culture of the congregation as a whole. There are certainly things for which Downtown is immune to change (ITC, as Kegan and Lahey describe), but if there is not even an awareness of the immunity or the change it relates to, the congregation will go back to the way it was before the gift and benefit of Creative Time.

Kegan and Lahey stress both the individual and communal phenomena of ITC. “It is not just individuals who are in the grip of competing commitments and constraining big assumptions. Collectives—work teams, leadership groups, departmental units, whole organizations, also unknowingly protect themselves from making the very changes they most desire.”<sup>25</sup> The framework of the research investigating Downtown Presbyterian’s level of immunity to change allowed for looking at the experiences of individuals, but also for seeing patterns across groups and categories, the collectives within the whole church as an organization. Kegan and Lahey see ways that people collectively live into and practice immunities so that they might protect themselves from implicit dangers that

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

might be revealed in the commitments and assumptions of their collective. They name that central to a collective success story is that key participants had both diagnosed and are working to overcome the ITCs that exist on the individual level.

Alan Roxburgh, in his book on “missional map-making,” offers additional insight into cultural change. Noting that, “the church, in all its forms, is the creation and work of the Spirit,” he reminds us that, “the Spirit has continually disrupted the church throughout its history, taking it to places where once accurate maps no longer applied.”<sup>26</sup> The disrupted (chaotic) church must find its way through change with new direction, and this “requires a transformation of imagination, organization, practice, and leadership.”<sup>27</sup> He, too, names the in-between, similar to *nepantla*, and that in those places people feel awkward and a sense of confusion, and leaders feel pressure to give direction by providing clear maps. Instead of giving direction as a default, leaders and systems within the church can turn to missional movement language in finding a new solution to disequilibrium, Roxburgh says. I would argue that Roxburgh’s maps are a bit like practices: “Maps (traditions, habits) don’t simply disappear; they remain in our minds, determining our actions and how we see the world. If we don’t recognize this, we will be misdirected in trying to navigate our current course.”<sup>28</sup> The more we practice things, the more they become second-nature and muscle memory, and how we see the world. Furthermore, according to Roxburgh, “if we don’t also see the complex forces that have propelled us into a new place of uncertainty, we will try to navigate our way forward

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<sup>26</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional Map-Making: Skills for Leading in Times of Transition* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

based on existing maps.”<sup>29</sup> How has Downtown Presbyterian brought old maps to new landscapes, or charted new maps into the unknown? Through quantitative and qualitative measures, this research allowed for investigation into immunities to change on both an individual and collective level, and to see how practices were informed by this change, disruption, and chaos.

### Practice

My final theoretical lens was that of Practice, in order to explore how the community intentionally, or unintentionally, established new practices together through the Creative Time season. I sought as well to see their effect, while also looking into already-established practices that are a part of the fabric of the life of the congregation. How did these practices lead to a better missional understanding and identity for the congregation? In what ways was the community practicing being together and practicing a developing understanding of its own missional identity? What new practices were established, and which existing ones were strengthened?

Scholars have long studied what makes individuals and teams better, stronger, and faster, from athletes, to musician, to chess players. Ericsson and Pool have developed strategies around practice and performance, and after studying champions and record breakers for decades found this truth: “While the abilities are extraordinary, there is no mystery at all about how people developed them. They practiced. A lot.”<sup>30</sup> Ericsson names “deliberate practice” as being essential to accomplishing advancement toward

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>30</sup> Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool, *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2016), 8.

established goals, combined with both solitary practice and practice with another or with a group. He also identifies a quantifiable tipping point in the number of hours needed to practice a skill for expertise, and that number is ten thousand hours.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, supports this theory of practice. He also cites the “ten-thousand-hour rule” as a general approach to achieving mastery and success. Whether applied to a student learning computer programming, an all-star hockey player, or members of the famous band The Beatles, the ten-thousand-hours of practice threshold holds true.<sup>31</sup> Gladwell gives the example of Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who, by the time he dropped out of Harvard after his sophomore year to attempt to build his own software company, had been practicing programming computers for nearly seven consecutive years, non-stop! Gladwell argues that Gates was actually way past the ten thousand hours by that point.<sup>32</sup> He also constructs the argument that these successful outliers in society find achievement not just by thousands of hours of practice, but also because of access to the ability to practice their craft. This may come in the form of living close to the computer lab, consistently getting ice time at the hockey rink, or getting a break on studio time to practice music. What we can learn from these secular theories of practice is that repeated efforts and having the advantage of the opportunity to practice, makes all the difference.

Psychologist Angela Duckworth offers one other summary of the theoretical scope of practice in *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. She identifies four factors that “paragons of grit” have in common: interest, the capacity to practice, purpose,

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<sup>31</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008), 44-47.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

and hope.<sup>33</sup> For context, she arrives at grit by originally studying the results of the “Grit Scale” given to cadets at West Point Academy. This was meant to be a way of separating out talent and measurable skills to see who would reliably make it through cadet training called “The Beast.”<sup>34</sup> What Duckworth found was that talent was no reliable predictor of grit, but that measuring an individual’s level of determination or tenacity was an incredibly accurate predictor of who would make it through and who would drop out. Angela Duckworth went on to test this theory of grit as a predictor of success in sales executives, and in young people who were successful in the National Spelling Bee competition. “Measurements of grit taken months before the final competition predicted how well spellers would eventually perform. Put simply, grittier kids went further in competition.”<sup>35</sup>

To return to Angela Duckworth’s “paragons of grit,” as it relates to practice, she found that not only did quantity of time devoted to interests matter in those she studied, so too did quality of time. Her research led her to Ericsson and his concept of deliberate practice. It is “*not* that experts log more hours of practice. Rather, it’s that experts practice *differently*.”<sup>36</sup> She names, based on Ericsson’s work, that deliberative practice requires goal-setting, undivided attention and great effort, and feedback. Once feedback

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<sup>33</sup> Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 91.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

has been received, the cycle of deliberative practice starts all over again, until “conscious incompetence becomes unconscious competence.”<sup>37</sup>

Ericsson and Pool, Gladwell, and Duckworth all shed light on principles around improvement of secular skills and talents, and the habits of peak performers. They are well applied to everyday life skills or professional endeavors. Though they do not speak directly to the disciplines of Christian practices, the principles of being deliberate and intentional, of communal and solitary practice, and of repeated practice over years and years, can all be applicable to practice within the context of the church. Let us turn now to defining Christian practices.

Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass define Christian practices as those practices that, “together constitute a way of life abundant . . . things that Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>38</sup> They are the “patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in light of God as known in Jesus Christ. Focusing on practices invites theological reflection on the ordinary, concrete activities of actual people.”<sup>39</sup> By introducing a focus on practices into the life of Downtown Presbyterian through Creative Time and into new spaces, it offered a chance to think deeply and theologically about the normal movements and activities of this time and place set aside. It pointed the congregation to the knowledge that God was shaping and fully present in these activities, and that specific

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>38</sup> Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 3

people were sharing in the collective by doing specific things together. It offered an opportunity to be deliberate and focused in a shifting and potentially haphazard time.

Volf and Bass see Christian practices as “a specific way of engaging in a dynamic that exists within the Christian life itself.”<sup>40</sup> They identify that life is fluid and in flux and that “those who seek to live faithfully must necessarily wonder where and how to discern the specific shape that a way of life abundant might take in a given time and place.”<sup>41</sup>

Their view of practices speaks to the perpetual and natural arc of the Christian life, while also recognizing the dynamism and fluidity present at one moment of time in the life of the church. Because Volf and Bass name that practices are rooted in the past, but they are also changing and adapting based on the circumstances, it was an appropriate lens for the “betwixt and between” of Downtown, the changing landscape and circumstances of a specific season in the life of the congregation and its leadership. Volf and Bass set forth twelve practices: honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and saying no, keeping Sabbath, discernment, testimony, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives.<sup>42</sup> These are all elements of a life that is “responsive to and illuminated by God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>43</sup>

Through practices we come to see how our lives are tangled up in how God is at work in the world and they offer a pattern of rehearsing a way through life.<sup>44</sup> As one practice

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>44</sup> Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 8-9.

flows into another, each makes space for knowledge of God's active presence, which flows into other parts of life.<sup>45</sup>

In a contrasting way of categorizing and quantifying practices, Muthiah cites Nancy Murphey's offering of another five practices. She suggests practices that are essential: works of mercy, witness, worship, discipling, and discernment. Muthiah also includes John Howard Yoder's list of yet a different five: binding and loosing (discernment), the breaking of bread together, baptism, the fullness of Christ (every-member giftedness), and the rule of Paul (participative decision-making).<sup>46</sup>

Jessica Duckworth's writing on practices centers around the concept of newcomers and oldcomers, which she applies to church membership. It was interesting to reimagine, as related to being an oldcomer and becoming a newcomer, in the context of a church that is both old and becoming new, at the same time. She begins her book *Wide Welcome* with the assertion that participating members in a church must be changed, must be ready to welcome newcomers, by understanding central practices of discipleship, practicing those alongside one another, and ultimately engaging together in answering the question, "Who are my people?" The church must be ready to be washed away from its established structure, recognizing that through the God-guided act of building and shaping the church together, new and old offer fluidity and movement in life together under the cross.<sup>47</sup> She highlights that there are those practices we can lift up and strengthen that are not innate, rather they must be learned, and they inform faithfulness

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Muthiah, "Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believer," *Journal of Religious Leadership*, No. 2 (2003): 178-179.

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Krey Duckworth, *Wide Welcome: How the Unsettling Presence of Newcomers Can Save the Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 3.



and discipleship for individuals and a community.<sup>48</sup> Creative Time and the movement into new spaces post-construction was a time of learning for the congregation and staff. The two years also called the community to question who were the oldcomers and who the newcomers, who was outside and who inside, and how did our language and assumptions need to change. Jessicah Duckworth speaks of a gathering God, a God whose Spirit draws in new and old, young and experienced, into new ways of being established and engaged together as church, to find new trajectories to be sent out as the church of the cross into the world. The church, through chaos, disruption, and change, is establishing and practicing a new structure, being shaped and rebuilt together, through God's guiding acts.

As Craig Van Gelder describes Don S. Browning's work, he makes the point that Browning "argues that theological reflection needs to be located within practice, that it is begun in a context of practice and contributes to practice."<sup>49</sup> Browning makes use of a "practice-theory-practice approach in order to bring text and context into conversation with descriptive, historical, systematic, and strategic lenses. His work clearly reflects the hermeneutical turn as he proposes the use of multiple interpretive lenses in trying to understand the life and ministry of Christian congregations."<sup>50</sup> This "hermeneutical turn" is a reference to the shift in human knowing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a development in "philosophical hermeneutics which have made us aware of the interpreted character of all

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>49</sup> Craig Van Gelder, "The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1 & 2 (Spring 2004 & Fall 2004): 147.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 147-148.

human knowing, including the interpreted character of interpretation.”<sup>51</sup> Van Gelder invites leaders in his work to ask, “What is God doing?” and “What does God want to do?”<sup>52</sup> These questions are not unlike those asked of members of Downtown Presbyterian Church as part of this research. Van Gelder urges keeping God present as part of the conversation, “allowing God to function as an acting subject through the presence of the Spirit of God working in the midst of a community.”<sup>53</sup> He highly emphasizes the practice of reflection and communal discernment, and approaching theology in a particular context. For Van Gelder, a community that engages in multiple shared practices that reflect that community’s Christian understanding and commitments is seeking to lead in mission.<sup>54</sup> To paraphrase Van Gelder, this research sought to examine the shared practices in which Downtown Presbyterian engaged, while also examining the shared history, Creative Time, that they have experienced.<sup>55</sup>

To return to Kegan and Lahey, they discuss the importance of practice in their work with Deliberately Developmental Organizations. They speak of practice like one might of learning an instrument or a language, that it is something we do normally and part of our everyday routines. With that framing, they make the point that if “we’re trying to become proficient, we never reach completion. Our practicing, and therefore our

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 154.

learning, never stops.”<sup>56</sup> They stress that the point of practicing is not related to performance and moving away from that mind-set causes dramatic change. In order to make practices work, “You must pay attention to creating a culture of practice, helping people adopt the spirit, intentions, and mind-set of practice.”<sup>57</sup> Like Bass’s description of practices all being interconnected with one another, each practice fits in its own place, but not one practice is separate and standing alone from any of the others.<sup>58</sup>

Robert Muthiah offers an approach to practices grounded in the assumption that theology shapes practices, and at the same time, practices shape theology.<sup>59</sup> He notes that practices are socially established, and they presuppose that an activity has a history, a tradition, such that it cannot be invented today and be declared a practice. Practices happen, are established, over time. Like Van Gelder, and citing Alasdair MacIntyre, Muthiah points out that practices are a “cooperative human activity” and that they are “inherently communal,” shaping “both the community and the individual.”<sup>60</sup> Rather than looking at practices, as others cited above do, as being related to the overall life of the church, Muthiah focuses on the meanings of practices as related to the priesthood of all believers. “As people become more aware of how the practice of witness is a communal

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *An Everyone Culture: Becoming a Deliberately Developmental Organization* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), 124.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>59</sup> Muthiah, “Christian Practices, Congregational Leadership, and the Priesthood of All Believers,” 168.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

one the practice becomes more participatory, thus reflecting the nature of the royal priesthood.”<sup>61</sup>

Muthiah offers both the strengths and weaknesses of the definition of Christian practices as being those “things that Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>62</sup> Muthiah lifts up that this definition of Christian practices allows them to be seen as both cooperative and traditional, but that it is a subjective activity to define a fundamental human condition or need. By tying Christian practices to the active presence of God, that they are done in response to and in light of the active presence of God in the world, how does one argue what that practice is or is not in response to? This definition would be strengthened if, as Muthiah explains, “it lifted up the standards of excellence within practices. These standards must be explicitly addressed because without them the practices have no positive formational norms.”<sup>63</sup> He goes on to say, “It is not enough for us to have a set of Christian practices that shape us *in a particular way* and this particularity is tied to the standards of excellence.”<sup>64</sup> He suggests standards of excellence might be unity, openness to the Spirit, and discernment done well.

Terri Martinson Elton asserts that leaders can create space for new practices, thereby “inviting people into new land, listening to the church and neighborhood.”<sup>65</sup> In her writing on consumerism and caring for those in the first third of life, she describes

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 174-175.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>65</sup> Terri Martinson Elton (CL 7522 lecture, Luther Seminary, St Paul, January 25, 2017).

practices that are open and inviting, and that focus on God's people gathered and sent into the world. "God's people are a gathered people, but they are also a sent people. Congregational gatherings are times to let God's anticipated future break into the present, as a foretaste of the abundant life to come."<sup>66</sup> Elton's work offers insight into how the Creative Time life of Downtown Presbyterian Church interacted with and was changed by the neighborhood, and how the neighborhood was changed by DPC being pushed out of its building. The people of DPC felt more forcibly and quite literally sent out of their building and their "sentness," at times, was messy and unchosen. Creative Time offered space to discern times when God's anticipated future broke in as a foretaste of the abundant life to come.

Dorothy Bass lifts up the messy reality we sometimes live in, but that "it need not be a cause for despair. In many ways, messy everyday practices, embraced humbly yet boldly, are precisely the forms of life that bear help and grace and companionship and challenge amid the actual complexities of contemporary society."<sup>67</sup> She urges that practicing need not be perfect, and that through practices that provide mutual support and encouragement, one step and then another allow for time to receive God's gifts and open a way for a channel of grace.<sup>68</sup> She also makes the point that Christian practices are not just *doing*, but that thinking, knowing, believing, *and* acting are all present within each practice. As a congregation that likes to think, that likes to wrestle with Scripture and the

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<sup>66</sup> Terri Martinson Elton, "Cultivating a Consequential Faith in a Consumer-Driven World: From Object to Subject to Agent" (unpublished working draft in *The Missional Church Consultation: A Faithful Future*, 2017), 25.

<sup>67</sup> Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), xix.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

societal questions of the day, DPC was challenged to act, believe, and practice, in new ways and new places in recent years.

In this chapter I introduced the historical context of Downtown Presbyterian Church, as well as the theoretical lenses for this research question, those of *chaos, disruption, and change*, and *practice*. I offered a framework for how they informed my research process and protocol. In the next chapter, I will build on the developed theoretical lenses and add in biblical and theological lenses, which influenced the research question.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

#### **Introduction**

I have identified the theoretical lenses I explored in pursuit of my research question as being those of *Chaos, Change and Disruption*, and *Practice*. In this chapter I will look through the biblical lenses of the story of creation in the book of Genesis, the Road to Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel, and the practices of the first followers of the risen Christ in the book of Acts. I will see the research question through the theological lenses of space and the social Trinity.

#### **Biblical Lenses**

##### Genesis 1

The Genesis 1:1-5 story of creation is often heard and interpreted as God creating the world out of a formless void, out of nothing, but professor Kathryn Schifferdecker notes that “the first few verses could be translated, ‘When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was wild and waste, utter darkness covered the deep, and the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters.’”<sup>1</sup> She goes on to say, “This is a story not so much about creation-out-of-nothing but about creation out of a world that is

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Schifferdecker. “Commentary on Genesis 1:1-5.” *Working Preacher*, January 11, accessed August 19, 2017. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2328](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2328)

something—it is wild and waste.”<sup>2</sup> She makes the point that creation had *form* and that the watery abyss, the primordial waters of Genesis 1, are in fact a symbol of chaos. Catherine Keller offers a connection between this sense of the chaos in Hebrew. In Hebrew, it is תְּהוֹם, *tehom*, meaning deep, sea, abyss. She refers to God in Genesis 1 by speaking of the depth of God, a depth of creation. *Tehom* is “the heterogeneous depth of divinity and of the world, place of places, [which] forms the first member of the tehomic trinity.”<sup>3</sup> The tehomic theology sees the deep in its fluidity, which generates and regenerates itself and everything else, with no clear beginning or end, in a kind of divine chaos. Within the chaos the Spirit itself is vibrating; it is “a pulsing, folding force,” which is “brooding o’er the chaos.”<sup>4</sup>

We see in the first verses of God’s story for the people of God, a story of God’s creative activity in the midst of the depth of chaos. This creative activity in the midst of chaos feels very much like the Creative Time context of Downtown Presbyterian Church. Over this raw stuff of creation, of the primordial watery abyss, sweeps God’s Spirit. The text uses the word “wind,” but the Hebrew word here, *ruach*, is the same word for breath, spirit. From our first introduction to God in the Bible, as God and God’s power and ways are being revealed, we can wonder that the Spirit of God, the breath of God, stretches over and through chaos, and that God makes something good out of it. Every kind of life, swarms and flies, creeps and swims, grows and yields fruit.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 231.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 232-33.



This research looked through the lens of Genesis 1 and the story of creation, which is part of the much larger document of the whole book. It is worth mentioning here that theories of the biblical story of creation through history include the belief in *creation ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing. Theophilus of Antioch added the idea of “out of nothing” to the concept of God producing creation, which allowed for an understanding of God as completely unconstrained in the act of creation.<sup>5</sup> D. Lyle Dabney argues that the Spirit at the time of creation reminds us of the possibility of God, and relates us to God and one another again and again, at each moment of our existence. “Because the Spirit is the presence of God in the world, the world is not God, but the world is never without God.”<sup>6</sup> Eric M. Vail argues for keeping *creation ex nihilo*, but under a bit of a remodel, building upon the work of Dabney. “This framework affirms that God does not establish or create *ex nihilo* by divine fiat, through a unilateral act. Rather, as the Spirit and Word operate inseparably, there is possibility for an other, enabled to become in concert with the goodness of God’s self-gifting for it in the Spirit and the Word.”<sup>7</sup> Taken broadly, creation out of nothing presupposes that God does not have any ongoing creative activity together with creation. Furthermore, creation out of nothing disregards the *something* of chaos, the substance and power for life and growth from the chaos of creation. To return to Keller, “By and large, God does not work *de novo* or *ex nihilo*, but *ex voce* and *per collaborationem*.”<sup>8</sup> God created out of a living voice, through collaboration

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<sup>5</sup> Eric M. Vail, “Creation out of Nothing Remodeled,” in *Theologies of Creation: Creatio ex Nihilo and its New Rivals*, edited by Thomas Jay Oord (New York: Routledge, 2015), 56.

<sup>6</sup> D. Lyle Dabney, “The Nature of the Spirit: Creation as Premonition of God,” in *Starting with the Spirit*, edited by Stephen Pickard and Gordon Preece (Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 2001), 99.

<sup>7</sup> Vail, “Creation out of Nothing Remodeled,” 64.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

with the Spirit. God did not create good out of nothing; God created good out of chaos, and Keller's theory of creation leads to an understanding that not only did God create out of the "something" of chaos with the Spirit, but it points us to a sense of community and collaboration in the midst of the chaos, right from the very beginning. Genesis 1 is goodness created from chaos, which is an important framework to hold alongside this research.

To draw in Margaret Wheatley again, in *Leadership and the New Science*, she reminds that if we look only for good and calm and concrete, the linear and the bounded, we miss this wild, wind-swept, and creative activity of God in our lives and our call to participate in it. Wheatley speaks of the importance of remembering how critical interdependent relationships are. She says, "The new science keeps reminding us that in this participatory universe, nothing living lives alone. Everything comes into form because of relationship. We are constantly being called into relationship—to information, people, events, ideas, life. If we are interested in affecting change, it is crucial," she says, "to remember that we are working with these webs of relations."<sup>9</sup> A congregation in any state is a web of relations, but one in the midst of change and new beginnings feels the importance and stretch of relationships and connections. Wheatley continues by sharing the image of a spider and the experience of touching a spider web, "feeling its resiliency, noticing how slight pressure in one area jiggles the entire web. If a web breaks and needs repair, the spider doesn't cut out a piece and terminate it, or tear the entire web apart and reorganize it. *She reweaves it*, using silken relationships that are already there, creating

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<sup>9</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 145.

stronger connections across the weakened spaces.”<sup>10</sup> As Wheatley and the spider teach us, a troubled, chaotic, system can find restoration and health by connecting to more of itself. Stronger relationships make a system stronger.

