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HOSPITALITY IN THE HOUSE OF GOD:
DECONSTRUCTING HABIT AND
BUILDING *MISSIO DEI*

by

JULIA A. CARLSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2021

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality in the House of God: Deconstructing Habit and Building Missio Dei

by

Julia A. Carlson

This research project addresses neighborliness, change, and hospitality in the life of a mainline church of 1,200 members. It is a congregation that has traditional worship and programming with progressive values. The congregants are not comfortable with change and are coming to terms with the missing Millennial generation. Mixed method Action Research using missional practices of hospitality and neighbor interviews offered new faith formation and relationship growth with neighbors. There were also educational opportunities on change, the missional church movement, and neighborliness. The work relies on the theology of Serene Jones, Kosuke Koyama, and Miroslav Volf.

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I am also grateful for the TTC support group who became my research team. The group was an open-hearted, open-minded sounding board, clarifiers, and commentators. They participated in an interview for a class and read *Forming the Missional Church* by Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert, along with volumes of papers and the endline data. Alex, Erin, Clayton, Howie, Jack, and Lola, I am grateful for your questions, suggestions, wisdom, and support! Thanks to my nephew Paul Carlson for the theoretical diagram.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B	Baseline Questionnaire
B/E	Baseline/End line
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
E	End line Questionnaire
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer Community
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
TTC	The Tradition Church also Tradition Church
VFW	Veterans of Foreign Wars

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CHAPTER 1

HOSPITALITY

Alpha and Omega

“Hospitality is not optional for Christians”¹

“The stranger is our future waiting to happen”²

This thesis begins and ends with hospitality. Not, as Henri Nouwen cautions, “tea parties, bland conversation, and a general atmosphere of coziness,”³ but as “a concrete expression of love.”⁴ When asked which commandment should be foremost, Jesus said, “The first commandment is this, ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord your God is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:28-31).⁵ Concrete expressions of love for one’s neighbor are the will of God. A congregation’s concrete practices of hospitality set its Christian identity.

¹Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 78.

²Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1998), 181.

³Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of Spiritual Life* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1975), 66.

⁴Pohl, 31.

⁵All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise.

The particular congregation and research site for this thesis was one in transition between the previous and next installed head of staff pastor. The research took place in the last five months of a transitional pastor's tenure and extended one month beyond. The transitional pastor set his focus on programs for church growth from the fall of 2018 until his departure in April, 2020. Before the interim began, the congregants were already ruminating on the growing number of grey heads on the diminishing number of people in the pews on Sunday morning. The transitional time gave congregants time to build up nostalgia for the past and concern for the future.

While the Western Church has been facing changes since the 1960s, this congregation has remained largely insular. They have a great generosity of spirit for helping others. They are less inclined toward relationship with neighbors. It has had the financial capability and membership numbers to continue in long held patterns of worship, study, and mission. This time of transition stirred awareness of change not only in leadership but in the broader culture. They awakened to their discomfort with the changing world. The number of new members does not match the losses from death and membership transfers; even more difficult is the reality that long-term friends cannot easily be replaced by new faces. Nostalgia and sorrow are becoming presences. Fear has taken up residence.

The Significance of this Study

While this research focused on one congregation, it shares the rapidly changing national culture with every mainline church in the country. This assembly has deep roots in Protestant Reformation worship and polity. They have an affinity for clericalism and an unspoken but practiced preference for patriarchal leadership. Committee work and

programming as Christian life is so deeply ingrained in its practitioners that to change seems unfaithful. As the demographic shifts in organizational participation catch up with them, structures like committees and programs are waning. Valuing the past as they do makes moving forward challenging.

This study is significant because, while Christians are taught the practice of remembering, it is to remember God's household economy which is the continuous work of salvation. It is not primarily to remember their own congregational past but to remember God's steadfast love and salvation. God points toward "a future and a hope," to quote Jeremiah (29:11c).

What today's parishioners have known of church they know by memory, by heart. This present newness is heartbreak. There is decrease, concern, and fear. However, in the very circumstances they mourn, God has consistently shown the will to ignite courage and make an opening for what is to come. The primary invitation is to receive God's own hospitality. Then the invitation to pass on "hospitality to strangers" which Christine Pohl defines as "...a highly valued moral practice, an important expression of kindness, mutual aid, neighborliness, and response to the life of faith."⁶

This project also brings feminist critique and theology to bear on hospitality, neighborliness, and change. The integration of women, both lay and clergy, into church leadership has been a major change factor in programming and volunteerism in the last several decades. At The Tradition Church⁷ women are still largely responsible for

⁶Pohl, *Making*, 4.

⁷The Tradition Church is a congregation of over 1200 members, in a mid-western capital city. It began as two congregations begun by the same pastor prior to the Civil War. They joined and added "The"

hospitality as social events while women and men address hospitality as membership growth and marketing. Theologies of equality included as lenses in this paper are justice oriented. They encourage agency and invite spiritual maturity and transformation.

The research practices in this project were all invitational and directed toward the whole congregation. The request included taking another look at scripture and practices from the missional church movement so a congregation might learn the possibility that God is already at work and in relationship in the neighborhood beyond the walls of the church.

Research Question

How might Action Research interventions utilizing missional practices of hospitality impact The Tradition Church and its relationship with neighbors?

Context

The context for this research is The Tradition Church (TTC). Context is defined as “the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.”⁸ Context, then, takes into account the organization, membership, identity, and change within the congregational system. Conversions and even revolutions have taken place in the broader church, country, and world while life within The Tradition Church has remained largely the same. The research question was formed with an awareness of that gap. Most of the lenses echo the variances of the last four decades bringing a then-and-now rhythm to this work. The research question casts out toward the impact new practices might have on the

to their name in 1914. Today, they describe their worship services as traditional and their presence as progressive. This is a pseudonym for the purposes of this thesis.

⁸Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 02/13/2020. 2:11 p.m., merriam-webster.com.

congregation. Because the practices are focused on hospitality, neighbors and neighborliness come into consideration.

The Tradition Church is known for its building, preaching, and a century-long focus on music and the arts. This congregation values aspects of its history sometimes to the detriment of the present. In addition to a broader look at the church's history, the second chapter will look at the meaning and condition of neighborliness.

The Lens of Neighborliness

While many people in this congregation know their own neighbors well and interact with them frequently, some have down-sized or moved within the city and have experienced the modern pattern of disconnect. The current conversation on the practice of neighborliness is a story of change and decline. The next chapter begins by looking back on 2019, and the celebration of the former public television show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Its producer and star, Fred Rogers, left an interview with thoughts and practices on neighborliness.⁹

Mister Rogers is followed by Professor Linda Woodhead's work on love and justice.¹⁰ She speaks to a quality of love for neighbors in relation to Jesus' command to love them. She brings her critique of the church's ability to form relationships with neighbors based on current instruction and practice. She says the church has focused on *agape*, or what she refers to as one-way love. In his article, Fred Rogers himself offered a

⁹Fred Rogers, "Catching Neighborliness," *Word and World* 15, no. 1 (Winter, 1995): 14-23.

¹⁰Linda Woodhead. "Love and Justice," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (Apr 1992): 44-61.

very subtle critique on Christian education versus praxis. Both writers suggest the church has shied away from the depth of Christian calling to love neighbors.

A secular look at neighborliness comes from Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. The final section of chapter two also includes some of Putnam's work with David Campbell in *American Grace* to look at changes in neighborliness and the social structure in the United States.¹¹ This view of neighborliness illustrates some of the vagaries and variations in culture. It was once common to create five-, seven-, and even ten-year plans for organizational direction and growth. Because of globalization, technology, politics, and differences in acculturation between generations, long-range plans are superfluous. The scale of change in and around the church invites evaluation. This project emphasizes the four-frame process from Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal as a tool for looking at a congregation and church as a whole system.

Tools for Change

Chapter two will look specifically at the four-frame theory presented by Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal.¹² Bolman and Deal present four different frames to evaluate an organization. It is their premise that institutions too often assess their effectiveness by department or section rather than look at the whole. This is true of The Tradition Church. When considering the level of change awaiting or confronting associations, businesses, and churches today, I am convinced it is most helpful to think beyond a single aspect or

¹¹Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), Kindle; Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

¹²Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2017).

division and consider the whole. In the church, evaluating a facility separate from worship, desired activity, giving, governance, personnel, theology, or spiritual practice would not provide a way forward. If any organization and particularly a congregation is to move ahead in mission or God's calling, wholeness and system-wide thinking is critical.

Bolman and Deal's work is also highlighted for this project because they believe good leadership should be aware and desire development of the spiritual nature of creativity and communal work. Though not a specific intent, their work speaks directly to the church. Churches are concerned about the secularization of culture, yet here is an endorsement from a secular source to nurture spirit and soul in the midst of change.

Finally, it is important to consider Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky's work on technical versus adaptive change.¹³ If a congregation is to live into its fullest potential, it is wise to know what solutions and expertise, or technical change, exist within the congregation. It is equally important to know when an organization needs to look beyond its current capabilities to learn new practices and find new ideas that may lead to adaptation of its mission and identity.

Change was a noted challenge for TTC going into this research. As research progressed, very few aspects of common life were left intact due to the advance of the coronavirus COVID-19; research began in November, 2019 and state government response to the virus brought an end to congregating within the building in mid-March, 2020.

¹³Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Review Press, 2017).

The *Missional* Era and a Theology of Welcome

The *Missional* Era ¹⁴

The research question specifically states the intent to use missional practices of hospitality. The *missional church movement* is an important lens for this research project.

Church consultant and pastor, Patrick Keifert uses the phrase, *missional era*, to describe his hopes for the present-day church. Some use the terms post-Christendom or the post-Modern Era to name the current epoch. Rather than define the present over and against the past, Keifert believes the phrase *missional era* is more hopeful and forward looking. The *missional church movement* had its roots in the 1970s, when the Reverend Lesslie Newbigen returned to England after years of missionary work in India. Newbigen saw the changes in church and culture more clearly for having been away from gradual transformations as it happened. The movement began with an honest critique of the church and a direct appraisal of the values and practices of that time.

The *missional church* emphasizes the Trinitarian nature of God and laments the practice of any congregational or denominational focus on Jesus alone or Spirit alone. In *missional thinking*, the Triune God is the source of the vocation and purpose of the church in practice as well as theology. This has long been referred to as *missio Dei*, which acknowledges God as a sending God. It challenges the patterns and habits of clericalism and remnant colonialism. Thinking *missionally* is an invitation to refocus on God's horizon and the larger world's needs through relationship with neighbors.

¹⁴Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2006).

The church has become accustomed to being a template rather than a living, breathing body. Church members have been taught that the pattern itself pleases God and serves the world. The pattern has become an ideal and perhaps an idol. Younger generations do not find the same value or meaning in the pattern; this has created a generation gap. While younger members feel there are unrealized potentials, some older members feel the best of church life is in the past. The *missional* movement challenges congregations to come alive again through life in God and God's new horizons.

Theology of Welcome

This research has become a journey from a nostalgic ideal of neighborliness, through some of its imperfections, and then to dramatic decline. It invites parishioners to remove the idealized appearance of tradition and look again through biblical and theological lenses.

Biblical Lenses

In a well-known story of hospitality, Sarah and Abraham offer shelter and food to a trio of strangers (Genesis 18: 1-15). Their agility and welcome become an example for church and society.

In the New Testament, Jesus included instruction and parabolic examples of creating a table that is inclusive of all people. The Christian church has long desired and worked toward a broad welcome yet the culture of any given congregation often lacks diversity. This thesis looks at a travelogue of lessons on fellowship in the fourteenth chapter of Luke. In this way, there is a focus on Jesus' own belief and practices of

hospitality. Because Jesus' expectations of table fellowship are sociologically and economically broad, hospitality leans into justice when looking at Matthew 25.

Theology of Relationships and Change

Finally, chapter three brings neighborliness, change, the missional church movement, and biblical hospitality together in theological exploration of boundaries and welcoming the stranger primarily through the work of Serene Jones, Miroslav Volf, and Kosuke Koyama.

Serene Jones brings in a younger person's metaphoric image of the present-day church as reduced to rubble. She also brings the invitation to return to God's story with a greater openness. She asks to what degree church members are ready to put off their mourning clothes and live on in the rubble. Volf asks religious folk to develop practices of making room for the stranger as the Trinity demonstrates through *perichoresis*, or the relationship of the Trinity. He developed a theology that includes ways a religious community can be open and at the same time maintain integrity. Whether in the mode of transformation or resurrection, hospitality is a meeting point of identity and practice for God's church. Hospitality is an aspect of God's Trinitarian being, and an imperative for the church.

Hospitality as Spiritual Maturity

Since beginning ministry at The Tradition Church, I have been guided in my work by a printed copy of a lecture given by Reverend Dr. Herbert Anderson in 2003. The lecture was prepared and delivered to chaplains and pastoral care professionals. He used what he referred to as an old German word *seelsorge*, which he translated as the "care of

souls,” to emphasize two things. The first is his belief that pastoral care is deeper and broader than the more current trend of spiritual care. Anderson recognized that while the term spiritual care may be more acceptable to a wider range of people in hospitals and other public settings, the care of souls is about the wholeness and wellness of individuals and communities. It is therefore deep, life-long work. His second concern was the breadth of public trends and ills, from terrorism, to addiction, and over consumption, as challenges of caring for souls at this time in history. As he comes to his conclusion, he states,

Everything we have said so far about the soul of ministry and the complexity of human life before God—about the virtues of soul that invite us to embrace vulnerability and ambiguity, taste humility and imagine what is possible—finds its expression in the church’s ministry of hospitality. The ministry of hospitality is about welcoming the stranger as someone with gifts to give.¹⁵

The next generations have become like strangers in their aversion to the church. The various lenses in this chapter challenge the depth of the practice of hospitality within and without of church buildings through the social and mission models of the past.

First Peter 2:5, states, “like living stones let yourself be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” This is a time of building something new whether as remodel or tear-down. It is a Spirit/soul problem for the church to treat hospitality as a membership drive or mission committee initiative. As Kosuke Koyama stated, “Christian theology will remain

¹⁵Herbert Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript. San Antonio, TX. (February, 2004): 38. The manuscript includes this note: “Readers are free to duplicate any or all of this material by permission of the author, Herbert Anderson, Ph.D., with appropriate acknowledgement of authorship.” Some of this information is also included in an article titled, “Whatever Happened to *Seelsorge*?” by Herbert Anderson. *Word and World* Volume 21, no. 1 (Winter, 2001), 32-41. https://www.lutheranservices.org/sites/default/files/images/pdfs/N4_HerbAndersonpaper.pdf, accessed 10/9/2020.

meaningful only as it takes the stranger seriously.”¹⁶ To this end, this research project introduced missional practices of hospitality at TTC.

Research Methodology

Chapter four outlines the research methodology. This chapter will describe the intended sequences of questionnaires, new practices, and educational opportunities. There was a research opportunity or two scheduled every month from late November 2019 through May 2020. There were three opportunities in March 2020, and that is when both public and church life went through a series of rapid changes to cope with COVID-19.

The research began with a survey of the congregation in the form of an online questionnaire. It contained fifty questions, both quantitative and qualitative, exploring beliefs and personal practices in the current church. It offered questions about change, neighbors, and neighborliness. The invitation to participate was given through the bulletin and monthly newsletter, via announcements on Sunday mornings in worship, and personal emails. A link to the questionnaire was included in the emails and available on the church website. Paper copies were available for pick-up or mail out through the church office.

The new missional practice of Dwelling in the Word was offered at 8:30 a.m., before the service on Sundays in Advent, 2019. Dwelling in the Word consisted of reading aloud a scripture passage, in this case Luke 1:41-55. There were short silences between the two recitations. Attendees then paired up to share meaningful phrases or

¹⁶Kosuki Koyama, “Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*.” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327, (1993): 288.

questions from their reading. After sharing with one another, true to the practice, each shared their partner's responses with those at the table.

Dwelling the in the Word was developed by Patrick Keifert and Pat Taylor Ellison of the Church Innovations Institute. Their goals for the practice are to empower Christians to read and engage God through scripture without dependence on professional clergy. They also believe that through the pattern of pairing for discussion we can listen one another "into free speech."¹⁷ This practice was well received by participants.

On the first Sunday in January, 2020, I invited congregants to an introduction and training session on the process of conducting an interview with one or two neighbors. This intervention was a repeat of a course requirement from 2018. While interested in the material gathered through the interviews, I was also interested in the experiences and feelings of the interviewers. Two focus groups were held on January 26, 2020, and February 2, 2020.

In February, I did the first of three planned educational sessions. This was primarily about changes in culture and church. Information came from Charles Taylor, Robert Putman, and David Campbell.¹⁸ The attendees filled out a pre-session, quantitative questionnaire. A few participants took the time to answer the post-session qualitative questions.

¹⁷Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2011), 20.

¹⁸Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 2007. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster), 2010.

In March, another round of Dwelling in the Word was planned for the Lenten season using Philippians 2:1-11. One person came for the first session and two others attended the second. The third session was cancelled as the church closed to in-person gatherings due to COVID-19. We were able to gather virtually for Dwelling in the Word on the fifth Sunday in Lent and Palm Sunday studying Psalm 121. Using Zoom, we were not able to follow the pattern of sharing in pairs but shared openly as a group of four.

The research methodology also included the practice of Dwelling in the World. This practice also came from the Church Innovations organization. Dwelling in the World is an umbrella which covers a number of practices that gets church members out into their neighborhoods. At TTC, the plan was for individuals or pairs to do prayer walks through their own or the church's neighborhood once a week for four weeks.

I stood at a table after the service on the first two Sundays of March to hand out the instruction sheet and answer any questions on the practice. By the third Sunday, the church was closed. At this point, the church staff made it a priority to get the invitation, instructions, and a log form available online. I appreciated their technical expertise as well as their urgent need for prayer out in the world.

The weather was mild in both March and April. By March 28, the state was asked to shelter-in-place to slow the spread of COVID-19. However, residents were encouraged to get outside for exercise and the prayer walks continued. Many who signed up in person at the beginning of March were unable to complete their intentional walks. Seven people participated through the online form. A focus group for walkers was held on May 31, 2020, using Zoom.

The March and April education presentations were recorded using Zoom and posted online in April. The second session, originally scheduled for March, was on the *missional church* movement. The third session, originally scheduled for April, presented images of churches in ruins from Scotland and Ireland to share a theology of hospitality. Both the PowerPoint presentations asked for feedback with specific questions on the last slide. Some answered the questions and others replied with open comments in letter form.

The research proposal called for an additional intervention in May to be decided by the research team. When the team gathered on March 8, we evaluated the church calendar from the perspective of planned events, the transitional pastor's departure, and the pastor search committee's expected schedule and decided that a larger event such as a picnic with neighbors was beyond the capacity of the congregation and staff. There were several large events in addition to Easter and a new-pastor-candidating Sunday in the offing. It was suggested that we repeat the neighbor interview opportunity as some did not have time to complete two interviews and many expressed an interest in doing more. Just one week later, the building was closed and all our services, including Holy Week and Easter, were online. In an email, I invited those who had done the neighbor interviews to get back in touch with their interviewee(s) if they could do that safely and ask two of the interview questions again: What keeps you awake at night? and, What gives you hope? One person reported making a call.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variables in this research were: two separate seasons of Dwelling in the Word, recruiting volunteers from the congregation to interview one or two of their

neighbors who do not attend church; attendance at one or all of the three educational sessions; participation in the practice of Dwelling in the World prayer walks through their own neighborhood or in the neighborhood near the church. The growth and change in congregant thinking with regard to hospitality and neighborliness as well as readiness for change are dependent variables.

All participation was by general invitation making the number of volunteer participants an intervening variable. One hundred sixteen people contributed to the baseline questionnaire; one hundred two joined in for the endline. Participation in other interventions ranged from six to twenty-seven. Participation on the questionnaire(s) comes close to representing ten percent of the congregation. Interest in other interventions involved one percent or fewer of the membership.

The many neighborhoods and suburbs in which participants and their neighbors live and where they did prayer walks was also an intervening variable. Their age, gender, length of time at The Tradition Church, length of time in their neighborhood, previous experiences with neighbors, and previous experience with change in the church were also intervening variables.

The COVID-19 pandemic became an intervening variable. It was an unprecedented event. By mid-March 2020, the Center for Disease Control asked that people not gather in groups larger than 250; the number in allowed gatherings was decreased to 50 and then to 10 within days of the first announcement. One Friday the bulletins were printed for a service and by Saturday morning the congregation was told to stay home. TTC had the capacity to livestream its services and kept up an abbreviated

worship service. The life of the church beyond worship none the less added to the research.

Key Terms

Dones: A name given to those who have been active in congregational life at one time but no longer attend.

Hospitality: This is a word that regularly connotes providing comfort and care for visitors to one's home or church. It may be a reminder of family practices or general etiquette. This project will wade into biblical and theological meanings of hospitality such as compassion, the courage to welcome the stranger and foreigner, as well as the secular or spiritual-but-not-religious around us.

Missional Church: An ecclesiological movement that begins with *missio Dei*, or God at the center. Importantly, it is with emphasis on God as Trinity. A congregation using a missional outlook receives the invitation to discern anew God's presence and work in our neighborhoods and join that work as led by the Holy Spirit. It transfers the focus from membership to relationship with neighbors. It invites a shift away from attractional thinking and marketing practices. There is also an emphasis on spiritual practices over programing.

Neighborliness: One of my conversation team members expressed his desire to bring what we have inside our building in worship and community, out into the neighborhood. This research project starts with the awareness of the long-term habit of arriving at the church building with the expectation that God is inside. The habit includes making ourselves available to praise and inspiration on periodic visits. It invites the notion that God is already at work in the neighborhood and in our neighbors.

Neighborliness suggests that, in both receiving and showing kindness and care, we may engage in new power and new life.

Nones: A name social scientists have given to those who state they have no religious affiliation when being surveyed.

Theologia crucis: Literally this means theology of the cross. It is brought to this paper by Kosuke Koyama with reference to Martin Luther. For Luther, the suffering and weakness Jesus endured on the cross was a theological principle of the revelation of God.¹⁹

Via Eminentiae: This also comes to this paper through Kosuke Koyama. He writes of extending hospitality to strangers as *via eminentiae*. The term refers to the practice of discerning who God is by positive means and that we can know who God is by what God does. In this case, Koyama stated that loving strangers as God loves them, through hospitality or welcome, is humanity's hope, or the eminent way, in the face of violence and genocide.

Institutional Research Board Standards for this Proposal

Since participation in this research project was on a volunteer basis, no one needed to participate if they were uncomfortable or felt at risk. Having stated that, the interventions and questions asked did not fall into any Institutional Research Board (IRB) categories of risk. The benefits were the possibility of gaining new information from neighbors, gaining new practices of hospitality, and learning more about changes in

¹⁹Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1984), 31-32.

culture and church. Those who interviewed one or two neighbors were given a confidentiality form to sign. Those who participated in other interventions were informed about the research project and indicated implied consent by participating in the online surveys. Participants signed a statement of informed consent when participating in a focus group or sending written electronic feedback following an online educational opportunity. These forms are in appendices D, G, H, and J.