While it may be tempting to pull back and disengage from the chaos, or focus only on the concrete, linear, and predictable in chaotic times, the people of God need to trust in God’s creative Spirit as present in the chaos, and to trust God is present in the open and wild spaces. Additionally, God’s people are called to participate in the reweaving of stronger relationships into something new, a new creation out of chaos and disorder. God’s first encounter with the people of God in the Bible offers this reassurance of God in the chaos, and the building up of relationships in that space. Practicing community together, and being a community engaged in Christian practices, are ways of furthering that building up in the space of chaos and change. Practices are the reweaving of the spider web, to use Wheatley’s analogy, to strengthen the relationships that exist within a complex and expanding community.

Vail, in *Creation and Chaos Talk: Charting a Way Forward*, offers a turn from a scientific view of chaos to an argument that “chaos talk” has been a growing interest in academia. He says that chaos “elicits feelings of uncertainty and confusion, being in danger and out of control.”<sup>11</sup> He also states that there are different understandings of what we mean when we use the term “chaos,” and that some use it synonymously with confusion, while others mean something with much more gravity. In quoting James

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>11</sup> Eric M. Vail, *Creation and Chaos Talk: Charting a Way Forward* (Eugene: Pickwick Publishing, 2012), 10.

Hutchingson, “Chaos would not likely emerge as an important theological concept were it not for the prominent role it plays in the initial verses of the Bible.”<sup>12</sup>

Vail notes that scientists and those outside the field of theology, like Wheatley, present a paradigm of chaos and creation. These arenas have led to a landscape that has a wider embrace of a conversation around the self-organizing complexities which emerge out of chaos, not unlike Wheatley’s strange attractors and fractals. Vail makes the point that scientists and biblical scholars mean different things when they talk about chaos. As a technical term, scientists can mean unpredictability, or systems lacking clear order, or exhibiting a measure of greater entropy. These systems, he says, can often be thought of as moving into or out of chaos, and such a usage provides an easy conduit to the way chaos is understood in biblical fields. He points out, “the differences in worldview between the Ancient Near Eastern and contemporary science can be easily blurred in bringing into a single conversation the use of ‘chaos’ by scholars in the fields of science, theology, or biblical studies.”<sup>13</sup>

Academic disciplines address views of the eschaton as related to chaos, and Vail gives attention to this scholarship. Some imagine it is eliminated entirely, while others think “it is forever a part of reality. Some authors feel it is fully and finally brought under God’s control, while others claim that everything returns to chaos in order for new creation to emerge.”<sup>14</sup> A last point to highlight from Vail is God’s relationship to chaos and its variation among authors. Some see God’s relationship to chaos as positive, others

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21.

as adversarial, while still others see God as being interwoven with chaos in a variety of ways, perhaps even as part of God's divinity or God's shadow side. Still other authors Vail cites suggest God employs chaos like a weapon or executes justice through chaos, acting as a craftsperson who uses chaos as a tool, as an artistic medium, or that chaos may be a healing ailment delivered by God. It is evident that throughout the scholarship Vail presents, God's relationship to chaos can be viewed as beneficial, dangerous, constructive engagement, as limiting chaos, containing it, or giving boundaries to it.

To return to God in creation, Vail frames the self-gifting of God as present in creation in Genesis 1, and thus present in chaos, in the first image of creation in Scripture. Beginning in the first verse in the first book of the Bible, the theme that emerges that God as creator is subsequently met with "an affirmation of God's abiding presence throughin. The first definition (by way of an image) of God as Creator is God *with* creation. The earliest notion of creation—in all its dimensionality and historicity—includes within *creation/world* a statement of God being *with* it."<sup>15</sup>

Vail goes on to say that God is not simply *with* creation, but that in being *with* creation, God is *for* creation. He supposes that God participates as a member of the newly begun and emerging community and that with this new creation that comes into being in Genesis 1:2, God relates positively with creation in offering God's self in gift. This self-gifting, according to Vail, is the first movement of God's creation of earth and heaven. God gifts God's self as the possibility for the other, through the brooding of the Holy Spirit over the waters. For Vail, God is intimately involved in the building up of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 200.

community, for goodness and for partnership, in a loving relationship with all of creation, with the possibility of establishing a relationship with others by the Spirit.

From this we can infer that God created for good, and not out of nothing, and because of that, God's creative activity through chaos is for growth, for connection, and for relationship. Other scholarship reminds that the word "beginning" in Genesis 1 "probably doesn't refer to the absolute beginning of all things, but to the beginning of ordered creation, including temporal order."<sup>16</sup> The author of Genesis acknowledges that God's creative work begins in chapter 1 with something already there and "the writer presupposes the existence and basic character of God."<sup>17</sup> The Spirit of God hovering over the waters, verse 2, "is the sole entity not picked up in the rest of the chapter; it brings God and raw material together, in motion rather than static, preparing for the ordering process to follow."<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1 teaches us that from chaos comes order, and that from God's creative activity comes community, relationships, and new life.

#### Luke 24

The Gospel lens I explored is the Road to Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel, chapter 24:13-53. This passage speaks to the context of Downtown Presbyterian and this research because the disciples are in their own state of chaos and disruption, but also change. They have just witnessed the death of Jesus, as he predicted, but are confounded by the story the women tell them of an empty tomb, after going to retrieve his body. His body is not there, but much like the way the creation story in Genesis 1 is not out of

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Walter C. Kaiser, Leander E. Keck and Terence E. Fretheim, *The New Interpreter's Bible, volume 1: Genesis to Leviticus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 342.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

nothing, the emptiness of the tomb is not *nothing*. It is a void that has form and function and leads the disciples on their journey toward understanding and meaning. It is the opening of the way to the creation of a new community by God's love for the world.

These two followers who have witnessed the events of Jesus' handing over to the authorities, his death, and victory over it, are confused, perplexed, and bewildered, and then full of joy and expectation. This seems not unlike some of what the Downtown Presbyterian community experienced in its journey through chaos, disruption, and change. The community was disoriented, but full of anticipation and hope. As Fred Craddock describes the disciples' experience, "The movement is by walking slowly and hopelessly from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and then hastily and hopefully from Emmaus to Jerusalem."<sup>19</sup> It is also interesting how the disciples begin their journey in one place in the midst of great change, and they eventually return to that same place. As they journey, God intercedes and interacts with them along the way, and when they return to the place where they started, they are wholly new and have new eyes and understanding. They are on unfamiliar ground, even as they walk a familiar path, but they are not standing still. Despite the commotion and disruption, God is leading them as a people on the move and God comes among them to comfort them in the form of the stranger turned Jesus.

This passage also speaks to practice. Jesus breaks bread with the gathered faithful, the bread is shared, and their eyes are opened to him. "The allusion to the Lord's Supper [is] inescapable. The experience of eating precipitates recognition."<sup>20</sup> It is in this

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<sup>19</sup> Fred Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 285.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly Beverly R. Gaventa, and James D. Newsome, *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV- Year A, volume 1* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 281.

fellowship and simple sharing of a meal that God's profound incarnate love for the world is once again made known. During the framing of this meal at Emmaus, the text is dominated by narration, not by the telling of the story in the disciples' or Christ's words. Leander Keck writes, "Having summarized the risen Lord's discourse in verses 25-27, the narrator guides the reader through this scene, yielding the floor to the characters only in verses 29 and 32."<sup>21</sup> Keck goes on to say, "no further words of the risen Lord are reported. At most, we are told that he blessed the bread. The scene is almost a mime, therefore, in which the unknown fellow traveler is recognized by his actions."<sup>22</sup> Jesus acts and serves not in words, but in practice; not by telling, but by leading his friends through doing and through the establishment of a practice they will enact again and again, in remembrance of him.

The passage ends with a sending and blessing, as Jesus reminds them, "You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49). Scholars ask the question, "What (or who) is the antecedent of 'you'?" Presumably "the disciples" are the addressed group who are witnesses to these things, "though one has to go all the way back to verse 33 to find a specific referent."<sup>23</sup> Keck notes that this last statement from Jesus to his disciples is an assurance, but it is "notable for its ambiguity; it does not explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit."<sup>24</sup> He does make the point that

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<sup>21</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible: Luke- John, volume 9* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 479.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>23</sup> Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, and Newsome, *Texts for Preaching*, 316.

<sup>24</sup> Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 488.



this part of the commission will come again to the disciples in Acts 1:4, almost verbatim, but with the unambiguous reference to the Holy Spirit: “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:15).<sup>25</sup>

The passage as a whole is a paradox of sending and staying, of waiting and moving. Returning to Craddock’s commentary, “[The] witness [of the two who encounter Jesus] is to other disciples, not to the world; that task must wait until they are empowered from on high.”<sup>26</sup> He goes on to say that, “The message that creates a believing community needs to be heard again and again by that community. To do so is to confirm, strengthen, encourage, and deepen faith.”<sup>27</sup> This speaks to an example of a missional leadership and communal practice, and Jesus’ conferment of it in his earliest post-crucifixion appearances to the disciples. Keck notes that Jesus’ action back in verse 28, when he “walked ahead as if he were going on,” (Luke 24:28) appears on the surface to be nothing more than an expected social gesture. “It implies that Jesus was not really going further but that he would not impose on the disciples to offer him hospitality. In Near Eastern customs, the guest was obligated to turn down such an invitation until it was vigorously repeated.”<sup>28</sup> For Keck, the theological argument is that Jesus is showing that he does not force himself upon others, but Keck makes the point that there is a thematic action to this. He says that all the way through the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has been going, and going further. Jesus moves through the crowds, proclaims the good news to cities far and wide, withdraws to the desert, and was always on the move in Galilee. The Luke-

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<sup>25</sup> All Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>26</sup> Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, 287.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 287-288.

<sup>28</sup> Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 479.

Acts model is of the Lukan Jesus going further, and in the book of Acts we hear that the gospel of Jesus Christ will “spread to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). “There will be plenty of work for the disciples to do, but for now, their instructions are to stay in Jerusalem (‘sit still’) and wait for the fulfillment of the Lord’s promises.”<sup>29</sup> For Downtown Presbyterian, Creative Time and construction was a time of waiting and moving, staying and sending. It was a time of going and going further, as life remained rooted in the existing and developing building spaces, while at the same time programs and ministries developed outside the walls of the church, out of necessity and opportunity.

The Gospel of Luke ends with the disciples returning to Jerusalem, where they will remain as the story continues in the beginning of the Book of Acts. The ending theme is a reminder that Jesus saves, sends, and blesses, and those who received Jesus’ blessing at the end of Luke engage in the earliest practices as a response. They “received Jesus’ blessing with great joy, they worshiped him and praised God, and they began immediately to do what he had instructed them to do.”<sup>30</sup> The transition from the gospel message to the message of the beginning of the church is based on practices rooted in blessing, an obedient response to the saving and sending love of Christ. The passage frames well the practices the faithful of DPC found themselves moving into during their own transitions, even as they were rooted in blessing and doing their best to respond obediently to God’s call.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 490.

## Acts 2

To continue the story from the end of the Gospel of Luke with a final passage to consider, and one on the matter of practice, we turn to the beginning of the Book of Acts. Some 3,000 have been added to the numbers of first Christians, the people of The Way, after the disruptive and chaotic Pentecost moment of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Those early followers of Jesus who were gathered together had just been waiting around in ordinary time. They were “all together in one place” (Acts 2:1) because it was the Festival of Weeks, originally a festival marking the first grain harvest of the year. For modern Christians, Pentecost means the fiftieth day, and we mark it as fifty days after Easter. For those described as being caught up in the Pentecost story in the beginning of Acts, it was a Sabbath day marking the end of “a week’s worth of weeks,” seven weeks of seven days, thus a day of rest after forty-nine days since Passover. For the Jews, Passover recalled hard times and the retelling of the story of their rescue as a people by God, and this Festival of Weeks, or *Shavu’ot* in Hebrew, symbolized the joy of harvest by leavening bread<sup>31</sup>. It also marked a celebration of the giving of God’s law, Torah, at Sinai. God’s Spirit came among them in the midst of the ordinary practices of their daily lives. In the center of it all, Peter calls them to repent and be baptized, and so “those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added” (Acts 2:1).

Following their baptism and movement into the body of the faithful, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). Professor Scott Schaaf asks the question, “Is the life of this

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<sup>31</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, General Editor, *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 826.

community to be taken as a model for Christian life today?”<sup>32</sup> Schauf goes on to say that if so, there are practices they model: “Teaching, fellowship, eating together, and prayer have been common Christian practices for ages. The middle two of these may be especially significant—fellowship (*koinonia*) and eating together, mundane as they seem, are not activities we just happen to do but are essential acts of Christian life.”<sup>33</sup> The earliest Christians are thus enacting practices essential to their new life together.

William H. Willimon, in his commentary on the Book of Acts, frames the importance of the story in this way: “The Book of Acts opens with the community waiting for something to happen, listening for a word. Presumably if God had done nothing, said nothing, there would be no community.”<sup>34</sup> What Willimon is offering is a community that came into being around practices, around prayer and discernment. He goes on to say, “Your church exists today in the same situation—as a result of the dialogue between a loquacious God who refuses to be silent and a community that tries to listen.”<sup>35</sup> Willimon asserts that the literature of Acts is in service to the community, and thus “Acts cares little for the trials and psychic makeup of individual personalities. . . . The community is at the center of Acts, with the God of the community being the chief actor in the drama.”<sup>36</sup> Listing the primary characteristics exhibited in the stories in the Book of Acts, Willimon says one of these characteristics is that like all of the rest of Scripture, Acts has

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<sup>32</sup> Scott Schauf. “Commentary on Acts 2:42-47.” *Working Preacher*, accessed August 23, 2017. [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2043](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2043).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts: Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

at its center the formation and equipping of disciples. What we see unfolding in Acts is the way Jesus calls people to a new way of being in the world, of not only living, but also dying. “The stories in Acts not only depict an author, God, not only render a new world, God’s world, but they also render a new way of living, discipleship in the church.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, they solidify a depiction of God’s people practicing their way into life together, becoming a community that practices faith together.

### **Theological Lenses**

#### Social Trinity

A first theological lens to consider is a missional one, a lens exploring the *social Trinity*, seeing God as both fixed and changing; God as adaptive and relational; and most of all, God as a sending, Trinitarian God. This lens addresses the congregation’s context as one that is set in tradition and history, but a context that is also in the midst of change. Downtown Presbyterian is a congregation that needs to adapt, and one that is meeting the opportunity to be relational in new ways.

God’s Spirit sends followers of Christ, and sends the church as the gathered community of God, to be God’s love, justice, and reconciliation in the world. The Spirit reconciles us to one another that we might be a witness to the world. Christ calls us to be ministers of reconciliation as his followers, the church, in the world. As Van Gelder claims, the Triune God is the primary force and action in the world, not the church.<sup>38</sup> The worshipping and sent community of God acts as the sign of God’s redemption and a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Alan Roxburgh, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 18.

foretaste of what that redemption looks like in the world, while also serving as an instrument to carry forward the message of the good news into every local neighborhood and the far reaches of God's creation.<sup>39</sup>

Jürgen Moltmann describes the Spirit of *missio Dei*, the missional God, as “circulating around the neighborhood.”<sup>40</sup> This is a God who is in motion, “a God who is social, inviting, integrating, unifying.”<sup>41</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna calls this activity and image of the Trinity as the *divine dance*, “indeed an apt image of persons in communion: not for an intradivine communion but for divine life as all creatures partake and literally exist in it. Not through its own merit but through God's election from all eternity, humanity has been made a partner in the divine dance.”<sup>42</sup> A good summary of this divine Triune life, the dance in communion, comes from Moltmann:

The grace of Christ, the love of God and the community of the Spirit work together in the liberation of human beings toward true life. Christ accepts us in grace; God loves without reserve; the Spirit gives us new vitality. The three persons are personally differentiated: Christ-God-Spirit. Each person works his or her own way: grace-love-community. But they work together in a unified movement that liberates and unites creatures who are separated from God. We live in the Trinity; our lives are Trinitarian lives.<sup>43</sup>

Here we see both change and constancy in God, a God who is both static and dynamic.

The persons are differentiated and work in their own way and meet us in their own ways,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>40</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” in *Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 120.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>42</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 274.

<sup>43</sup> Moltmann, “Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology,” 120.

but they are unified in a movement that sends God's people out as the church into a world in need.

For David J. Bosch, "Mission concerns the world also beyond the boundaries of the church. It is the *world* God loves and for the sake of which the Christian community is called to be salt and light. . .Mission means serving, healing, and reconciling a divided, wounded humanity."<sup>44</sup> The worshipping and sent community must go beyond the boundaries of the church to actively participate in the work of the Triune God who calls people forward. In Reppenhagen's and Guder's conclusion and tribute to Bosch at the end of his seminal work, and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *Transforming Mission*, they summarize his ecclesiology by saying, "The church can only exist as the church of Jesus Christ when it understands itself as a part of God's mission and lives out that understanding. . .Thus the church is not merely the outcome of mission but the medium of mission."<sup>45</sup> So the church is both the medium of mission, as Bosch would say, and the ecclesial activity of mediation, according to Miroslav Volf.<sup>46</sup>

Downtown's leaders have shared that they believe that Downtown's missional nature goes beyond an attitude of tolerance toward all people and does not fall prey to the feelings and prejudice of Western superiority of the Enlightenment. However, as Bosch says, a total transformation was needed and was beginning to take shape at the end of the Enlightenment period.<sup>47</sup> In that regard, Downtown's leaders are educated and trained,

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<sup>44</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, CA: Orbis Books, 2011), 505.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>46</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 163.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 352-353.

both professionally and for service to the church. They can identify a separation between the Enlightenment context and missionary enterprise, and the present cultural context and the congregation's own missionary enterprise. The congregation can continue to push in learning and witness, to listen for and seek out what transformation is needed now and what might be beginning to take shape, through the public work of the Holy Spirit, in its immediate milieu, neighborhood, and larger community.

In *God the Spirit*, Michael Welker stresses this public nature of the Spirit, noting, "the Spirit coming upon one is not something a person can voluntarily bring about."<sup>48</sup> God's Spirit forms and restores community in ways that cannot be initiated absent the power of the Spirit, and in ways that cannot be created without a willingness to be shaped as the Spirit will shape. The coming of the Spirit does not cause a private change in an individual or group of people, but rather a public change. Additionally, there is a change in identity, authorization, and empowerment.<sup>49</sup> This power creates space, creates relationships, and it creates an environment in which leadership can take place. As a context in change and disruption, the congregation of Downtown Presbyterian was pushed to see the power of the Holy Spirit in the public change all around, in creating, empowering, and authorizing. The Spirit of God rests on and abides with those on whom the Spirit chooses to descend, allowing that person, or group of people, to establish justice, mercy, and knowledge of God.<sup>50</sup> This public/private relationship between the coming of the Spirit onto a Spirit-bearer is an interesting tension. Patrick Keifert makes

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, 1st English-language ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 74.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-76.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.



the point that the Spirit is involved in God's preferred and promised future for the local church,<sup>51</sup> but that in order for public leaders to focus on this preferred and promised future, in their own lives and in the life of the local church, personal spiritual practices need to be maintained.<sup>52</sup>

A connective and relational God is at work in the neighborhood and in the lives of the people who work and live in Downtown Presbyterian's part of the city. God relates with creation, but God also brings about relational connections within creation and between the people of God. As Bosch describes it, "The historical gap of two millennia between our time and the time of Jesus, may turn out to be of less importance than the social gap that separates today's middle-class elite from the first Christians or, for that matter, from many marginalized people today."<sup>53</sup> For DPC, acknowledgement of this social gap will lead to a better self-understanding on the part of the congregation, and a willingness to pursue what effect a clarified self-understanding has on the congregation's interpretation of mission, and following the lead of a missional God.<sup>54</sup> Downtown understands God in its particular context as a "telling-presence-God," sending out the people of God to be a telling presence in the world. To them, God's telling presence is one of peace and justice, and it is around this that the congregation orients itself. Unfortunately, with this identity, the church is the agent with its telling presence in the city, and God is secondary, as the one who creates, shapes, and shares with creation the

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick R. Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era, a Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006), 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-73.

<sup>53</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

incarnate Good News to tell. The congregation and its leaders, up to this point, conceive of the social justice ministries of the church (mission) as “the building up of a vibrant community life, where real sharing, mutuality, justice, service and solidarity take place.”<sup>55</sup> What follows from this, however, is not an imagination of the people of God as being on the move, as “God’s people on a pilgrimage, God’s people chosen not for themselves but for God’s purposes, God’s people respectful of the Spirit’s workings outside their own boundaries but committed to sharing the full implications of God’s covenant with all humanity.”<sup>56</sup> In the midst of its strong identity, its good work in the city and globally, the people of Downtown have not been aware enough of the Spirit’s working even within their own boundaries, let alone outside of them, or just outside their immediate boundaries and in the church’s neighborhood.

Perhaps the congregation could benefit from a practice of reorienting its ecclesiology as that “from below,” to quote Nicolas Healy in Cheryl Peterson’s *Who is the Church?* As Peterson states, “an ecclesiology from below begins with the church’s agency and its concrete ecclesial practices.”<sup>57</sup> She goes on to say that, “For Healy, beginning with the church’s agency is thoroughly theological because the church’s activity is constituted by the activity of the Holy Spirit, which animates it.” As Healy sees the Holy Spirit as the source of agency, Peterson takes this one step further to see the Holy Spirit as also source of identity.<sup>58</sup> Downtown Presbyterian as a community actually

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, CA: Orbis, 2004), 298.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>57</sup> Cheryl M. Peterson, *Who is the Church? An Ecclesiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

has a strong connection to *missio Dei* and draws its own distinctive identity from its participation in God's mission in the world. What this work here reveals is that the church's connection to *missio Dei* is largely absent of the leading power of the Holy Spirit. It is *missio Dei* without *missio Spiritus*. As Darrell Guder describes the foundations for missional leadership, "The purpose of leadership is to form and equip a people who participate and announce the purpose and direction of God through Jesus Christ. Such leadership, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, works to create a people whose life is a witness to Jesus Christ."<sup>59</sup>

This research hoped to engage that sense of leadership within the congregation, as inspired and agitated by the leadership and agency of the Holy Spirit. Downtown Presbyterian's journey through Creative Time and the interventions of the research endeavor affected the people of DPC and their awareness of a missional God at work in and among the life of the congregation.

### Space

The second theological lens I developed was that of space and the awareness of holy and sacred spaces. This informed my research because space, lack thereof, deconstruction of old and construction of new, anticipation of additional, and movement out into different space, was so central to the congregation's experience of this building project. It invited people to imagine the needs and uses for new spaces, and to consider what is gained and what changes by going out into the community to be people of faith in spaces new to them, and spaces not typically used or interacted with for practicing faith.

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<sup>59</sup> Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 183-184.

The congregation had to examine the attachment to, and meaning of, existing spaces that were changing or taking on new shape or use. The meaning of *Open Doors Open Futures* (ODOF), as both a theological and practical concept, was something the congregation and staff had to wrestle with, especially as the doors opened post-construction and community groups and organizations interacted with the building, staff, and congregation in new ways. As a congregation in the heart of a busy downtown, with hundreds of thousands of visitors passing by each year from the nearby hotels and conference center, the church pre-ODOF had its doors locked during business hours, requiring a receptionist to grant access. The opening of the new building marked an end to that practice and now the doors of the church are wide open to the city and wider community. This everyday decision has affected the sense of ownership and sharing of space.

To bring together the missional and spatial lenses, I engaged the work of Nancy DeMott, Tim Shapiro, and Brent Bill in their book *Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Message*.<sup>60</sup> As these authors say, “all buildings speak, and they speak in many ways. Even if the people themselves are silent, whether in prayer or in doubt, the stones cannot be silent.”<sup>61</sup> As a congregation that identifies with, and is very much identified by, its building, understanding the developing missional aspect of building and space was important to this research. DeMott, Shapiro, and Bill assert that all parts of a church building are sacred, not just the obvious worship and prayer spaces. Parking lots, kitchens, and meeting rooms can communicate a theological perspective, and can be sacred space, just as much as a sanctuary or a chapel.

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<sup>60</sup> Nancy DeMott, Tim Shapiro, and Brent Bill, *Holy Places: Matching Sacred Space with Mission and Message* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute), 2007.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

As Welker speaks of the public nature of the Holy Spirit, Jürgen Habermas draws an important distinction around the public and private spheres, especially important as Downtown's building opening moved it more into the public sphere for the city and community, even as it continued to exist as a private and religious institution. Habermas argues that, "the usage of the words 'public' and 'public sphere' betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings. Their origins go back to various historical phases and, when applied synchronically to the conditions of a bourgeois society that is industrially advanced and constituted as a social welfare state, they fuse into a clouded amalgam."<sup>62</sup> Habermas, citing Paul J. Weithmann, notes Weithmann's description of churches and religious communities. He sees them as "actors in civil society who fulfill functional imperatives for the reproduction of American democracy. They provide arguments for public debates on crucial, morally-loaded issues and handle tasks of political socialization by informing their members and encouraging them to take part in the political process."<sup>63</sup> Habermas notes the interaction between religious bodies and the changing cultures and norms of secular society and institutions. "On this reading, religious movements process the radical changes in social structure and cultural dissynchronies, which under conditions of an accelerated or failing modernization the individual may experience as a sense of being uprooted."<sup>64</sup> Habermas is not discussing so much a physical space a church or religious body takes up in a place, on an entire city block of a busy downtown

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<sup>62</sup> Jürgen Habermas, translated by Thomas Burger, with assistance of Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>63</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (2006): 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

city, for example, but rather the spatial significance in which a church or religious institution resides in a secular and political society. Matt Sheedy, in commenting on Habermas's "Religion in the Public Sphere," notes: "Habermas's move thus places a shared burden on religious and secular persons alike and proposes a framework where religious voices can contribute to political decision making without becoming overtly politicized in the process."<sup>65</sup>

Martin Heidegger develops a philosophy and theology of space and place. He introduces the German verb *buaen*, meaning "to build" or "to construct," and that in traditional High German, this word as *buan*, took on the meaning "to dwell."<sup>66</sup> He goes on to say that this meaning in modern day has been lost on us, but that a "covert trace" of it exists in the German word *Nachbar*, meaning "neighbor." The *Nachbar* is the "near-dweller," or the one "who dwells nearby."<sup>67</sup> For Heidegger, "the old word *buan* not only tells us that *buaen*, to build, is really to dwell; it also gives us a clue as to how we have to think about the dwelling it signifies. When we speak of a dwelling we usually think of an activity that [a person] performs alongside many other activities,"<sup>68</sup> or one might say "alongside many other practices." Heidegger asserts to be a human on earth is to dwell, and that as *buan* and *buaen* have developed in meaning and usage over time, we can understand three things from the language:

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<sup>65</sup> Matt Sheedy, "Religion in the Public Sphere: The Limits of Habermas's Proposal and the Discourse of World Religions." *Illumine: Journal of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Society Graduate Students Association*, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/Illumine/article/view/2943>. Accessed January 4, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 348.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-349.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

1. “Building is really dwelling.
2. Dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on earth.
3. Building as dwelling unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings.”<sup>69</sup>

This concept of dwelling, of being “dwellers,” seems significant to pull in from Heidegger’s writing as it relates to the context of Downtown Presbyterian. One translation for “abide” in Greek is the word μένο, but also οἰκεῖ, which brings forth connotations of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the lives of believers, as in Romans 8:9, “But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Here οἰκεῖ can be translated as the Spirit of God “is making its home in you,” with οἶκος, οὐ, ὅ, being a house, a material building, a household, family, lineage, or nation.<sup>70</sup>

Heidegger continues by discussing space and boundaries. He first addresses space, saying, “A space is something that has been made room for, something that has been freed, namely,” and that this space is made within a boundary.<sup>71</sup> For Heidegger, the boundary is not something at which there is a stopping point, “but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*.”<sup>72</sup> This feels like an interesting way to play with the original text in the context of Heidegger and DPC, in that the Spirit of God is dwelling through material spaces, but

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>70</sup> Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 694-95.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 356.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 356.

also through generations. Through the generations there is an opening up, an essential unfolding of God's Spirit and the people of God.

What a powerful way for Downtown Presbyterian to think about the opening of the new building spaces, as the beginning of something essential unfolding. DPC moved into light-filled spaces, and beautiful new rooms for worship and music, learning and fellowship and play, but had to come to an understanding that they were not worshipping a building or witnessing to what a new and shiny structure meant for the congregation's status in the city or denomination. The building may witness to the concept of the church being agile on its feet and responsive, open, and inviting. It may witness to a God who is continually calling the community of God forward, out of the exilic spaces of our day, but the building cannot witness on its own—it is what the people do in it, how they dwell in it and move past boundaries, and who they welcome into it, that really matters.

Having named the biblical and theological lenses for this research, in the next chapter I will describe the methodology I used to conduct the research. I will first review and explain my research question. Then I will discuss in detail my process, research instruments, variables, and data analysis.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

With the basis of historical background, theoretical lenses, and biblical and theological lenses, I turn now to describe the research methodology employed. I will further explain my research question and topic in detail. I will also give explanation to choices made relating to methodology, instruments used, population selected, variables, and data analysis.

#### **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this research study was to engage the congregation and their experiences by exploring the answer to the question:

*How might action research interventions involving communal practices affect the missional identity of a congregation in the midst of disruption?*

I chose Action Research as my methodology to engage my research question because, as Creswell explains, a participatory worldview has an agenda for change and reform, such that the model “may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher’s life.”<sup>1</sup> I chose transformative, mixed methods, beginning with a baseline survey, concluding with an end line survey, and offering interventions in the middle of the research window, for this fit well with my context and question. Given my role on staff and the relational nature of the study, I

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<sup>1</sup> John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2009), 9.

could not separate myself out, for I was always an invested party. This model also allowed me to continue to “disrupt” the life of the congregation in thoughtful and intentional ways with my interventions, just as the congregation was settling into new life in its new building and spaces.

I would say my mixed methods approach was weighted more toward a quantitative focus, than a qualitative one.<sup>2</sup> I conducted a census and the population involved in the study were members of the congregation, and specifically those who are currently serving on one of the church’s boards, the Deacons, Elders, or Trustees, or those who have served on those boards in the past. There are about 100 currently-serving officers on the three boards of the church at any given time, and an additional 500 in the cohort of those who formerly served on a board. Thus, the population size was approximately 600 people. Individuals surveyed were between the ages of mid-twenties to mid-nineties. The population included those who identified as male or female, and individuals were given the option of selecting another designation for gender. All levels of employment, students, a range of household incomes, long-time members and newer members to the church were included. They were selected based on their level of leadership and involvement, either by currently serving or having recently served in an elected leadership capacity of the church, and not any other demographic information. The group surveyed was limited only to the leadership of the church, but offered demographically a sampling across the body of the congregation. Participants were invited via email to complete the baseline quantitative questionnaire electronically,

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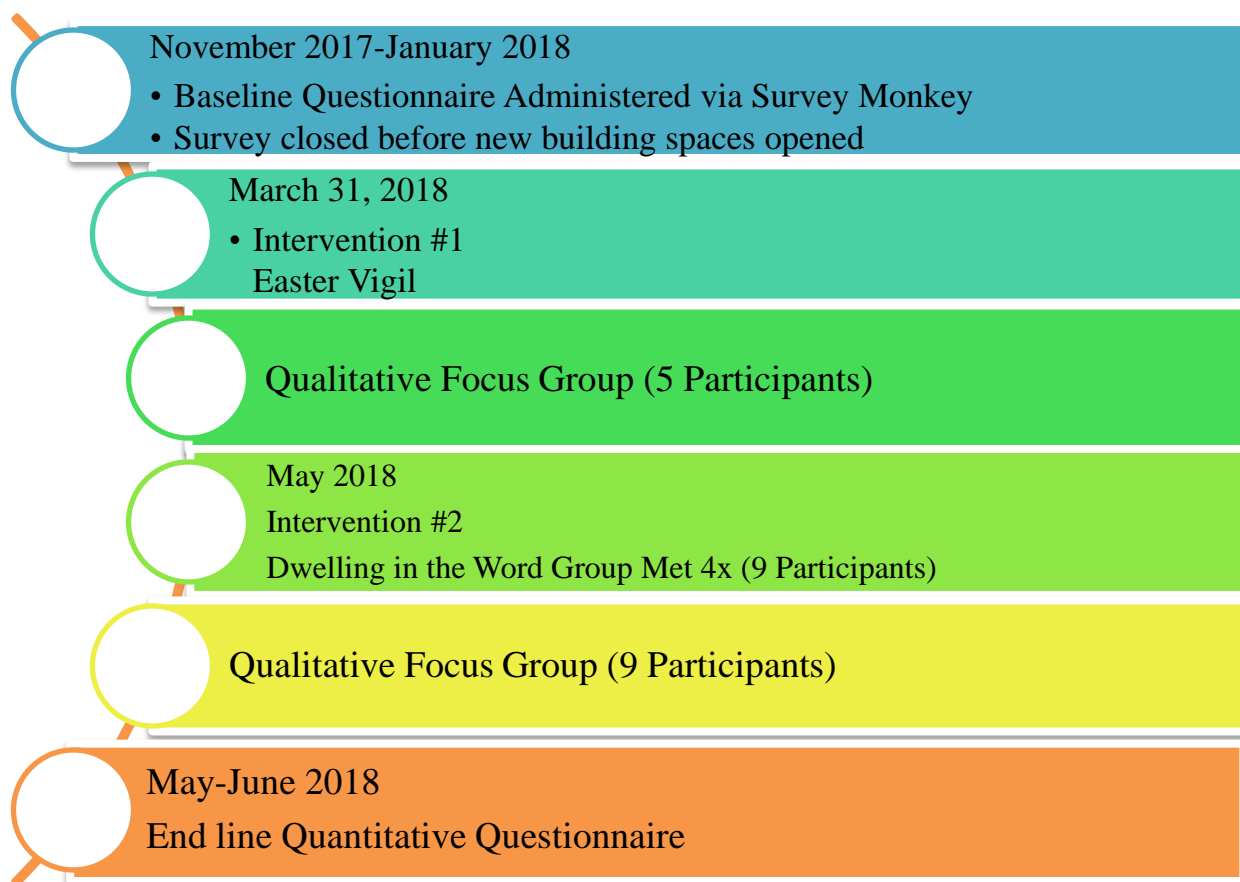
<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 224.

through Survey Monkey.<sup>3</sup> The quantitative end line questionnaire was administered in the same manner.

The first of the two interventions was an Easter Vigil, which the congregation in recent years had not practiced together. It took place four months after the baseline survey was administered, and was open to the entire congregation and wider community. The second intervention was Dwelling in the Word, a developing practice for the congregation. I selected a purposive sample for qualitative focus groups. I invited five individuals from those who participated in the Easter Vigil to meet once for a focus group. A group of nine individuals, invited by me through email, came together once a week for four weeks for Dwelling in the Word and I conducted a focus group with all nine after the last gathering. Dwelling in the Word took place after the Easter Vigil and five months after the baseline survey. All five Easter Vigil participants, and all nine Dwelling in the Word participants, were included in the larger group who were given the opportunity to respond to the baseline survey. I have reported in the following chapter the total number of respondents, the frequency by category, the percent by category, and the mean, where appropriate. The research process is described in the following figure:

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<sup>3</sup> The quantitative data for this survey was collected using Survey Monkey, Survey Monkey Inc, San Mateo, CA. Information available: [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com).



**Figure 1. Research Process**

I analyzed the data using IBM SPSS software.<sup>4</sup> I field tested my instruments with colleagues across the metro area, not involved at Downtown Presbyterian, and several colleagues out of state who have completed doctoral work and are familiar with social science research. Informed consent was obtained from those who willingly participated in the qualitative focus group interviews and implied consent was obtained from those who participated in the quantitative survey, prior to their participation.

I recorded and transcribed the qualitative interviews, with the assistance of a professional transcriber, and coded these data according to the method developed by

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<sup>4</sup> The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences currently produced by IBM, <https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics>

Kathy Charmaz, in order to define what was happening in the data and to grapple with its meaning.<sup>5</sup> I used *in vivo* codes initially after moving through the data word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident. I grouped the *in vivo* codes into focused codes for themes and topics, to “sift, sort, synthesize and analyze large amounts of data” from my initial coding to relate categories to subcategories and to, as Charmaz describes, bring data back to a coherent whole.<sup>6</sup> I then grouped the focused codes into axial codes, and finally integrated the axial codes into theoretical codes in order to describe the relationship between the axial codes. This served, as Charmaz describes, to aid in making my analysis both more coherent and comprehensible and to synthesize connections between the Easter Vigil and Dwelling in the Word axial codes.<sup>7</sup>

Each quantitative questionnaire respondent had a unique designation, based on Survey Monkey structure.<sup>8</sup> Paired t-tests were conducted on data from those who participated in both the baseline and end line surveys, in order to measure before and after interventions, and the effect of the interventions. Quantitative and qualitative instruments may be found in appendices A-C. Consent forms may be found in appendices F-G.

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<sup>5</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Each questionnaire was sent via email invitation, and through Survey Monkey, each recipient received a unique survey link that tied their survey response to their email address. More information is available at [https://help.surveymonkey.com/articles/en\\_US/kb/How-can-I-track-the-names-and-emails-of-respondents?bc=Individual\\_Responses](https://help.surveymonkey.com/articles/en_US/kb/How-can-I-track-the-names-and-emails-of-respondents?bc=Individual_Responses)

## Variables

The independent variables for the interventions with Action Research (AR) were as follows: the disruption to the physical space and thus the disruption to the life of the church as experienced by members during construction; and the communal practices engaged in by the congregation. I explored how the congregation adjusted in the midst of disorder and change. Did the congregation try to find balance by reverting to old ways and traditions? What practices helped the congregation grow more missionally now and into the future?

The dependent variable was the missional identity of the congregation. At a baseline measurement, how well did the congregation articulate an understanding of the work and agitation of the Spirit during this time set apart? Did they speak of a God who is active, who sends, reshapes and reimagines, and who participates in the lives of the faithful? This research hoped to examine to what extent change fatigue was contending with the movement of the Spirit through the season of chaos and disrupted spaces. How did action research help a community understand its own immunity to change,<sup>9</sup> in order to name and maintain missional momentum?

At an end line measurement, after the congregation moved into new spaces post-construction, and began to establish new patterns and practices together, I asked how well the congregation connected with and shared in the work of a missional God to be a missional church because of practicing through chaos, disruption, and change. I do think the two independent variables were related to one another in that communal practices changed due to the challenge and opportunity of Creative Time, and continued to change

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change*.

as the congregation moved into new spaces. It was more difficult to practice together as a community. Creative Time reset the rhythms of practicing together and possibly fueled a temptation to hold fast to old ways and traditions, instead of holding fast to that which is and can be new. The hope for this research at the outset was that it might reveal if there was a relationship between the congregation's missional identity, and even its ability to name it as such, and the disruption and communal practices they have experienced.

Several intervening variables needed to be taken into account. One was the overall timing of the construction. Delays or unanticipated disruptions occur, and did this affect people's perceptions and experiences of the completion of construction and satisfaction with movement into new spaces? A second intervening variable was whether or not long-anticipated parking worked as efficiently or effectively as planned for. It was also possible that there were other interferences during the congregation's return to the building. Essentially, were people dissatisfied in the end with the design or the result of the project for the cost? Any of these could continue to fatigue their spirits and diminish the sense of the Spirit's momentum. A final intervening variable considered was that there were intentional or unintentional communal practices the congregation engaged in as a result of Creative Time that were not widely known to the researcher, and thus are not accounted for.

### **Biblical and Theological Rationale**

In recognizing God's continual interactions with, and interventions into, God's created world, several passages speak to a relational and intervening God. Luke 10 is a strong example of this aspect of the Triune and sending God. Jesus appointed seventy to go out into the places he intended to go, without any comforts or resources, to offer peace

upon each house. He instructed them to receive the welcome offered them, to heal the sick, and to say to all, “The Kingdom of God has come near” (Luke 10:4-10). The people they met were changed by this encounter with the disciples, as were the disciples themselves. In fact, Luke tells that “The seventy returned with joy” (Luke 10:17).

In a second example, the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel and he hears the promise of these future actions and interventions from God:

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. <sup>28</sup>Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:24-28).

In these five verses, God makes eleven promises and predictions to the house of Israel that God will gather and bring, heal and cleanse, remove and put within them, and most of all, they will hear the declaration that God will be their God. This passage offers the central claim of the Old Testament that God is a relational God, who will not turn away from bringing about a new thing. This is a God who is invested, who is intentional and observational, and this is a God who acts on behalf of the best interests of the people of God.

Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 is another example of a relating and intervening God. He interrupts her at a time and place where he should not be and tells her all about herself, her past and future. Through this interaction, she is changed and she believes, and thus she goes on to intervene in the lives of others. She goes back to the city and tells people about what she has seen and heard. “Many Samaritans from that city believed in [Jesus] because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told



me everything I have ever done” (John 4:40). A woman who has had multiple husbands, who must draw her water alone at Jacob’s well in the heat of the day, meets the Messiah and her life is changed.

Though there are many others, one final example to offer is that of the ministry of reconciliation God calls us to through Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians. God intervened with the world in the incarnate love of God through Jesus and God reconciled God’s self to all through the death and resurrection of Christ. God has given the people of God the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). We are made right in our relationship with God through Christ and “so we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). We are called to intervene in the relationships we share with others, to resolve and make new, just as God did in Jesus Christ.

This research design sought to employ transformative, mixed methods in AR methodology to enhance the ability of the researcher to listen to the disruptions within the community, and to intervene in the midst of change. The ethical considerations for this research followed Institutional Review Board compliance. There were no anticipated risks for the participants, nor were any vulnerable or special populations, or classes of subjects, involved. Subjects are not identified by name and the data will be stored in a locked cabinet for three years in my office, and in a password protected electronic file on my computer. I will be the only person to have access to the data, along with my advisors and a transcriber. This person signed a confidentiality form. The data will be destroyed on May 31, 2022, three years following the date of graduation. Survey instruments may be found in the appendices, along with the informed and implied consent forms, and the confidentiality form.