All data will be kept in a locked file in my office; only my advisors, Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to the data and to the focus group recordings. My research team had access to the endline questionnaire results; they signed a confidentiality agreement, contracting with us not to disclose any information, see appendix H. While I made every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. The focus group recordings will be not be used for educational purposes. They were used as a record of a conversation and will be stored in a locked drawer in Julia Carlson's office; only my advisors, Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke, and I will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed May 31, 2024.

Ethical Considerations

One of the ethical considerations of this work is care for the congregation's fear and resistance to change. This congregation has been sheltered from outside changes in culture because of their large number, a healthy endowment, and an insular nature. The scale of advocacy, mission giving, and accomplishments such as seeding a building project that now houses forty-four previously homeless youth, give the congregation identity and presence in the city. They expect to continue in the same patterns. Coghlan

and Brannick state, “It may seem obvious that naming the need for change and its causes is essential.”²⁰ TTC has not addressed the changing culture or movements such as the missional church. They have, to this point, continued to work to attract new members.

Again, as Coghlan and Brannick stated,

Another key element in evaluating the need for change is the degree of choice about whether to change or not. This is often an overlooked question. Choices are not absolute. While there may be no control over the forces demanding change, [i.e.] a budget reduction, there is likely to be a great deal of control over how to respond to those forces. In that case there is likely to be a good deal of scope as to what changes, how and in what timescale the change can take place. The action research cycle enables shared inquiry into how these forces for change are having an impact, and what choices exist to confront them.²¹

Much of this was new for the congregation and required care along the way.

A further ethical concern was for the care of neighbors in the form of respect and confidentiality during interviews and in the handling of all written materials. Training was provided for those who volunteered to conduct interviews. The training included listening, acceptance, and confidentiality.

Pastoral Transition

I started this Doctor of Ministry program when the Reverend Doctor Fergus was the head of staff.²² He retired from ministry in January of 2018. After two months, the Reverend Andrews started as a transitional head of staff; he was with the church until

²⁰David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (Los Angeles, CA: (Sage Publications Ltd, 2014), 80.

²¹Coghlan and Brannick, 80.

²²This and all names in this paper are pseudonyms.

April of 2020. Reverend Andrews specialized in church growth and made this a focus of his time with The Tradition Church.

In July of 2018, the second associate pastor at TTC took a call as a solo pastor in a local suburban church. That position was filled with an interim associate at the end of October. The business administrator retired in November of 2018 and another member of the administrative team gave her notice in December. With a new head of staff and other staff changes, processes for worship, communications, and programming were in nearly constant flux. This culture of change affected staff more than congregants but where it affected lay leaders and committees, most changes returned to former patterns, but at a lower level of function, in the few months between the departure of the transitional pastor and the arrival of the new head of staff.

Results of Research and Interpretation

The quantitative survey information was descriptive of the congregation. The research showed that the majority of participants own single family homes and many have been in the same home for more than fifteen years. Most of the respondents are over the age of fifty-five, many have also had a long association with TTC and have served as lay leaders. The results showed stability among congregants that echoes that of the congregation.

The qualitative questions on the baseline and endline surveys as well as in other qualitative data invited reflection on God, neighbors, the secular community, worries, hopes, and involvement with the church. From the many responses, both short and long, it was apparent that some honor the congregation's past while others want to return to it; this was expressed outrightly or in nuanced ways with past tense verbs and passive voice.

Some respondents wrote about frustration with the way the past influences the present and keeps them in a fixed pattern.

Just a few people engaged the Dwelling in the Word and Dwelling in the World practices but they demonstrated that new energy and relationship with God comes through these experiences. The neighbor interviews appeared to create curiosity and greater openness to neighbors and spirituality outside the church. The COVID-19 closures and restrictions affected the Dwelling practices as well as the educational events. One of three education sessions was in-person and the last two were recorded and offered as a link on the church website. Between the Dwelling practices and educational opportunities, I received twenty-four emailed feedback notes which ranged from a repetition of the content to individuals wrestling with personal practices, theology, and beliefs.

Care for neighbors and social justice issues such as systemic racism,, and heterosexism are like a stream running through the data. This also brings awareness to the gap between the congregation's wealth, stability, and education levels compared with those receiving the church's mission outreach. The other river running throughout the data is the concern for membership growth and the future of the church. The conflux of all rivers and streams is hospitality; the respondents used the language of growth, welcome, and inclusivity in addition to the word hospitality. There exists the impulse to hide from both giving and receiving it which, now that it has been revealed, can be seen as disbelief and promise in their midst.

Conclusions and Reflections

While some of the data demonstrate familiar aspects of this congregation such as their longevity and their fear of change, it also showed the strength of their faith and worship, their bond with the church, and commitment to social justice. The data contained the fears and long-fixed patterns of an old, stable church in a new time. In missional thinking, this is an invitation to engage with God's agency. Their often-passive voices invite development of their personal, spiritual agency. The use of the past tense invites liturgies and rituals honoring their past as they begin new practices. This chapter will take a brief look at what Walter Brueggemann refers to the practice of traditioning.

The data also invite the congregation to consider mutuality or their relationships with one another, with near neighbors, and with the neighbors in need. Even as they focus on their desire for more families, the families they have already among the membership feel disconnected and not fully heard or served and with fewer opportunities to serve. The long-term relationships that are the backbone of the congregation are perceived by some as cliques. Chapter six further discusses hospitality with a new consciousness that hospitality within the body is as much a growing edge as hospitality to neighbors. The data bear out the promise of the missional practices as well as the Action Research interventions as a break in old patterns that can bring new awareness and openness.

Epilogue

After years of interim ministry, The Tradition Church is my first installed call. I thought it would be a time of greater stability both personally and professionally. However, the story of the congregation's last four years is one of transition and change. The Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary provided structure, a cohort, biblical

and theological resources, and leadership tools to this variable and this unprecedented time. The epilogue contains further reflection on this time of ministry and my ministry as a whole.

Summary

This research project at The Tradition Church brought people together in new ways. In a congregation that is averse to change, the missional practices of hospitality introduced offered a deeper welcome to members and friends of the congregation by listening to their thoughts and stories through the Dwelling in the Word practice. They were amazed to find out their neighbors were eager to talk about beliefs and spiritual practice. When the pandemic hit, they had a new spiritual tool in the form of Dwelling in the World prayer walks. In a time when all people felt vulnerable and helpless, they had a new practice of faith. There is much to say about results and interpretation, but first it is time to take a more detailed look at the lenses that informed this research.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY, NEIGHBORLINESS, AND CHANGE

This chapter begins with a brief history of The Tradition Church (TCC)¹ followed by some neighborhood demographics. Since the research question involves interaction with neighbors, this section also includes an exploration of neighborliness. Current materials on neighborliness indicate a twenty-year trend toward change. Church life has also been in flux so change is also an important lens for this work.

History

The Tradition Church is a one hundred sixty-five-year-old congregation in a mid-western capital city. One pioneering pastor started two congregations in the mid-1800s. Through the decades, one church thrived while the other struggled. After several more decades of discussion, the two churches became one congregation in 1914. As a part of the merger, they formally added the word “The” to the church name; it is an expression of unity and particularity. In that same year, the combined congregation moved into the newly built Neo-Gothic structure that now houses their worship and programs.

The architect for the endeavor saw to details throughout the building project and for decades beyond when, for example, a new stained-glass window was funded. He tended to the design and any further installations throughout his life. The head-of-staff

¹Pseudonyms are being used for the church as well as any persons named in this paper.

pastor at the time managed staffing details to set a tone for the priorities and presence of the congregation in the city. His plans included an emphasis on worship, music, and the arts. These continue to be important aspects in the life of the congregation. It might be said a portion of the church's identity was thus set in stone.

Six senior pastors, one woman and five men, have served the congregation at this site. The congregation is accustomed to a monarchical pattern of leadership. They have enjoyed a place in the social structure of the city. In the past, business executives and entrepreneurs sought out membership for business and community connections.

As the growing pastoral staff cared for an expanding number of congregants in the 1950s, the head of staff oversaw a structural expansion of the building that included church school space as well as kitchens, social rooms, a great hall, a cloister, and a garden. The next pastor renewed the congregation's emphasis on music with the purchase of several pianos and other instruments, a choir school start-up, and a new pipe organ. He saw to some remodeling in the sanctuary as well.

In the last two decades, while inwardly maintaining interest in music and the arts, TCC has developed a stronger outward focus on their mission presence in the city. Church volunteers tutored students at a local high school for over ten years. Congregants participate in a meal program along with other churches in the city. They funded various programs to address homelessness and use the youth room as a temporary overnight shelter for the overflow of homeless families one month each year.

Demographics

The congregation is ninety-nine percent white with any diversity coming from international adoptions. The church membership for 2017 was recorded at 1,606. The

sum had been static for the previous decade; the number of confirmands and new members versus those lost to death and membership transfers was up or down two to three people per year. In 2019, the membership rolls were cleaned and just over three hundred people were removed due to lack of contact information. Membership is now recorded at 1,251. More telling though, nine years ago the education department census was at 414. Even though membership remained flat overall, the education department enrollment declined from 414 to 371 from 2010 to 2015 and has now dropped to 143 in four years-time.

Pledged income during for the same timeframe had been on the rise until two of the top three givers died and a generous family with teens moved to the suburbs in 2016. Total income which includes pledges, capital building pledges, investment income, and other donations dropped by one and a half million dollars from 2012 to 2016 while income from bequests grew five-fold.

The Tradition Church has many challenges. Going into 2018, and again in 2019, the church budget committee looked at making cuts due to decreased pledge income. The volunteer pool is shrinking. The previous installed pastor often preached on justice for people of color, the full inclusion of the LGBTQ community, and climate change, but now there is greater tension around these issues in conversation. The outward political polarization of the country is affecting the community. In spite of losses and changes in demographics, as the name suggests, the congregation remains very attached to traditional worship, programming, and denominationalism.

As the research question suggests, new missional practices of Dwelling in the Word and Dwelling in the World were introduced into the TTC congregation with an eye

toward neighborliness and hospitality. Authors writing about the concept of neighborliness and community speak only of change when they compare the present to the recent past. For the purpose of this paper, this is identified as a then-and-now topic.

Neighborliness

Mister Rogers

In a 2017 article titled, “Where Has My Neighbor Gone?,” Jennie Hornyak Wojciechowski reviewed seven books published between 2000 and 2016, all of which examine “the decline of relationships, cohesiveness, consensus, and ...neighborliness” in America.² In her review of Robert Putnam’s book *Bowling Alone*, Wojciechowski states, “Americans go to church less, socialize with neighbors less, join fewer civil clubs and organizations. They are less likely to be involved in their children’s schools, less likely to volunteer, and they give less money.”³

In 2018, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*,⁴ a television show for children, was the subject of a documentary and a special fiftieth anniversary television salute. Fred Rogers was also portrayed in the 2019 film, *It’s a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*,⁵ starring Tom Hanks as the Reverend Rogers. Wojciechowski wrote about “change and loss” with

²Jennie Hornyak Wojciechowski, “Where Has My Neighbor Gone?” A Review Article, *Word and World* 37, no. 1, (Winter 2017): 53-60.

³Wojciechowski, 54.

⁴*Won’t You Be My Neighbor?*, directed by Morgan Neville. Premier at the Sundance Film Festival, January, 19, 2018, 93 minutes, distributed by Focus Features, focusfeatures.com. *Mister Rogers: It’s You I Like*, Fiftieth Anniversary Tribute, executive producer Ellen Doherty. First aired January 18, 2018 by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

⁵*A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* directed by Marielle Heller. (Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group, 2019).

the question, “where has my neighbor gone?” The nostalgic and historic revival of interest in Mister Rogers may be a part of that wondering and lament. As 2019 ended, he appeared to be an icon for something of value that was lost. Perhaps, for some, he is the icon of something new to be found. It remains to be seen if he could exemplify a way toward more, rather than less, in terms of neighborliness and in contrast to Wojciechowski’s list of failing social connections. Because Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister, there is perhaps an underground current of hope that it may bring a religious revival as well.

Back in 1995, Fred Rogers wrote an article for the same publication, *Word and World*, titled “Catching Neighborliness.” Rogers wrote,

There’s an old Quaker saying that character is caught, not taught. That’s why I’m especially careful when I use the term “religious education.” Education often means learning a skill and practicing it. But of course, children do not develop into caring human beings merely by memorizing biblical passages, hearing stories like The Good Samaritan, or filling in workbook sheets about New Testament heroes. Neighborliness is caught, not taught.⁶

Much of the article is about parenting using illustrations from letters and conversations with parents of his young audience members. He gave examples and advocated for the practice of coping skills, vulnerability and courage, open gender roles, giving and receiving forgiveness, expressing all emotions in healthy ways, and grieving losses. Rogers came to believe that parents and other adults who demonstrate these practices help children “catch” the neighborly values of “empathy and forgiveness.”⁷

⁶Fred Rogers, “Catching Neighborliness,” *Word and World* 15, no. 1 (Winter, 1995): 14.

⁷Rogers, 14.

Parents following Rogers' advice were encouraged to do their own emotional work and grow into new patterns as they responded to their children's need to do the same.

Rogers concluded that these practices led to acceptance of self and others. He stated this "can lead us, when we're young, to one of the most important discoveries of all: that people can like us just the way we are—our dark sides, our bright sides, and all our other sides as well."⁸ Neighborliness, then, is found not only in recognition of our humanness, but in the earliest possible learning and accepting of this shared condition.

It appears that Rogers offered a subtle critique of Christian education as well. He segregated religious education in the form of worksheets and biblical memorization from learning a skill and practicing it. For Rogers, it might be said that the intentional work of parenting was a new kind of religious education. Beyond memorizing Bible passages, he advocated for the practice of the biblical value of transformational growth on behalf of another. In this way, neighborliness is an act of hospitality. The church has been a model and training ground for community, neighborliness, and hospitality. Even so, a famous neighbor called out the weakness of having knowledge without turning it into practice.

Mister Rogers' Neighborhood aired from February 19, 1968 to August 31, 2001.⁹ His unofficial Sunday school lessons were directed at Generation X and the Millennials who are also known as Generation Y.

⁸Rogers, "Catching," 23.

⁹IMDB and Wikipedia. Accessed 4/5/2020, at 7:47 p.m. en.m.wikipedia.org and m.imdb.com

Neighborliness is also the topic of a lecture published in 1992. In an address on love and justice, distinguished professor of the sociology of religion at Lancaster University, Linda Woodhead, further questions the Christian practice of neighborliness.

One-Way Versus Two-Way Love

Professor Linda Woodhead asserts “neighbor-love”¹⁰ as an aspect of Christian love that has been ignored. She defines neighbor-love as “self-sacrificing equal regard which is indifferent to the value of its object.”¹¹ She says this has been traditionally understood for Christians as a “one-way” love. The author states that this has been taught as an “*agapeistic*” love “freely and generously offered by a ‘subject’ to an ‘object’ who merely receives it.”¹² Woodhead dates this mindset back to the time of Augustine and believes that, in practice, Christian mission has been devoid of *eros* from the early church forward. Her critique is this: the “subject of love remains unaffected by the object.”¹³ Woodhead asserts that by emphasizing *agape* over *eros* the church is teaching a one-way love that has negated an important and transformative aspect of growth for practitioners. This may be akin to Rogers’ challenge of the passive nature of religious education. Woodhead raises an interesting critique of congregational practice as it pertains to spiritual growth. Her language needs some further consideration.

¹⁰Linda Woodhead, “Love and Justice,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (Apr, 1992): 44.

¹¹Woodhead, 46.

¹²Woodhead, 46.

¹³Woodhead, 46.

Agape is often taught as an unconditional love that only God can give.

Scripturally, as single word and concept it is found in 1 Corinthians 13, in which Paul says, “love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Again as a concept, Paul used it in Romans 13:10 “Love does not do wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” *Agape* also references human love or the love God and Jesus have for humanity. *Agape* is the word used to state that God is the source of love, “Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). It is best known as the word used to describe who God is, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8).¹⁴

Walter Bauer defines *eros* as “passionate love.”¹⁵ The only scriptural reference he makes is to Galatians 6:14, in which Paul expresses passion for following Jesus Christ; “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” This is a reference to the concept of passion, but the word *eros* is not used in the passage. It is not surprising that *eros* has not been highlighted by theologians and pastors.¹⁶ However, *eros* is commonly used by feminist theologians and those, as in the case of Woodhead, who work across the fields of religion and sociology.

¹⁴Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 5-6.

¹⁵Bauer, 311.

¹⁶Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 125.

Walter Brueggemann, however, suggests that in terms of God's passion the reader should remember ". . . the person of YHWH, . . . is fully available as a character in Israel's life." When writing about the love of God, he reminds the reader that one of the interpretations of the Song of Solomon is as "erotic love between God and God's people."¹⁷ He states,

there is an intensely emotional interaction between God and God's people or, in Christian tradition, between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:25) which is profoundly important. God in this tradition is fully capable of intimate engagement and is as committed to God's people in intense ways as is any lover toward the beloved. That relationship of covenantal fidelity is one of passion because God is passionately committed.¹⁸

Professor Woodhead labeled *agapeistic* love as one-way because, in her view, the Christian remains "cool and unemotionally detached." "Regard," she stated, "seems easier to command and to will than does more emotionally attached attitudes . . ." This, according to Woodhead, leaves Christians in a practice of "minimum beneficence, more like basic tolerance or acceptance than anything more positive."¹⁹ Brueggemann would say this is not about the quality of love but of obedience to God's covenant.

Theologically, *eros* has been associated more often with women and commonly in the negative.²⁰ The Victorians privatized and shamed *eros*. By contrast, in the current

¹⁷Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 125.

¹⁸Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 125.

¹⁹Woodhead, "Love," 47.

²⁰Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 170. As Judith Plaskow wrote in *Standing Again at Sinai*, "Women have been separated from the (male) community in public prayer because of their supposed danger as sources of sexual temptation. Identification of women with sexuality, goddesses, and paganism contributed to the emergence of male God-language historically and is strongly linked to contemporary opposition to female images." Plaskow's critique is from the Jewish perspective, others such as Rosemary Radford Ruether ("Motherearth and the Megamachine"), Audre Lorde ("Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power") can be found in *WomanSpirit Rising*: Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds, *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist*

culture it is highly sexualized and monetized. But as Woodhead sees it, *eros* truly represents passionate involvement and willingness to sacrifice as in a Good Friday passion. Jesus demonstrated what two-way love should look like. As Woodhead states,

What seems to be true here is that really to love someone means being prepared to give everything in order to help them, even one's life. . . . For Christians Jesus' sacrifice on the cross must be the supreme example of this. There can be no limit to love, not even the limits which one's own interest and fear of suffering might try to impose.²¹

Clerical practice and congregational life have often emphasized neighborliness and hospitality as the tea and coziness Henri Nouwen warned against. Feminists use the word *eros* as a way to jolt the reader and disturb the status quo. For the sake of control and propriety, the Greek forms of love were placed in a hierarchy which the church has long followed. Again, as Woodhead writes,

the traditional Christian analysis of neighbor-love arranges human loves in a hierarchy. At the top is the one-way love it identifies as *agape*, true Christian love. Then come the two-way loves, friendship and erotic love. The latter is seen as even less value than the former because it is even more emotionally attached, partial, selfish, needy, and reciprocal.²²

As a sociologist looking at the church, Woodhead admits the Christian practice of caring for the stranger is not easy but suggests it does not appear to be genuine to outside observers, “. . . it is much better to acknowledge that one does find it hard really to love someone than to feign such love.”²³ Woodhead uses the word *eros* to address a perceived

Reader in Religion. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1979). Beverly Waldung Harrison, Carter Heyward, Phyllis Trible, Rita Nakashima Brock, and James Nelson have similarly critiqued Christianity's gender and power hierarchies as well as its unease with human sexuality.

²¹Woodhead, “Love,” 51.

²²Woodhead, 55.

²³Woodhead, 49.

lack in faith formation or transformational spiritual growth in the Christian church. “In two-way love the person who loves is happy to admit that they are not self-sufficient, that there are things which they can receive from others, that their very humanity is in many respects a gift from others.”²⁴ The modern church has given much from self-sufficiency for many decades. Denominations have sent money and missionaries around the world just as local congregations have funded agencies and programs to improve lives. Love goes out from the church and lives are touched, but are those within the church being transformed?

In the English language, the one word ‘love,’ does not capture all the nuances of the many words and forms used to describe love throughout the scriptures. In the thirteenth chapter of John, Jesus gave a new commandment, “. . . that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (13:34). John uses the verb form of *agape*, but just as Rogers intimated that memorizing scripture did not teach empathy or forgiveness, Woodhead linguistically suggests that the language and practice of the church does not create passionate disciples. She proposes neighbor-love should be added to the Christian vocabulary and that engaging emotionally with neighbors and recipients of the church’s goodwill can be transformational for the church and the world.

Back in 1976, in the same era as Lesslie Newbigin whose work is highlighted in the next chapter, Episcopal priest and feminist Carter Heyward stated,

What we in the church must be about, I am convinced, is a return to religion of passion—a way of being in which anything less than spilling over with the Spirit of God is not enough; spilling over with desire to know and do the will of God in our

²⁴Woodhead, “Love,” 49.

daily work and play; with righteous and active indignation at injustice, with careful caring for others and self, with courage to stand up and be counted—when it counts; spilling over with integrity in relationship and with awareness of our oneness with all aspects and persons of creation, filling up and spilling over with the Passion of Jesus. This is what we must be about, within or without the religious institutions we have known.²⁵

This is, however, undoubtedly *agape*. In this waltz of words is the *perichoretic* communal love/passion of the Trinity. Brueggemann suggests that believers and practitioners do not need more words or language, but rather the will to practice two-way love with God: “More central to the theological enterprise is covenantal love, a mutual commitment of trust, regard, and obedience between two partners.”²⁶ He further states that once in a two-way love with God, love for God’s people, for neighbors, is the result to be imitated. “When this provision is not devoid of emotion, the primary accent is upon public obligation, in a neighborly covenantal framework, to care for and enhance the well-being and dignity of the neighbor.”²⁷

Every generation, and perhaps congregation, must find its language and practice to express the love of Christ. Decades apart, Heyward, Rogers, and Woodhead suggest that Christian values add to the quality of communal life. Walter Brueggemann adds that God’s love “bespeaks reciprocity inside an already established covenant relationship. . . . social life depends upon maintaining and fulfilling already embraced obligations.”²⁸ Yet the lack of passion or the outward perception of genuine love within churches and in their

²⁵Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice: Images of Power, Sexuality, and Liberation* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 21-22.

²⁶Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 126.

²⁷Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 126.

²⁸Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 127.

outward work contributes or exists alongside the decline in neighborliness as there are limitations in Christian understanding and practice.