In this chapter I have offered the methodological framework for the research process and exploration of the research questions. In the next chapter I will turn toward analysis of the results of this social science research. I will first report findings from the questionnaire responses for the quantitative data, and then present findings from focus-group coding for the qualitative data. This chapter will allow for an integration of both the qualitative and quantitative data, which will then lead to conclusions that can be suggested because of this research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

In this chapter I will describe the results of the research that came out of the methodology described in the previous chapter. The purpose of my research was to understand, through Action Research, how the lay leaders of Downtown Presbyterian Church experienced the chaos, change, and disruption of an extended period of building construction, and if that season affected their missional identity and/or their connection to spiritual practices. Did they express more connection to one another or their own faith because of this journey through a time of construction and movement? Did this movement out of the church building and into the community clarify their identification with a missional God? To restate my research question:

*How might action research interventions involving communal practices affect the missional identity of a congregation in the midst of disruption?*

#### **Review of Research Process**

I surveyed trained and ordained lay leaders in the congregation, over the age of eighteen, who were either currently serving or had served on one of the church's three leadership bodies: the Session, the Board of Deacons, and the Board of Trustees. I asked these 600 individuals to complete a baseline survey between November of 2017 and January of 2018, offered what I intended to be two independent variable, interventions in the winter and spring of 2018, and then asked them to complete an end line survey in May and June of 2018. Participants were able to access the surveys through the online

tool Survey Monkey, with 170 people participating in the baseline survey, and 102 people in the end line survey. The first of the two intended independent variables was an Easter Vigil, open to the whole community, held on March 31, 2018. The second was a Dwelling in the Word group, which met four times during the month of May. The participants in the focus group following each intended intervention were selected from among the original group of 600 trained and ordained leaders. The opening of the new building spaces occurred after the baseline survey was administered and before the two interventions and the end line survey.

From analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative research results, it seems that the two intentional and anticipated interventions of the Easter Vigil and Dwelling in the Word did not have much impact for participants. The movement back into the new spaces, which happened in January 2018 and before both of those variables took place, looks as if it was actually the more influential independent variable. The process of returning to a newly expanded Downtown Presbyterian Church appeared to have more of an effect on practices and a missional perspective and language for participants than did the proposed in. The Easter Vigil and Dwelling in the Word focus groups gave people the space and opportunity to reflect on Creative Time, their spiritual practices and experiences of community and a missional God, but in and of themselves, they were not disruptions that catalyzed much change or movement.

### **Quantitative Results**

Quantitative research was one appropriate method for exploring my research question, as it allowed me to establish a baseline measurement within the congregation and to compare that information to an end line measurement several months later.

Caution must be used so as not to extrapolate these results to the congregation as a whole, as the sample surveyed represents only those in lay leadership who participated by responding to questions. They are a subset of the whole congregation, but are not representative of all groups and individuals within the church. You can only make conclusions about this group, because of methods of nonprobability, as Peter Nardi warns.<sup>1</sup> The rate of participation among those who were included in the sample, was 170 of 600 (28.3%) responding to the baseline survey, and 102 of 600 (17.0%) responding to the end line survey. The number responding to both the baseline and end line surveys was forty-nine of the 102 end line respondents (48.0%), or 8.2% of the total population of the census (forty-nine of 600 total lay leaders surveyed).

#### Profile of Quantitative Survey Participants

Descriptive statistics can help us to understand the characteristics of this study's quantitative sample. Though the total number of participants varied between the baseline and end line surveys, the percentage frequency of male and female participants remained nearly the same. These results are shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Gender Frequency in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL) Surveys [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]<sup>2</sup>**

	BL Frequency	Percent	EL Frequency	Percent
Female	112	66.3	69	69.0
Male	57	33.7	31	31.0
Total	169	100.0	100	100.0

<sup>1</sup> Peter Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 115-24.

<sup>2</sup> N= total number of respondents.

In comparing the frequency of length of membership for baseline respondents, there was a higher prevalence of respondents (34.9%) from those who have been members of Downtown Presbyterian for more than 25 years, than from any other length of membership. The higher frequency of response was even more marked for respondents of the end line survey for those who have been members for over 25 years (50.0%). See table 2. Survey questions did not examine why those with longer length of membership were more likely to participate in the survey, but it could be that those with a longer tenure felt more connection to the process, given their history with the congregation. It could also be as simple as availability. Those who have been members longer are more likely to be older, and thus retired, and may have had more time to engage in the questionnaire.

**Table 2. Length of Membership Frequency in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL)**

**Surveys [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]**

	BL Frequency	Percent	EL Frequency	Percent
Less than 2 years	12	7.1	1	1.0
2-5 years	23	13.7	9	9.0
6-10 years	22	13.0	6	6.0
11-15 years	19	11.2	10	10.0
16-20 years	19	11.2	14	14.0
21-25 years	15	8.9	10	10.0
Over 25 years	59	34.9	50	50.0
Total	169	100.0	100	100.0

**Table 3. Frequency of Leadership Involvement in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL)**Surveys<sup>3</sup> [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]

	BL Frequency	Percent	EL Frequency	Percent
Currently Serving Elder	22	2.9	10	10.1
Currently Serving Deacon	21	12.4	6	6.1
Currently Serving Trustee	9	5.3	4	4.0
Member of Community of Leaders	95	55.9	75	75.8
Sunday School Teacher	9	5.3	6	6.1
Committee/Council Member	58	34.1	36	36.4
Choir Member/Musician	18	10.6	11	11.1
Retired Clergy	2	1.2	1	1.0
Not currently serving in a leadership role	19	11.2	11	11.1
Other, please specify <sup>4</sup>	31	18.2	16	16.2

The mean age for respondents of both the baseline and end line surveys was 67 years, (baseline 67.3 years and end line 66.8 years). The frequency of responses based on current leadership for baseline and end line surveys is shown above in table 3.

Respondents could only be serving currently on one of the three leadership boards. The Community of Leaders is a group that gathers several times a year and is made up of those who have served as an Elder, Deacon, or Trustee in the past, either at Downtown Presbyterian, or in another PC (USA) congregation. There was high participation in the survey from this group (55.9% in the baseline and 75.8% in the end line), as well as those who serve on committees or councils (34.1% in the baseline and 36.4% in the end line).

In establishing a baseline of what practices were important in an individual's life of faith, 73.9% of the baseline respondents said Observing the Sabbath was important,

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were invited to check as many as applied.

<sup>4</sup> I coded respondents' open-ended answers into the following categories: justice ministries, hospitality, education, community involvement, and worship.

70.6% responded that Practicing Hospitality was important, followed by 73.2% Prayer, 57.5% Participating in a Small Group, 36.3% Discernment, 37.9% Bible Study, and 35.3% Music-Related Practices. Participants were invited to choose as many practices as they felt applied to them and their experience. In an end line measurement, when asked if they had participated in these practices in the last six months, 83.7% said they had practiced Observing the Sabbath, 82.7% Practicing Hospitality, 79.6% Prayer, 77.6% Participating in a Small Group, 23.5% Discernment, 39.8% Bible Study, and 21.4% for Music-Related Practices. With the exception of Discernment and Music-Related Practices, a higher percentage for each category was displayed at the end line survey for participating in each practice than was expressed as important to an individual's life of faith at a baseline measurement. Participants were invited in the end line survey to check as many as applied. See table 4 for comparison of these percentages.

**Table 4. Frequency of Important Practices in Baseline (BL) and Participation in Last Six Months in End Line (EL) Surveys<sup>5</sup> [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]**

	BL Frequency	Percent	EL Frequency	Percent
Observing the Sabbath	113	73.9	82	83.7
Practicing Hospitality	108	70.6	81	82.7
Prayer	112	73.2	78	79.6
Participating in a Small Group	88	57.5	76	77.6
Discernment	56	36.3	23	23.5
Bible Study	58	37.9	40	39.8
Music-Related Practices	54	35.3	21	21.4

<sup>5</sup> Respondents were invited to check as many as applied.



Participants were given the opportunity to write in their own practices not provided for in the survey questions, and I was able to code those responses, as they fell together into similar categories and themes. Those other practices, as identified by respondents, were Contemplative Practices, Being in Nature, Connecting with Others, Educational Ministries, Worship, Community Involvement, and Justice-Oriented Ministries. Of course these coded categories from narrative data are highly subjective, and one could argue that worship can be and is oriented toward justice, or that through educational ministries, people connect with one another. I felt these were the best categories and divisions to make based on distinctions I saw in people's self-generated responses. As table 5 shows, of the seven categories, six showed up in both baseline and end line responses, and with the exception of the decrease in an expression of Being in Nature, Community Involvement, and Contemplative Practices from baseline to end line, the other categories that were expressed increased from one measurement to the next. There was a high number who did not write in additional categories for this question: 113 for the baseline and eighty-five for the end line. Percentages below are based on the number of individuals who wrote in additional categories, rather than the total number who responded to the question as a whole. It may be the case that those who wrote in their response to this question in the baseline did not feel the need to or did not attend to this question in the end line survey, or perhaps they were among those who did not participate in the end line survey.

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**Table 5. Frequency of Additional Categories in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL)**Surveys<sup>6</sup> [BL<sub>N=57</sub>, EL<sub>N=17</sub>]

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	BL Frequency	Percent	EL Frequency	Percent
Contemplative Practices	12	21.0	2	11.8
Being in Nature	2	3.5	0	0.0
Connecting with Others	6	10.5	4	23.5
Educational Ministries	3	5.3	4	23.5
Worship	2	3.5	1	5.9
Community Involvement	21	36.8	1	5.9
Justice-Oriented Ministries	11	21.1	5	29.4

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The baseline survey asked the question, “How frequently do you engage in the following practices?” referring to Observing the Sabbath, Practicing Hospitality, Participating in a Small Group, Prayer, Discernment, Bible Study, and Music-Related Practices.

Respondents were given the answer choices on a Likert scale of 1-4, with Often (4), Occasionally (3), Seldom (2), or Never (1). The corresponding end line question was, “How frequently do you engage in these practices?” and was measured on the same Likert scale. Comparing the frequencies of responses allows for the opportunity to see changes in participation in these practices from the period during Creative Time to the period of time after the end of construction. Table 6 shows these results.

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<sup>6</sup> The baseline question was, “What practices are important in your life of faith? Please check all that apply and offer others which help shape your life of faith as an individual in community.” The end line question was, “I have participated in the following Christian practices through Downtown in the last 6 months and offer others which have helped to shape your life of faith as an individual in community.”

**Table 6. Respondents' Frequency of Participation in Christian Practices in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL) Surveys [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]**

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	BL Frequency	Percent	Mean	EL Frequency	Percent	Mean
<i>Observing the Sabbath</i>			3.7			3.7
Never	7	4.6		3	3.1	
Seldom	3	2.0		6	6.2	
Occasionally	24	15.7		9	9.3	
Often	119	77.8		78	80.4	
<i>Practicing Hospitality</i>			3.4			3.4
Never	2	1.3		2	2.1	
Seldom	15	9.8		11	11.3	
Occasionally	47	30.1		31	32.0	
Often	83	54.2		53	55.0	
<i>Participating in a Small Group</i>			3.0			3.0
Never	9	5.6		4	4.1	
Seldom	35	22.9		17	17.5	
Occasionally	46	30.0		46	47.4	
Often	55	35.9		28	28.9	
<i>Discernment</i>			2.8			2.5
Never	17	11.1		17	17.5	
Seldom	31	20.3		18	18.6	
Occasionally	48	31.4		23	23.7	
Often	35	22.9		13	13.4	
<i>Bible Study</i>			2.6			2.4
Never	24	15.7		18	18.6	
Seldom	47	30.7		29	30.0	
Occasionally	34	21.7		26	26.8	
Often	35	22.9		12	12.4	

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**Table 6. Respondents' Frequency of Participation in Christian Practices in Baseline (BL) and End Line (EL) Surveys [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>] (continued)**

	<u>BL Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>EL Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<i>Music-Related Practices</i>			2.5			2.0
Never	30	19.6		3	34.0	
Seldom	36	23.5		16	16.5	
Occasionally	34	21.7		16	16.5	
Often	32	20.1		10	10.3	

These results show that respondents identified their participation from a baseline to an end line measurement as holding steady or decreasing for most practices, when looking at “Occasionally” or “Often.” Participating in a Small Group increased slightly from baseline to end line, when adding together the percentages of those who marked Occasionally or Often (65.9% in the baseline to 76.3% in the end line). Several practices showed increases in the response of “Never” from the baseline to the end line, primarily Practicing Hospitality, Discernment, Bible Study, and Music-Related Practices.

Paired t-tests were conducted for individuals who answered both the baseline and end line surveys. These tests were performed in order to measure the possible effect of intended interventions of Dwelling in the Word and the Easter Vigil, but in light of focus group data may actually have measured the possible effect of moving into new spaces. Statistical significance was found in several instances of paired t-tests. Participants were asked in the baseline survey, “I have encountered the Holy Spirit in new ways in the last 18 months,” meaning during Creative Time. They were asked at an end line measurement, “I have encountered the Holy Spirit in new ways because of our new

spaces.” Both were measured on the same Likert scale of 1-6 with Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5), and I Don’t Know (6). In analyzing the results, responses of “I Don’t Know,” were counted as missing and were not factored into the analysis of the means. A paired t-test showed statistical significance when I compared the means of responses to these two Likert-scale questions, ( $t_{(44)} = 2.3$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ), see table 7.

**Table 7. Paired t-Test Results for Encountering the Holy Spirit During Creative Time Versus in New Spaces<sup>7</sup>**

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Valid Responses for:

$\bar{x}_b$	$\bar{x}_e$	df	t-value	p
(N <sub>b</sub> )	(N <sub>e</sub> )			
3.6	3.2	44	2.3	0.025
(45)	(45)			

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With the higher mean represented in the baseline survey, these results suggest a greater sense of encountering the Holy Spirit during Creative Time than in the opening of the new building spaces. A similar result was shown through paired t-test results with questions seeking to find out if Creative Time or the opening of new building spaces had greater impact on Participation in a Small Group. There was statistical significance to

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<sup>7</sup> Interpretive Key for t-Test Results:

N is the total number of responses.

$\bar{x}$  is the mean.

df is the degrees of freedom

*b* and *e* subscripts: baseline and end line data, respectively.

p is the probability ( $T \leq t$ ) one-tail.

show that Creative Time had a greater effect on Participation in a Small Group than did moving into new spaces ( $t_{(39)} = 2.9$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ), see table 8. It is important to remember that the t-test results only reflect the expressed experiences of forty-nine people who completed both surveys, or 8.2% of the total population of the census surveyed.

While the data do show a statistical significance in the sense of a decrease in encountering the Holy Spirit from Creative Time to the opening of new spaces, with a mean of 3.6 at a baseline measurement and 3.2 at an end line measurement, these mean values indicate most people were neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This may be suggesting a preference toward Creative Time, which will be explored more fully in the coding data from the qualitative aspects of this research.

**Table 8. Paired t-Test Results for Participating in a Small Group**

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Valid Responses for:

$\bar{x}_b$	$\bar{x}_e$	df	t-value	p
(N <sub>b</sub> )	(N <sub>e</sub> )			
2.3	1.8	39	2.9	0.006
(40)	(40)			

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When presented with statements about their engagement during Creative Time, respondents shared reflections on a Likert scale of 1-6, with Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neither Agree nor Disagree (3), Agree (4), Strongly Agree (5), and Not Applicable (6). Here 6 as a response was counted as missing and not factored into the analysis of the means. Responses suggest active participation in Creative Time opportunities and a response to the variables around Creative Time. These Creative Time

variables developed during the course of understanding the research, and were not known initially to determine as separate variables at the outset. This will also be further explored below in a discussion of the qualitative data and the two interventions.

In response to the statement, “I have found it difficult to participate in the life of the church in the last 18 months,” 28.0% Strongly Disagreed, and 24.2% Disagreed. Only 5.1% Strongly Agreed with this statement. When presented with, “God’s Spirit has been consistently active in the life of this congregation,” 49.7% Agreed, and 37.7% Strongly Agreed. When looking specifically at “God is at work in the midst of the construction and disruption in our congregation,” 47.2% Agreed, and 36.5% Strongly Agreed. Several missional statements were offered, the first being, “God is partnering with our congregation to serve God’s people,” and 47.8% Agreed, and 28.5% Strongly Agreed with this idea. A second missional statement was, “God is sending the church out in new ways to participate in God’s work in the world,” and 43.7% Agreed, and 33.5% Strongly Agreed. They felt overwhelmingly at a baseline measurement that “God is present in our midst,” 39.6% Agreed and 54.1% Strongly Agreed. The frequencies, percentages, and means for these statements are presented in table 9 below.

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**Table 9. Respondents' Frequency of Baseline Responses to Engagement in Creative Time [BL<sub>N=170</sub>]**

	BL Frequency	Percent	Mean
<i>Difficult to participate</i>			2.6
Strongly Disagree	44	28.0	
Disagree	38	24.2	
Neither Disagree/Agree	32	20.4	
Agree	30	19.1	
Strongly Agree	8	5.1	
N/A	5	3.2	
<i>Spirit consistently active</i>			4.3
Strongly Disagree	2	1.2	
Disagree	5	3.1	
Neither Disagree/Agree	7	4.4	
Agree	79	49.7	
Strongly Agree	60	37.7	
N/A	6	3.9	
<i>God is at work in the disruption</i>			4.3
Strongly Disagree	2	1.3	
Disagree	1	0.5	
Neither Disagree/Agree	16	10.1	
Agree	75	47.2	
Strongly Agree	58	36.5	
N/A	7	4.4	
<i>God is partnering</i>			4.2
Strongly Disagree	1	0.5	
Disagree	4	2.5	
Neither Disagree/Agree	21	13.2	
Agree	76	47.8	
Strongly Agree	45	28.5	
N/A	12	7.5	
<i>God is sending</i>			4.3
Strongly Disagree	1	0.7	
Disagree	4	2.5	
Neither Disagree/Agree	19	12.0	
Agree	69	43.7	
Strongly Agree	53	33.5	
N/A	12	7.6	



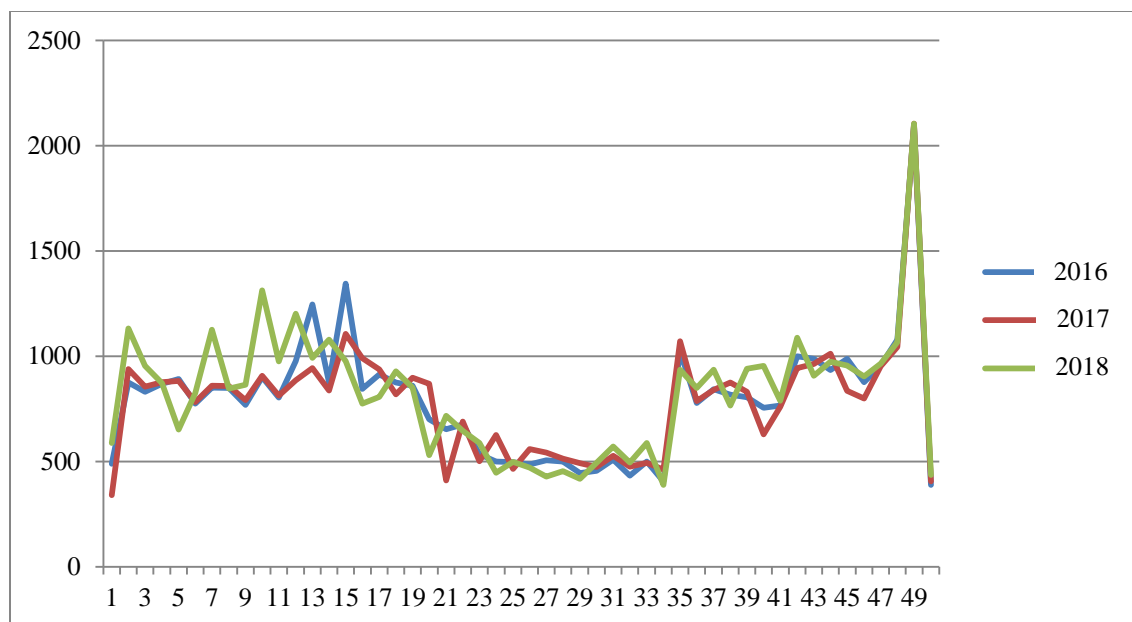
**Table 9. Respondents' Frequency of Baseline Responses to Engagement in Creative Time [BL<sub>N=170</sub>] (continued)**

	BL Frequency	Percent	Mean
<i>God is present</i> <sup>8</sup>			2.6
Neither Disagree/Agree	4	2.5	
Agree	63	39.6	
Strongly Agree	86	54.1	
N/A	6	3.8	

These results suggest that at a baseline measurement, eighteen months into Creative Time and construction, respondents were not finding it difficult to participate in the life of the congregation. They agreed that the Spirit was active in the life of the congregation, and they felt that God was at work in the disruption of construction. They also named that God was partnering, present, and sending the church out into the world to participate in new ways during Creative Time.

Attendance data is another way to look at participation levels. Figure 2 below shows the total worship attendance data for each week for the years 2016-2018, for the congregation and community as a whole, and not just for those who participated in this research. The blue line represents 2016, when construction began in April. The red line represents 2017, when the congregation was fully in Creative Time for the entire year, and the green line represents 2018, when the congregation moved into new spaces the third Sunday of the year. Graphing the attendance data shows that attendance trends followed the same peaks and dips over the three years, without any marked decrease during the 22 months of Creative Time.

<sup>8</sup> This statement was measured on a Likert scale of 1-4 (1= Neither Disagree nor Agree; 2= Agree; 3= Strongly Agree; and 4= N/A. N/A was coded as zero and was not calculated as part of the mean).



**Figure 2. Weekly Attendance Data for 2016-2018**

Membership data remained steady through these years at 3,100, representing both new members added into the rolls of the church, and accounting for member deaths and transfers. The average number of new members joining the church each of the three years remained level.

In comparison to table 9 addressing frequency of engagement in Creative Time, statements were presented to respondents to reflect on Creative Time at an end line measurement on the same Likert scale of 1-6, with the same response of 6= Not Applicable. They were asked to Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree on statements such as, “It is a relief to have the construction behind us,” “The season of construction and disruption was an important time of growth and adaptation for the congregation,” “I identify with the church in new ways because of our new spaces,” “Creative Time helped me grow in my faith,” and “We are a stronger community of faith because of Creative Time.” They also reflected on the same statements as in the baseline measurement of

“God’s Spirit is consistently active in the life of this congregation,” “God is at work in the movement into new spaces,” “God is partnering with our congregation to serve God’s people,” and “God is sending the church out in new ways to participate in God’s work in the world.” Frequency, percentage, and means for these statements are presented below in table 10.

**Table 10. Respondents’ Frequency of End Line Responses to Engagement in Creative Time [EL<sub>N=102</sub>]**

	<u>EL Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<i>It is a relief to have construction behind</i>			4.5
Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	
Disagree	3	3.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	2	2.0	
Agree	37	37.0	
Strongly Agree	56	56.0	
<i>The season of construction was important</i>			3.7
Strongly Disagree	3	3.0	
Disagree	8	8.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	29	29.0	
Agree	39	39.0	
Strongly Agree	21	21.0	
<i>I identify with the church in new ways because of new spaces</i>			3.5
Strongly Disagree	5	5.1	
Disagree	14	14.1	
Neither Disagree/Agree	27	27.3	
Agree	34	34.3	
Strongly Agree	19	19.2	
<i>Creative Time helped me grow in my faith</i>			3.0
Strongly Disagree	6	6.1	
Disagree	15	15.1	
Neither Disagree/Agree	52	52.5	
Agree	21	21.2	
Strongly Agree	5	5.1	

**Table 10. Respondents' Frequency of End Line Responses to Engagement in Creative Time [EL<sub>N=102</sub>] (continued)**

	<u>EL Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<i>We are a stronger community of faith because of Creative Time</i>			3.6
Strongly Disagree	2	2.0	
Disagree	9	9.1	
Neither Disagree/Agree	33	33.3	
Agree	29	29.3	
Strongly Agree	25	25.3	
<i>Spirit consistently active</i>			4.2
Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	
Disagree	0	0.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	7	7.1	
Agree	51	51.5	
Strongly Agree	38	38.4	
I Don't Know	2	2.0	
<i>God is at work in the movement into new spaces</i>			4.2
Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	
Disagree	3	3.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	11	11.1	
Agree	50	50.5	
Strongly Agree	30	30.3	
I Don't Know	4	4.0	
<i>God is partnering</i>			4.3
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0	
Disagree	0	0.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	14	14.3	
Agree	52	53.1	
Strongly Agree	25	28.6	
I Don't Know	7	7.1	

**Table 10. Respondents' Frequency of End Line Responses to Engagement in Creative Time [EL<sub>N=102</sub>] (continued)**

	<u>EL Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<i>God is sending</i>			4.2
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0	
Disagree	1	1.0	
Neither Disagree/Agree	13	13.3	
Agree	43	43.9	
Strongly Agree	37	37.8	
I Don't Know	4	4.0	

The mean values for these end line responses were lower when measuring the importance and impact of Creative Time once that period of time had ended, compared to an assessment of Creative Time while participants were in the midst of it. People expressed relief that Creative Time was complete and there was a return to “normal,” but they could also express the value of construction and Creative Time, and that Downtown Presbyterian became a stronger community of faith because of it. There was a lower mean (3.0) when asked about the importance of Creative Time on the growth of an individual's faith, as compared to that of the faith of the community as a whole (3.6). It may be that people had a difficult time knowing how to respond to that specific question, being unsure how to identify what was meant by “growing in faith.” More than half, 52.5%, answered that they neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

Evaluating means from similar missional statements from the baseline to end line measurement yields a surprising result that shows very little change from the first measurement to the second. These statements were about the activity of God's Spirit in the life of the congregation, God at work during construction and disruption, God's partnership with the congregation, and God's sending of the church in new ways to

participate in God’s work in the world. Tables 9 and 10 show the respective frequency, percentage, and means for these statements. Table 11 below summarizes the baseline and end line means for an easier comparison.

**Table 11. Comparison of Means from Baseline to End line Responses to Missionally-Focused Statements [BL<sub>N=170</sub>, EL<sub>N=102</sub>]**

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	<u>BL Mean</u>	<u>ELMean</u>
<i>Spirit consistently active</i>	4.3	4.2
<i>God is at work in the disruption</i>	4.3	
<i>God is at work in the midst of movement into new spaces</i>		4.2
<i>God is partnering</i>	4.2	4.3
<i>God is sending the church out in new way</i>	4.3	4.2

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While these means are positive because they suggest strong agreement with these missionally-focused statements, the results do seem to indicate that movement into new spaces and the interventions of the Easter Vigil and Dwelling in the Word did not affect a sense of God’s missional Spirit in the world. The Spirit seems to be consistently active, but could not be identified as more so at an end line measurement, over what was named at a baseline assessment. Exploring quantitative data is but one means of investigating the experience of members of the congregation during Creative Time, through interventions, and after opening new spaces. Qualitative data offer further insights, and it is to these results we will now turn our attention.

## Qualitative Results

The survey results above allowed for insights into people's attitudes, perspectives, and practices at the beginning and end of the research window, before and after interventions, through baseline and end line quantitative measurements. Qualitative measurements allow for insights into people's experiences and reflections upon two intended independent variables. These two variables were introduced during the research framework in order to offer new communal spiritual practices to the community, and each was followed by a focus group. The first new practice offered was an Easter Vigil, which took place two months after the new building opened. The second was a Dwelling in the Word small group, which met over the course of four weeks. The focus groups allowed me to explore further the questions and themes in the baseline survey.

### Profile of Focus Group Participants

Everyone who participated in Dwelling in the Word had the opportunity to take the baseline survey; many who participated in the Easter Vigil did, but not all. Nine people participated in Dwelling in the Word and forty-seven people participated in the Easter Vigil. Of those groups, all nine participated in the Dwelling in the Word focus group, and five people participated in the Easter Vigil focus group. The nine Dwelling in the Word and five Easter Vigil individuals were selected, by me, through email invitation, in order to represent a sample across age, gender, and length of membership at Downtown Presbyterian (see tables 12 and 13 below). There was not an individual who participated in both interventions. I would have liked younger individuals to have participated in both focus groups, but invitations did not yield responses from a younger age demographic. The mean age for Dwelling in the Word was fifty-eight years old, and

for the Easter Vigil focus group the mean age was sixty-five years old. I recorded these focus group discussions digitally and used a transcription service to assist in transcribing the audio files to Word documents.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 12. Profile of Focus Group Participants for Dwelling in the Word**

Respondent	Gender	Age	Length of Membership
D1	Female	57	29 years
D2	Female	48	10 years
D3	Male	58	21 years
D4	Male	48	10 years
D5	Female	58	4 years
D6	Female	55	6 years
D7	Male	79	11 years
D8	Female	52	24 years
D9	Female	68	32 years

**Table 13. Profile of Focus Group Participants for Easter Vigil**

Respondent	Gender	Age	Length of Membership
EV1	Female	56	21 years
EV2	Female	55	14 years
EV3	Male	83	23 years
EV4	Female	82	23 years
EV5	Male	50	8 years

<sup>9</sup> The transcription service used was dictate2us, Maple House, Haymarket Street, Bury, BL9 0AR, England. Operations@dictate2us.com.



## Analysis of Focus Group Interviews

I now turn to a detailed consideration of the qualitative interviews. I analyzed each interview from the transcriptions from both the Dwelling in the Word and Easter Vigil groups through a process of producing *in vivo* codes. This was accomplished by coding the data word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident. These data became the foundation for focused codes, by gathering the *in vivo* codes into relevant thematic categories. *In vivo* codes can be found in appendices D and E. The focused codes were further grouped as subcategories into axial codes, and as a final step, the axial codes are presented as theoretical codes. The theoretical codes were achieved by diagramming how the axial codes could be related. As Kathy Charmaz instructs, “Coding gives you tools for interrogating, sorting and synthesizing hundreds of pages of interviews, field notes, documents, and other texts. Interrogating your data means that you take them apart and examine how these data are constituted.”<sup>10</sup> She says this process is “particularly useful for close examination and analysis of the data by breaking them into their components.”<sup>11</sup> This allows the researcher to work with the data in such a way that the researcher can explore, organize, and describe it. I will provide an overview of the coding process, in order to offer the reasoning behind the coding, and will conclude by proposing observations of themes and how they inform an understanding of the findings that occurred from the survey results.

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<sup>10</sup> Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

### Dwelling in the Word Focus Group

I met with a group of nine individuals from Downtown Presbyterian Church, all who were currently-serving, or formerly-serving, Elders and Deacons in the congregation, for four consecutive weeks for Dwelling in the Word. This was a new practice for all the participants, and after the final Dwelling in the Word session, I conducted a focus group with all nine people. I gathered sixty-seven *in vivo* codes from the transcribed qualitative data. I then grouped these into twenty-four focused codes (see table 14) and developed seven axial codes from the focused codes (see table 15).

**Table 14. Dwelling in the Word: Focused Codes<sup>12</sup>**

- 
- F<sub>1</sub>. Cooperating spirit in Creative Time
  - F<sub>2</sub>. Connecting with other churches as Christian groups in the neighborhood
  - F<sub>3</sub>. Maintaining ministries through Creative Time
  - F<sub>4</sub>. Focusing on the ministries, not the building
  - F<sub>5</sub>. Realizing visibly what is going on
  - F<sub>6</sub>. Seeing opportunities to open doors to the community
  - F<sub>7</sub>. Engaging and being more open to downtown neighbors
  - F<sub>8</sub>. Community feels welcome
  - F<sub>9</sub>. Drawing the community in as part of the church
  - F<sub>10</sub>. When there is no conflict, there is no community
  - F<sub>11</sub>. Coming together as community supports faith
  - F<sub>12</sub>. Having faith that construction will lead to good things
  - F<sub>13</sub>. Finding a way to think of new things and do them
  - F<sub>14</sub>. Inspiring people through space
  - F<sub>15</sub>. Drawing people into the space and drawing people out into the city
  - F<sub>16</sub>. Church is called to help people in a different light
  - F<sub>17</sub>. Church is called to expand into the city
  - F<sub>18</sub>. Hoping for the church to become racially integrated
  - F<sub>19</sub>. Hoping that the congregation's ministries please God
  - F<sub>20</sub>. Committing to small group meals
  - F<sub>21</sub>. Hoping for more spiritual growth opportunities
  - F<sub>22</sub>. God created an opportunity
  - F<sub>23</sub>. God is in the timing of all of this
  - F<sub>24</sub>. God is here
- 

<sup>12</sup> F<sub>x</sub> represents the Focused Code number for each statement. AD<sub>x</sub> represents the Axial Code number for each grouping of Focused Codes for Dwelling in the Word.

**Table 15. Dwelling in the Word: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes**


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AD <sub>1</sub> . Missional nature of God and God's people
F <sub>2</sub> . Connecting with other churches as Christian groups in the neighborhood
F <sub>4</sub> . Focusing on the ministries, not the building
F <sub>6</sub> . Seeing opportunities to open doors to the community
F <sub>7</sub> . Engaging and being more open to downtown neighbors
F <sub>8</sub> . Community feels welcome
F <sub>9</sub> . Drawing the community in as part of the church
AD <sub>2</sub> . God is at work in the life of Downtown Presbyterian
F <sub>5</sub> . Realizing visibly what is going on
F <sub>22</sub> . God created an opportunity
F <sub>23</sub> . God is in the timing of all of this
F <sub>24</sub> . God is here
AD <sub>3</sub> . Change and Disruption
F <sub>1</sub> . Cooperating spirit in Creative Time
F <sub>3</sub> . Maintaining ministries through Creative Time
F <sub>10</sub> . When there is no conflict, there is no community
F <sub>11</sub> . Coming together as a community supports faith
F <sub>13</sub> . Finding a way to think of new things and do them
AD <sub>4</sub> . Hope for the future
F <sub>12</sub> . Having faith that construction would lead to good things
F <sub>18</sub> . Hoping for the church to become racially integrated
F <sub>19</sub> . Hoping that the congregation's ministries please God
AD <sub>5</sub> . Space as missional
F <sub>14</sub> . Inspiring people through the space
F <sub>15</sub> . Drawing the city into the space and drawing people out into the city
AD <sub>6</sub> . Call of the church
F <sub>16</sub> . Church is called to help people in a different light
F <sub>17</sub> . Church is called to expand into the city
AD <sub>7</sub> . Spiritual practices
F <sub>20</sub> . Committing to small group meals
F <sub>21</sub> . Hoping for more spiritual growth opportunities

---

The participants in the Dwelling in the Word focus group identified strongly with a missional God, and saw God as present and active in the life of the congregation

through the discernment and preparation process for construction, but also through Creative Time and into the time of the building's opening. Not only was a sense of belonging expressed, "I felt drawn into the community as part of the church [during Creative Time]," but also a sense that the time of construction and change fostered a missional understanding of being a community of faith. As one person put it, "it [was] a good reminder that the church isn't the building, it's the community and the relationships that underscore that." Another person shared, "there were so many opportunities for us to open our doors to the community and that wasn't Creative Time as much as the end of it and the [opening of the] new spaces. I definitely felt an openness to engaging and being more open to our downtown neighbors." This same person wondered whether or not we had been doing this all along, and if perhaps the time of change and disruption did not just cast things in a new light. One participant declared, "When there's no conflict, there is no community," making a direct connection between the chaos and change and feeling more closely tied to others in the church and beyond. This person, who acknowledged not always being in line with the aim and direction of the project, went on to say that the fact that "I have been in conflict with this community has been healthy for me. I think overall, the fact that I have been aggravated is a helpful thing for my faith. I do feel the community was always coming together more as a group over the last two years, supporting my faith in ways it perhaps hadn't been before."

Several members who were already participating in small groups before construction, but meeting at the church, found the forced change requiring them to meet elsewhere actually strengthened that practice. "During disruption, my discipleship group

decided to eat together once a month. It was a great bonding time and we are still doing it.”

From someone who welcomed weekly summer evening gatherings for worship and fellowship into their home, “I really loved having the church on Wednesday evenings at our house. That was just really a deep blessing for the house and for us as well. There are people I would otherwise not know and those people I now see as part of my family; it just wouldn’t have happened otherwise.” Here is an expression of Christian spiritual practices enacted and shared as a direct result of the chaos surrounding the building project.

Participants identified listening as one of the main components of Dwelling in the Word that they found to have the most impact, supporting the sense that communal spiritual practices were strengthened throughout the time of chaos for these individuals in the congregation. “I like the listening part of it. . . and I like that it is more active. It is kind of a safer way to talk because you’re talking about what you heard and you’re sharing just with another person.” People also identified with a strong sense of God’s abiding presence, both during and after construction, and were able to articulate this with missional language. “I feel like we have been called to expand into the city and that we were given lots of opportunities, right at the beginning. I think that we’ve been given a real opportunity and it gives me confidence that there’s something really important happening here just beyond making a nice building.”

### Easter Vigil Focus Group

The Easter Vigil was held on Holy Saturday as a new practice for the congregation and community. I met with five individuals several weeks after the Easter Vigil from those who participated for a focus group interview, and from the transcription data, I identified 129 *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes can be found in the appendices. From these *in vivo* codes, I interpreted thirty-eight focused codes (see table 16) and developed four axial codes from the focused codes (see table 17).

**Table 16. Easter Vigil: Focused Codes<sup>13</sup>**

- 
- F<sub>1</sub>. Bringing together the light
  - F<sub>2</sub>. God was present
  - F<sub>3</sub>. Sitting by yourself in spaces
  - F<sub>4</sub>. Awakening to what God is doing
  - F<sub>5</sub>. Reflecting
  - F<sub>6</sub>. Inviting in the city
  - F<sub>7</sub>. Proclaiming the church in the heart of the city
  - F<sub>8</sub>. Holding the light of Christ with the light of the city
  - F<sub>9</sub>. Developing greater sense of community
  - F<sub>10</sub>. Recognizing the importance of practice, ancient and new
  - F<sub>11</sub>. Enriching traditions
  - F<sub>12</sub>. Being open to trying new things in Creative Time
  - F<sub>13</sub>. Getting out of comfort zone
  - F<sub>14</sub>. Naming that period of disruption could have been longer
  - F<sub>15</sub>. Being transformed by change
  - F<sub>16</sub>. Changing only when there is disruption
  - F<sub>17</sub>. Moving forward through change
  - F<sub>18</sub>. Seeing beauty in challenge
  - F<sub>19</sub>. Living together in smaller community is important
  - F<sub>20</sub>. Committing to small group meals
  - F<sub>21</sub>. Discerning together shapes community
  - F<sub>22</sub>. Extending invitation to people outside
  - F<sub>23</sub>. Seeing challenging times as fun
  - F<sub>24</sub>. Grieving for the old way

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<sup>13</sup> F<sub>x</sub> represents the Focused Code number for each statement.

**Table 16. Easter Vigil: Focused Codes (continued)**

- 
- F<sub>25</sub>. Responding to each other in new ways
  - F<sub>26</sub>. God is moving us into new land
  - F<sub>27</sub>. Going out into the world
  - F<sub>28</sub>. Knowing we are not in control
  - F<sub>29</sub>. Listening to where we are going
  - F<sub>30</sub>. Being willing to let go
  - F<sub>31</sub>. Reconnecting people in groups in new ways
  - F<sub>32</sub>. Naming that God wants us to be children of God
  - F<sub>33</sub>. Listening to each other
  - F<sub>34</sub>. Listening to the world
  - F<sub>35</sub>. Listen, God is calling us
  - F<sub>36</sub>. Realizing it is not about the building
  - F<sub>37</sub>. Living out the Gospel
  - F<sub>38</sub>. Being part of God's work
- 

**Table 17. Easter Vigil: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes<sup>14</sup>**


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AE<sub>1</sub> Missional nature of God and God's people

- F<sub>1</sub>. Bringing together the light
- F<sub>6</sub>. Inviting in the city
- F<sub>7</sub>. Proclaiming the church in the heart of the city
- F<sub>8</sub>. Holding the light of Christ with the light of the city
- F<sub>22</sub>. Extending invitation to people outside
- F<sub>26</sub>. God is moving us into new land
- F<sub>27</sub>. Going out into the world
- F<sub>35</sub>. Listen, God is calling us
- F<sub>37</sub>. Living out the Gospel
- F<sub>38</sub>. Being part of God's work
- F<sub>36</sub>. Realizing it is not about the building
- F<sub>34</sub>. Listening to the world

AE<sub>2</sub> God is at work in the life of Downtown Presbyterian Church

- F<sub>2</sub>. God was present
- F<sub>4</sub>. Awakening to what God is doing
- F<sub>32</sub>. Naming that God wants us to be children of God

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<sup>14</sup> AE<sub>x</sub> represents the Axial Code number for each grouping of Focused Codes for the Easter Vigil.

**Table 17. Easter Vigil: Axial Codes with Supporting Focused Codes (continued)**

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**AE<sub>3</sub>. Spiritual practices**

- F<sub>10</sub>. Recognizing the importance of practice, ancient and new
- F<sub>5</sub>. Reflecting
- F<sub>11</sub>. Enriching traditions
- F<sub>19</sub>. Living together in smaller community is important
- F<sub>3</sub>. Sitting by yourself in spaces
- F<sub>20</sub>. Committing to small group meals
- F<sub>21</sub>. Discerning together shapes community
- F<sub>29</sub>. Listening to where we are going
- F<sub>33</sub>. Listening to each other

**AE<sub>4</sub>. Change and disruption**

- F<sub>9</sub>. Developing a greater sense of community
- F<sub>12</sub>. Being open to trying new things in Creative Time
- F<sub>13</sub>. Getting out of comfort zone
- F<sub>14</sub>. Naming that period of disruption could have been longer
- F<sub>15</sub>. Being transformed by change
- F<sub>16</sub>. Changing only when there is disruption
- F<sub>17</sub>. Moving forward through change
- F<sub>18</sub>. Seeing beauty in challenge
- F<sub>31</sub>. Reconnecting people in groups in new ways
- F<sub>23</sub>. Seeing challenging times as fun

**AE<sub>4</sub>. Change and disruption**

- F<sub>24</sub>. Grieving for the old way
  - F<sub>25</sub>. Responding to each other in new ways
  - F<sub>28</sub>. Knowing we are not in control
  - F<sub>30</sub>. Being willing to let go
- 

Participants in the Easter Vigil focus group articulated identifying it as a practice in and of itself. One person said, “The ancient idea where you are intentionally given the opportunity to stop and reflect about something precise and specific, to think about this time in your life, this time in Jesus’ life. . . It was so important to be in that moment.”

Worshippers gathered around fire representing the light of Christ, outside the church building in the darkness, to begin the service. The lights of the downtown neighborhood in which the church is situated illuminated the group, as buses and passersby made their



way down the busy thoroughfare just steps away. Some identified that opportunity, in and of itself, as a practice. “The fire was so welcoming and as an actual experience, it was so important to awaken us to what it is we are doing. . . It is very important to just look at your own life and what Christ and the church are meaning for you. And then we brought the light back into the service. . . and God was there.” The fire was powerful in imagery and experience for others. “There we were outside in that time of year [March] and it’s dark and behind us a city bus is going by and the high-rise buildings, and so these concepts of the church in the heart of the city just so powerfully reflected in that image.” Then this respondent makes a direct connection between the spiritual practices of the Easter Vigil and Downtown Presbyterian’s mission to, and presence in, the city. “Downtown [has been] inviting the city, bringing them in, and that’s what we did. We went out into the light of Christ with the light of the city and we invited that light and brought it in.”