The Post-Modern Decline of Neighborliness

In *Bowling Alone*, author Robert Putnam introduces examples of the decline of social groups in the United States. There are diverse cases such as a bridge club in Pennsylvania, an NAACP group in Virginia, a VFW Post in Illinois, The Charity League of Dallas, an alumnae association in Washington, D.C., and even a high school band in Massachusetts. All came into the 1990s thriving and were either disbanded or struggling to survive by 2000, when the book was published. One of the veterans from Berwyn is quoted as having observed, “Kids today just aren’t joiners.”²⁹ A representative of The Charity League stated that “volunteers are in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. They’re dying and they’re not replaceable.”³⁰

According to Putnam, in the 1960s the baby boom generation across the country was primed to join social and civic organizations. While many institutions, unions, and groups grew and thrived in the ensuing decades, the clubs, leagues, and organizations also provided an ecosystem for the development of “social capital” which eventually developed both positive and negative outcomes. Social capital, according to Putnam, exists alongside “physical capital” and “human capital.” “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity

²⁹Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000). chap. 1, Kindle Edition.

³⁰Putnam, chap. 1, Kindle.

and trustworthiness that arise from them.”³¹ As described historically at TTC, people found that belonging to an organization or congregation afforded opportunities to help and serve their community. It also gave them the chance to make connections for social success as well as in business.

According to Putnam, most human relationships have an aspect of reciprocity that, at its best, means caring and concern. When a neighbor shows concern for the health and well-being of another, it is the best of human nature to prompt the same in return. This is Fred Rogers’ thesis: neighborliness is caught. It speaks to Linda Woodhead’s insistence on two-way relations. However, human nature can succumb to selfish ends or come from the margins where caring and mutual support were never demonstrated. The concept of reciprocity can become skewed. Putnam used the phrase “favor bank” to describe wanting to give help to others because one has received assistance from others.³² Following this line of relationship, it is possible to see some organizations and clubs represent higher social capital and the opportunity for larger favors.

Social capital, in short, can be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes, just like any other form of capital. Therefore, it is important to ask how the positive consequences of social capital—mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness—can be maximized and the negative manifestations—sectarianism, ethnocentrism, corruption—minimized.³³

Neighborliness, like belonging to a congregation, fraternal or alumnae organization, or professional association, requires trust, mutuality, and caring to have

³¹Putnam, *Bowling*, chap. 1, Kindle.

³²Putnam, chap. 1, Kindle. According to Putnam, the term “favor bank” came from *The Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe. Putnam however is quoting economist Robert Frank, who used Wolfe’s phrase in reference to social capital in a conversation.

³³Putnam, chap. 1, Kindle.

integrity. The kids who are not joiners do not find this in the institutions Baby Boomers hoped would be a legacy to their children.

Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*, clearly demonstrated changing patterns in social interaction through several decades of the recent past. In *American Grace*, a book Putnam co-authored with Robert Campbell, the pair identify three different kinds of change: "Lifecycle" change when "people change but society does not change"; "Generational" change when "society changes but people do not"; and "Period" change "when people of all ages experience simultaneous change."³⁴ It seems lifecycle and generational changes have been at work within institutions. As Generation X and the Millennials have grown to adulthood and into the labor-force they have made different choices regarding social lives and social capital. Period change has emerged. Putnam and Campbell also stated, ". . . for some reason when a younger generation deviates substantially from its predecessors, then that aggregate social change may be quicker . . ."³⁵ The present condition of neighborliness and communal life provokes the need to explore change as well as leadership for changing times.

Organizational, Generational, Cultural Change

Then-and-Now Again

Being able to discern the need for change and to lead change have always been necessities for organizations. There are many ways to think about change. The word itself

³⁴Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 73.

³⁵Putnam and Campbell, 73.

has many synonyms such as alteration and revolution, cash and coins, to substitute or convert, or to transform or modify. All are called into use in this time of sweeping and permanent change. Margaret Wheatley shared some of the technological aspects of current life that are rapidly and irreversibly changing the culture in which we live through a poem, “Utopia is Scary” by Nicholas Carr. He wrote:

What should we call this age we’re living in?
 There are so many choices: the digital age,
 the information age, the internet age, the computer age,
 the connected age, the Google age, the emoji age,
 the cloud age, the smartphone age, the data age,
 the Facebook age, the robot age, the posthuman age.
 The more names we pin on it, the more vaporous it seems. If nothing else, it is an
 age geared to the talents of the brand manager.
 I’ll just call it Now.³⁶

What does the church have to say about existence and meaning in the reality of this era? It is an imperative to get from then-to-now in order to move into God’s preferred future which might be called, that-which-God-is-preparing. Change and change theory must be a consideration in the life of any organization and certainly the church.

Yet, change is difficult for human beings. As Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky wrote, “People do not resist change, *per se*. People resist loss.”³⁷ That means the invitation to transformation may create discomfort while the offer to modify an idea or practice may find acceptance. It is easy to adjust a schedule or alter clothing but difficult to change a habit, create a new organizational culture, or redefine a mission. Fear of loss

³⁶Margaret J. Wheatley, *Who Do We Choose to Be?: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2017), 103. Wheatley’s recommended reading list included three of Nicholas Carr’s books, *The Glass Cage*, *The Shallows*, and *Utopia Is Creepy and Other Provocations*.

³⁷Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 11.

and resistance are the most likely outcomes of attempts to revolutionize an organization or to enter into a transformative process of change.

Yet change is already a remarkably far-reaching reality. In 2006, Margaret Wheatley wrote about the possibilities of using science, nature, and ecosystems as guides for change in *Leadership and the New Science*. In a dramatic shift in approach, her most recent book is the result of researching the pattern of how civilizations throughout history have ended. The newest book asks in its title, *Who Do We Choose to Be?* Technology and globalization may feel like advancement, but Wheatley locates the present as a time of breakdown. Wheatley was so moved by the sense of “profound disruption” that she wanted to engage as many people as possible in the question that titles her book. In this time and place, in a kind of reality-of-change-inventory, she asks, who do we want to be? States Wheatley,

In the Age of Decadence . . . everyone is focused on their self-interest. Elites protect their wealth, leaders protect their power, and the masses clamor for entertainment. We worship actors, musicians, and athletes. We are bought off with food and grand spectacles; we become obsessed with sports.³⁸

Wheatley’s approach is to treat these issues as spiritual problems.

Whether associations, communities, or churches are ready for change, change is here. Peter Block echoes Wheatley, “When we shift from talking about the problems of community to talking about the breakdown of community, something changes. *Naming the challenge as the ‘breakdown of community’ opens the way for restoration.* Holding

³⁸Wheatley, *Choose*, 69.

on to the view that community is a set of problems to be solved holds us in the grip of retribution.”³⁹

Organizational Change

A mess can be defined as both a troublesome situation and a group of people who eat together. The core challenge in leadership is to move an organization from the former to something more like the latter.⁴⁰

Culture eats strategy for breakfast.⁴¹

In their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal present four frames for evaluating the culture of an organization, business, or even a country. These are outlined in Table 1 below.

Evaluation of the health and function of any organization is necessary over time. Many businesses evaluate themselves by division or department. When evaluations happen in silos, solutions are siloed as well. The authors’ hope is that leaders might look at organizations as a whole. After reviewing the limitations on the scope of previous work in this field, Bolman and Deal demonstrate the breadth of challenges in organizational leadership and the complexity of addressing these systemically. They believe and make a good case that the four frames address systems most effectively. Looking at structure, human resources, politics, and symbol can all work together for the greatest good. The church has long believed there is power in wholeness. By including

³⁹Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishing Inc., 2009), 34.

⁴⁰Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2017), 40.

⁴¹Bolman and Deal, 240.

the symbolic, Bolman and Deal suggest that in reality the spiritual infuses the best of human endeavor.

Table 1. Bolman and Deal Four-Frame Model⁴²

	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Metaphor for organization	Factory or machine	Family	Jungle	Carnival, temple, theater
Supporting disciplines	Sociology, management, science	Psychology	Political science	Anthropology, dramaturgy, institutional theory
Central concepts	Roles, goals, strategies, policies, technology, environment	Needs, skills, relationships	Power, conflict, competition, politics	Culture, myth, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes
Image of leadership	Social architecture	Empowerment	Advocacy and political savvy	Inspiration
Basic leadership challenge	Attune structure to task, technology, environment	Align organizational and human needs	Develop agenda and power base	Create faith, belief, beauty, meaning

While evaluating the entire TTC system is not a part of the research question and beyond the scope of this paper, seeing the church before, during, and after the current transitional time clearly demonstrated the limitations of introducing change within specific groups or committees without addressing the whole. For example, some

⁴²Bolman and Deal, *Reframing*, 20.

congregational worship practices and justice values from the previous pastor's tenure were replaced or faded away without comment. A new committee of one was tasked by the transitional pastor to create small group ministries; it was not publicly introduced or intentionally implanted. In the first instance the justice practices are experiencing a revival in many small groups which are in need of a center. In the second case, the one human resource asked to be added to another committee. Both outcomes create questions around congregational identity and values.

The work of Bolman and Deal is also highlighted for this context because the four frames demonstrate dynamic possibilities when the many aspects of a corporate sized organization or, in this case, church come together as a whole. At TTC, the volunteer pool is declining in number. Some are aging out of evening meetings and events or physically less able to participate in activities such as carrying a tray of communion cups. Those who still work have time constraints. At TTC the patterns of committees and leadership boards may not be serving the church to its fullest potential. Furthermore, they have become rote and have adopted business practices that lean toward order and efficiency over creativity and spirit-filled life.

For Bolman and Deal, the conclusion formed after presenting a case study for the symbolic frame is that "soul is the secret of success." They stated:

Symbolic perspectives question the traditional view that building a team mainly entails putting the right people in the right structure. The essence of high performance is spirit. . . . there are many signs that contemporary organizations are at a critical juncture because of a crisis of meaning and faith. Managers wonder how to build jobs, such questions are important, but by themselves, they limit imagination and divert attention from deeper issues of faith and purpose. . . . Leaders serve a deeper and more durable function if they recognize that team building at its heart is a spiritual undertaking. It is both a search for the spirit within and creation of a community of believers united by shared faith and shared culture. Burton Clark calls this an organization's saga, a story "between the

coolness of rational purpose and the warmth of sentiment found in religion or magic . . . it includes affect that turns a formal place into a beloved institution.” Peak performance emerges as a team discovers its soul.⁴³

It is ironic Bolman and Deal suggest the greatest success in organizations will come from the release of spirit and that soul is the secret of success while church leaders, both lay and cleric, have been turning churches toward business models, focused on structure, and separating spirit/soul from policy/strategic plan. Hence, one might say, culture is having church for breakfast.

Bolman and Deal suggest that evaluating an organization will lead to changes.

“The frames offer a checklist of issues for change agents to recognize and respond to.”⁴⁴

The authors agree that

too many change initiatives fail because they rely too much on “data gathering, analysis, report writing, and presentations” instead of a more creative approach aimed at grabbing the “feelings that motivate useful action.” In other words, change agents fail when they rely mostly on reason and structure while neglecting human, political, and symbolic elements.⁴⁵

In spite of the intent to be reformed and always being reformed according to the agency of God, Reformation churches have held to a pattern of operation with an unquestioning doggedness. In a challenging statement, Alan Roxburgh wrote, “The Protestant story couldn’t hold the imagination or desires of post-war generations, so the ‘60s exploded like a socio-cultural Mt. St. Helens.”⁴⁶ There is a test suggested here to

⁴³Bolman and Deal, *Reframing*, 277.

⁴⁴Bolman and Deal, 380.

⁴⁵Bolman and Deal, 380.

⁴⁶Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), chap. 1, Kindle Edition.

expand the container of faith, perhaps even a dare. Bolman and Deal offer tools for examining a given congregation interested in holistic growth.

Organizational evaluation and change are healthy practices for business and for the church. It is also important to consider if change is technical or adaptive.

Technical versus Adaptive Change

Preparing a budget is a matter of financial expertise; budgeting is a technical process. Stewardship and pledging are long-held practices of church membership; giving is a spiritual process. A ten-year trend of flat membership growth and fewer giving units is an adaptive change waiting to be addressed. For The Tradition Church in this present time, growth initiatives, the creation of a small group committee, and rewriting the church's operations manual are a repetition of past practices which is the definition of technical change.

Membership in the church is dropping, which means practices of membership such as pledging and volunteering are waning. To believe the solution is a technical retraining for any secularized individuals back toward membership is to misunderstand secularism as well as adaptive considerations for the church. In *How (Not) to Be Secular*, James Smith wrote,

Evolutionary psychology and expressive individualism are in the water of our secular age, and only a heroic few can manage to quell their chatter to create an insulated panic room in which their faith remains solidly secure. Ours is a “secular age” according to Taylor, not because of any index of religious participation (or lack thereof), but because of these sorts of manifestations of contested meaning.⁴⁷

⁴⁷James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), Introduction, Kindle.

Smith, in providing a condensed version of Charles Taylor's work, *The Secular Age*,⁴⁸ is stating that as the world has changed in thought and behavior, it has forever altered the world of religious belief and meaning.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky are proponents of discerning the type of change needed and using adaptive leadership when appropriate because it gives companies, employees, church members, citizens, or leaders a process for finding lasting, meaningful cultural change and new visions. As Heifetz and Linsky wrote,

Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.⁴⁹

Looking back, Fred Rogers suggested that demonstrating and practicing neighborliness would create empathy and forgiveness in children and their parents more effectively than memorizing Bible verses; this was an adaptive change. Linda Woodhead advocated for the practice of two-way relationships in Christian caring so that both giver and receiver would be transformed by the exchange. Along the same line, both Heifetz and Linsky suggest organizations, including the church, might consider that the answer to the future life of a congregation may come from outside of the community itself.

⁴⁸Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴⁹Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 13.

Margaret Wheatley sees organizations that allow for more communication and self-organization as being more “viable, resilient, and agile.” But, she clarified,

If an organization seeks to develop these life-saving qualities of adaptability, it needs to open itself in many ways. . . . Information must actively be sought from everywhere, And then it must circulate freely so that many people can interpret it. The intent of new information is to keep the system off-balance, alert to how it might need to change. An open organization doesn’t look for information that makes it feel good, that verifies its past and validates its present. It is deliberately looking for information that might threaten its stability, knock it off balance, and open it to growth. Closed off from disturbances, kept at equilibrium, such organizations run down, atrophy, and die.⁵⁰

The subtitle of Heifetz’s and Linsky’s book is, “Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change.” It indicates what a serious, provocative, and risky undertaking adaptive leadership is. It carries more risk because technical solutions are those that can be found within the organization itself. Adaptive change “requires experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community.”⁵¹ As they go on to say, “leadership requires disturbing people—but at a rate they can absorb.”⁵²

Evolution and Survival

As stated above, Margaret Wheatley has been working with the concepts of leadership patterns that mimic nature and ecosystem. *Leadership and the New Science* is a hopeful and energizing read. Among other things, she highlighted the positives and possibilities of chaos theory for leadership. She wrote,

⁵⁰Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishing Inc., 2006), 83.

⁵¹Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 18.

⁵²Heifetz and Linsky, 20.

As ancient myths and new science both teach, every system that seeks to stay alive must hold within it the potential for chaos, “a creature slumbering deep inside the perfectly ordered system.” It is chaos’ great destructive energy that dissolves the past and gives us the gift of a new future. It releases us from the imprisoning patterns of the past by offering us its wild ride into newness. Only chaos creates the abyss in which we can recreate ourselves.⁵³

The intervening decade, however, prompted her to clarify in a new work that chaos is both life-giving and detrimental. In *Who Do We Want To Be?*, she wrote,

The chaos cycle is triggered by changes in the environment; these external changes force the system to abandon its old ways and respond to the new. Everything that held it together—its beliefs, meanings, and structures—no longer work now that the environment has changed. And so the system falls apart. It descends into chaos and finally reaches a bifurcation point where it has two choices: Either it can reorganize using new beliefs and structures that work well in the changed environment. Or it can insist on the old ways, fail to reorganize itself, and die. Both rebirth and death are possible as an outcome of the passage through chaos.⁵⁴

Here is the most real of reality checks. Bolman and Deal wrote about an organizational preference to stay in a research mode rather than address problems. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky first identify for the reader the kinds of issues that can be fixed from within and those that require an adaptive change or conversion. As their book is sub-titled, leading change can be a career-killer. After years of writing about leadership, Margaret Wheatley turned to the environment to refresh the field’s knowledge as well as metaphors. Then following the trajectory of current affairs, she most recently studied and wrote about the historic pattern of the decline of civilizations. Every one of these authors or writing teams included information on spirituality whether named as spirit, energy,

⁵³Wheatley, *Leadership*, 119.

⁵⁴Wheatley, *Who*, 6-7.

soul, creativity, or what gives meaning to life. They are approaching leadership and change as spiritual issues.

For me, this idea was first planted by environmentalist Gus Speth. Speth is a former dean at Yale School of Forestry and he said the following to a British radio presenter in 2013:

I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with thirty years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy. And to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that.⁵⁵

Wheatley's message of respect regarding the natural world's ability to teach humanity adaptation and leadership skills remains key, but the book, *Who Do We Choose to Be?*, opens with the statement,

We seek to understand the forces at work that created this present world, not the one we have spent long years laboring to create, but a world that increasingly harms most and benefits scant few, a world stubbornly spiraling toward self-destruction.⁵⁶

Rather than a formal bibliography, Wheatley included a recommended reading list on technology, geology, biology, and social commentary, along with titles from Buddhist priest, Pema Chodron; Benedictine sister, Mary Margaret Funk; Quaker, Parker Palmer; and Holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl. Even as her writing leans into the apocalyptic, her approach turns toward the spiritual with a direct comment for the church:

When a paradigm no longer provides reliable guidance for how to live in the world, the most common response is to grasp hold of it more firmly. . . . We use

⁵⁵NC Interfaith Power and Light website. Accessed February 13, 2020 at 8:02 p.m. This website is a climate change advocacy ministry of the North Carolina Council of Churches. ncipl.org

⁵⁶Wheatley, *Who*, 4.

our big brains and our powers of cognition to resist change. Our skills at manipulating information lead us to become more fundamentalist, more certain.⁵⁷

Wheatley asks, “Can certainty give way to curiosity? Can arrogance give way to humility?”⁵⁸

Sometimes we seek change and at other times, change comes upon us. Bolman and Deal take structure, human resources, politics, and symbol seriously yet promote metaphor and image along with creativity, imagination, and play. They conclude that “soul is the secret of success.” Heifetz and Linsky present leadership as a life or death proposition but end their book with a reflection on heart, the sacred heart, and the open heart. Innocence, curiosity, and compassion, according to Heifetz and Linsky, are the virtues of an open heart.⁵⁹ This lens is expansive. It ranges from day to day organizational concerns, through membership and polity and congregational practice, to the apocalyptic. Change is a constant reality in the world today. Change offers spiritual growth and transformation. It takes intent and willingness to face and engage it.

Summary

The history of The Tradition Church is one of staid and steady presence. Many of the current members are second, third, or fourth generation members. However, the children and grandchildren are no longer following patterns of church membership, religious education, and volunteerism. Just under half the congregation lives in the city

⁵⁷Wheatley, *Who*, 196.

⁵⁸Wheatley, 196.

⁵⁹Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership*, 230-236.

and the rest of the members and friends span out to the suburbs in every direction. There has been limited connection with neighbors living nearest to the church.

While few would admit it now, the receding generational flow may be a gift to this congregation and its neighbors. It is an invitational opening toward neighbors who may be bowling alone. In this era of change, it is well worth considering Fred Rogers lifting up the practices of faith over memorizing the word of faith. Woodhead promoted a concept of neighbor-love because it is her perception that congregants are not being transformed by loving from a distance and their mission work does not reflect God's steadfast, passionate love for God's people. As change is in the air, water, and ground of these days, Bolman and Deal, Heifetz and Linsky, as well as Margaret Wheatley have wisdom to understand the present and address the future in realistic and healthy ways.

The next chapter again addresses hospitality through the biblical lens. It brings the missional church movement into this conversation. It also addresses theologies of welcome and expansion, finally concluding with hospitality as a call to spiritual maturity.

CHAPTER 3

MISSIONAL, BIBLICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

The Tradition Church is currently focused on the missing Millennial generation. Their own children and grandchildren are largely absent. Some of them are loosely tied to congregational life through the occasional wedding and, at a higher rate, baptisms. The missional church movement offers truth in the form of naming current cultural and religious trends. It offers a faithful way forward by refocusing on God and new practices. This is, to some degree, a further look at change.

The chapter then moves from looking at and naming truths about this ecclesiological age to the eternal wisdom of scripture and engaging hospitality from biblical and theological lenses. To suggest a way forward the missional movement asks, among other things, “What is God up to in the neighborhood?” The biblical lens will look at what God is up to in the lives of Abraham and Sarah in Mamre then turn to Luke and Matthew for New Testament insights. God’s story continues to crescendo through the theological work of Serene Jones, Kosuke Koyama, and Miroslav Volf. Each, in their own way, invites opening and making room for neighbors and strangers.

Missional Church

What Is God Up to in the Neighborhood?

The missional church movement is specific and often not fully understood. It is revivalist in the way of a return to scripture and the triune God. It is deconstructive in its

honest appraisal and critique of the current realities. The movement suggests an awareness of the need to make room for new practices and new relationships within the congregational community, with neighbors, and in the world. This calls for expansive theology and it has a particular emphasis on renewing relationship with God through scripture. The missional movement had its beginnings in the work of Lesslie Newbigin.

Newbigin and Missional Beginnings

Lesslie Newbigin returned to the England after decades of missionary service in India. As he reflected on the condition of church and culture he stated, "... the liberal, secular democratic state is in grave trouble."¹ His statement reads like today's newspaper,

The attacks on [Church] from powerful new religious fanaticisms are possible only because its own internal weaknesses have become so clear: the disintegration of family life, the growth of mindless violence, the vandalism which finds satisfaction in destroying whatever is comely and useful, the growing destruction of the environment by limitless consumption fueled by ceaseless propaganda, the threat of nuclear war, and—as the deepest root of it all—the loss of any sense of a meaningful future. Weakened from within, secular democratic societies are at a loss to respond to religious fanaticism without denying their own principles.²

From Newbigin's wake-up call and into the 1980s and 1990s, a number of ecclesial writers and ministers misunderstood the scope and critique in his message. Others took a smaller view and adapted its new language into attractional programs without changing form or practice. In *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile went through numerous misunderstandings author by author

¹Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 223.

²Newbigin, 223.

and practice by practice to clarify the varied messages that grew from early *missional* initiatives.³

Since Lesslie Newbigen returned from India and began his critique of the Church, missional leaders have been the unheard prophets crying out in the wilderness during this time of diaspora. Missional leadership is future-oriented and dynamic. At the same time, it is rooted in scripture and the agency of God. The missional church first looks to *missio Dei* as the starting point of congregational life. The phrase *missio Dei* refers to the mission of God or God as a sending God.

Christians seek to participate in the life of God. This means participating in the *Theologia* or being of God as well as the *Oikonomia* or work of God. The church has the intention of both, yet through the centuries it has also built up self-reliance and religious habit. Newbigen's critique of the church made a plea for a return to focus on God's activity. Missional leaders suggest God has a preferred future that can be seen most clearly through relationships beyond the church and through the greater community.