Another aspect of the service was a section in the middle when worshippers were given the opportunity to move about the spaces inside the building and engage in prayer and reflection stations for about a half hour. They could reflect on art in a candlelit room, or sit in the Sanctuary in prayer. In one area they could write a prayer or hope or concern on a board with water and a brush, and it would remain for just a few minutes before disappearing. They interacted with these stations in spaces that existed before construction and in spaces that were new after construction. “I found myself writing words I wouldn’t have otherwise uttered, but they just came out when I was writing. . . It was reflective,” one person commented.

There was a feeling of connection among those who participated and a feeling of something new taking place. “I think the sense of community that night sticks with me, with those that were here. I felt it that night and there were some different people there than are normally around. So I keep remembering that as we welcome new people.” This sense of connection was extended out by the focus group participants to relate to Creative Time, and being on the move in the midst of change. They were able to name that the congregation members were welcomed as strangers in the other churches who received Downtown Presbyterian Church for programs, ministries, and meetings. “Meeting in other churches was a positive experience because we weren’t in our bubble of *us*. We were welcomed as strangers.” Others expressed really feeling a sense of change. “We were able to try different things [because of Creative Time]. It got me out into a different part of the city that I didn’t know well and we saw different people.” Another agreed, adding, “It felt like more of a community than I guess we can get into here.” Small groups were mentioned here again and how some experienced the building up of their small group connections because of the constraints, or openness, of Creative Time. “My small group, we get together twice a month and that became even more important because I wasn’t getting down here because it was so disruptive. It was good for me to push out into other parts of the city; it was that sense of smaller community and really how important that is.”

One person even felt the year and a half of Creative Time went by too quickly, “it could have been longer,” and this person felt it would have allowed for even more growth. “As time goes on, if our spiritual journey is one of being transformed, of changing, it’s pretty clear that if everything is going great and it’s on track, we don’t

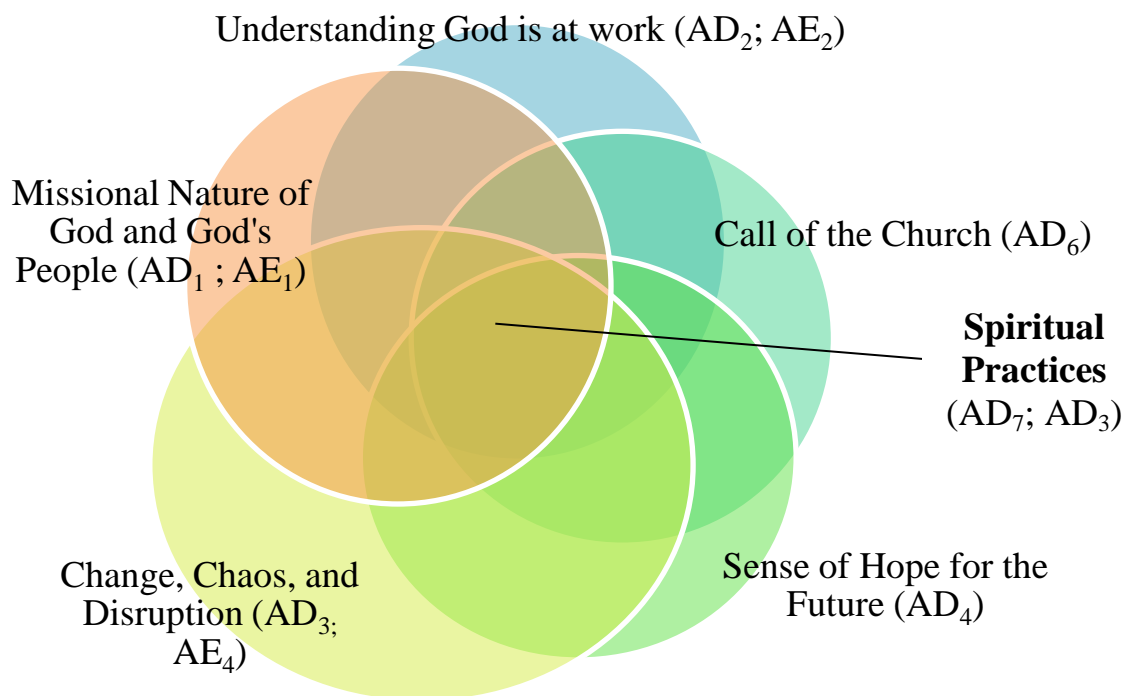
change. We only change when there is disruption, when there's trauma, when there's trouble that comes into our lives and we rethink things.”

The focus group time ended with a conversation around God at work in the life of the church, during Creative Time and at present. One person acknowledged that great care had been given to the larger community in preparation for design and construction, and named the practice of discernment as part of that time. In seeing that practice and orientation as part of moving forward, this person ended by saying, “The absolute central fact of the church going forward is being open to the community in welcoming people not just in the morning service. I just think that is where the church is going and that's where the church seems relevant. The more invitation we can extend to people outside, the better.”

Acknowledging the lack of control during Creative Time seemed to relate to God's activity in the world, for some. “On our spiritual journey, we surrender. We are not in charge, we are not in control. We like being in control and we like being in charge. If we acknowledge that we are not in control, we open up possibilities.” This person expanded further by saying “God is telling us that the church of the future is not like this [controlled,] but open, fluid, accepting. And it's important that a person find something here, or have an experience here.”

A figure can be a useful way to see connections between the theoretical and axial codes as themes emerge. Figure 3 shows the connections between theoretical and axial codes for both focus groups, to include Dwelling in the Word and the Easter Vigil. In my research, I found thematic overlap between the axial codes that emerged from the

Dwelling in the Word and Easter Vigil focus groups, such that they could be combined into one cohesive visual representation.



**Figure 3. Dwelling in the Word and Easter Vigil Theoretical Code and Axial Code Relationship<sup>1</sup>**

Spiritual practices developing because of Creative Time and moving into new spaces lie at the center of the shared expressions, which come into view in axial codes from the Dwelling in the Word and Easter Vigil groups. These two interventions provided lenses through which a focus on Creative Time and movement could happen. Downtown Presbyterian members spoke about the change and disruption, articulated an

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<sup>1</sup> AD<sub>x</sub> corresponds to the coordinating Axial Code for Dwelling in the Word and AE<sub>x</sub> corresponds to the coordinating Axial Code for the Easter Vigil.

understanding that God is at work in the world, and that God is missional, as are we as God's people. From this develops a hope for the future and call of the church—and all of these influence and are influenced by Christian spiritual practices for those who participated in the interventions. A modified Venn diagram is a fitting way to represent the relationality of these expressions and lived experiences because they do not exist in mutual exclusivity, but rather overlap and interact each with one another. It is modified because each contributing circle that emerged from this research does not have equal influence and symmetry. The change, chaos, and disruption experienced by the congregation (light yellow in the figure above) catalyzed participation in spiritual practices, while also helping to clarify a sense of the call of the church by a missional God. This call of a missional God of the people (red in the figure above) of Downtown Presbyterian Church out into the neighborhood, and into one another's lives in new ways during Creative Time, brought about a reorientation toward spiritual practices that lasted into the return to the physical gathering space of the congregation. Spiritual practices brought about the discovery of these five areas shown in the figure above, even as the five areas influenced participants' spiritual practices.

Similar results were seen by triangulating the qualitative data from two interventions of the Easter Vigil and Dwelling in the Word with quantitative results. Participants shared a greater sense of encountering the Holy Spirit during Creative Time and expressed that connecting with a small group as a spiritual practice was important during Creative Time. They named that the Spirit was consistently active during Creative Time and that God was at work in the disruption. They felt that God was partnering with them through the transitions and movement and could feel that God was present and

sending them as a people of faith. These are expressions of an understanding of God at work in the world and the missional nature of God in the midst of chaos, change, and disruption.

Having explored the quantitative and qualitative results of this research, let us take a turn toward naming what is important about these findings. What do these results mean now and for the future for Downtown Presbyterian Church and the faithful in that context? I will also discuss the scope and limits of this research and possibilities for future research endeavors.

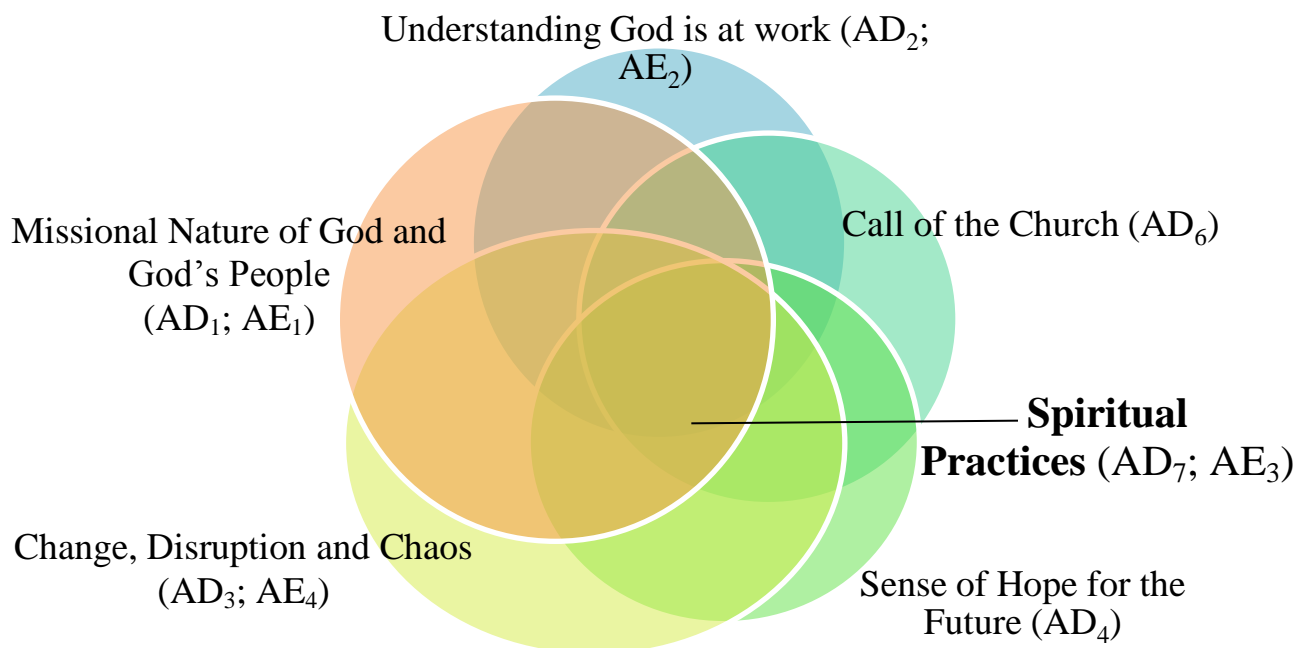
## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSIONS

Several important results emerged from investigating the quantitative and qualitative data gleaned from six months of research with members of Downtown Presbyterian Church. Through baseline and end line surveys, and with two interventions as intended independent variables, participants shared their sense of the importance of experiencing Creative Time's construction, and the change and chaos this disruption brought. The movement out of the building and the experience of moving back in allowed them, or perhaps forced them, to engage in spiritual practices in new ways and for some, they engaged in these practices for the first time.

#### **Spiritual Practices**

Through triangulation of the quantitative qualitative data, the reflections and results were closely aligned for the two interventions of Dwelling in the Word and the Easter Vigil. Both coding exercises led to axial codes that fit the same themes and affirmations, mainly that the change, chaos, and disruption experienced by the congregation over the eighteen months of construction led to a greater focus on spiritual practices. Engaging in these spiritual practices, specifically the practices of Observing the Sabbath, Hospitality, and Participating in a Small Group, increased from the baseline to end line measurements. The figure below reminds us of a visual representation of the interaction of these themes.



**Figure 4. Dwelling in the Word and Easter Vigil Theoretical Code and Axial Code Relationship<sup>1</sup>**

What is curious to me about the practices of Observing the Sabbath, Hospitality, and Participating in a Small Group is whether or not the disruption to the context of Downtown Presbyterian Church catalyzed the need for small groups to meet in new ways and in new places, for hospitality to be offered and received in new ways, especially in people's homes, and for rest and renewal to be observed in new ways. DPC has always been an active and thriving congregation with ministry opportunities happening all throughout the week in and around the building. That changed when parking was eliminated and space use was limited, due to construction. Perhaps these changes caused individuals to stand down from the busyness of church life for a time, since worship and

<sup>1</sup> AD<sub>x</sub> corresponds to the coordinating axial code for Dwelling in the Word and AE<sub>x</sub> corresponds to the coordinating axial code for the Easter Vigil.



activities at the church were limited to Sundays. The results could suggest the congregation found a practice of Sabbath, not limited to a traditional Sabbath day of Sunday, but in a new form due to Creative Time constraints. The spiritual practices which did not feel significant to the congregation through survey research were Music-Related Practices, Bible Study, and Discernment. I wonder if people associate these practices, especially Bible Study and Music-Related Practices, as happening in connection with the building and through organized rehearsals/meetings at church. The choir continued to rehearse on-site during Creative Time, so that was a practice that was not greatly affected by the circumstances of that period of time. It would be interesting to delve more into the congregation's sense of association with Discernment as a practice and how that fit into their experience of Creative Time. Was this a practice they did not understand as much to begin with to be able to assess their relationship with it during or after Creative Time? Or was the congregation actually in a constant state of discernment for the years leading up to and moving through Creative Time, because of the decision-making required to undertake *Open Doors Open Futures*? Did this lead them to be so invested in a discernment process they could not separate enough from it to evaluate? I will now view the results through the biblical, theoretical, and theological lenses for this research.

### **Biblical Lenses**

#### Luke 24

A return to the biblical lenses can offer insights into the study's results and proposed conclusions relating to spiritual practices. The disciples in Luke 24 faced the death of Jesus in Jerusalem and on their travels just after, and two of them experienced a direct encounter with him. It was in the movement away from Jerusalem and the process

of coming back, more than the return itself, which brought about awareness and change for them. It was as the disciples practiced their faith together, and waited together, that they experienced change, which seems to parallel the reflections of members of Downtown Presbyterian Church. Paired t-tests showed statistical significance in response to the statement, “I have encountered the Holy Spirit in the last 18 months,” more so than the statement, “I have encountered the Holy Spirit in new ways because of new spaces.” It was clear that individuals who participated in the research found a movement of the Holy Spirit in their midst during Creative Time, their Road to Emmaus, if you will, in ways they did not sense after the new building was opened.

Both the Creative Time movement out, and the movement back into a new church after construction, affected a change in the context. Creative Time brought DPC through the challenges of going out into construction, disruption, and chaos, and back into the challenges of coming back in. It became clear through the research process that there were several stages of Creative Time. There was the initial loss of parking, but much of the existing building remained the same as external demolition on-site got underway. As demolition and construction moved inward, secondary and tertiary stages of Creative Time developed, even as fatigue and challenges grew over the twenty two months. The stages brought new perspectives and new experiences as the surrounding landscape changed. Just as the disciples encountered Jesus along the way in the midst of the stages of change they were experiencing, the congregation seems to have encountered the Holy Spirit on the road through Creative Time.

There was an expression from some members of the congregation that the Creative Time of waiting could have been even longer. This seems to be a recognition

that God's Spirit was at work in that season of melting, molding, filling, using, and sending. The disciples were in a period of waiting after Jesus' death, as they were changed, filled, used, and sent by the Holy Spirit into their new future.

## Acts 2

During Creative Time, a greater sense of community was formed for the people of DPC, not unlike the first practicing Christians in Acts 2. Just as those early Christians did, the faithful of DPC found new ways of building and reinforcing unity and connection through basic communal spiritual practices, which Creative Time offered, more so than did the opening of new spaces. Acts describes the people's sense of being amazed and perplexed in the midst of the sweeping movement of the Holy Spirit that Pentecost Day. They asked what it all meant and what they were to do (Acts 2:12; 2:37). The congregation of Downtown Presbyterian Church searched for meaning during Creative Time, and they did so through the movement of practicing community together.

Dwight Zscheile reminds us that the book of Acts "brings to the forefront the Spirit's agency and power in creating and leading a new community."<sup>2</sup> Zscheile recalls the conflict, divisions, and barriers the apostles move through in the narrative of the book of Acts, but that "it is a nomadic and residential adventure of being pushed into new experiences by the Spirit of God in order to show God's healing power to people where they are. . . it is a journey of learning, new creation, changed imagination, trial, and failure. It is shaped by practices of prayer, discernment, storytelling, and witness in

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<sup>2</sup> Dwight Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 48), 2014.

relationship.”<sup>3</sup> Here, Zscheile is describing the experiences of the early Christians, but it is also a fitting description for what members of Downtown Presbyterian Church shared of their nomadic adventure, their push into new experiences, their being shaped by practices.

### Genesis 1

In Genesis 1, God created not out of *nothing*, but out of something, out of the primordial chaos. Creative Time brought the absence of many things, such as comfort, easy use of space, and the regular and known rhythms of church life together. Creative Time was not *nothing*. The research supports the notion that some new understanding and awareness was created out of the absent aspects of the life of DPC, and a new understanding and awareness is continuing to find a way in the faithful of Downtown Presbyterian Church. Eric M. Vail, as noted in chapter 3, and in light of the results of this research, describes God’s intimate involvement in the building up of community, for goodness and for partnership, in a loving relationship with all of creation. This is the first image and act of creation from Genesis 1. This opens the way for the possibility of establishing a relationship with others by the Spirit. The results point to a building up of the community of Downtown Presbyterian Church, relationships strengthened with others by the Spirit, because of the creative and chaotic time of construction.

Just as creation in the beginning was not out of nothing, the empty tomb at the end of Luke’s Gospel is not *nothing*. It is a void, certainly, an emptiness and chaotic change that the disciples feel acutely. The disciples moved toward practice and community, establishing new beliefs in the messy “real life” of love and hope, suffering

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 50.

and sorrow, just as the congregation of DPC did during their time of change and the absence of the familiar ground on which they stood and practiced together. Creative Time was certainly not *nothing*, rather it was a definite *something* through which the Spirit blew, and worked, and led.

### Theoretical Lenses

#### Chaos, Disruption, and Change in a Practicing Community

This research helped to bring together the ways chaos, disruption, and change encouraged members of Downtown Presbyterian Church to practice and find community in new ways. Nancy Tatom Ammerman makes the assertion, “No commitment fails to change the person who makes it. It is one of the ironies of social life that individualism and communalism are utterly intertwined. We only know who we are individually as we build that identity out of the attachments in which we are embedded.”<sup>4</sup> Creative Time appeared to draw together that individualism and communalism, out of a time of incredible commitment, and allow them to be intertwined in the context of space, disruption, and practices. Ammerman describes the story of Robert Wuthnow’s research into the role of small groups in U.S. society, and not only in religious institutions. Wuthnow’s work shows that those in small groups form a greater sense of attachment, and that small groups strengthen community attachments rather than encouraging members to be self-focused.<sup>5</sup> This attachment to small groups and the practice of being in small groups with others was clearly a strong point of connection, as both the quantitative

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Community and Congregation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 353.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

and qualitative data show. The chaos, disruption, and change of Creative Time, as the surrounding context, is what drove people to make those small group and communal attachments, and to identify these groups as crucial practices in that season. To return to Ammerman, “Understanding congregational response to change obviously requires more than understanding the external context: it also requires understanding the cultural work by which congregations seek to shape that context.”<sup>6</sup> This research brought together that interweaving of the internal cultural work of the congregation, imbedded in the changing external context. It shed light on the shifting cultural work of the congregation and individuals’ places within that shift.

Peter Block, in his book *Community: The Structures of Belonging*, names what he calls the “possibility of community” and the “nature of collective transformation.”<sup>7</sup> He speaks of the importance of small groups, saying, “Communal transformation is best initiated through those times when we gather. It is when groups of people are in a room together that a shift in the context is noticed, felt, and reinforced. . . the times when we gather are when we draw conclusions about what kind of community we live in.”<sup>8</sup> These assessments and conclusions about the kind of community the people of Downtown Presbyterian Church live in came through small groups and finding hospitality in the shelter of one another through Creative Time. Perhaps the limited spaces available during Creative Time allowed for or encouraged this community-building to happen in ways that an expanded church building did not, post-Creative Time. The congregation was able to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

spread out more once construction was complete, and the results of this research could be suggesting that the opening for communal transformation changed, diminished, as people gathered differently in increased spaces.

The results spoke not just to the potential impact of change, disruption, and chaos. These conclusions also came together by the formation of space and community through Dwelling in the Word and the Easter Vigil. Even more so, the very act of bringing people together into a room for the post-intervention focus groups could be seen as “a leading indicator of the future,” to use Block’s term, as people were able to talk about God at work in their lives, in the life of the congregation, in the city, and in the wider church. Block uses the shorthand throughout his book, “the small group is the unit of transformation.” In the space of a small group dwelling together, intimacy is created. “The intimacy makes the process personal. It provides the structure where people overcome isolation and where the experience of belonging is created.”<sup>9</sup> This research seems to suggest that the small group was a unit of transformation in DPC, for individuals and small collectives, within the context of the larger physical transformation of the building and the missional identity of the congregation. Here intimacy was found, practices were enacted and shared, and a Spirit-led community came into being in new circumstances.