This undertaking is more about constructing questions that will create movement and invite imagination rather than offering answers. The call is for leaders willing to empower others. As Newbigen stated,

Jesus . . . did not write a book but formed a community. This community has at its heart the remembering and rehearsing of his words and deeds, and the sacraments given by him through which it is enabled both to engraft new members into its life and to renew this life again and again through sharing in his risen life through the body broken and the lifeblood poured out. It exists in him and for him. He is the

³Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

center of its life. Its character is given to it, when it is true to its nature, not by the characters of its members but by his character.⁴

Living with Critique

Since the missional church begins with *missio Dei*, it emphasizes God's triune being, God's sending nature, and God's agency. When calling out the books and articles that did not fully understand the movement, Van Gelder and Zscheile wrote,

The critique offered here does not argue that the authors did not have an understanding of the person and work of Christ or the person and work of the Spirit; evidence is clear that they did. Rather, the point being made is that utilizing primarily a Western view of the Trinity can lead to a functional modalism where the works of the three persons of God become separated from one another.⁵

Their insight on the separation of the three persons of God is important. A section of Christian presence in the world today shows when emphasis is on Jesus alone, God's economy and the Spirit's leading are lost. Predominance of the Spirit can lose its grounding and God without Incarnation and Spirit can provoke judgmental, guilt-ridden lives.

Missional movement proponent Alan Roxburgh put this another way, "Protestant churches have been in the midst of a great unraveling for quite some time"⁶ This image of unraveling is helpful. Roxburgh explained that his wife is a knitter and sometimes, as with any knitter, she realizes she has made a mistake and has to pull out the stitches in order to make the correction. Use of the term unraveling suggests, in the way of Bolman and Deal, that it is natural for a church to look for practices and habits that are no longer

⁴Newbigin, *Gospel*, 227.

⁵Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 54.

⁶Alan Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in our Time* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2015), chap. 1, Kindle.

working or holding the Body together. The term is also grounded and ordinary, it does not have the agitating or catastrophic feel that comes with announcements of the end of Christendom or the plethora of grey hair. As Roxburgh states, “God is present and active in the midst of the unraveling.”⁷ Roxburgh called on sociologist Hugh McLeod to set the stage:

In the 1940s and 1950s it was still possible to think of western Europe and North America as a “Christendom,” in the sense that there were close links between religious and secular elites, that most children were socialized into membership in a Christian society, and that the church had a large presence in fields such as education and welfare, and a major influence on law and morality.⁸

As previously stated, Roxburgh believes “The Protestant story couldn’t hold the imagination or desires of post-war generations.”⁹ Churches were unprepared for such an eruption of change and in reaction held more tightly to tradition or moved toward technical fixes for, what was, a need for cultural adaptation. He says, “It is not that the ways we have been God’s people were wrong. They were developed for another time, and now they are fraying, stretched and torn in the midst of massive social changes”¹⁰ Since this shift has been in the making for forty years, he suggests that leaders mitigate time for grieving what is lost. It is a somewhat stunning statement to suggest grief should have passed; true as it is and as smart as it seems, many have not yet surrendered to this reality.

⁷Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁸Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁹Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁰Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 1, Kindle.

Roxburgh recapped paradigms that mainline churches developed using the following time frames and descriptors; 1914 to 1945 when the focus was “on organizational rationalization to be better equipped to continue the growth coming from immigration” with the development of “a clericalist church”; 1950s-1970s, “Denominationalism at its height” with “cradle to grave programs through corporatist, franchise-based organization run by managers and professionals”; 1970s-2000s, “an era of religious winners and losers as mainline churches fail to grasp the cultural shifts of the sixties and evangelicals and charismatics win the culture wars in terms of growth.”¹¹ We will return to this timeline again when looking at the data.

Roxburgh sees four narratives that have kept church in the pattern of serving the past. These are:

Functional rationalism - We have the technology; we can fix it.
 Management and control – With the right management, we can guarantee success.
 Ecclesiocentrism – If we can fix the church, all will be well.
 Clericalism – We are the ordained; we must have the answers.¹²

In *Christian Dogmatics*, Robert Jensen wrote, “Every community has spirit, indeed a spirit. And every community has some god. The community’s god may be the one *whose* spirit the community has. But more usually a community’s god is its defense *against* its own spirit, for the normal function of religion is to provide stability.”¹³ As mentioned above, the missional church strives to be a source of truth. Roxburgh says the

¹¹Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 47.

¹²Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹³Robert W. Jenson, Ed., *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984). 146.

church is unraveling. Jenson says the church makes a god of its historic function in order to maintain its own stability. The truth is this will not sustain life nor does it serve the gospel.

Missio Dei

As an alternative to the four narratives named above, Roxburgh exegeted the exchange between God and Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-12). Roxburgh pointed out that it begins in the first-person singular from Moses' point of view; "I will turn aside and see this great sight.' God calls out his name and Moses answers 'Here I am.'"¹⁴ But then,

the Exodus writer shifts the tone and God's voice becomes primary. God creates a boundary, tells Moses not to come closer, and announces his own identity and intentions with a series of personal pronouns that put the lie to Moses' claims. . . . The dynamic is not simply the announcement of God's decision to act. It addresses the question of who is the primary agent/actor.¹⁵

For Roxburgh, this is an example of turning toward the agency of God. As a contrast, in speaking of churches in this time, Roxburgh stated:

These churches have so turned in on themselves that they presume the church is the primary focus of their energy; they work on being attractational, on growing, on meeting needs and helping people, or on designing programs to send a segment of their members to serve outside their walls. What has happened through this long period of introversion and anxious search to fix the unraveling is that these churches, overall, have lost the capacity to discern the disruptive work of the Spirit beyond their circles. They have yet to be convinced that God's primary location is out ahead of the churches, and not only inside them.¹⁶

¹⁴Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹⁵Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 3, Kindle.

¹⁶Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 3, Kindle.

The missional church suggests alternative views of both neighbor and mission; to be missional invites the reversal. Rather than the church deciding what to do with volunteers and money based on the habit of an historical model, the body is invited to discern what God is already doing in the neighborhood. This is another expression of *missio Dei*—God is already active in the world. As David J. Bosch wrote, “Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone.”¹⁷

Missional Church Era

According to a time line of change set out by Alan Roxburgh and echoed by Robert Putnam and David Campbell, the Church has been a remnant for more than fifty years, rather than a prophetic presence. It has been living more akin to diaspora since the middle of the last century and into the present time.¹⁸ Theologians have struggled to name the last fifty years; it has been labeled Post-Christendom, post-Christian, or Post-modern. Pastor, professor, and church consultant Patrick Keifert states, “I prefer a much more positive, hopeful, and challenging description of our situation: a ‘New Missional Church Era.’”¹⁹

The missional church is a way forward that offers step by step, trial and error faith work that suggests new paradigms. In a lecture, Dwight Zscheile stated, “If you want

¹⁷David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 399.

¹⁸Roxburgh, *Joining*, chap. 1, Kindle.

¹⁹Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute Inc. 2006), 26.

Christianity, you have to choose it and work for it.”²⁰ Missional leaders have chosen Christianity. Missional leadership turns to face the irreversible changes in organizational effectiveness, generational participation, and theological scope discussed here and in the coming sections. Missional practice invites each person as well as the Body to be present with the intent to discern God’s new and preferred future for a given congregation.

Both Patrick Keifert and Alan Roxburgh have set out complete processes for a congregation to work with if church leaders want to fully engage with missional thinking at every level of their life together.²¹ Keifert together with Nigel Rooms, and Dwight Zscheile have also suggested practices or disciplines that can be used to infuse some missional thinking and practice into congregational life.²² Rooms and Keifert suggest six missional practices: “dwelling in the word, dwelling in the world, hospitality, corporate spiritual discernment, announcing the kingdom, and focus for missional action.”²³ In *The Agile Church*, Dwight Zscheile suggests nine disciplines for adding missional ideology into congregational life: “1) Cultivate spaces for conversation and practice; 2) Address fear and shame; 3) Engage ambivalence and conflict; 4) Interpret the present in light of the past; 5) Discover open spaces; 6) Be present; 7) Practice your way forward; 8)

²⁰Dwight Zscheile, lecture, July, 2017.

²¹See Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute Inc., 2006). Also see Alan J. Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in Our Time* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2015).

²²See Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* (Saint. Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2014), and Dwight J. Zscheile. *The Agile Church: Spirit Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014).

²³Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2014), 21.

Translate; 9) Improve.”²⁴ Both approaches resonate with Newbiggin’s suggestion that re-animating the church lies in “remembering and rehearsing” the words, practices, and life of Jesus.²⁵

Whether approached with a full process or as the introduction of practices as has been done at The Tradition Church through this research, the Trinitarian God is the central agent. There is more to be said about God’s mission and being both biblically and theologically.

God’s Economy

This phrase, “God’s economy,” is an ancient concept that was developed through the first several centuries of the church but was gradually demoted by other doctrinal controversies. In *God for Us*, Catherine LaCugna traced the history and recovery of the concept. LaCugna wrote,

By contrast, the biblical and pre-Nicene sense of the economy is the one dynamic movement of God (Father) outward, a personal self-sharing by which God is forever bending toward God’s “other.” The economy is not a mirror dimly reflecting a hidden realm of intradivine relations; the economy is God’s concrete existence in Christ and as Spirit. The economy is the “distribution” of God’s life lived with and for the creature. Economy and theology are two aspects of one reality: the mystery of divine-human communion.²⁶

God’s Trinitarian nature is also critical. As an aspect of her work, LaCugna offered an awareness that the church has had a role in the growth in atheism. Without the

²⁴Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit Let Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 87-110.

²⁵Newbiggin, *Gospel*, 227.

²⁶Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1973), 222.

complexity of the whole Trinity, congregations, denominations, and individuals too readily hook into earthly benefits or power. As LaCugna wrote:

The rudimentary problem with traditional Christian theism, then, the reason it has proved to be dysfunctional or bankrupt for so many people today, the reason it has been met by widespread atheism, the reason that so many harmful legal, social, economic, and political arrangements have been associated with it and justified by it, does not necessarily lie with the doctrine of the Trinity, nor even with the idea of the “monarch” of the Father. The fault lies with the fact that the Christian doctrine of God became functionally nontrinitarian.”²⁷

While focused first on God as a sending God (*missio Dei*) the missional church movement also stresses the importance of the Trinitarian nature of God. Throughout her book, Catherine LaCugna walks the reader through church history. She tracked the growth and losses of the doctrine of the Trinity through time and then theologically massages the doctrine back into being. The detail of her work is beyond the scope of this paper, but of particular importance to TTC, she addressed the problems of monarchical theology and the ways it leads to monarchical church.

Monarchy comes from *mone arche*, one origin, one principle, one rule. In our study of the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity in part I, as well as its reconstruction in part II, the theme of divine monarchy played a central role. In early Christianity divine monarchy was virtually identical with monotheism. And, because God and Father were used interchangeably in the Bible, in early creeds, and in pre-Nicene theology, Christian monotheism was identified with the rule of God the Father.²⁸

This monarchical pattern not only led to predominantly male leadership in the history of the church but to subordinationism that steered theology toward inequality among the persons of the Trinity. The return to Trinitarian doctrine brings a sense of equality within and without of God, Christ, and Spirit, as she wrote, “the primacy of

²⁷LaCugna, *God*, 395.

²⁸LaCugna, 389.

communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of the God of Jesus Christ.”²⁹ In two splendid sentences, LaCugna writes,

Confessing faith is incomplete unless it becomes a form of life. Living faith in the God of Jesus Christ means being formed and transformed by the life of grace of God’s economy: becoming persons fully in communion with all; becoming Christ to one another; becoming by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is: love unbounded, glory uncontained.³⁰

In this glorious decree she includes humanity in the life of the Trinity, “formed and transformed . . . becoming by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is.” Her description of God as “love unbounded, glory uncontained,” is a soaring promise and a counter to monarchy, patriarchy, and hierarchy. In LaCugna’s own work, the energy and integrity of God is palpable and inspiring. Her recognition of what was lost is enlightening. The missional movement offers critique and reorientation guided by a thoroughly grounded biblically based and historic Trinitarian doctrine.

God’s Hospitality

Abraham, Sarah, and Rublev

In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, there resides a story of three men who appear at the tents of Abraham (18:1-15). Abraham rushes to get Sarah and a servant moving to prepare food for these unexpected visitors. Abraham himself waits on the table for their meal. The effort of providing for the unexpected callers is apparent in the many details shared. Here in this one opportunity, Abraham stands out as an incomparable host. The story endures as a standard for hospitality.

²⁹LaCugna, *God*, 391.

³⁰LaCugna, 377.

When it is done right, strangers become guests. Here, the unexpected visitors move from strangers to guests to angels and then to God_Christ_Spirit. The three male guests have been depicted with wings in the icon written by Andrei Rublev. For Rublev, it is the Trinity. He takes all of this and creates an image of God in our midst. The guests receive the best presence and care humanity can offer. This is important because Abraham's guests have a message.

The visitors bring the announcement that Sarah will conceive a child within the year. In the Bible, messengers are angels which connects this Old Testament scripture to the familiar words of Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels unaware." It is with a New Testament understanding that Rublev depicts them with wings and names them Trinity. Yet, the icon has been claimed as a 15th century visual exegesis on the story of Abraham's hospitality.

God, then, is the recipient of human hospitality. The welcome, though, does not follow through to the end. Abraham and Sarah deliver genuine safety and provision for their guests' needs, but they laugh at the message. At the end of this encounter, the guests inform Abraham and Sarah they will become pregnant within the year and have a son, and Sarah laughed.

In a commentary on Genesis, Walter Brueggemann says, "Abraham, and especially, Sarah, are not offered here as models of faith but as models of disbelief. For them, the powerful promise of God outdistances their ability to receive it."³¹ The encounter was a prophetic one but contains a message, that at the moment of its delivery,

³¹Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 158.

they can no longer believe. Can this then also be a commentary for the church? Can it be a commentary for doubters, or for those who have left or never had religion? Even when it appears one has entertained angels or welcomed God amazingly well, it demonstrates that further growth is always possible. The exchange between Trinity and human duo exhibits, as Woodhead stated, that the practice of faith, love, or hospitality is very difficult work. Brueggemann writes:

Once again, this story shows what a scandal and difficulty faith is. Faith is not a reasonable act which fits into the normal scheme of life and perception. The promise of the gospel is not a conventional piece of wisdom that is easily accommodated to everything else. Embrace of this radical gospel requires shattering and discontinuity. Abraham and Sarah have by this time become accustomed to their barrenness. They are resigned to their closed future. They have accepted that hopelessness as a statement of irony, for the total Abraham/Sarah story is about a call embraced. But in this central narrative, the call is not embraced. It is rejected as nonsensical. And indeed, if no new thing can intrude, if newness must be conjured from present resources, the promise announced here truly is nonsensical.³²

This text then is an example of the best of human hospitality when it comes to food, drink, and shade from the hot sun. It also demonstrates the resistance human beings have to God's preferred futures; welcoming God is welcoming God's message. The message to Sarah and Abraham is that a son will be born. All Christians receive this message. "You are my Son, the Beloved, listen to him" (Mark 9:7)! Thus, Brueggemann asks, "Is God's sovereign power finally limited to our expectations?"³³

³²Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 158-159.

³³Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 160.

In the Shadow of the Ideal

Abraham's actions with the three unexpected visitors sets a high bar for hospitality. Looking further at the lives of Abraham and Sarah their humanity and flaws are on display. For example, in Egypt, Abraham introduced Sarah as his sister. If Pharaoh had wanted her for the harem, Abraham as husband was expendable. Abraham as brother lived to tell the tale (Genesis 20:1-16). Sarah and Abraham together conspired to create a lineage through Sarah's servant Hagar. After the birth of Isaac, Sarah insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away and Abraham acquiesced (Genesis 21:8-21). The great, hospitable moment with the three strangers came in the midst of very flawed, human lives.

Furthermore, in Genesis 19, two of Abraham's three visitors go on to Sodom. Lot attempts to offer safety and shelter to them by taking them to his home. The men of Sodom surround the house and demand that the strangers be sent out. Their intent was to rape Lot's guests. This passage is used by some to biblically malign homosexuality. This threat, however, was not one of sexual attraction but of humiliation and domination. Lot offers his daughters to the throng in order to keep his guests safe, making it difficult to interpret this text in terms of sexual ethics. It is the story of willful violence to strangers. The behavior of the men of Sodom is the antithesis of hospitality.

While Brueggemann keeps focus on Genesis 18, as the story of readiness or unreadiness to receive God's messengers and God's message, Stuart A. Irvine suggests that Abraham's moment of great hospitality is purposefully juxtaposed with Lot's attempt to

give comfort and safety to visitors.³⁴ For Irvine, God’s promise to destroy Sodom, again as announced by the visitors, and then the destruction itself, demonstrates that God fulfills God’s promises.³⁵ Those who connect Genesis 18 and 19 draw attention to the possibilities God brings juxtaposed with the best and the worst of human response.

The Parable of the Great Dinner

The gospel of Luke contains a story told by Jesus about a man who planned a large banquet (14:15-24). The invitations had been sent, but when all was ready the expected guests began to make excuses and declined to be present. The host became very angry and from the anger came the command to his servants to go out and find “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (14:21b). This was done and the table was not yet filled. The servants were instructed again to go out as far and wide as necessary to find enough guests to fill the table. To go out as far as the highways and hedgerows would be to include the traveler, the transient, and possibly the immigrant and refugee.³⁶ The welcome here is widespread and diffuse. When sent out the second time, the host says, “make people come” (14:23), and this can be heard two ways.

According to the Anchor Commentary, Augustine interpreted it as license to use physical force to make converts. To this, biblical scholar Joseph Fitzmyer stated that

³⁴Stuart A. Irvine. “Is Anything Too Hard for Yahweh?: Fulfillment of Promise and Threat in Genesis 18-19,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42.3 (2018): 285-302.

³⁵Irvine, 299.

³⁶Bruce A. Malina and Richard L.Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 367.

Augustine “thus became the spiritual father of the Inquisition.”³⁷ Alternatively, Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, along with Fitzmyer, suggest that the servant was to be forceful in encouraging acceptance of the invitation since the impromptu guests would most likely be uncomfortable in the man’s home. From Malina and Rohrbaugh:

Outside the city walls, along the roads and hedges, lived the outcast population. These are not peasant villagers but landless persons who lived immediately outside every preindustrial city. They would have included beggars, prostitutes, tanners (who reeked), and traders—all persons needing daytime access to the city but not allowed to live within it. The Greek imperative verb form used here (compel!) suggests that considerable coercion would have been necessary to induce these people to enter precincts of the elite after business hours, when city gates normally closed.³⁸

As the passage ends, the host, still angry, insisted that the tables be filled and then says, “For I tell you, not one of those men who were originally invited shall taste of my dinner” (14:24). According to Fitzmyer, this is generally considered to be a reference to the banquet of the kingdom of heaven.³⁹ Though the reasons given for not attending the dinner as invited were all well-reasoned and part of the social structure of the day, there is clear admonishment for making the banquet secondary to any other events.

This parable is part of a sequence of teachings on table fellowship. The writer of Luke situated these educational moments in a series of stops along Jesus’ route to Jerusalem. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus told his fellow guests how to humbly choose a place at the table and instructed them on how to prepare a guest list:

When you are going to give a luncheon or a dinner, do not call your friends, or even your brothers, your relatives, your rich neighbors, lest they only invite you in

³⁷Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* The Anchor Bible. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 1057.

³⁸Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science*, 367.

³⁹Fitzmyer, *Gospel*, 1057.

turn and so you are repaid. Rather, when you are going to give a dinner party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then you will be blessed, for they do not have the wherewithal to repay you; you will be repaid instead at the resurrection of the upright (Luke 14:12-14).

This earlier teaching is directive and without the parabolic story. Here, hospitality is about caring, compassion, and justice. As Richard Rohr wrote, “table fellowship seems to have been Jesus’ unique form of visual sermon, cultural critique, and social protest.”⁴⁰

Theology of Hospitality

Neighborliness and a sense of communal living is on the wane. The Millennials, it was said, are not prone toward membership or fraternal organizations. The missional church movement suggests, first of all, the acceptance of these new realities, an acceptance of what is; once reality is situated, the missional church advocates for discernment of God’s work in the world.

Scripture has always called for hospitality and welcoming the stranger. In the context of The Tradition Church, hospitality has come to mean the quest for membership within the building and helping those in need outside the church. Biblically, hospitality is an important aspect of both God’s story in scripture and missional thinking.

The theology of hospitality is understanding that God is creating opportunities for caring, compassion, and justice in the midst of a changing world and in the midst of this congregation. God_Christ_Spirit is an agent of change. The previous chapter sought to show the church has changed because culture eats strategy for breakfast. The missional church movement sees it as undeniable unraveling. Theologically, here demonstrated are

⁴⁰Richard Rohr, *The Good News According to Luke: Spiritual Reflections* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 160.

the ways the church's old boundaries have been stretched or broken by deconstruction of ideas, patterns, and practices that cannot hold the dreams of present and future generations. LaCugna's work in *God for Us* traced the development of Trinitarian understanding as well as its ebbing through time. She suggested that the loss of Trinitarian theology rendered the church complicit in creating atheists and advocated reclaiming this powerful doctrine. Additionally, the work of Serene Jones and Miroslav Volf provide images, metaphors, and language for rebuilding congregational life through theologies of hospitality, openness, and embrace.

Feminist Deconstruction

Seminary president and theologian Serene Jones wrote an article in 2001 about post-modernism, feminism, and the church. As she was writing, she had the impulse to share a portion with her daughter's care-giver, Kate, a younger divinity school graduate and Roman Catholic. Kate said:

When I think of postmodernism, I think of deconstruction. Of things being dismantled. Of old things being taken apart. It's like I live in a world where all the things my parents took for granted as being 'true' are now lying around in fragments, and our generation is dancing around in the midst of these pieces. As for the church, it's clear to me that feminism and postmodernism both did a lot to help tear these things down and I am glad. Unlike your generation, I never believed old truths like only men can be priests, homosexuality is wrong, and women are naturally more nurturing than men. This is the part of postmodernism and feminism I really like; it's kind of exhilarating; there is so much possibility. I have the freedom to be who I want to be.⁴¹

Jones noted however, that Kate's words did not match her tone or affect. With encouragement, Kate went on to describe the difficulty and frustration of living in a

⁴¹Serene Jones, "Bounded Openness: Postmodernism, Feminism, and the Church Today," *Interpretation* (January, 2001): 49-50.

deconstructed world. Finally, she compared it to a Habitat for Humanity build in which she had taken part. Again, Kate said:

I feel like our generation is standing in the rubble of demolished houses hoping someone shows up to help us figure out how to build something beautiful and safe. . . . we need someone to share with us the wisdom, the know-how, the basic rules of community—because we don’t know those anymore. . . . The trick is that the church needs to show up on the site of the previous, demolished house and not spend all its time bemoaning the demolition but instead put its energy into helping us creatively build a new house.⁴²

Dr. Jones goes on using Kate’s words to uplift the exhilarating freedom that is possible with God. It is important to name the deconstructed nature of the current time. It is also important to name the elements of deconstruction, one of which is feminist critique. Kate recognizes the work of the grandmothers and mothers of feminist theology in providing a welcome to be oneself in freedom and belonging. Some of the *nones* and *donees*⁴³ may be missing because they are unaware of liberation theologies.

Equally important is the truth that recognizes deconstruction has limits, it does not nurture life in the long term; as Jones also states, “a purely deconstructive posture cannot sustain us.”⁴⁴ As Jones sees the church moving forward with the lessons of feminism and other aspects of deconstruction, she envisions “a community of ‘bounded-openness’—a community simultaneously marked by the gifts of critical openness and resilient boundedness.”⁴⁵

⁴²Jones, “Bounded-Openness,” 51.

⁴³*Nones* is a name given by social scientists to those who state they have no religious affiliation when being surveyed. *Donees* is a name given to those who have been active in congregational life at one time but rarely or no longer attend.

⁴⁴Jones, 51.

⁴⁵Jones, 51

Through a discussion of the work of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Jones highlights their critique of Western influence and suggests that the rebuilding comes, as Jesus demonstrated, through telling God's story differently:

It is a rather strange, elusive story of people who are not afraid of difference, who do not seek to order all that exists, who approach otherness with wonder and not repressive fear. It is the story of a world whose borders are fluid, a world where the lines between one thing and another are always transversable but where the differences that do exist are respected and not reduced to a function of their relationships. It describes a place where both the individual and communal self can flourish, a place where radical openness and constitutive boundedness joyfully coexist.⁴⁶

Here Jones suggested that the church with its Reformation roots intertwined with the roots of the Enlightenment has an obsession with reason and order. This, she posits, has created a fear of difference and re-ordering.

In this article there is a convergence of generational change, theological expansion, aspects of hospitality, and missional thinking. Since it begins with one person's description of her parent's institutions as rubble it starts with a challenge to religious institutions to consider Kate's truth: something that works for an older person is perceived to be broken beyond repair by someone who is younger. This gives credence to Jones' concerns regarding an obsession with order and distress around difference and re-ordering. As she stated, "the most profound faith is one with the courage to dance in the rubble, to face God in the abyss of ruptured truth claims."⁴⁷ As Jones advocates for fluid boundaries, she leans into the missional. While feminism is a part of the deconstruction and change, it is also a form of hospitality; anyone who has not felt welcome to

⁴⁶Jones, "Bounded-Openness," 54.

⁴⁷Jones, 56.

participate fully in the church because of gender also knows the importance of this acceptance. The change is a part of the rebuilding. Though not a missional advocate *per se*, Jones and the missional proponents agree renewal can be found in relationship with God and God's story:

to have faith is to find oneself utterly and completely determined by this story; it involves letting the weight of one's life fall into the hands of saving grace. It is to be determined by the beauty of their reality . . . but neither doubt nor reason is allowed to displace the primacy of place given to the revealed, radically gratuitous story of God's saving love.⁴⁸

Even if the Protestant story is not big enough to hold the dreams of the next generations, God's story can. God's story is big enough because it is full of paradox and parables. It has angel visits and hosts who create a whole new guest list that brings justice out of anger.

A Theology of Embrace

In an article from *The Christian Century*, writer Mark Oppenheimer interviewed Miroslav Volf about his life and work. He described Volf as a "Pentecostal among evangelicals, a mainline Christian among evangelicals, and an evangelical in the mainline. Growing up, he was a Christian among communists."⁴⁹ The interviewer indicated that Volf experienced the hard edges of humanity as a Christian in a communist country and while doing his mandatory military service. Oppenheimer said, Volf "has the catholicity of a refugee. He's reluctant to join any camp—military, ethnic, or

⁴⁸Jones, "Bounded-Openness," 57.

⁴⁹Mark Oppenheimer, "Embracing Theology: Miroslav Volf Spans Conflicting Worlds," *The Christian Century* (January 11, 2003): 20.

intellectual.”⁵⁰ *The Christian Century* writer concluded Volf’s background and experience give voice to a unique theology.

In the revised preface to the 2019 reprinting of *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf explained his motivation for writing the book, “I wrote it for myself, to figure out how to manage the identity centered conflict that was raging in my own soul, an internal echo of the war that was tearing apart the country in which I was born.”⁵¹ He further stated, “To counter the practice of identity-based exclusion, I developed a theology of embrace.”⁵²

In the introduction, Volf stated his main thesis for *Exclusion and Embrace*: “The will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.”⁵³ In addition to the concept of embrace, Volf includes consideration of a theology of making room.

In an article for *Modern Theology* in 1998, Miroslav Volf used a quote from Nicholas Federov as a title: “The Trinity Is Our Social Program.” He immediately clarified that God cannot be applied as though God were a strategic plan. By working with the concepts of eternity versus mortality, *kairos* versus *chronos*, he makes clear that he does not intend to flatten God into a report, a comprehensible notion, or to words on paper.

⁵⁰Oppenheimer, “Embracing,” 18.

⁵¹Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989, 2019) ix-x.

⁵²Volf, *Exclusion*, xiv.

⁵³Volf, *Exclusion*, xxiii.

Then he made his case for shifting from the word “program” to the word “vision.”

When it refers to social issues, “program” usually means “a plan or system under whose action may be taken toward a goal.” Unless we advocate for something close to a merger between humanity and divinity, however, the doctrine of Trinity manifestly does not constitute such a plan or system of action. What it does contain are the contours of the ultimate normative and toward which all social programs should strive. Hence, I speak of “vision.”⁵⁴

For Volf, the way people behave in community is “related to the doctrine of the Trinity,” again clarifying human beings are in time and not equal with God who is eternal.⁵⁵

Volf critiqued the long-held practice of Christians identifying themselves and their beliefs in the negative. Very early on, Christians developed the practice of describing how they differed from those around them, or “forging our identity antithetically,” in the words of Regina M. Schwartz.⁵⁶ This is important, as Schwartz and Volf concur the practice often leads to aggression or hostility rather than to identities of love. These steps of discourse bring the author to this social vision: the degree to which Christians are able to manifest the Trinity in their lives is reflected in the quality of their community. Volf stated:

Community is not simply a collection of independent and self-standing persons; inversely, persons are not merely so many discreet individual parts and functions of the community. Persons and community are equiprimal in the Trinity. . . . I want to explore here the implications of this observation for the understanding of identity. They are immense and are best studied by delving into the notion of “mutual indwelling” of divine persons, technically, *perichoresis*, meaning “making room” not “dancing around.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴Miroslav Volf, “The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,” *Modern Theology* 14:3, (July, 1998): 406.

⁵⁵Volf, “Trinity,” 408.

⁵⁶Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 63.

⁵⁷Volf, “Trinity,” 409.

Jürgen Moltmann, Catherine LaCugna, and Richard Rohr write about *perichoresis* using divine dance imagery. Volf adds the concept of “making room.”⁵⁸ As rejuvenating as the thought of a spinning, waltzing, Trinitarian energy is, the vision of making room within community is also a helpful and grounded concept for congregational life. It touches on the missional through Trinity and God’s own being.

In terms of a gathering, this proposes pulling together more tables and chairs when friends or strangers arrive unexpectedly. Ecclesiologically, it suggests moving out of the realm of correct worship and doctrine and into an openness for hearing anyone and everyone’s stories of divine encounter. Volf quoted John Zizioulas, “The person is the horizon within which the truth of existence is revealed, not as simple nature subject to individualization and recombination but as a unique image of the whole and the ‘catholicity’ of being.”⁵⁹ A Trinitarian sense of making room creates wholeness. Identity can then be forged in positive practices of community.

Inviting the other into conversation and community with one’s true self requires agility and grace, and, Volf says, “is contained in the narrative of the divine self-donation on the cross with its dual and interrelated messages about ‘indiscriminate welcome’ and about the importance of ‘truth and justice’.”⁶⁰ Volf begins by stating the Trinity should be the church’s social pattern or vision. From this view, his main thesis for *Exclusion and Embrace* is worth repeating: “The will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others,

⁵⁸Volf, “Trinity,” 409.

⁵⁹Volf, “Trinity,” 411.

⁶⁰Volf, “Trinity,” 412.

except that of identifying them in their humanity.”⁶¹ He states this is the indiscriminate welcome of the cross. The cross is truth and it is justice. “Pure gold,” according to the author. “Abstract principles are not pure gold; the narrative of the life of the Trinity, at whose heart lies the history of self-donation is pure gold.”⁶²

Using the words, “pure gold,” speaks of Volf’s interest in the quality of relationships. He is interested in healthy, life-giving boundaries for individuals and communities. He asked, “How does one know when to close the boundaries of self in order to stabilize one’s identity and when to open them in order to enrich it?”⁶³ Volf is detailed and highly nuanced in his thinking and writing. He says, “Whether the borders will be opened or closed will depend on the specific character of both the self and the other at a given junction in their relation. The only advice possible is to seek supple wisdom rather than stable rules.”⁶⁴ This is akin to Serene Jones’ critique of the church’s obsession with reason and fear of re-ordering its life. The antithetically formed and obsessively reasoned practitioner or community would likely develop the habit of remaining closed. Instead he suggests the Spirit led practice of making room for the stranger and friend alike.

⁶¹Volf, *Exclusion*, xxiii.

⁶²Volf, “Trinity,” 412.

⁶³Volf, “Trinity,” 411.

⁶⁴Volf, “Trinity,” 411.

Hospitality as Spiritual Maturity

The Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.⁶⁵

In this poem Rumi suggests that it is an act of humanity to embrace life as a traveler whether this is a metaphor for circumstances that bring change to one's own life or the arrival of another human being in need of a host. The language, beautiful and startling, names the work of love and compassion for self and others. It is an ancient poem which speaks of faith formation of such depth that allows one to choose or accept what seems negative, painful, or diminishing because it will eventually lead to new life.

⁶⁵Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *The Essential Rumi*, translation by Coleman Barks with John Moyne. (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1995), 109. Used with permission.

Spiritual Living and Change

If a congregation is a living system, it must become aware of the laws of thermodynamics as well as the Torah. In Deuteronomy, God said,

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish, you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants might live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

The people of God are invited always to choose life, not survival, but life. In *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley emphasizes the need for openness, the spread of information, and a measure of instability for the health of any living system: “In classical thermodynamics, equilibrium is the end state in the evolution of closed systems, the point at which the system has exhausted all of its capacity for change, done its work, and dissipated its productive capacity into useless entropy.”⁶⁶

Even Miroslav Volf uses the language of science to express that the stranger is a gift among familiars.

Given the original trinitarian *perichoresis* as its soteriological analogue, the relationship among humans are also analogously *perichoretic*, though in a weaker sense. They are *perichoretic* in a way appropriate to them as finite, embodied, and . . . fallible creatures. Within the church, our identities are—or at least ought to be—porous, which is to say bounded yet permeable. This porousness does not

⁶⁶Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2006), 76.

compromise our individuality but rather expands and enriches it. We are richer precisely as individuals the more others across times and spaces indwell us. We can describe this sort of personal identity as “catholic personality” enriched by otherness—“a microcosm of the eschatological new creation.”⁶⁷

Choosing life is to choose community. Kate’s voice reveals a plea for community from one generation to another. The church of today must reckon with a plea for community that may not include congregational life and worship as it is now known. The church of today is invited to consider that the Holy Spirit is part of a broader spiritual ecosystem.

Spiritual Maturity: Stringing Together Pearls of Great Price

In an editorial on Rublev’s icon in a 2003 issue of *Arts: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*, Wilson Yates says this about Rublev’s icon of the Trinity,

the theological imaging of the figures finally yields an inner sense of spiritual presence. For in the balance of lines and shapes, in the harmony of movement, in the colors whose hues envelop us, in the subjects the figures symbolize, and the quietness they convey we are pulled into them and their world, if but for a moment, that removes us from the world about us. And in that moment our spirits are stilled. With the Psalmist we arrive and know now what is meant when the poet writes, “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).⁶⁸

Rublev’s icon, written from his own faith and practice, has a contemplative value. Yates explained Rublev’s spirituality by introducing the *Philokalia* with this brief explanation,

a book of which readings from different spiritual figures who teach a continual life of prayer in which a stillness, gratitude and peacefulness is realized in a heart focused on loving kindness. As Bagglely notes, it is sometimes called “‘*Hesychasm*’ from the Greek word *hesychia* which conveys the meaning of stillness, tranquility and being concentrated in attentiveness”.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Volf, *Exclusion*, 309.

⁶⁸Wilson Yates, *Arts: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 15, no.1 (2003): 3.

⁶⁹Yates, 3. Yates is quoting from John Bagglely’s study, *Words of Perception*. (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 1988), 68.

The missional church emphasizes practices in addition to scholarship and knowledge. Reading Sarah and Abraham's story through Rublev's icon invites believers to a life that includes resting in the stillness of God; it invites concentrated attentiveness on God which eventually arrives at the practice of welcoming the stranger. What the icon adds to the scripture's understanding is the challenge each person has in welcoming God and receiving God's message through the ear of the heart.

Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama takes Rublev a step further. At a lecture in the 1990s to the student body of Union Theological Seminary in New York, Koyama referenced Rublev's icon of the Trinity via Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

As a theologian and Japanese man, Koyama often wrote about the stranger. He recognized his was a theological voice that was not white and not American or Western, so his perspective on the stranger was from the perspective of a stranger. His presence suggests Western Christians must wrestle with being strangers in this faith.

As the lecture developed, he asserted the pattern of stranger to guest when hospitality is offered. "Paradoxically, however, the stranger can become the guest if we can overcome the fear of the hostile alien by way of making friendship. Thus, the stranger carries a possibility of future reciprocal hospitality."⁷⁰ Koyama stated that hospitality begets hospitality. He also lifted up minority theologies and recognized in the time when he was speaking that, "Blacks, womanists, feminists, native Americans, Latin

⁷⁰Kosuki Koyama, "Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*." *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (1993): 284.

American liberationists” are theological “resident aliens” and among those in need of welcome.⁷¹

Then he goes further by equating God with the stranger because of the teaching in Matthew 25:31-44. In these verses, there is a rhythmic repetition of needs describing real hospitality. The first time through this litany, it is the voice of the king who praises those who practiced compassion. He says “. . . 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, 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” (25:35-36). In the same words, the righteous asked the king when they did any of these actions for him and the king responds, “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” (25:40). The full litany of needs is repeated two more times to those who were judged as wanting because they did not show hospitality to the king in the guise of the stranger.

Koyama stated that in this passage, Jesus offered an image of God as one on the margins and in need of hospitality. Jesus’ teaching challenged the systems of control and social standing. He is referring to Philippians 2:5-11 which is printed in full in the footnote.⁷² “It is this scandalous Christ who has the power to destroy our self-idolatrous

⁷¹Koyama, “Extended,” 287.

⁷²“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

centre-complex. The gospel radically disturbs our hierarchical distribution of power and prestige. A hierarchy-in-reverse is consonant with the mind of Christ.”⁷³

For Koyama, the destination of this faith journey is Luther’s *theologia crucis*, or theology of the cross. He says,

the key insight of Luther’s *theologia crucis* is that the true knowledge of God comes from the knowledge of the suffering of Jesus Christ. This happened concretely when Christ loved strangers and gave his life for them (Romans 5:6-8). The ‘form of Christ’ (Galatians 4:19) is the form of “extending hospitality to strangers.” This form is the essence of the Christian gospel. It is the vision of ecumenism. It is that which inspires Christian mission. Mission is “extending hospitality to strangers.”⁷⁴

There is a point in each of the synoptic gospels when Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was. They named speculations heard from the crowds, until finally, Peter named him as the Messiah. In consideration of this passage, Koyama called on this statement from Paul Tillich:

he [Jesus] accepts the title “Christ” when Peter offers it to him. He accepts it under the one condition that he has to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, which means to deny the idolatrous tendency even with respect to himself. This is at the same time the criterion of all other symbols, and it is the criterion to which every Christian church should subject itself.⁷⁵

Koyama names hospitality as a willingness to put the other and the stranger ahead of the self; this is the hospitality of Matthew 25.

Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Many Christians interpret this to mean bearing the burdens of their own lives, but the gospel clearly invites the denial of

⁷³Koyama, “Extended,” 285.

⁷⁴Koyama, 285.

⁷⁵Koyama, 292.

self in order to bear the burdens of others. Whether as individual Christians or as congregations, the practice of hospitality, or caring for the alien and foreigner, is critical. As Koyama stated, “The only way to stop the violence of genocide in our world is the *via eminentiae*, or the eminent way of ‘extending hospitality to strangers’ as the Lamb of God did.”⁷⁶

The Cross: A Theological Arrival

As Jesus’ crucifixion is also known as his passion, it is appropriate to recall that *eros* is translated as passionate love; however, it is *pathema* that is translated as passion meaning suffering, misfortune, or persecution.⁷⁷ Here again, the Greek language is more nuanced as *pascho* also refers to the experience of suffering; it is the source of the word paschal or paschal lamb.⁷⁸ I Peter 1:11 uses *pathema* in reference to Jesus’ suffering on the cross whereas Luke 22:15, I Corinthians 12:26, and Hebrews 2:18, all use *pascho*.

Additionally, the Greek offers *pathos*, which can be translated as endurance of suffering or emotion. In an article about the *pathos* of God, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote,

Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable example, but an outgoing challenge, a dynamic relation between God and [humanity]; not mere feeling or passive affection, but an act or attitude composed of various spiritual elements; no mere contemplative survey of the world, but a passionate summons.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Koyama, “Extended,” 286.

⁷⁷Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 601.

⁷⁸Bauer, 633.

⁷⁹Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 289.

Dr. Woodhead's argument challenged not only the way humanity relates to one another, but the way they love. Using the terminology of *eros*, she advocated for two-way neighbor-love. *Agape* is well known through the scriptures, *eros* is not. Regardless of the Greek used, *agape*, *filio*, *eros*, or *pathos*, the English is love. Love is most familiar in current ethos as romantic love or love of parent for a child. If, in current culture, it connotes a passionate caring, it is privatized, often held between a couple or within a family.

In *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck defined love as, "The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."⁸⁰ He states that a person must engage their will to love and that love differs from doing good. Writes Peck,

Will is desire of sufficient intensity that it *is* translated into action. . . . Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. No matter how much we may think we are loving, if we are in fact not loving, it is because we have chosen not to love and therefore do not love despite our good intentions. On the other hand, whenever we do actually exert ourselves in the cause of spiritual growth, it is because we have chosen to do so. The choice to love has been made.⁸¹

Woodhead suggested that, though the church may have accomplished good works, it is not the same as making the choice to love; she believes the church has suffered from one-way relationships with strangers. Much mission work is done from a distance without meeting the stranger or recipients much less welcoming them as guest

⁸⁰M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 81.

⁸¹Peck, 83.

and moving to friend. As Woodhead stated, the Christian “remains unaffected.”⁸² The unaffected Christian is rarely ready for the *theologia crucis*. Without two-way relationships we do not make room for each other. To make room means a greater willingness to engage the passion of suffering that transforms systems of racism, sexism, and heterosexism. As Woodhead stated, “What seems to be true here is that really to love someone means being prepared to give everything in order to help them, even one’s life.”⁸³ This is the *agape* understood to be of God and it is the passion (*pathema* or *pascho*) of Jesus. It takes spiritually mature people to willingly let go of the ego’s need for power, control, and the need for affection for the sake the neighbor, stranger, the immigrant, or the resident alien and share the same life.

Volf also arrives at the cross in his theology of embrace:

Note first the two dimensions of the passion of Christ: self-giving love that overcomes human enmity and the creation of space in himself to receive estranged humanity. This same giving of the self and receiving of the other are the two essential moments in the internal life of the Trinity; indeed, with the triune God of perfect love they are identical.⁸⁴

Volf is presented here because he suggests Trinitarian relationship or *perichoresis* be translated as “making room.”⁸⁵ Koyama suggested expansion when he asked that the church make room for theologies from Africa, Asia, and South America; he advocates for

⁸²Linda Woodhead, “Love and Justice,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (Apr 1992): 46.

⁸³Woodhead, 51.

⁸⁴Volf, *Exclusion*, 128.

⁸⁵Volf, “Trinity,” 409.

“minority theologies.”⁸⁶ Here are a variety of voices encouraging Christians to make more room for one another, whether differing in age, gender, race, or sexual orientation.

Serene Jones comes from the margins as Koyama does. So first is the shared critique:

By not backing away from the often uncomfortable position of decrying all order, they have forced us to ponder seriously the limits of our Western obsession with self-evident “truths” and our fear of unordered difference. It seems to me, further, that this insistence has been good for theologians like me who struggle with the ongoing truth of the Christian message. . . . As we engage in doctrinal reflection, the postmodernist asks us to remember that what often passes for universal, rational truth may well be more a product of culture than of a mythic “unencumbered reason.”⁸⁷

Once new openings occur, Jones sees a new and expanded vision of church:

a community marked by a grace that constantly opens it outward in two directions. On the one hand, the church is called to look beyond itself to the God who calls it into being and to offer praise for the grace that holds it. The church is constantly opening toward and being opened by God. On the other hand, the church knows that it has been called into being by God not simply for its own sake but for the purpose of serving the world, for the purpose of proclamation in word and deed. Church is thus a community that exists for the sake of the worldly other, be it friend or enemy. In both these ways then, the church is a community of radical openness: it is a community whose very being rests in a play of difference.⁸⁸

This is the challenge.

Herb Anderson gave a lecture to chaplains and pastors at a pastoral care conference in 2003. Anderson encouraged these religious professionals to deeper work, to the care of souls in this fast-paced and fearful world. Writes Anderson, “Everything we have said so far about the soul of ministry and the complexity of human life before God –

⁸⁶Koyama, “Extended,” 287.

⁸⁷Jones, “Bounded-Openness,” 55-56.

⁸⁸Jones, 58.

. . . finds it expression in the church's ministry of hospitality. The ministry of hospitality is about welcoming the stranger as someone with gifts to give."⁸⁹ He continued,

When we offer hospitality to the stranger, we welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our lives that has the potential to expand our world and deepen our faith. Thomas Ogeltree has written about hospitality in this way: "Regard for the strangers in their vulnerability and delight in their offerings presupposes that we perceive them as equals, as persons who share our common humanity in its myriad variations." Hospitality is about breaking down barriers that separate us. Ogeltree contends, and I agree, that hospitality is at the core of the moral life. However, as our communities and families become more diverse, hospitality is more than a religious ideal; it is a human necessity. The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama has suggested that "The only way to stop the violence of genocide in our world is by extending hospitality to strangers." Doing so is not only the essence of the Gospel but essential for survival in a pluralistic world.⁹⁰

These voices, two feminists, an Asian, and an Eastern European, along with Dr. Anderson, are in favor of embracing, opening, and making room for the stranger. Once reception and space are made for the actual stranger or outsider, there exists a deeper acceptance and comfort for the insider as well. Congregational space, then, better resembles God's dimensions; there is room for other Christian denominations and congregations, for other religions, and people of no religion.

Margaret Wheatley wrote, "Living systems create themselves."⁹¹ A congregational community can be described as a living system, a spiritual ecosystem. The

⁸⁹Herbert Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript. San Antonio, TX. (February, 2004): 38. The manuscript includes this note: "Readers are free to duplicate any or all of this material by permission of the author, Herbert Anderson, Ph.D., with appropriate acknowledgement of authorship." https://www.lutheranservices.org/sites/default/files/images/pdfs/N4_HerbAndersonpaper.pdf, accessed 10/9/2020.