To draw again on Margaret Wheatley’s *Leadership and the New Science*, she points to participatory and interdependent relationships in the universe that bring order and beauty found in chaos. These relationships, and our awareness of them, are crucial in our participation in change. Stronger relationships make a chaotic and changing system

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 95.

stronger, according to Wheatley, and this seems to be so for the experiences of those of DPC who practiced their way through chaos, disruption, and change. Stronger relationships through chaos, disruption, and change coincided with the Creative Time intimacy the community found in small group transformation.

To return to the research question: “*How might action research interventions involving communal practices affect the missional identity of a congregation in the midst of change?*” It is important to consider the concept of beliefs, as they relate to both missional identity and practices. Miroslav Volf makes the assertion that there is a critical link between beliefs and Christian practices. He says that shaping practices, which is fundamentally about shaping a way of life, is internal to the very nature of Christian beliefs.<sup>10</sup> “To determine whether beliefs are essentially practice-shaping, it is particularly important to examine the nature of beliefs about God.”<sup>11</sup> The work of this research within the changing context of Downtown Presbyterian Church attempted to find the interplay between beliefs and practices. For Volf, “Engagement in practices helps open our eyes to how core beliefs are to be understood and re-formulated as Christians live in ever-changing situations.”<sup>12</sup> He then asks which comes first in this understanding and reformulation—are beliefs grounded in practices, or do practices ultimately find their grounding in beliefs? The core of what Volf is emphasizing is that Christian beliefs shape practices and engaging in Christian practices can lead to a greater sense of understanding and rootedness in these beliefs. He is clear to state that making a separation between

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<sup>10</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Theology for a Way of Life,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 252-253.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.



beliefs and practices, as being mutually exclusive, is an oversimplification. He would argue that core Christian beliefs are integrated in Christian practices, as a component of practices. Practices, for Volf, are Christian “insofar as they are ‘resonances’ of God’s engagement with the world.”<sup>13</sup> The people of Downtown Presbyterian Church experienced these resonances through Creative Time and were able to name and claim God’s engagement with the world, and to find their own, through the process of this research.

Volf dedicates a good bit of his focus in “Theology for a Way of Life” to the meaning of “real life” and the presence of, and attention given to, Christian beliefs and Christian practices in “real life.” As Dorothy C. Bass explains in the introduction to their book, “‘*Real life*’...is the messy realm of work, love, celebration, and suffering where human beings dwell and thus where Christian life and ministry take place.”<sup>14</sup> The people of Downtown Presbyterian Church dwelt together in the messy, real life of Creative Time and discovered Christian life and ministry, Christian practices, and God’s missional engagement in the world through the Holy Spirit in that season.

## **Theological Lenses**

### Space

There was some feeling at the beginning of this research endeavor that the new spaces, after the years of discernment and planning, fundraising, and waiting, would overwhelmingly speak to an affirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit, the redirection of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>14</sup> Volf and Bass, 1.

the missional leadership of the church, and the continued growth of spiritual practices in the life of the congregation. This is not what the research showed. Space as a theological lens would address how the new building would “speak” as DeMott, Shapiro, and Bill suggest buildings can. Downtown Presbyterian Church, as a “telling presence,” would speak in new ways to the city through the new building, or so the leadership of the church thought, and I certainly did, too. It may be possible that Creative Time allowed for that freeing of space Martin Heidegger refers to, that the boundaries of construction and chaos invited the “essential unfolding” of the missional nature and understanding of the community through practices and change.<sup>15</sup> The essential unfolding may still be underway and sufficient time was not given for measuring the effects of this unfolding through the timeframe of this research.

### Social Trinity

Alan Roxburgh suggests that the missional church is not about more and bigger churches located out in the neighborhoods, or more churches being better at getting people into their (and here I would add “new”) buildings to make them Christians. He has described something else, another option. “I saw a different kind of movement involving thousands and thousands of lights being lit in neighborhoods and communities across the continent, as God’s people *moved back into their neighborhoods* to rediscover that God was already ahead of them creating and calling forth that which is new. Local churches can be part of this movement.”<sup>16</sup> Creative Time helped the congregation in that pursuit of

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<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 356.

<sup>16</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 180.

moving into the neighborhood to rediscover, or perhaps discover for the first time, God's calling them forth into something new. The end of Creative Time moved them back into the immediate neighborhood of the church, but with increased knowledge of who they were, where they had been, and the importance of the interaction of contexts.

Leadership as a general concept takes place at every level of a structure or organization. It is moving toward a goal in relationship and as a collective action. Missional leadership is more than just moving out into the neighborhood, or living creatively through a certain period in the life of a congregation. Missional leadership takes place at every level of the church, but not just when the church goes out and interacts with the neighborhood, or reconnects with the neighborhood or wonders what God might be up to "out there."

Here Bolman and Deal offer insights in *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice & Leadership*. By outlining their four frames (Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic) and showing how these lenses work together and differentiate from one another, they introduce *reframing*. Reframing "requires an ability to think about situations in more than one way, which lets you develop alternative diagnoses and strategies."<sup>17</sup> Creative Time as a missional leadership endeavor, a missional learning lab, required thinking about the situation in more than one way, and offered the opportunity for the development of more than one strategy. It invited leadership that pursued "a more complex view that takes account of individual, relationship and context."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

Missional leadership is adaptive and responsive because of the belief in the sending of the church into the world by the Holy Spirit. It is leadership based on asking the questions, “How do I experience God?” and “How does God experience me?”<sup>19</sup> It is making ourselves open to, as Jürgen Moltmann would say, “God’s experience of us”<sup>20</sup> as leaders in and for God’s church. Moltmann’s take on *experience*, God’s own and God’s of us, of the energy and power of the Holy Spirit, is a Trinitarian expression. “The experience of the Spirit sets the person who is touched by it in a beginning event which is open for the coming liberty of the whole creation, and is therefore still incomplete. The experience of the Spirit begins the completion and perfecting of the creation of human beings and all things, which makes them the home of the triune God.”<sup>21</sup> Moltmann’s experiential interpretation is a statement on the development of missional leadership and the development of God’s own active and creative leadership in the world, with a proclamation that all activity proceeds “from the Spirit. [The Spirit] is the maker of the new creation.”<sup>22</sup>

The people of Downtown Presbyterian Church followed the Holy Spirit through the new creation that was Creative Time, even while believing they were waiting for the ultimate new creation of an expanded building and ministries. They began to engage in the question of how they experience God and how God experiences them, through shared

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<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

spiritual practices. In so doing, they began to sense the energy and power of the Holy Spirit in Creative Time and in all times, in their congregation and neighborhood.

### **Limitations of This Research**

There are certainly limitations in generalizing the findings here from this research. The nature of the research design was highly specific to the context of Downtown Presbyterian Church's expansion and manner in which the congregation moved through the multi-year discernment and decision-making processes, approached Creative Time, and moved into new spaces. The research design only invited engagement from approximately 20% of the congregation's membership, and of that group, all were currently or formerly serving leaders. This was, at its inception, designed to engage those who were already active, invested, and knowledgeable, had some sense of agency and influence, and were those who were seen by the congregation as leaders. These research findings should thus not be extrapolated more broadly to declare any generalizations about the congregation as a whole. Large segments of the population were not included in the research design because of time and scope constraints, so caution must be taken not to make conclusions about the experiences of everyone at Downtown Presbyterian Church.

This is not to say that connections cannot be made from this research endeavor or that nothing is transferable to another context. Change and disruption are constant in our world, especially in institutions, and specifically in the church. Other congregations considering a building project that brings disruption may find value in this research. Congregations seeking to find ways to introduce new Christian practices may be able to glean something from this portrayal of the Downtown Presbyterian Church milieu.

One segment of the congregation not engaged in this research design was the youth, or more broadly, the Families, Youth, and Children's Ministry area. I would be curious to know from the young people of the church, for whom the period of construction may have felt like a more significant period of time, how they would frame the change, disruption, and chaos. What new practices emerged for them as individuals and as a small unit? Did they experience any transformation and, if so, how did that inform their understanding of community, of the church, and their place in it? How did that inform their sense of God at work in their lives and in the world? If I were to continue this research, I would like to engage with the young people who were active in the high school youth ministry program during Creative Time, as well as those who were younger and coming into the new building spaces as the next generation. They felt change and disruption, but I suspect not in the same way as those in this research.

### **Other Questions Raised by This Research**

Other questions that flow out of this research could address long-lasting communal practices the congregation might engage in well into its movement into new spaces. Are small group, hospitality, and Sabbath-observing practices still strongly identified by both those who participated in the research, and by those in the wider church? I wonder what could be identified as learnings from the extended season of creativity and disruption, and how that applies to the church's ongoing missional identity formation. The movement into the new spaces was certainly not without its challenges, and was arguably another iteration of Creative Time, just not labeled as such. It was an important learning not to limit the power of the Holy Spirit throughout all aspects of this process, certainly, but also to have openness to naming for the congregation all the

moving parts and changes. Even something as celebratory as completing construction and having the opportunity to explore modern and long-anticipated spaces can be a challenge for people of faith. The first year in the new building was thought of as the Year of Learning. It would be interesting to investigate if any new practices emerged for individuals and the community as part of the new beginnings and new learnings of the open future where God is leading the congregation. The second year of the new building was framed as the Year of Invitation, with a focus on potential for cultivating growth in ministries, outreach to the community, and ideally, nurturing of shared spiritual practices.

### **Summary**

The leaders of Downtown Presbyterian Church expressed a greater sense of connection to each other and to the movement of the Holy Spirit through the experience of the change, disruption, and chaos of Creative Time than through the return to a new and expanded building. They found new ways of developing and strengthening community and relied on Christian practices in which they were already engaged. The good news is that change is constant in our lives and is healthy for the life of a thriving church. The research has supported a posture of the call of a congregation in motion to be the church in the neighborhood and the world, to have hope in the midst of change, and to continue to practice responding together to the invitation to be a missional church into an open future.

## EPILOGUE

In some ways, the change and disruption the congregation experienced during Creative Time, and which I examined in this research process, was not apart from change and disruption, and perhaps chaos, in my own vocational journey, and the one I took through this program. I submitted my application to the doctoral program while on parental leave with our third child, and shortly after I was accepted and committed to this academic endeavor, I moved into a new call within the structure of my congregation. Several of my ministry responsibilities stayed the same, but many more areas of leadership and executive function were added in. Like the people of Downtown Presbyterian Church through Creative Time, I stayed in the same place while multiple factors and pieces of my identity as a pastor shifted around me. I left behind what was familiar as it changed in my context, and returned and re-tuned to the same place, wholly new and different. This research process helped me to reflect on practices I have developed throughout the course of moving into a new role within the life of the staff and congregation, and helped me to realize the opportunity for a greater development of practices. How do my beliefs inform my practices, as a pastor, as a researcher, as a person of faith? How do those practices connect me to a sense of rootedness in my beliefs?

I found myself asking many of the same questions I asked others as a researcher. Do I sense the movement of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and in my life as I am connected to this group of faithful followers? Where do I sense God at work in my life and in my leadership in the life of the congregation? The Doctor of Ministry program has



opened me to my congregation's neighborhood and its needs and spirit in new ways, and just as the new building hopes to draw out the congregation and draw in the city, I have felt my own shift in that kind of understanding.

Through this research process, I have been reminded of the value of just listening, of asking well-crafted and thoughtful questions, and being open to the responses and the change in direction they might suggest. As a leader in a congregation oriented toward being a "telling presence," this research encourages openness toward a more listening presence, both for the researcher and the congregation. There is much to be gained by listening to God's Word, to the neighborhood, to one another through practices, and the whispering of the Holy Spirit more fully through all the creative times ahead in the open future where God is leading.

I understand my leadership as being in partnership with God and with community, as one who is sent, following *missio Dei*. My developing leadership is reflective and participatory, both in context and in God's mission in the world. I am coming to an understanding that it is impossible to see the world without missional lenses. The cumulative effect of the readings, writing, research, and discussions over the past four years cause me to hear the news of the world from a missional perspective, and to see opportunities in my congregation for missional leadership that I otherwise would have missed.

## APPENDIX A

### BASELINE QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE: NOVEMBER 2017

#### **PART I: Background Information**

- Q1. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
- Q2. In what year were you born? (please enter a 4-digit birth year) \_\_\_\_\_
- Q3. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
- a. Less than a high school degree
  - b. High School degree
  - c. Some college education, but no degree
  - d. Associate's degree
  - e. Bachelor's degree
  - f. Graduate's degree
  - g. Professional degree
  - h. Doctoral degree
- Q4. Employment Status: Are you currently...?
- a. Employed for wages
  - b. Self-employed
  - c. Out of work and looking for work
  - d. Out of work but not currently looking for work
  - e. Engaged in home-centered work
  - f. A student
  - g. Military
  - h. Retired
  - i. Unable to work
- Q5. What is your home zip code? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q6. How long have you been a member of Downtown?
- a. Less than 2 years
  - b. 2-5 years
  - c. 6-10 years
  - d. 11-15 years

- e. 16-20 years
- f. 21-25 years
- g. Over 25 years

- Q7. Which best describes your involvement\_\_\_ (please select all that apply)
- a. Currently Serving as Elder
  - b. Currently Serving as Deacon
  - c. Currently Serving as Trustee
  - d. Member of the Community of Leaders (those who have served on Session, Deacons or Trustees, but who are not currently serving in an active role)
  - e. Sunday School Teacher
  - f. Committee or Council Member
  - g. Choir Member/Musician
  - h. Retired Clergy
  - i. I do not currently serve in a leadership position
  - j. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART II: Practices**

*Christian practices can be defined as, "patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in light of God as known in Jesus Christ."*<sup>1</sup>

- Q8. What practices are important in your life of faith? Please check all that apply and offer others which help shape your life of faith as an individual in community.
- a. Keeping Sabbath
  - b. Practicing Hospitality
  - c. Prayer
  - d. Participating in a Small Group
  - e. Discernment
  - f. Bible Study
  - g. Music-related practices
  - h. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q9. How frequently do you engage in these Christian practices?

	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never- this practice is not important to me
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				

<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 3.

	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never- this practice is not important to me
Bible Study				
Discernment				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q10. My participation in these Christian practices has increased in the last 18 months

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q11. My connection to others through these Christian practices has increased in the last 18 months

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q12. My connection to God has increased in the last 18 months because of these Christian practices

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q13.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I am interested in learning more about Christian practices						

**PART III: Creative Time- The time of demolition and construction, since April 2016**

*Please respond to the statements below, indicating how strongly you disagree or agree.*

Q14.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
My worship attendance has not changed much in the last 18 months						
I have live streamed worship more in the last 18 months						
I have participated in church meetings outside of the building during Creative Time						
I have found it difficult to participate in the life of the church in the last 18 months						
I have accessed assisted parking on a Sunday morning						
The period of construction has been challenging for me						
I have felt well informed of what to expect in Creative Time						

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
There has been too much change in the life of the church in the last 18 months						
I have felt involved in the decision-making process of <i>Open Doors Open Futures</i>						
Creative Time has helped me grow in my faith						
<i>Open Doors Open Futures</i> feels like the right direction for our church						

#### **PART IV: Missional Identity**

Q15. Please respond to the statements below, indicating how strongly you disagree or agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
God's Spirit has been consistently active in the life of this congregation						
God is at work in the midst of the construction and disruption in our congregation						

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I have encountered the Holy Spirit in new ways in the past 18 months						
God is partnering with our congregation to serve God's people						
Our community of faith organizes itself well around our mission						
I feel invested in the future of the church in the city						
God is sending the church out in new ways to participate in God's work in the world						
Downtown is adaptive and responsive to its context						



**PART V: Change**

Q16. Please respond to the statements below, indicating how strongly you disagree or agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
I often hear, "but we've never done it that way" when new ideas are proposed at church						
New people bring new ideas into the life of the congregation						
We hold fast to our traditions at Downtown						
I have seen a lot of change in my years in the congregation						
In order to be adaptive, congregations must try new things						
The leaders of the church have a plan and order for making necessary changes in the church						
We are "Reformed and always reforming-" God is present in our midst						

## APPENDIX B

## INTERVENTION QUALITATIVE PROTOCOL: APRIL- JUNE 2018

*Following Participation in Easter Vigil*

1. What is your story of coming to this church?
2. Did you participate in Dwelling in the Word?
  - a. If so, tell me one thing about your experience of Dwelling in the Word.
3. Tell me one thing about your experience of the Easter Vigil.
4. How have you experienced the disruption to our spaces in the last two years?
  - a. What has been positive?
  - b. What has been more challenging?
  - c. How has it changed your sense of connection to the community?
  - d. How has it affected your sense of faith?
5. Can you think about a time in your life when you experienced God in disruption?
6. How would you describe what God is up to in our congregation?
7. How are we participating in that activity of God, or how could we be?
8. What is one hope you have for the open future of our congregation?
9. What is one hope you think God has for the open future of our congregation?
10. Is there anything more you would like to share about the Easter Vigil and God's activity in the midst of change?

*Following Participation in Dwelling in the Word*

1. What is your story of coming to this church?
2. Did you participate in the Easter Vigil?
  - a. If so, tell me one thing about your experience of the Easter Vigil.
3. Tell me one thing about your experience with Dwelling in the Word.
4. How have you experienced the changes to our spaces and ability to be together in the last two years?
  - a. What has been positive?
  - b. What has been more challenging?
  - c. Has it changed your sense of connection to the community?
  - d. Has it affected your sense of faith?
5. Can you think of a time in your life when you experienced God in disruption?
6. What passage did you engage for Dwelling in the Word?
7. How would you describe what God is up to in our congregation?
8. How are we participating in that activity of God?
  - a. How could we be participating in that activity?
9. What is one hope you have for the open future of our congregation?
10. What is one hope you think God has for the open future of our congregation?
11. Is there anything more you would like to share about Dwelling in the Word and God's activity in the midst of change?

## APPENDIX C

## END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE: JUNE 2018

**PART I: Background Information**

- Q1. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
- Q2. In what year were you born? (please enter a 4-digit birth year) \_\_\_\_\_
- Q3. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
- Less than a high school degree
  - High school degree
  - Some college education, but no degree
  - Associate's degree
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Graduate's degree
  - Professional degree
  - Doctoral degree
- Q4. Employment Status: Are you currently...?
- Employed for wages
  - Self-employed
  - Out of work and looking for work
  - Out of work but not currently looking for work
  - Engaged in Home-centered work
  - A student
  - Military
  - Retired
  - Unable to work
- Q5. What is your home zip code? \_\_\_\_\_
- Q6. How long have you been a member of Downtown?
- Less than 2 years
  - 2-5 years

- d. 6-10 years
  - e. 11-15 years
  - f. 16-20 years
  - g. 21-25 years
  - h. Over 25 years
- Q7. Which best describes your \_\_\_\_ (please select all that apply)
- a. Currently Serving as Elder
  - b. Currently Serving as Deacon
  - c. Currently Serving as Trustee
  - d. Member of the Community of Leaders
  - e. Sunday School Teacher
  - f. Committee or Council Member
  - g. Choir Member/Musician
  - h. Retired Clergy
  - i. I do not currently serve in a leadership position
  - j. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q8. Did you complete the initial survey in November 2017?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
- Q9. Did you participate in the Easter Vigil?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
- Q10. Did you participate in Dwelling in the Word?
- a. Yes
  - b. No

## **PART II: Practices**

*Christian practices can be defined as, “patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in light of God as known in Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>*

- Q11. I have participated in the following Christian practices through Downtown in the last 6 months (please check all that apply) and offer others which have helped to shape your life of faith as an individual in community.
- a. Keeping Sabbath
  - b. Practicing Hospitality
  - c. Prayer
  - d. Participating in a Small Group

---

<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 3.

- e. Discernment
- f. Bible Study
- g. Music-Related Practices
- h. Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q12. How frequently do you engage in these Christian practices?

	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q13. My participation in these Christian practices has increased since we have moved into new spaces

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q14. My connection to others through these Christian practices has increased since we have moved into new spaces

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

Q15. My participation in these Christian practices was helpful during the time of construction and disruption

	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Not at all
Keeping Sabbath				
Practicing Hospitality				
Participating in a Small Group				
Discernment				
Bible Study				
Music-Related Practices				
Other1				
Other2				
Other3				

**PART III: Open Doors Open Futures**

*Please respond to the statements below, indicating how strongly you disagree or agree.*

Q16.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
The construction project and timeline went pretty much as planned						
It is a relief to have the construction behind us						
The time of construction and disruption was an important time of growth and adaptation for the congregation						
I identify with the church in new ways because of our new spaces						
Creative Time helped me grow in my faith						
I feel invested in the future of the church in the city						
We are a stronger community of faith because of Creative Time						



#### **PART IV: Missional Identity**

*Q17. Please respond to the statements below, indicating how strongly you disagree or agree.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
God's Spirit has been consistently active in the life of this congregation						
God is at work in the midst of the congregation's movement into new spaces						
I have encountered the Holy Spirit in new ways because of our new spaces						
God is partnering with our congregation to serve God's people						
Our community of faith organizes ourselves well around our mission						
I feel invested in the future of the church in the city						

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know
God is sending the church out in new ways to participate in God's work in the world.						
Downtown is adaptive and responsive to its context						

Thank you for your participation in completing this questionnaire!