⁹⁰Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript, 38.

⁹¹Margaret Wheatley. *Who Do We Choose to Be: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2017), 64.

theology here is about the metamorphosis of a living system. It takes seriously God's admonition to choose life. Wheatley wrote this about choosing merely to survive:

Evolution has become a synonym for progress, but this is not the science. Evolution describes adaptations that make the organism more fit for its current environment. That environment can be improving or deteriorating. The survival of any species depends on its recognition of how the environment has changed and what it demands if the species is to survive. Adaptations are not necessarily improvements or progress; they are intelligent responses to what has changed.⁹²

To choose life is to choose, as suggested by Serene Jones and Miroslav Volf respectively, bounded-openness and a theology of embrace. It is, as offered by Kosuke Koyama, to choose the way of the cross. It is the cross that teaches the paradox in hospitality: to earn the friendship of the stranger is to lose control or power, and to move away from sameness. The gains are humility, compassion, and reconciliation. From Matthew 25 and the way of the cross, justice enters the picture. Volf says, "... to agree to justice, you need to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the other."⁹³

It is practice more so than program that hones the disciple and prepares the apostle to live in the way of the Trinitarian God. The church in God may struggle to consistently show love but there are also the matters of will and intent.

Summary

The sending God, the three-in-one God, is expansive and invitational. The missional church movement calls congregations to explore their current realities and introduce new practices to shift from clerical culture and learn corporate discernment in

⁹²Wheatley, *Who*, 61 n3.

⁹³Volf, *Exclusion*, 207.

order to follow the sending God. As the old traditions wane and with the possibility that younger generations see it as demolition, the rehabbing or rebuilding of church is an invitation to engage *missio Dei*. It is perhaps to see the sending God as architect who is designing a locally centered ecclesiology or as Creator of spiritual ecosystems.

Biblical hospitality is a two-way relationship. Abraham and Sarah provide for three strangers and in return, they receive a message from God. This suggests that if God has the good grace to show up, the people of God could move beyond “an atmosphere of coziness,” and toward a passion or love for whom and what God loves. Theologically, then, hospitality becomes a choice, first for the well-being of neighbors because that leads to well-being for all. Choosing life, *pathos*, *pathema*, *pascho*, and love, *agape*, *filia*, *xenia*, or *eros*, requires spiritual maturity. It is now time for research interventions at The Tradition Church.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

The Tradition Church, as the pseudonym suggests, uses a hymnal and includes a creedal affirmation of faith each week in the worship service. The church has four organs: one a museum piece and the other three used weekly or monthly. A recent interim pastor who introduced many of his valued practices into the worship service had to admit defeat on his mission to bring in laser lights. As already reported, some TTC congregants are third and fourth generation members. They have only recently awakened to the loss and uncertainty created by the absence of their children and grandchildren as active members of this beloved church. Because of this awakening there is a desire to return to the glories of the past and fear for the future. This research is focused on hospitality with intervening missional practices to introduce new ideas and put them into conversation with neighbors.

Having tried to pull in the younger cohorts for several decades, the question of hospitality asks parents and grandparents to turn from old answers and consider new forms of being church that might address generational attendance patterns. It may put them more in touch with the quickly growing religious affiliates referred to as nones and dones. *Nones* is a sociological term given to those who respond to having no religious

affiliation on questionnaires.¹ *Dones* is a term to describe people who were, at some point in their lives, engaged in church life, but no longer attend. Hospitality asks that Sunday sports programming for children be addressed respectfully and supportively rather than judgmentally. It invites intervention with the publicly valued ethos of individualism and busyness affecting family life as well as congregations. Hospitality is a broad concept by which a congregation might even invite one another to consider new forms of governance as the most active volunteers are often the newly retired who travel for extended periods of time, causing inconsistencies in lay leadership while others are aging out of volunteering all together. The hope is that hospitality experienced through missional practices may be seeds of transformation toward God's preferred future rather than holding fearfully to tradition and looking back.

Hospitality is also welcoming the stranger. TTC has a history of interacting together through two and three generations of shared family stories. It is challenging for them to consider welcoming neighbors and strangers or those with unknown family backgrounds and unknown stories.

So, with all these in mind, the introduction of new practices gave congregants the opportunity to experience hospitality, for example, to welcome another way of engaging scripture through Dwelling in the Word. The interventions invited them to reach out to a neighbor, whether someone in the next house or a co-worker in the next cubicle. They asked about worries, hopes, and spirituality under the auspices of research. It gave them a chance to engage a stranger or someone of long acquaintance in a new realm. The

¹Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 121.

interventions invited them to go out and spend time on behalf of neighbors through Dwelling in the World prayer walks. Furthermore it gave them opportunities to attend education and discussion events around these topics of generational and organizational change countered by new possibilities suggested by *missional* practices. As Richard Rohr stated in a lecture, “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”²

Research Question

I have chosen Action Research interventions in the form of mixed method research. The research question is:

How might Action Research interventions utilizing missional practices of hospitality impact The Tradition Church and its relationship with neighbors?

Action Research offers a process for both research and change by starting with the pre-step of examining the context and “constructing what the issues are.”³ The process continues by planning action, taking action, and evaluating action. This is a context driven process, first to identify necessary change then to take the action steps, returning to the context for evaluation. The intent is that return to context and evaluation will lead to further construction of issues followed again by the rest of the cycle. As David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick wrote:

In its original Lewinian and simplest form, the action research cycle comprises a pre-step and three core activities: planning, action and fact-finding. The pre-step

²I first heard this from Richard Rohr in a workshop presentation at the Christ United Methodist Church in Rochester, Minnesota, in 2007. A similar statement, “You can’t think your way into right action, but you can act your way into right thinking,” is well known among affirmations shared by practitioners of the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Step Program.

³David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2014), 9-10.

involves naming the general objective. Planning comprises having an overall plan and decision regarding what is the first step to take. Action involves taking that first step, and fact-finding involves evaluation of the first step, seeing what was learned and creating the basis for correcting the next step. So there is a continuing spiral of steps, each of which is comprised of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action.⁴

Action Research offers the opportunity to bring a change agent into a context in the form of research. The interventions of this research design are, in the Action Research model, action steps. As mentioned in chapter two, “leadership requires disturbing people—but at a rate they can absorb.”⁵ This is addressed by the step by step nature of Action Research.

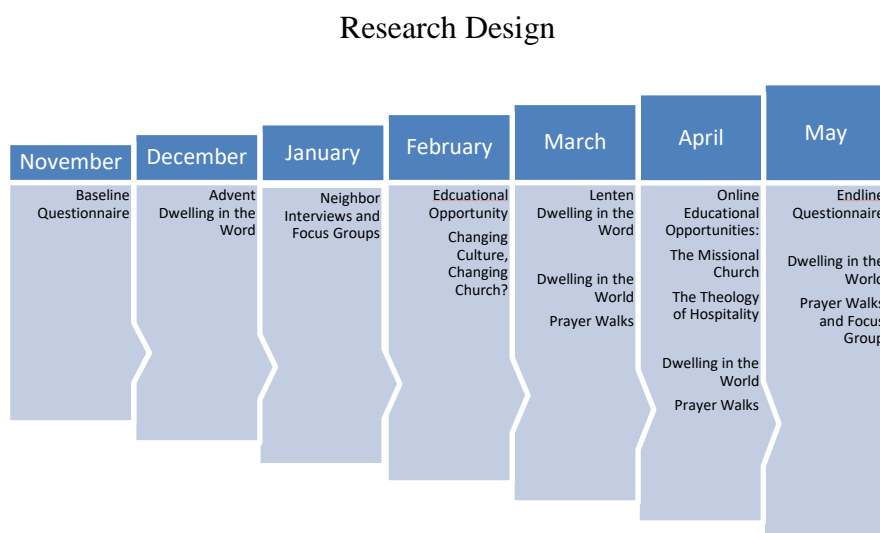


Figure 1. Research Design

The context for this research is The Tradition Church. The population for this research consisted of all members and friends⁶ of the congregation eighteen years of age

⁴Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing*, 9-10.

⁵Coghlan and Brannick, 20.

⁶Friends of the congregation are active, non-member attendees.

and older. All participation was by open invitation. The baseline and endline questionnaires each represent both a census and an intervention. They both gather data as a census does, and, some of the language used and areas of questioning are intended to be interruptive and educational. The other interventions were a convenience sampling, with some participating in multiple interventions while others did one or none. The rolls were cleaned in December of 2019; as the baseline began, the membership was at 1612; by the end, it was 1251.

As shown in the Research Design in figure 1, above, the planned interventions included baseline and endline questionnaires, two seasons, Advent and Lent, of Dwelling in the Word, neighbor interviews, two education events, and the practice of Dwelling in the World through prayer walks. An additional education session was planned with the topic to be determined by the research team and the research proposal left an open possibility of a final intervention also to be determined.

Baseline and Endline Questionnaires

In order to survey those eighteen and older in the congregation, I offered two questionnaires, one as a baseline from November 14–December 14, 2019, and one as an endline from May 1–June 14, 2020. The endline questionnaire had the same questions as the baseline with an additional query pertaining to participation in the interventions. Paper copies for the baseline questionnaire were available in the church office to pick-up or be mailed out upon request. The office was not staffed regularly for the endline survey and parishioners did not have access to the church at that time due to COVID-19. Invitations to take the survey were issued in the monthly newsletter and weekly email alerts to the congregation for both baseline and endline. It was also announced in the

worship service. There was a link for both surveys on the church website making it a true census. Emails were sent with a direct link to the baseline questionnaire to 378 members with the invitation to participate; 510 received an email invitation with a link to the endline survey. The baseline questionnaire is appendix A and the end line questionnaire is appendix Q. The research team gave feedback on the questions during development. They also had access to both questionnaires before they were available to the congregation as a field test.

Dwelling in the Word

A Dwelling in the Word practice took place on Sunday mornings before the worship service during the four weeks of Advent. The scripture used for all four Sundays in Advent was Luke 1:46-55, also known as Mary's Magnificat. The participants met in a classroom at round tables for both series. A sheet was prepared for each session outlining the Dwelling process on one side and the scripture passage on the other; the instruction sheet and scriptures are appendix B. Attendance varied at every gathering. I took notes during each discussion.

The church building closed in mid-March 2020, due to the statewide response to try to prevent a spike in COVID-19 cases. The first Sunday in Lent, one parishioner came to the Dwelling session and the second week, two people came. The text was Philippians 2:1-11. The third and fourth weeks of Lent were lost due to that sudden closure of the building on Saturday with an additional week to get Zoom sessions set up for the fifth Sunday of Lent and Palm Sunday. The research plan called for a short evaluation at the end of the group time on the last Sunday of each season of Dwelling. There was only one person in attendance at the last session of both seasons, so an email

was sent to all participants asking for their evaluation of Dwelling in the Word using the following questions: Have you attended other Bible studies? Was this different? What did you like about it? What do you think about reading the same scripture four/six weeks in a row? Do you have any further thoughts or questions on Dwelling in the Word? These questions are also in appendix C. Five participants responded.

Neighbor Interviews

The January intervention was an invitation to conduct one or two interviews with a neighbor(s). An information and training session for interviewing a neighbor took place on Sunday, January 5, 2020, after church. Nineteen people attended this event. Two additional information sessions were offered during the week which garnered three more participants. Four additional participants contacted me electronically and received the instructions, interviewee number(s), and question sheets by email. Twenty-six people started the process with potential for forty-one interviews.

At the information and training session or through email, interviewers were instructed to read aloud the implied consent message on the top of each worksheet which is available in appendix D. Instructions also included a description of my previous process for conducting interviews, and the difference between an interview and a conversation. I asked them to take notes with permission of the interviewee, trying to get as many exact phrases as possible. If the interviewee was not comfortable with note-taking, they were instructed to write down all they remembered as soon as possible after the interview. Some of the participants asked if they could add questions to the process; I asked them to go directly through the six interview questions and close the interview before continuing a conversation or asking further questions. They all agreed to do this.

All of the worksheets were numbered and each potential interviewer signed in recorded their interviewee number(s) and email address. All the interviewers signed a confidentiality agreement, a copy of this is in appendix H. At their request, the sheet was also sent to them electronically via email. Some returned the interview sheets and others turned in their information electronically. Focus groups were held after the worship service on the last Sunday in January and the first Sunday in February to talk about the experience. The focus group questions are in appendix E.

Educational Opportunities

On February 23, 2020, I offered an educational session titled “Changing World – Changing Church?”. The introduction touched on Charles Taylor's work on enchantment in the medieval world and on the Enlightenment using David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*. The presentation demonstrated the long-changing nature of religious life, influences on belief and practice from the Reformation as it intertwined with the Enlightenment, and information from the Faith Matters Survey as interpreted by Robert Putnam and David Campbell in *American Grace*. The presentation included an understanding of generational change. The concepts of technical versus adaptive change from Heifetz and Linsky were introduced.⁷ The post-class questionnaire is in appendix I; the content of the presentation is in appendix S.

⁷Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* 6th Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017). Robert D. Putnam and David E Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010). Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017).

A second educational session titled, “What Is God Up To in the Neighborhood?: The Missional Church,” was scheduled for March 22, 2020; because the church building closed due to COVID-19, it was recorded on Zoom and available as a link on the church website. This included an introduction to Lesslie Newbigin and his impressions of the church in England upon return from India in the 1970s. The session then focused on missional concepts of *missio Dei*, God as a trinitarian sending God. This presentation included discussion of the nine disciplines of a church desiring to address change from *The Agile Church* by Dwight Zscheile; the six habits of missional churches from Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert’s *Forming the Missional Church* were also included.

Zscheile’s nine disciplines are:

1. Cultivating spaces for conversation and practice;
2. Addressing fear and shame;
3. Engaging ambivalence and conflict;
4. Interpreting the present in light of the past;
5. Discovering open spaces;
6. Being present;
7. Practicing your way forward;
8. Translating;
9. Improvising.⁸

Keifert and Rooms’ habits are: Dwelling in the Word, Dwelling in the World, hospitality, corporate spiritual discernment, announcing the kingdom, and focusing on missional action.⁹ The following questions were on the last slide of the presentation with the invitation to send me an email: What did you learn, what surprised you? Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways? What do you think this could mean for our future?

⁸Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 89-110.

⁹Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, 2014), 21.

Where is God in this? What further questions do you have? Nine participants sent feedback. The feedback questions are also in appendix I and the content of the presentation is in appendix T.

A third educational event titled “The Theology of Hospitality,” was scheduled for the end of April. It was also recorded on Zoom and linked to the church website. The presentation followed the course of the previous chapter beginning with Henri Nouwen’s concern that hospitality is related to tea parties and bland conversation. Using pictures of centuries old church ruins from Ireland and Scotland, the presentation included two quotes from Serene Jones’ child care giver on the deconstruction of institutions of the Modern era and new theologies from the margins including Jones’ suggestion of bounded-openness, Volf’s theology of embrace and making room, and Koyama’s revival of Luther’s *theologia crucis*. The following questions were on the last slide of the presentation with the invitation to send a feedback email: What did you learn, what surprised you? Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways? What do you think this could mean for our future? Where is God in this? What further questions do you have? Fifteen respondents sent feedback. These feedback questions are also in appendix K and the content of the presentation is in appendix U.

I shared a print, *A Sense of Home* by Melanie Weidner at all three of the presentations. It is a piece that shows five panels. The first is the outline of a house with a tree next to it on a sunny day. As night begins to fall in the second panel, the house begins to tilt and the roots are pulled out. The third panel shows the house, no longer an outline but solidly filled in, launched across the sky like a rocket. Then the house is lying on its side on a lawn as the dawn breaks. In the final panel, the sun has returned, the

house is standing once again with both the night and the tree inside. For me, change, missional church, making room, and spiritual maturity come together in this piece of art.

As church, we are being uprooted. There is grief and perhaps conflict in facing the change and darkness. While this is less comfortable than staying in place, facing the night is movement and growth. The house lands on its side and it is not entirely clear how it becomes upright again but when it does, the tree of life is within. The night time, compassion, experience, and courage are within.



Figure 2. *A Sense of Home* by Melanie Weidner

Dwelling in the World

Originally planned for March and April only, Dwelling in the World was extended through May due to COVID-19. Members and friends of the congregation were invited to go on prayer walks as a practice of Dwelling in the World. They were invited to walk in their neighborhood or in the direct environs of the church. I created an instruction sheet for this activity that also included a log for their walks. Rather than go into a classroom, I stood at a table after the church service on the first two Sundays of March to talk to those interested in this practice. As people stopped individually or in small groups, I went through the instructions on the sheet. Those who took sheets with

the intention of doing the prayer walks signed in. Though it was not used, the original instructions and record sheet is in appendix M.

The intervention was a simple one. I suggested using a mantra or to pray for households by family name or house number, as they walked. It was suggested that they pray for those they met and it was up to them to speak or not to speak. They were invited to go singly or in pairs. Participants were asked to do an intentional prayer walk at least once a week for four weeks. I left it up to participants whether they would follow the same route or vary it each week.

This practice was also altered by COVID-19. One member of the church staff took the instruction and log sheet and created an online log using Vimeo; this is in appendix N. This was posted directly on the website for easy access. Prayer walks were promoted through the monthly newsletter and the weekly E-News throughout March and April and for the first two weeks of May. A focus group met online on May 31, 2020; the questions are in appendix L.

Added Intervention

As per the research proposal an additional intervention was planned by the research team at a meeting on the first Sunday in March. We decided to repeat the neighbor interview practice due to great interest. However, just one week later, the state's governor asked that the people of the state to shelter in place and work from home as much as possible. The sheltering order remained in place through the second week of May. As the church encouraged compliance with the sheltering order, it did not seem appropriate to suggest the interview process. I invited those who did interviews in January to check back in with their interviewee to ask about worries and hope during this

time of the virus, one did so. As was previously reported, the final portion of the research was an endline questionnaire that again served as census and intervention. The endline questionnaire is in appendix Q.

Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Action Research

It is possible to look at Action Research interventions and see the footsteps of Jesus. He moved from group to group, and teaching opportunity to teaching opportunity, actively demonstrating new practices and a new way of life. He interacted with women and men, Jews and Samaritans, the hungry, the sick, and the displaced. He gave each person the opportunity to recognize the Divine in him and then see their own reflection in his eyes. As Charles Wesley wrote in the first year after his own conversion, he came “with healing in his wings,”¹⁰ offering growth if not transformation for any and all. It is possible to think of Jesus as Action Research in sandals. He brought something that has never been fully captured by any organized religion, even the one that took his name. It is an idolatry to think otherwise. And people still seek him, still seek the potential of the good news.

Author Bonnie B. Thurston suggests that curiosity and the search for something new began during the ministry of John the Baptist. Thurston says,

In Mark’s narrative people from Jerusalem, the locus of the temple, the dwelling place of God, flock out to the desert to hear John. This gives me pause. What were those people seeking? What did the center of religious life and worship not provide? Why were they choosing the call of the desert over institutional or organized religion? These it seems to me are very timely questions.¹¹

¹⁰Charles Wesley, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Hymnary.org February 10, 2020 at 4:41 p.m..

¹¹Bonnie J. Thurston, *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 6.

Like John, Jesus invited those he met into new practices. He said, "... go into your room and shut the door and pray ..." (Matthew 6:5b). He demonstrated the need for prayer by taking time away from the crowds and disciples alike to pray (Mark 6:46). He showed and taught compassion (Mark 6:34).

When crowds gathered and when he was alone with the disciples, he taught them "whoever wants to be first must be last of all; whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 8:34-9:1; 9:35ff). Again, from Thurston:

Discipline and discipleship have the same root. "Disciple" in Greek is *mathetes*: disciple, pupil, follower, in Mark, one who learns by following. In Latin, "disciple" is a compound: *dis*, apart, and *capere*, "to hold." Discipleship is holding apart (from societal expectation? the 'usual' way of doing and being?), or it is being taken apart in order to be put together in a new way. Training is what makes disciples.¹²

Through instruction followed by the opportunity for practice, and in the company of Jesus' own practices, he demonstrates a kind of Action Research model. As Thurston says, "We know who Jesus is by what Jesus does."¹³ She chose to write about diverse aspects of Jesus' life by using the various geographies through which he travels in the gospel of Mark. She draws out aspects of spiritual life in chapters on the wilderness, the sea, the valley, mountain, and city. She also included the concept of home. Thurston says, "Home is the place from which we launch. Home is also the place we are seeking."¹⁴ Here again is the image of house or home. Thurston continued,

Ideally at least, in our world, "home" is where we go to be ourselves. It is where our masks come off, where we expand psychically and spiritually, where we are ourselves. "Home" is where we do not have to get ourselves up in psychic fancy

¹²Thurston, *Spiritual*, 35.

¹³Thurston, 24.

¹⁴Thurston, 16.

dress. This is why heaven is our ultimate home. It is the place of our complete belonging, where we are fully known, where we will be our perfected selves.¹⁵

Elsewhere I have spoken of The Tradition Church as more closed than open, more intellectual than spiritual, and where tradition is the framework that gives structure to the house and, at the same time, the walls that hold change and growth at bay. Jesus as change agent, as agent of Action Research, offers an active theology of transformation.

When writing about Jesus' various experiences on or near water, Thurston wrote,

Jesus enters the most severe experience of human beings, chaos in a time of transition and brings order out of it, indeed, the text says he effects "a dead calm." The pattern is threefold: (1) the great chaos of the sea, (2) the great fear of the disciples, (3) the great calm brought by Jesus. To put the matter theologically, the place of transition is often the theophanic place, the place where God is most clearly manifested to us. The place of chaos can be the point of theophany. It is *in* the period of liminality and transition, in the stormy sea crossings of life, when we may be most fearful and frantic, that Jesus reveals himself most clearly as who he IS. And that, it seems to me, is very good news.¹⁶

Ethical Considerations

All information gathered through this research will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Only I and the members of the research team have seen the raw data. Each member of the research team has signed a confidentiality document. The form is in appendix H.

One of the ethical considerations is the congregation's resistance and fear of change; as Coghlan and Brannick stated, "It may seem obvious that naming the need for change and its causes is essential."¹⁷ TTC had not previously addressed the changing culture or movements such as the missional church. They have, to this point, continued to

¹⁵Thurston, *Spiritual*, 18.

¹⁶Thurston, 25.

¹⁷Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing*, 80.

work to attract new members using sources from the 1990s. Again, as Coghlan and Brannick stated,

Another key element in evaluating the need for change is the degree of choice about whether to change or not. This is often an overlooked question. Choices are not absolute. While there may be no control over the forces demanding change, [i.e.] a budget reduction, there is likely to be a great deal of control over how to respond to those forces. In that case there is likely to be a good deal of scope as to what changes, how and in what timescale the change can take place. The action research cycle enables shared inquiry into how these forces for change are having an impact, and what choices exist to confront them.¹⁸

The educational sessions as well as the research interventions presented new ideas and experiences for the congregation.

A further ethical concern was for the care of neighbors in the form of respect and confidentiality during interviews and in the handling of all written materials. Training was provided for those who volunteered to conduct interviews. The training included listening, acceptance, and confidentiality.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Quantitative responses were analyzed using SurveyMonkey statistics software. The baseline and endline questionnaires provided descriptive analyses. According to Creswell and Creswell, there should be a descriptive analysis of data, “for all independent and dependent variables in the study. The analysis should indicate the means, standard deviations, and range of scores for these variables.”¹⁹ Descriptive analyses for all the interventions or independent variables as well as for the dependent variables were done.

¹⁸Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing*, 80.

¹⁹John W. Creswell, and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* 5th Edition (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2018), 157.

In any tables, I have reported the total respondents (N), the frequency of respondents by category (n), the percent of respondents by category, and the mean where appropriate.

In addition to comparisons between baseline and endline questionnaire responses and respondents, there are the intervening variables of age, gender, length of association with TTC, income, experiences and opinions about neighborliness and neighbors, along with experiences and opinions about change. COVID-19 was also an intervening variable. It affected the ability to be in person throughout the Lenten Dwelling in the Word practice, for the final two education sessions, and changed the participant pool for the prayer walks. The prayer walk focus group was also online.

All members and friends of the congregation over the age of 18 were invited to take part in all aspects of the research; the baseline and endline questionnaires were intended to be a census of the population. There are currently 1,251 people on the rolls; one hundred sixteen took part in the baseline and one hundred two in the endline. It was a nonprobability congregational sampling where interested parties participated at their convenience. The research team field tested the survey instruments.

There were qualitative data from the baseline and endline surveys as well as from interview notes, focus groups, and feedback from Dwelling in the Word participants and educational session respondents. I used *Constructing Grounded Theory* by author Kathy Charmaz for coding qualitative data. She states, “Careful coding helps you to refrain from imputing your motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and to your collected data.”²⁰ Charmaz recommends initial coding and concentrating on

²⁰Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 4th Edition (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2014), 133.

“words that reflect action.”²¹ She has much to say about the importance of initial coding various practices including *in vivo* codes which “preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself.” Charmaz states that *in vivo* coding draws attention to words and language, keeping “symbolic markers of participants’ speech and meanings.”²² She refers to the next level of coding as “focused coding” which seeks out patterns and categories from the initial work.²³ Axial coding, then, moves to subcategories and frames.²⁴ She speaks of focused coding as fragmenting the data and of axial coding as pulling it back together. Finally, she includes theoretical coding in order to “conceptualize how . . . substantive codes are related, and move [the] analytic story to a theoretical direction.”²⁵ This attention to detail was ethically important for keeping personal opinions and expectations out of the interpretation of results.

In January, I asked congregants to volunteer to conduct interviews with neighbors, with an eye toward those who do not attend church. Some spoke to neighbors nearer to the church. Others talked to folks in their own neighborhoods in the city and other parts of the metro area. The location of their interviews was their choice. The hope was for ten to twenty people to volunteer to interview a neighbor; twenty-two came to one of three information and training sessions on January 5 and 9, 2020; four were unable to attend one of the sessions and asked for the forms via email. The congregation heard

²¹Charmaz, *Constructing*, 116.

²²Charmaz, 134.

²³Charmaz, 138-147.

²⁴Charmaz, 147-150.

²⁵Charmaz, 150.

about this opportunity in the December newsletter and in weekly email updates through December. All church officers were invited personally.

I had the opportunity to have conversations with neighbors as a part of my previous doctor of ministry coursework, and found the experience and the comments to be very interesting. It created greater connection to the neighborhood around the church due to exposure to a variety of experiences and spirituality through hearing their stories. In addition to collecting the notes from their visits, all interviewees were invited to attend a focus group discussion to process their experience of listening to neighbors. Eight interviewees attended a focus group on January 26, 2020. Four interviewees attended a focus group on February 4, 2020. The training process for this and protocol for each interview is in appendix D. The protocol for the focus groups is in appendix E and the informed consent form for focus group participants is in appendix G. The confidentiality form for all interviewees is in appendix H.

As stated above, I offered Dwelling in the Word during Advent and Lent; the plan was to take fifteen minutes on the last Sunday of each season to get feedback on the process. There were fewer participants on the Sunday before Christmas and the Lenten season practice was changed by COVID-19 response, so this was not feasible. Consequently, I asked for feedback via email at the end of the Lenten series. The questions are in appendix C and the consent form is in appendix J.

I expected between twenty and thirty people to participate in Dwelling in the World prayer walks. Over twenty signed up to do prayer walks on one of the first two weeks of March; only one of those who expressed interest in the beginning was able to complete any prayer walks as the virus changed routines and norms. Several reported that

it was difficult to get time alone. Seven women participated through the online connection; six of them attended the online focus group discussion. Focus group questions are in appendix L and the consent form for both Dwelling practice participants is in appendix J. The original instruction and tracking sheet is in appendix M; the online tracking form is in appendix N.

On February, 23, 2020, I offered an education session on changes in culture and church. The post-class qualitative questionnaire is in appendix I. I also offered an education session on the missional church and on the theology of hospitality. Both of these were offered online through a link on the church website due to COVID-19. The feedback questions from the end of each presentation are appendix K and the informed consent form is appendix J. The content for each of the presentations is in appendices S, T, and U.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The first and last interventions were the online baseline and endline questionnaires. There were two separate interventions of Dwelling in the Word, one four-week session during Advent and four weeks completed during Lent. In the month of January, volunteers from the congregation interviewed one or two of their neighbors. Several volunteer interviewers chose to speak with work colleagues who do not attend church. Others selected neighbors or acquaintances they knew did not have a church home while still others found the opportunity to speak to neighbors they did not know well or at all. In February an educational session was offered on change in both church and culture. A thirty-minute recorded presentation on the missional church and another on the theology of hospitality were added to the church website in early April. Those who

attended the February offering in person, along with church officers, and former pilgrimage participants received email invitations to view the online sessions. Volunteers practiced Dwelling in the World prayer walks through their own neighborhood or in the neighborhood near the church through March, April, and May. These interventions were independent variables. After all the interventions, the growth or change in congregant thinking with regard to hospitality and neighborliness as well as readiness for change are the dependent variables.

All of the variables involved the intervening variable of an unknown number of volunteer participants. All participation was by general invitation, email, or personal contact. The many neighborhoods and suburbs in which participants and their neighbors live and where they did their neighbor interviews and prayer walks were also intervening variables. Their age, gender, length of time at Tradition Church, length of time in their neighborhood, previous experiences with neighbors, and previous experience with change in the church were also intervening variables. COVID-19 was also an intervening variable.

Summary

The results of this work are presented in the next chapter. As I conclude this information on the methodology, I am reminded of a critique of Christian communities from a former colleague in the world of recovery. He wrote,

In the AA Fellowship “everybody opens up about their brokenness and their failures, and they heal ... what happens in Churches is just the opposite ... we sit there with our pain and brokenness, and we never share it and we don’t heal. Our

Churches are just the opposite of community. ... we will have to work hard toward becoming the kind of community where it is safe to tell your story.”²⁶

The Tradition Church has many life-long members who have experienced Christianity as comfortable and comforting. Within the larger community, there are small groups that have indeed spoken about failures and broken places; they know one another well and have helped each other through loss and sorrow. These groups can be perceived as seed beds of deeper community or spawn a wariness of insider groups and cliques. Newer members coming in from other congregations and denominations experience the kind of honest community McElrath alludes to in varying degrees. Many congregants have unresolved conflicts from this or previous congregations bringing a melding of blessed dysfunction.

On the broadest possible scale, announcing the research project and continued communication about each aspect of it declared to everyone, there is something here to look at, there is something about this congregation’s life that prompts curiosity and holds unrealized potentials. All in all, a small percentage of the congregation participated in these Action Research interventions. Yet, the results will demonstrate they come from a cross section of ages, length of membership, neighborhoods, beliefs, and hopes.

As Lois Malcolm reminds us, the Holy Spirit is not only a source of guidance but a source of God’s dazzling promise to do the work of healing and wholeness for ourselves on behalf of the world.

The Spirit is God’s energizing power in our lives, continually working good out of whatever is happening to us or around us. Living out of the Spirit’s life, we find we become more expansive and more generous. We have greater sense of

²⁶ Damian McElrath, *The Essence of Twelve Step Recovery: Take It to Heart* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 2008), 7.

our worth and the growth of others. The Spirit opens us up to new possibilities, since for God all things are possible.²⁷

²⁷Lois Malcolm, *Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 61.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS

After much discussion, planning, and writing, the research process came to life in November 2019. It was energizing for the congregation; many people asked about the Doctor of Ministry program and process. The majority of those who took part in the process were fifty-five to eighty-five years of age, but the range of participation was twenty-three to eighty-six plus. Up until COVID-19 prompted the leadership to close the church building, the first online questionnaire, the Advent Dwelling in the Word practice, neighbor interviews, and initial educational opportunity stimulated conversation about faith, curiosities, and hopes. Following the closure, two educational presentations and the Dwelling in the World prayer walks went online. The electronic education opportunities allowed some folks who would not ordinarily be available for Sunday classes to participate. The qualitative and quantitative data materialized to form an interesting and informative collection of facts, opinions, worries, hopes, and statements of faith.

Research Process

The baseline questionnaire went live on the church website on November 21, 2019. The first Dwelling in the Word session took place on December 1, 2019, with five of us in attendance. The attendance was eight on the eighth, six on the fifteenth, and three on the twenty-second. I had anticipated doing a short feedback session at the end of the last gathering but that did not seem appropriate after one of them left early for choir

practice. The hope was then to get feedback after the Lenten session of Dwelling in the Word. The instruction sheet and scriptures used are in appendix B.

On January 5, 2020, I held an information and training session on doing an interview with one neighbor or possibly two. Twenty-one potential interviewers attended, picked up the interview form, and signed a confidentiality agreement; these forms are in appendices D and H respectively. The form included a statement of implied consent to be read to the interviewee by the interviewer. Two attended an additional Wednesday afternoon training and one attended on that evening. Four other folks requested information and forms electronically for a total of twenty-eight potential interviewers. Eighteen interviewers were able to complete one or two interviews for a total of twenty-eight interviews. Eight interviewers attended a focus group on January 26, 2020, and four came to discuss their experience on February 2, 2020. The focus group questions are in appendix E and the consent form is in appendix G.

After the church service on February 23, 2020, at the regular adult education hour, I hosted a PowerPoint presentation titled “Changing World–Changing Church?.” There were twenty-eight women and men present for information on the growth of secularism using materials from Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*.¹ The presentation also included trends in communal and religious life from *American Grace* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell as well as Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*. Finally, I introduced the concept of adaptive versus technical change as described by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky in

¹Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

*Leadership on the Line.*² Six attendees responded to six qualitative questions at the end of the session. The questions are appendix I. The content for the session is in appendix S.

March was to have been the most active month in the research plan. On March 1 and 8, 2020, I attended a table after the service to explain the practice of Dwelling in the World Prayer Walks. I had a sheet with suggestions for the practice and to log four walks.

March 1 also marked the beginning of the Lenten Dwelling in the Word practice. One person came to the first Lenten session and two other folks attended on March 8, 2020. Life and church changed dramatically by the next Sunday.

At a special meeting on March 14, 2020, the governing body of the church made the decision to close the building following the directives of the state's governor and health department. Only one of the women who signed up for the prayer walks in-person was able to begin the practice. An online and scaled down version of the log sheet was added to the church website and a total of seven women used the log sheet. Six of the women attended a Zoom Dwelling in the World Focus Group on May 31, 2020. Focus Group questions are in appendix L. The consent form for both Dwelling practices is in appendix J.

Dwelling in the Word came back online via Zoom on March 29 with four attendees; three participated on April 5, 2020. I sent the feedback questions to each of the

²Robert D. Putnam and David E Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2010); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), Kindle Edition; Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017).

Dwelling in the Word participant on email and five of seven replied; the questions are in appendix C and the informed consent is appendix J.

Worship continued via a livestreaming technology that was already in use prior to COVID-19 including Holy Week and Easter services. Meetings, studies, and gatherings were gradually moved online through Zoom within a few weeks. I recorded two educational sessions on Zoom, one on the missional church and the other on the theology of hospitality. The last slide in each presentation asked for feedback with these questions: “What surprised you? Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways? What do you think this might mean for our future? Where is God in this? What further questions do you have?” These two Zoom presentations were available on a link on the church website from mid-April through May 22, 2020. The content for these presentations is in appendices T and U.

After churches closed and particularly through Easter, there were many more computers registered through the livestream system than ever before. A retired pastor from one hundred fifty miles north watched one presentation and sent an email response with a few comments and the title of his Doctor of Ministry thesis. Several TTC members who had drifted away returned in this time of COVID-19; a few took part in the endline questionnaire. This last segment of the research went online on May 1, 2020. The last response came in on June 12, 2020. The endline questionnaire is in appendix Q.

Fifty-four people reported via the endline questionnaire that they took part in both the baseline and endline questionnaires. While we were still meeting in person, written attendance records were kept for all activities. However, information on the total number of viewers for the online education presentations was not available; the number in the

attendance column in table 2 below reflects those who responded to the feedback request by sending an email. If the number is greater in the self-reported column, it cannot be verified. There is also a discrepancy in the number of Dwelling in the Word participants. Again, those listed in the attendance records column took part during the specified research times which were in-person for Advent and both in-person and online during Lent. The additional four and six self-reported participants respectively may have practiced on their own or are reporting having done Dwelling in the Word with the deacons or intercessors in the past two years.

Table 2. Number of participants by activity.

	Attendance Records	Participation Self-Reported via Endline Questionnaire
Baseline Questionnaire	116	116
Dwelling in the Word Advent	7	11
Dwelling in the Word Lent	3	9
Neighbor Interviewers	18	12
Neighbor Interviewees	28	0
Interview Focus Groups	12	0
Changing World/Church Education	27	12
Missional Church Education (Online)	9	17
Hospitality Education (Online)	15	19
Dwelling in the World Prayer Walks	7	7
Prayer Walk Focus Group (Online)	6	0
Endline	102	102
Total	350	305

The Data

There are quantitative and qualitative data from the baseline and endline questionnaires. There are five emailed responses to questions regarding the Dwelling in the Word practice. The neighbor interview practice garnered notes from twenty-eight interviews and further information from two interviewer focus groups totaling twelve

participants. As stated above, there are six written post-presentation comment sheets for the in-person education on change in culture and church. There are nine written commentaries from the online missional church presentation and fifteen commentaries from the presentation on the theology of hospitality. Some of those answered the exact questions from the presentation in order while most captured their thoughts in a more narrative form. The Dwelling in the World Prayer Walk logs are brief and limited primarily to dates and comments on the route or neighborhood; an example of the online tracking form is in appendix N. The prayer walk focus group yielded much more information.

Initial, Focused, and Axial Coding

Using Kathy Charmaz' process of coding meant reading the qualitative answers from the baseline and endline questionnaires as well as written feedback from on-line presentations and the transcripts from three focus groups. The baseline questionnaire is in appendix A and the endline is in appendix Q. Some questions elicited short answers or word lists; these pages were color coded by terms, concepts, or content. I started my coding process by looking at the first qualitative question on the baseline/endline questionnaires, Who is God for you? This question elicited many short answers or lists of attributes. I worked through the baseline/endline information categorizing and making line by line notes when appropriate. Then I moved to the other qualitative material from emails, interview worksheets, and focus group transcripts. The pages of notes grew in number. Charmaz suggests looking for the action words and collecting the *in vivo* codes that express a particular feeling or catch-phrase.

From the initial codes, I made notes for each question or, in the case of emails, by intervention. After going from the notes back to the data, I gathered all the note pages and started to combine various words, phrases, and categories in assorted ways. After several weeks the initial codes led to the following focused codes:

Table 3. Focused Codes

Focused Codes
Age, Resources, Time
Attributes of God
Change brings more: (negative) crime, traffic, vandalism
Change brings more: (positive) diversity, businesses, homes, parks
Church Growth
Co-Exist, Common, United, Similar
Hope in each other
Hopes
Inclusivity
Influence, but the right influence
Justice: racism, sexism, LGBTQ, economic disparity, climate change, politics
Love and acceptance
Memories
Must, Should, Need to, Have to be, Has to
Openness
Outreach, Service, Peacemaking
Practice living our faith
Preservation
Sharing with intent
Uncertainty
Verbs: Past Tense/Present Tense; Passive/Active Voice
We are all one
Worries
Worship, Music and
Preaching

I have not included any quantitative information on the children and family program at the church. There was one question on the baseline and endline instruments on participation in children and family programs. The possible answers included the “not

applicable” option that some used but many answered using the “do not attend,” skewing the results. The focused codes from all the qualitative data emerged into the following axial codes which are used as headings as this chapter continues:

Table 4. Axial Codes

Axial Codes
Longevity and Stability: "Babel All Over Again"
Remembering a Church: "Go Back"
"In our Stasis"
Building a Dwelling Place: "Bearing Love"
Re-Membering a Church: "Love x 42"
Growth-Welcome-Inclusivity-Hospitality

Theoretical Coding

The qualitative information quickly came together with references to longevity and stability. This first axial code emerged along with the qualitative data on home ownership and length of time in their neighborhoods. Age, length of association with the congregation, and service as an ordained officer was taken into account. The cadence of repetitive solutions and suggestions along with a few longer and more dramatic comments on the glory of the past prompted the second axial code of remembrance. The enlivened feedback that came from the missional interventions prompted the idea that the Action Research began building a new dwelling place for some participants. The genuine and inspired comments about the church’s relationship with the secular world, neighborhood, and hospitality indicated there is some interest in outward relationships that might re-member this church.

As I started to work with these four axial codes, Longevity and Stability, Remembering a Church, Building a Dwelling Place, and Re-Membering a Church, as section headings for this chapter, I realized the data showed evidence the church has

places of stillness or inertia and then Stasis became an axial code as well. The final axial code started out as hospitality because it is key to the research question. The participants added the additional vocabulary of growth, welcome, and inclusivity.

The axial codes emerged intuitively from time spent with the focus codes. The axial codes are pictured in the theoretical diagram in figure 3 below.

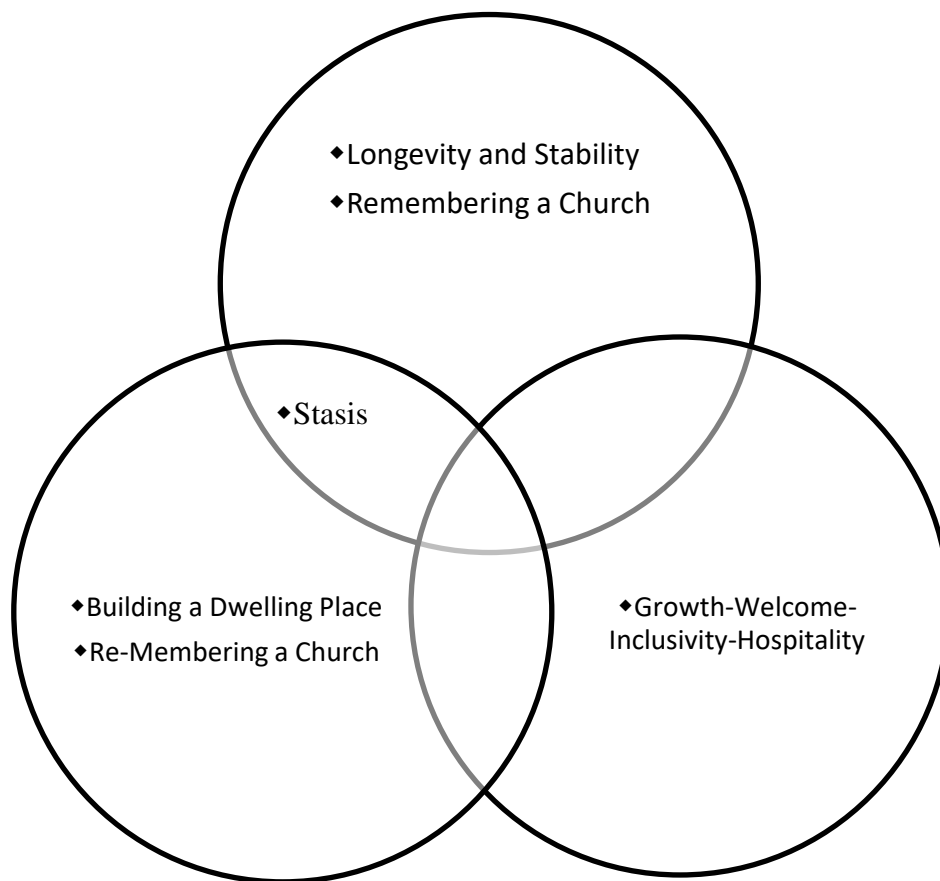


Figure 3. Theoretical Diagram 1

One further focus code, Verbs: Past Tense/Present Tense; Passive/Active Voice, informed the order and grouping of the axial codes in the diagram. The qualitative data are used descriptively within these axial code headings. The many comments on history, current life, and upcoming concerns included in the qualitative data prompted a second

rendering of the diagram with the timeframes of Past, Present, and Future. It further visualizes Stasis as a stuck point between the past and the present as seen below in Figure 4.

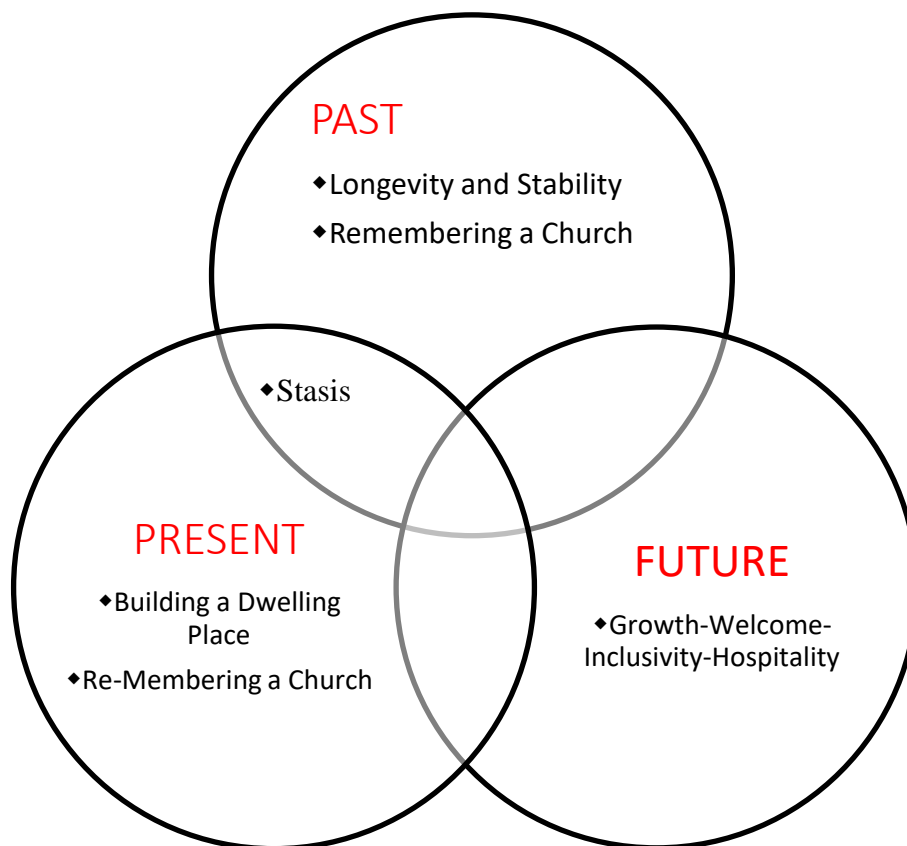


Figure 4. Theoretical Diagram 2

Longevity and Stability: “Babel All Over Again”

The Tradition Church is now within a decade of its 175th Anniversary. The congregation enjoys longevity. As previously stated, they have been housed in a Neo-Gothic, cruciform structure for just over one hundred years. The building has a very large and solid presentation and has been a stable presence in the neighborhood and city. When a crisis or challenge arises, a longstanding, established institution has a solid platform

from which to navigate troubled waters. Stability can allow people to choose change as opposed to having it thrust upon them. Long life, solid architecture, and financial resources have given this congregation a sense of permanence over the decades.