## APPENDIX D

### DWELLING IN THE WORD *IN VIVO* CODES

1. Always struck me as so great that the sanctuary wasn't changing
2. Everything was maintained at full levels despite the facilities changes. That's cool.
3. So much time spent during Creative Time in effect justifying the decision in ways that didn't strike me as being entirely straightforward.
4. In being at other churches, we all see ourselves as Christian groups in the same neighborhood, sharing and collaborating whenever there was a need around to do that.
5. There was a spirit of cooperation.
6. Stress on staff having to deal with moving and changes.
7. I think there was a lot of pressure on staff.
8. I think it costs us some staff people and that was distressing.
9. And how do we continue to grow and allow that to be what it's supposed to be through the ministries when we are also still tied back to the budget constraints and change and adapting and all the rest?
10. I think that's a challenge for me, really keeping focus.
11. It's an exciting opportunity to be part of a place where there's a real market for visible revitalization going on that also really has external signs.
12. And we need to step up to make good on that.
13. Sabbath time for pastors, I think that has been very difficult during this time.
14. I did feel like there were so many opportunities for us to open our doors to the community.
15. I definitely have felt an openness to engaging and being more open to downtown neighbors and community feeling welcome at the church and inviting downtown congregations in and things like that.
16. I felt drawn into the community as part of the church.
17. I can sense a curiosity by the broader church.
18. The challenge is not to have the building be the thing we are doing.
19. I am here all these years and I just still believe and it doesn't get ruffled by a change in space.
20. Where there's no conflict, there is no community...I would say the fact that I have been in conflict with this community about this project has been healthy for me.
21. For someone who has been upset about this project from very early on, you just love this church.
22. I think overall the fact that I have been aggravated is a helpful thing for my faith.

23. I do feel like the community was always coming together more as a group over the two years did support my faith in ways that it perhaps hadn't been supported before.
24. One way that I see God operating is in the sense of calling that personally in our family.
25. I see God as an active participant.
26. In the midst of construction, people came because of what they were going to do, what they were really dedicated to.
27. So going through that period of construction, we went outside and met wherever.
28. I think it shows a depth of faith that people have in coming to Downtown Presbyterian to go and do things, to go and be involved in things they believe in.
29. We had faith that the construction would lead us to good things.
30. When you walk out of the service and you come out and it's a different atmosphere. I feel like I see people a bit more uplifted.
31. I also see a situation where we are so blessed we don't know what to do with it.
32. It's a challenge to have so much abundance.
33. Even when we didn't have space we found a way to think of new things and do them.
34. So God is here.
35. Spaces to me feel really special.
36. The Hall, when you're looking out on the city, and the prayer room. I see the city.
37. These spaces feel really special.
38. We connect the city to us and us to the city.
39. The spaces are special in new ways.
40. So I think God was working there as well.
41. It was just really inspiring to see people
42. I think the architects, they inspire a person to think of things.
43. The prayer room- the first time I just went and I was amazed. I stood in the window just looking out of it, and it seems to be such a connection.
44. The view is almost like you are standing in the city.
45. God is in the timing of all of this.
46. I see a real calling of our church to help people see the church in a different light.
47. I feel like at this time, we have been called to expand into the city.
48. We were given opportunities
49. And we had opportunities right from the beginning
50. We had ecumenical worship here.
51. So I think that we've been given a real opportunity
52. It also ties into giving me confidence that even though it is hard and it is a lot of money, there is always something really important happening.
53. It is beyond just making a nice building.
54. The most disruptive time for me, the death of my daughter, God was at work.

55. God was at work in deep grieving, and has been ever since.
56. Our hope is that we become more racially integrated
57. That we take concrete action to become a church in which fewer than 80% of the members are white.
58. I don't think of God as having hope.
59. Like Aquinas, Jesus didn't need or have hope or faith the way we do. It was different.
60. I don't rule out the notion that God has hope.
61. I hope our congregation pleases God, but I don't know whether that is so.
62. During disruption, my discipleship group decided to eat together once a month.
63. It was great bonding and we still do it.
64. I hope for our congregation more opportunities for spiritual growth.
65. Anything in the direction of contemplative practices is something I appreciate.
66. One hope God has for us is to remember to care for each other, especially our older members, like the Senior Center.
67. It feels like God created an opportunity.

## APPENDIX E

### EASTER VIGIL *IN VIVO* CODES

1. I kind of strolled in here and it felt right.
2. The services felt right and the people felt right.
3. We're all children of God at Downtown, this foundational, Presbyterian Church gets that too.
4. The actual experience of going outside was so important to awaken us to what it is that we are doing.
5. It was a very important time to look at your own life.
6. Looking at what you think is important and what Christ means for you.
7. And looking at what the church are meaning for you and what they are here for.
8. If it were taken away, what would that mean?
9. We brought the light back into the service.
10. We felt something was still with us.
11. We needed that.
12. What is it that we need and was it gone for a while?
13. I mean, God was there.
14. It is an amazing experience once you start thinking about it.
15. The darkness gave me energy.
16. It's that the dark and the quiet and I think being able to go and sit someplace and just be by yourself.
17. I found myself writing word that I wouldn't have uttered, but they came out when I was writing.
18. It was reflective.
19. The ancient idea where you are intentionally given the opportunity to stop and reflect about something precise and specific about this time in your life, this time in Jesus' life...
20. We stopped to think about this time in the life of the church.
21. We had this whole long process of discernment
22. We ended up with this building and then the uses now being made in this building...
23. On Ash Wednesday, the cross, there it was and at that time of the year it is dark and behind it the city bus is going by and the high rises and so on. This concept that the church is in the heart of the city is so powerfully reflected in that image.
24. What Westminster has been doing is inviting in the city, bringing them in.
25. That's what we did. We went out into the light, the light of Christ, with the light of the city.
26. We invited that light and brought it in.
27. I don't know who did the Vigil, but it was a powerful thing.

28. You know the thing about the church is that we have these traditions and they are important, but at least at Downtown Presbyterian they don't dominate.
29. They don't constrain, they don't hold back.
30. They enrich.
31. I think the sense of community that night continues to stick with me.
32. Actually, we did meet some new people that night.
33. During Creative Time, we were welcomed as strangers [at the other churches].
34. And so we hope that we can have people come back and feel the same here.
35. Meeting in other churches was a positive experience because we weren't in our bubble of us.
36. We were able to try different things.
37. I mean it got me out into a different part of the city that I didn't know well.
38. It got me out of my comfort zone into something different.
39. We saw different people.
40. I felt like I got to talk to some of our young adults more, you know, the high school youth.
41. I felt like I was sharing a table with youth and they were coming in.
42. So I felt more of a community than what we can get into here.
43. I think here we get into our set table or our set people.
44. I think that the period of disruption could have been longer.
45. But as time goes on, if our spiritual journey is one of being transformed and changing, it is pretty clear that if everything is going well and it's on track and things are happening, we don't change.
46. We only change when there is disruption, when there is trauma.
47. When there is trouble that comes into our life and we rethink things.
48. Actually experiencing the needs and the disruption and the turmoil and the rest of it was good.
49. Without that, I don't think that the change and transformation would have happened.
50. A few people were complaining about the new direction and the new building and you know.
51. Things aren't always like they used to be.
52. We had our family routines and that sort of thing and change is uncomfortable.
53. What causes change is uncomfortable and so some people experience the discomfort and then pull back from it.
54. With so much unfamiliar in what should be a safe space...
55. It does cause some tension.
56. I think one of the positives is that for a long time I have heard, "We need to change here. We need to move forward. People want to try new things."
57. And then they really don't.
58. This focused us to do things differently, or to do things in a different way.
59. Do the same thing differently.
60. Or try the Easter Vigil- something totally different.
61. I think we learned more about each other's responsibilities because when we're here and we're safe and things are just humming along...

62. But then all of a sudden you go someplace else and you realize- who really does that or this, or who really didn't do that.
63. So there was beauty in that and challenge, too.
64. Was there no way for us to be creative before?
65. I think we need to remember we still have an existing building that is still nice and good.
66. So we need to remember those spaces and still use them.
67. I think it brought home to use to reinforce the importance of smaller community.
68. My small group, we get together twice a month and that became even more important because I wasn't always getting down here for things because things were so disruptive.
69. So I think it was that sense of the smaller community and really how important it is.
70. I agree 100% with that small community and in addition, the very great care to the larger community.
71. And during discernment, perhaps meeting with leaders and meeting with neighbors helped.
72. I think the absolute central fact of the church going forward is to be open to those in the community in welcoming people in not just a morning service, but there are people maybe just coming for the seniors' meeting.
73. I just think that is where the church is going and that is where the church seems to be relevant.
74. The more invitation we can extend to people outside...
75. They are welcome to walk in because maybe they haven't felt they could.
76. And maybe we weren't as creative with the doors always being locked before.
77. Really, God? Another challenge?
78. Maybe I questioned the energy it took in the inconvenience sometimes.
79. Sometimes the central concept of community gets involved there
80. First of all you want to say "the Body of Christ..."
81. If you are not part of a community then you are somehow outside.
82. There is something about the bleakness.
83. The bleakness and getting through the bleakness to the brightness.
84. That makes the brightness all the brighter.
85. I think you forget sometimes in disruption and think of the goal as to why you are doing it at all.
86. You can forget how the community can come together to make it happen because you want to have a good ending to it.
87. The struggle is there.
88. That was the beauty that there were many different members of that community that came through during these challenging times so that was fun.
89. Were we grieving for the old days, maybe?
90. There has been so much excitement about what can happen now.
91. I guess in a personal way, you have that feeling when you move or take a new job or have a new relationship- it has felt familiar to that in some ways.
92. I think people have pulled together in different ways.
93. I think people are responding to each other in different ways.



94. Maybe like Abraham, God is moving us into a new land.
95. In the old stories, things aren't always perfect.
96. But now God is pulling us along and making us reach out to other people.
97. And it is not just merely a circle of friends
98. Like Jesus, his message was to go out into the world.
99. And dealing with people on the margins, so that is what Jesus did.
100. Probably the first lesson we have to learn on our spiritual journey is that we are not in charge.
101. We are not in control and we like being in control. We like being in charge.
102. God is telling us that the church of the future is not like this, but it is like this-something else.
103. It is not crucial that a person be a member of Downtown Presbyterian.
104. It is important that a person find something here or have an experience here.
105. Or that something takes place for them.
106. I feel like right now we are being drawn more towards that individual level, where more of us can participate on some scale.
107. The affordable housing is putting a select few doing that work.
108. I also feel like right now there is some openness to try different things.
109. We need to listen to where are going.
110. We need to be willing to let go of things that are no longer relevant.
111. Or that no longer have the impact or make sense for where we are.
112. I think we need to be more willing to look at those things as we keep looking for new things, too.
113. I would like to see ways for groups to reconnect.
114. I think what God wants for this community is for us to be children of God.
115. God doesn't want us to abandon Presbyterianism.
116. I think my hope is just to allow more people to experience our community, our church.
117. Come in, be a part of us, however that looks to you.
118. I hope we can continue to listen to each other.
119. And listen to the world around us...
120. And listen to what God is calling us to do.
121. And figure out a way to communicate.
122. I feel that there is something that we can lack here.
123. To show a different way, that a mighty fortress is our God, it doesn't have to be a building that is a mighty fortress.
124. I think maybe God is asking us to live out the gospel, instead of just preaching it.
125. Helping me to see the work I am called to right now and being part of God's work in all of it.
126. The disruption [of a pastoral misconduct incident nearly 20 years ago] led to shared leadership.

127. It went from a largely authoritarian model. This was the single most significant element in disruption.

128. Creative Time was 5 years of discernment in all its richness and uncertainty and willingness to be led where the process went.

129. This was rather than beginning with an overarching concept or vision and then working toward and working out those details.

## APPENDIX F

### IMPLIED CONSENT LETTER

November 15 - December 15, 2017

Dear church leader,

You are invited to participate in a study of our congregation's identity and practices in the midst of change and Creative Time. I am conducting this study as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Daniel Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke. I hope to learn about the ways our congregation is changing and adapting in the midst of the end of construction and preparation for new spaces. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are one of the following:

- A current Elder, Deacon or Trustee of our congregation
- A former Elder, Deacon or Trustee of our congregation or a previous congregation

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed questionnaire. Your return of this questionnaire is implied consent. Your responses will be treated confidentially. Please be candid.

The questionnaire is designed to assess perceptions about the experience of construction and change in our building and community these past 18 months, while exploring individuals' own spiritual practices. It will take about 20 minutes. No benefits accrue to you for answering the questionnaire, but your responses will be used to help in the development of my doctoral research. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the questionnaire.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Luther Seminary our congregation, or the wider denomination. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, contact me at \_\_\_\_\_@luthersem.edu Phone: (612) xxx-xxxx. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Reverend Meghan K. Gage-Finn

## APPENDIX G

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

*Practicing Community: Naming, Claiming and Practicing the Holy Spirit's Sending of  
Congregation in the Midst of Change into an Open Future*

You are invited to participate in a study of our congregation's identity and practices in the midst of change and Creative Time. I am conducting this study as part of my Doctor of Ministry thesis project in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary. My advisors are Dr. Daniel Anderson and Dr. Alvin Luedke. I wish to follow up with participants with a more in-depth interview. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about participants' experiences of specific spiritual practices in the midst of change and development in the life of the congregation, specifically following the conclusion of construction and the movement into new building spaces.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things. Meet with me as a group for 45 minutes to an hour. I will ask you some questions about your experience with spiritual practices and your impression of God at work in our church and community. This is not a test. I am looking for your honest responses.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

There are no risks involved in this study. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to participate. No benefits accrue to you for participating, but your responses will be used to help support the creation care of congregations in our synod.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. If I publish any type of report, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file at \_\_\_\_\_ Presbyterian Church in City, State; only my advisor, Dr. Daniel Anderson, a professional transcriber, and I will have access to the data and any audio recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. All raw data including audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes will be destroyed by May 19, 2022. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the small number of participants in this group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or with other cooperating institutions, this congregation, or the Presbyterian Church (USA). If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Meghan K. Gage-Finn. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at m\_\_\_\_\_@luthersem.edu. Phone: 612-xxx-xxxx. You may also contact my advisors, Dr. Daniel Anderson at \_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_ and Dr. Alvin Luedke at \_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to be audio recorded:

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to allow use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H

## CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR USE WITH TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

Research Study Title: *Practicing Community: Naming, Claiming and Practicing the Holy Spirit's Sending of Congregation in the Midst of Change into an Open Future*

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all research data received from the researcher related to this research study.
2. I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.
3. I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.
4. I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.
5. I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession. All audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.
6. All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up records, will be returned to the researcher or permanently deleted. When I have received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the researcher or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the research team.
7. I understand that Luther Seminary has the right to take legal action against any breach

of confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

Transcriber's name \_\_\_\_\_ Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

## APPENDIX I

## EASTER VIGIL LITURGY

**Easter Vigil 2018****8:00pm- Gathering in the Light (Downtown Presbyterian Outdoor Plaza)**

*(Sunset at 7:40pm; full darkness at 9:19pm. One bonfire lit on upper plaza, votive candles prepared off to side, with several tapers for sharing the light. Luminaries are up the stairs from the street to the building. Christ candle, as yet un-lit, present in base.)*

Welcome

**John 1:1-5**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**Voice One** (lights one candle and then speaks): Here we gather in the darkness, the shadow-lines curving around the dust and the road, the garden and the table, the cross and the tomb. They hold our stories of all who travel this way to follow beyond the questions to truth, to acclamation.

**Voice Two** (lights one candle and then speaks): But we are restless this night, with the way things are where death seals a tomb and



bandages wrap the dead. Dare we believe that this is not how it might be?

**Voice One:** Dare we believe that there is more than Judas's kiss of betrayal, than Peter's denial, than the call for Barabbas, and Jesus breathing his last?

**Voice Two:** We come to this place, in the settling nightfall, aware of our participation in Jesus' death for us, aware of our need for the promise of light and the time and space set aside to live into the in-between.

**Voice One:** Here we hold together the light and the darkness, as those who watch for the morning, as those who watch for the morning.

**Voice Two:** And so we share the light of Christ (*light Christ Candle*) as we prepare our vigil, as ones who have witnessed and who will witness, as ones who proclaim God's love for the world and will proclaim that great love again. (*With tapers, the light of the Christ candle is shared and passed to each with a votive candle, with the words "The light of Christ."*)

*The Light of Christ-  
Christ Candle and musicians lead procession into Church Hall.*

## **8:20-Gathering in the Tomb (Church Hall)**

*Christ Candle to base, votives to communion table, Church Hall completely dark*

### **Genesis 1:1-19**

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

<sup>3</sup>Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

## *The Lord is my light- Taize*

### Genesis 1:20-2:4a

<sup>20</sup>And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." <sup>21</sup>So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God the Lord created them; male and female God created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

<sup>29</sup>God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all

the work that he had done in creation.

<sup>4</sup>These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

(Pause)

*Wait for the Lord* led by cantor and guitarist, pause

Isaiah 55: 1-11

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. <sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup>See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for God has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup>Seek the Lord while God may be found, call upon God while the Lord is near; <sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that God may have mercy on them, and to our God, for the Lord will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup>For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

(Pause)

*Wait for the Lord* led by cantor and guitarist, pause

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup>The Lord led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. <sup>3</sup>The Lord said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." <sup>4</sup>Then God said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. <sup>6</sup>I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." <sup>7</sup>So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. <sup>8</sup>I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup>Then the Lord said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." <sup>10</sup>I prophesied as God commanded me,

and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. <sup>11</sup>Then the Lord said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' <sup>12</sup>Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. <sup>14</sup>I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

(Pause)

*Wait for the Lord* led by cantor and guitarist, pause

Instructions to reflection stations...

**8:50-Gathering in Reflection (The Corner, Meditation Garden (single cross and fire pit), Garden Room (crosses), Prayer Room/Sanctuary)**

9:15-Bells ring to call back to Church Hall

**9:20-Gathering in Communion (Church Hall, curtains open)**

Romans 6:3-11

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For whoever has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

*Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers-*

Matthew 28:1-8

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like

lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

## *Raise a song of gladness- Taize*

### **Prayer at the table**

**Voice One:** Let us pray, This night, Lord Jesus, we know that the world has conspired and turned away, but we hold fast to the light. We rest this eve in the space between your dying and the promise of your rising. We are part of the angry crowds, the betrayers, but you pull us toward to reassurance and celebration of new life.

**All: And so we come to this table to witness to what was, what is, and what will be.**

**Voice Two:** When hope seems gone and the future broken, when the hungry need food and the victimized seek justice, may we witness to and participate in your story. For this night, it seems it is all we can do.

**All: Yet we retell your story, not just in this place, but in every place we find ourselves, for this story is the hope of the world.**

**Voice One:** This table is a welcome place for all, where we are rooted and from which we are sent to be your body, O Christ, in the world. This bread is the means of a new beginning, and this cup the promise for all. We come as we are and in all that we have done. May we trust in this meal to renew us, restore us, and reawaken us to witness and tell, to listen and share. May your Holy Spirit rest upon each one of us and all of us together, taking these elements common to our daily use to set them aside for a sacred celebration in your name.

**All: So we come as we are, O Savior Christ, with all the worry we have, the hurt of the past, bringing forward what is broken in us**

**and in the world. We come fearing the future and the burden on the unknown. But still we come.**

**Voice Two:** As the night thickens, we wait and we watch. We give you thanks for your great sacrifice, and we give you thanks for one another, that as we break this bread and bless this cup we do so remembering together, witnessing together, sharing together in your great love for the world. And we remember, witness, and share saying together the prayer you taught us, *Our Father...*

Words of Institution

*Come and fill-* Taize

**Closing Prayer**

One: We give you deep thanks, O God. The tomb is empty. Love and hope have overcome hatred and despair.

**All: There is Light in the midst of our darkness. We've been fed by your Word, by Christ's sacrifice for us, and we have been fed within this community.**

One: Pour out your Spirit upon us, that we might move from this place made new, proclaiming your great love the world, for Christ is Risen!

**All: Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**9:40-Gathering in Preparation (Church Hall)**

- Open curtains fully
- Turn up lights
- Orient chairs toward city for 7am service
- Arrange flowers
- Charge and bless and pass the peace

**10:00-Gathering in Fellowship (Recreation Room)**

## APPENDIX J

### DWELLING IN THE WORD TEXTS

**Tuesday, April 10**

**Reading for Sunday, April 15**

#### **John 20:19-29**

<sup>19</sup>When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup>After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” <sup>24</sup>But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup>A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup>Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

**Tuesday, April 17****Readings for Sunday, April 22****Exodus 3:1-5**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup>When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup>Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

**Genesis 1:24-31**

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”



<sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

## Tuesday, April 24

Readings for Sunday, April 29

### 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup>through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. <sup>3</sup>For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup>Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

**Mark 8:27-30**

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”<sup>28</sup> And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”<sup>29</sup> He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”<sup>30</sup> And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

**Tuesday, May 1**

**Readings for Sunday, May 6**

**Acts 10:1-17, 23-26, 28, 34-35**

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called.<sup>2</sup> He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.<sup>3</sup> One afternoon at about three o’clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius.”<sup>4</sup> He stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” He answered, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.<sup>5</sup> Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; <sup>6</sup>he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.”<sup>7</sup> When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him,<sup>8</sup> and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.<sup>9</sup> About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.<sup>10</sup> He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance.<sup>11</sup> He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners.<sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.<sup>13</sup> Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.”<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or

unclean.” <sup>15</sup>The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” <sup>16</sup>This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. <sup>17</sup>Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon’s house and were standing by the gate.

So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging. The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. <sup>24</sup>The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. <sup>25</sup>On Peter’s arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. <sup>26</sup>But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up; I am only a mortal.”

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

### **Matthew 25:31-40**

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?’

<sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

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