Age, Income, and Choice

Many of the congregants who took part in the baseline and endline questionnaires also enjoy personal longevity and stability. The reported age ranges and the number who live in single-family homes as well as the length of years in their homes all point to greater permanence in their personal lives.

Seventy-seven percent of the baseline participants and eighty-three percent of the endline are over the age of fifty-five. Table 5 shows the Pew Research Center age cohorts alongside the ages of those who participated in the baseline and endline instruments. The table also includes the ages of the neighbor interviewees.³

Table 5. Survey participant age profile.

Age Range	Cohort Name	Birth Years	Baseline N=116	Endline N=102	Neighborhood Interviewees
18-22	Gen Z	1998-Present	0	0	0
23-39	Millennial	1981-1997	3	1	3
40-54	Gen X	1965-1980	20	10	8
55-70	Baby Boomer	1946-1964	37	33	8
71-85	Silent	1928-1945	52	51	6
86+	WWII	1901-1927	3	6	1
Total			115	101	26

³Pew Research Center website, accessed August, 8, 2020. pewresearch.org

The baseline reported seventy-eight percent of respondents live in single-family homes, as do seventy percent of endline participants. The other choices were twinhome (baseline 3/endline 5), duplex (3/3), condominium or townhouse (10/13), apartment (6/7), senior living (4/3), or other (1/2). Table 6 shows the number of years these participants have lived in their present homes.

Table 6. Years in present home.

	Baseline		Endline	
	N=116		N=102	
	n	%	n	%
0-1	9	7.97	7	6.69
2-5	17	15.04	17	16.59
6-15	16	14.16	32	31.44
16-40	56	48.67	28	27.59
41+	16	14.16	18	17.69
Total	114	100.00	102	100.00

Table 7. What drew you to your neighborhood? (Check all that apply)

	Baseline		Endline	
	N=116		N=102	
	n	%	n	%
The right house	59	52.68	53	51.96
Close to work	36	32.14	33	32.35
Good schools	28	25.00	23	22.55
Close to family	26	23.21	19	18.63
Lower crime rate/safety	22	19.64	24	23.53
Grew up nearby	12	10.71	14	13.73
Diversity	12	10.71	8	7.84
Aging/health needs	8	7.14	14	13.73
Total	203	181.23	188	184.32

When asked what drew them to their neighborhoods, just over fifty percent in both groups stated it was finding the right house. Budget can limit or expand choices such as those listed above in table 7. The range of income among questionnaire participants

along with written answers indicate that stability allows for more choices. A home in a neighborhood with a low crime rate and good schools adds to overall stability.

Those who took part in the baseline survey mirror the church for long-term steadiness with over fifty percent having lived in the same home for sixteen to upwards of forty-one years. The endline participants are more evenly spread between the top three ranges, with thirty-one percent in the six to fifteen-year span. Still, the majority are settled or settling.

The income levels reported by participants are in table 8. These levels demonstrate that there is a wide scale of incomes within the group. This is also one of the questions that demonstrates variation of participants between the baseline and endline instruments. Fifty-four percent of baseline and forty-two percent of endline participants reported an income of \$100,000.00 or more. Both groups even out when looking at an income of \$75,000.00 and above. Again, stability allows for choices and reliable income makes home ownership possible. When one is able to make choices such as these, the sense of stability multiplies.

Table 8. Household incomes.

	Baseline		Endline	
	N=116		N=102	
	n	%	n	%
\$20,999 or less	0	0.00	1	1.00
\$21,000-50,999	11	9.49	14	14.00
\$51,000-74,999	12	10.34	9	9.00
\$75,000-99,999	15	12.93	19	19.00
\$100,000-149,999	35	30.17	26	26.00
\$150,000+	28	24.14	16	16.00
Prefer not to answer	15	12.93	15	15.00
Total	116	100.00	100	100.00

There is favor and freedom here. Given the age range of participants, some of these figures represent retirement income which can be fifty to seventy percent less than a working income. Congregants at TTC refer to themselves as privileged. While one person stated in a conversation, “We are wealthy and also not wealthy,” in trying to describe the wide scale of incomes, “wealth” and “wealthy” are a part of congregational identity.

Identity also comes from long association with the congregation. Given the longevity of the congregation and the building, it is not surprising that this is a generational church. There are folks in their seventies who grew up in this congregation as a second, third, or fourth generation member. Some of their children attend this church regularly. Many more of their children visit at Christmas or Easter or bring their children in for baptism.

Table 9. Number of years associated with TTC.

	Baseline N=116		Endline N=102	
	n	%	n	%
0-1	2	1.58	4	3.93
2-5	16	13.65	12	11.76
6-15	23	20.55	17	16.67
16-25	17	14.52	12	11.76
26-40	33	28.15	28	27.45
41+	25	21.55	29	28.43
Total	116	100.00	102	100.00

As seen in table 9, those who have been members or friends of the congregation for twenty-six to forty years represent the largest response age group in both baseline and endline instruments. Adding in those who have associated with the church for forty-one or more years represents over fifty percent of the group which, like the number of years in their homes, indicates a personal longevity and stability that mirrors the church itself.

Identity

For many decades, this congregation was able to take its future for granted. In the past three years, they have become more keenly aware of how few Generation Xers and Millennials are present. Until very recently, their sense of stability in the way of membership numbers, financial health, and endowment allowed them to continue to practice congregational life from an historic perspective with little discussion or action regarding changes in generational patterns of living. Change is now more obvious in the pews, meeting rooms, and Bible studies; there are fewer participants and most meetings take place during the day because attendees are retired, have daytime availability, and prefer driving in daylight. An increasing number are aging out of their ability or interest in volunteering. In their baseline and endline comments some recognized that the building can be “daunting” or have a “museum like atmosphere.” As one person said, “The building in its totality can put people off.”

Their strong sense of tradition is blessed assurance to the great majority of survey respondents and congregants. But there is a downside, as one person who viewed the educational presentation on the theology of hospitality wrote:

Everything you say about the openness of hospitality is true, but perhaps not the hallmark of our own historical traditions. *Sola scriptura* seemed so simple to Luther (“You see what this says. This says **just what I say it says!**”), but then along comes our pal Calvin, Knox, the French Reformation, the English Reformation, and all the rest and *prima scriptura* and the Tower of Babel gets built all over again.

Babel came to mind when thinking of this congregation in some of my previous classwork. It is interesting to find one of the members connecting the stability and strength of TTC’s Reformation identity with the building of Babel. Though the people of

the story are working together to build something for the common good, they were driven by human will rather than the discernment of God's way. As Walter Brueggemann wrote:

The fear of scattering . . . is resistance to God's purpose for creation. The peoples do not wish to spread abroad but want to stay in their own safe mode of homogeneity. . . . They try to surround themselves with walls made of strong bricks and a tower for protection against the world around them. . . . This unity attempts to establish a cultural, human oneness without God. This is a self-made unity in which humanity has a "fortress mentality." It seeks to survive by its own resources. It is a unity grounded in fear and characterized by coercion. A human unity without God's will is likely to be ordered in oppressive conformity.⁴

Comments following the first educational presentation on the secular age and current cultural change equate change with "decline." In the baseline and endline instruments, some respondents equated change with "dumbing down" or a loss of "pageantry." Some used the language of evolution, but one, quite dramatically stated, "the church is being replaced." Another asked, "Do we wait for the new way to reach God?" They seem to be asking, if not Babel, or a fortress mentality, then who are we and what do we do now?

When asked about their thoughts on the relationship between Jesus' church and the secular community in the baseline and endline questionnaires many "needs" and "shoulds" were shared. We should: "reach out to help"; "be integrated"; "be involved in the community"; "be the conscience of society"; and "be an example of how things should be done." Or, we need: "to be seen as caring"; "to be visible"; and "to serve the community." There are many more written words from the questionnaires, some of which demonstrate broader thinking and others that, like these, are vague on process. But here

⁴Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation Bible Commentary, edited by James Luther Mays, Patrick D. Miller Jr. and Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 99-100.

we have the quick answer, the general reply, possibly from old sermons and even Sunday school lessons. More telling are the statements with a verdict attached like, “Too many people don’t go to church,” and “I see a tendency to dispense cheap grace to keep the pews full.” There is a firmness or severity in statements like, “Preaching the gospel is non-negotiable.” Another wrote, “We have an obligation for outreach to help our neighbors. Doing that, we cannot forget the Great Commission, also part of our obligation.” As one person added, “There’s lots of talk about attracting new families with not much regard for the families currently at TTC.” There are shifts into the present time both inside and outside the congregation that have not taken place.

For the sake of grace, there are many active ways to preach the gospel, and as suggested by Francis of Assisi, using words when necessary. It is unlikely the person who typed in a quick response intended to say the congregation should only *look* caring and more likely they meant the membership could more openly demonstrate care for those in the neighborhood. Still, these thoughts are part of long held patterns of doing church. Figure 5 below shows the one of the God-Church-World models shared by Reverend Dr. David Hahn, in his teaching at Luther Seminary. Hahn developed a set of diagrams that configure a variety of ways churches and culture are interacting with God based on interviews or ecclesial patterns. All four configurations are in appendix R. The Tradition Church holds the pattern of the church as a mediator or container for God; living in this pattern rarely allows that God’s agency is at work in the world with or without the church. This pattern was familiar to the church of the Modern Era; some like TTC have continued a pattern of mission committees and Sunday school in denial of changes in the

world and God's *missio Dei* or sending nature.⁵ In a reversal of view, the missional church suggests the church does not have a mission, it is God's mission that has a church.

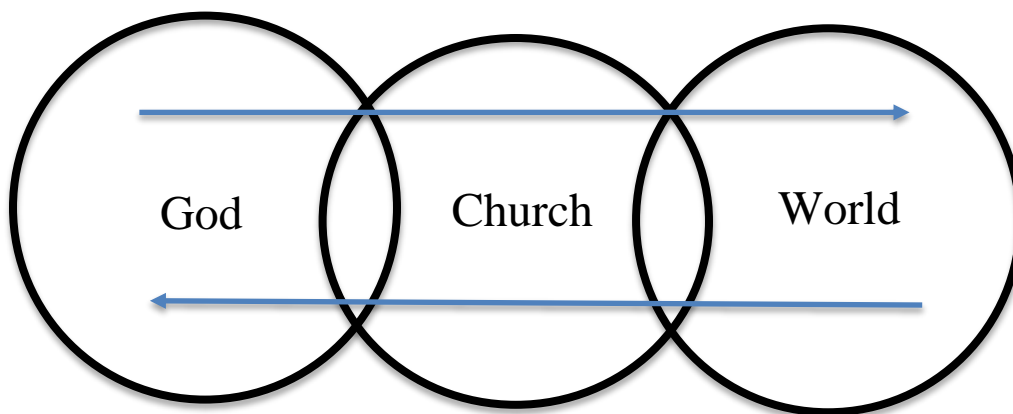


Figure 5. Hahn's Single-Subject Church/Ecclesio-Centric Diagram

Ruth Gendler wrote and illustrated *The Book of Qualities* where she gave gender, personality, homes, and hobbies to various qualities of living. In her book, Faith and Doubt live in the same apartment building and their mothers are cousins. Trust is the daughter of Truth; Wisdom likes to wear blue. Through personality, job, wardrobe, and family, Gendler was able to reveal foibles, gifts, and struggles of human qualities. In thinking of this congregation's long held practices and fear of change, an aspect of Discipline came to mind, "Discipline understands that the same structure which support you can also hold you back. The bones of the skeleton which support the body can become the bars of the cage which imprison the spirit."⁶

⁵David Hahn, "Configurations of the God-Church-World Relationship." Used with permission.

⁶J. Ruth Gendler. *The Book of Qualities* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1988), 11.

“Fear has a large shadow”⁷

A long history and the aspects of life that offer stability such as a long-time home, money in the bank, along with friends, family, and community have become a grab-bar for safety. If a group of whales is called a pod, and crows together are referred to as a murder, what do we call a collection of fears? Two suggestions arose, that it might be called a congregation or perhaps a flock. The data showed that participants have found solace, stability, and comfort; they do not want to see the stable, comforting pattern change. They acknowledge what is missing as these answers to a question about possible interaction between Jesus’ church and the secular world indicate: “We may need to adjust the worship format to attract younger people.” “We have lost belief in the mystical wisdom of Christ.” “We have to attract young folks.” “How do we compete and win?” And from a question on what they might see changing at TTC in the next three to five years, a most telling answer: “Hopefully, nothing.”

Remembering a Church: “Go Back”

It is not uncommon for church members to have a favorite pastor or memorable era, whether one particular pastor’s ministry or a season of life. One set of questions from the baseline and endline questionnaires was inspired by Margaret Wheatley’s work: “What made you say ‘yes’ to” TTC?, and “What do you want to see from your time of ministry at TTC?”⁸ There is an aspect of history or memory to the question. About half of

⁷Gendler, *Book*, 4.

⁸Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc, 2006), 132. She states she has seen tired and cynical employees open up when they have the opportunity to talk about what their work means to them. To

the respondents answered in the present tense naming current connections, programs, or advocacy that tie them to the church. For others, it evoked nostalgic remembrances of young children in Sunday school, choir school, or Christmas pageants.

One third of the baseline and endline participants first connected with the church through the various music programs and a quarter of the baseline stated it was the preaching. Other connecting points mentioned are encapsulated well by one respondent, “The sense of church inside the walls and of the work of the church outside the walls, community outreach, collaborative partners and a sense of inclusiveness and social justice.” Another wrote, “It has been a good, supportive, community all my life.” Here, the past and present blend. Yet some emphasized the past and a sense of loss, as one other wrote, “The preschool (gone). The Choir School (shrinking). Rev. Julian (gone).”⁹

The following came from the last question of the endline questionnaire, “Do you have anything you want to add?” It stands out in length and content:

This church was once an influential powerhouse in the state. When I was a deacon, I remember hearing an Elder claim that the church wanted to be more like a neighborhood church. Well now it is. That was the start of the slide downhill. Fewer members and less influence. Sad really. So many more people were touched in positive ways before than they are now. Fix it. Go back and understand why it was successful before and be more like that. Look at the big successful churches, now mostly in the suburbs. And see what they are doing well. There is a theme and TTC is missing it.

This statement expresses a particular passion for the past. The language is burdened with longing for what was and suggests the present ranks lower not only in power and influence but in meaning. It is reminiscent of the reciprocity of relationships

reignite energy and passion, she suggests asking, “What called you here? What were you dreaming you might accomplish when you first came to work here?”

⁹Pseudonyms are used for all former pastors named throughout.

and the benefits as well as potential pitfalls of social capital as discussed in chapter two. In the book, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood*, Alan Roxburgh wrote a parable about three friends who grew up together. They remained very close through college and, after moving to different parts of the country due to professions and relationships, they came together for a weekend every year to support one another and sustain their connectedness. Eventually though, they grew apart. Years passed before one of them proposed a reunion. It started off well enough, but at one point, the sense of camaraderie changed:¹⁰

The host began doing all the talking and it was all about himself. Each time the friends spoke, the host cut them off and turned the conversation back to his life, his questions, and his needs, he asked lots of questions to elicit information that would further focus on his own interests and plans. He mined them for information that could make him look better. He seemed preoccupied with how to become more successful.¹¹

Table 10. Overview of Twentieth Century trends in US churches.

Years	TTC Pastors	Roxburgh's Defining Paradigms
1914-1945		"Development of clericalist church"
1950s-1970s	Rev. Dr. Irving (1943-1969)	"Denominationalism at its height"
1970s-2000s	Rev. Calvin (1970-1993)	"Mainline fails to grasp the cultural shifts of the 60s through evangelicalism"
1990s-2000s	Rev Julian (1999-2006) and Rev. Dr. Fergus (2007-2018)	"Gradual recognition the culture has shifted"

¹⁰Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 31-34.

¹¹Roxburgh, *Missional*, 33

Before revealing the three characters in his parable, Roxburgh recapped mainline church paradigms developed during the time frames and descriptors. Table 10 above shows the eras with a brief description from the book along with the dates of TTC pastorates identified here using pseudonyms.

The timing of his observations fit The Tradition Church's head of staff pastor changes. From 1914 forward, most of the pastors have "DDiv" behind their names fitting the "growing emphasis on the proper credentials in terms of education and identity."¹² The second time frame belonged solely to Dr. Irving while the 1970s-2000s, was the time of Reverend Calvin, when the three friends from the parable, "Scripture, culture, and church," lost their closeness and sense of camaraderie.¹³ The stability of TTC deferred the recognition of the cultural shift to the later years of Dr. Fergus' ministry and the transitional time. All of these pastors are lifted up and also critiqued in the qualitative data. The Tradition Church's current hopes and solutions often suggest repeating familiar patterns from beloved pastorates. They are crossing and re-crossing the bridge between past and present.

What Works

Worship is the primary activity for The Tradition Church. Table 11 shows the dedication of members in attending worship. Eighty baseline participants or seventy-three percent attend church nearly every week; ninety are married or in committed relationships and eighty-eight live in single-family homes. Worship attendance represents

¹²Roxburgh, *Missional*, 47.

¹³Roxburgh, *Missional*, 47.

the single highest number in the baseline and was claimed by one hundred nine folks as a spiritual practice in table 19.

Table 11. Sunday worship attendance.

	Baseline		Endline	
	N=116		N=102	
	n	%	n	%
Several times a week	7	6.36	6	6.00
Nearly Every Week	80	72.73	67	67.00
About once a month	10	9.09	16	16.00
Several times a year	10	9.09	11	11.00
Never	3	2.73	0	0.00
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	110	100.00	100	100.00

Another important way those in membership take part in the life of the congregation is through lay leadership. A deacon or elder is considered to be ordained for life. When asked if participants had been ordained at any point in their lifetime, the majority indicated they were ordained as elders and/or deacons. The board of trustees is smaller so fewer have served. Table 12 shows the result of this inquiry from both online instruments.

Table 13 shows the number who are currently serving on one of the boards. At the request of one of the research team, this follow-up question also included the opportunity to claim current service in Christian education. Table 13 shows the largest majority of respondents are not actively serving in these capacities.

Table 12. Ordained deacon, elder, and trustee. (Check all that apply)

	Baseline N=116	Endline N=102
	n	n
Deacon	63	47
Elder	52	43
Trustee	14	12
None of the above	36	40
Total	165	142

Table 13. Currently serving as deacon, elder, or trustee. (Check all that apply)

	Baseline N=116	Endline N=102
Deacon	14	17
Elder	11	6
Trustee	5	2
Sunday School Teacher/Leader	3	3
Tweens Teacher/Leader	0	1
Youth Teacher/Leader	0	0
None of the above	78	73
Total	111	102

Worship and lay leadership are the most important connection points among those who participated in the baseline and endline questionnaires. Not much was said about the quality of the leadership experience, though one person wrote, “We always felt we weren’t on enough committees.” Another added, “We set artificial goals.” One indicates a feeling of not enough participation and the other a lack of meaning in the work. Leadership boards and committees brought members into closer contact with clergy and perhaps with the power and influence referenced in the quote above.

The online questionnaires contained several sections to survey members on their current church engagement. Tables with the results of all of these sections are in appendix O. The questionnaires included gatherings that are gender specific such as the

women's mission sewing and the men's breakfasts. As is true in most congregations, some groups constantly fluctuate in participation and some become finite or closed. Large attendance numbers were not the expectation in every case. The questionnaire purposely served to give the participants the opportunity to see the breadth of offerings as it measured those who had not been aware of programs and current involvement.

Tables 14 and 15 below represent the most open and all-inclusive programming of the church. What is interesting to see on paper is where the majority or largest group emerged on the scale of participation. What is surprising to see on paper are the number of respondents who selected "Do Not Attend" for any given event. The answer suggests a solid, predetermined decision. Those of us who prepare church communications, whether on paper or electronically, hope to awaken interest and generate attendance. These tables seem to be stating that those communications speak to a small group who report attending occasionally and may make time depending on their schedule or our content. As one respondent wrote, "The church offers a lot which is wonderful." Another expressed appreciation for "the ability to pick and choose the programs that I would want to participate in."

However, these data suggest we have been using the concept of the attractional church within our congregation with marginal success. It is then a wonder we would expect it to work outside the congregation with the occasional Christian; the moralistic, therapeutic deist; the secular humanist; or to put it more simply, our neighbors. Members and friends of TTC have been adopting more and more secular habits themselves. For eight of fourteen events, do-not-attend achieved the highest response. As important as worship is to the congregation, these answers still reflect decided limits on engagement.

Table 14. Programmatic involvement: Worship

	Baseline N=116				
	Did not know	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Thanksgiving Eve	0	46	23	24	10
The Tableaux	1	28	27	23	25
Christmas Eve	0	13	25	41	33
Ash Wednesday	1	26	35	27	18
Maundy Thursday	1	28	34	30	17
Good Friday	1	37	34	20	14
Easter	0	6	7	49	51

Table 15. Programmatic involvement: Public Events

	Baseline N=116				
	Did not know	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Blessing the Animals	6	59	19	6	7
Carillon Concerts Choir School Concerts	1	58	34	7	3
Sunday Series	4	46	33	15	10
Chapel Concerts	1	19	41	33	18
Community Sing	4	42	47	6	8
Singers Concerts	11	51	26	13	5
	11	46	36	9	7

A Holding Pattern

Gendler wrote that once Discipline has “mastered a form, she is free to improvise.”¹⁴ In a congregation accustomed to success, influence, and notoriety from a well-known, stable platform, facing the cultural shifts of the 1960s to the 2000s is a

¹⁴Gendler, *Book*, 11.

difficult consideration. They have a long history of best practices and they are, as one respondent wrote, “a bit afraid to stretch outside of comfort zones.” Improvising opens them to the possibility of failure which, again, is difficult. While many do not want to repeat history, the longing for the large, thriving congregation of the past underlies the hopes of even the most forward-thinking members. Many are trying to be in the present and move forward with the best of intentions, expressing “needs and shoulds” learned from Sunday school through adulthood in the church of the Modern Era.

“In our Stasis”

Hope and Reality

One of the great strengths of the majority age group in this congregation is life-long friendships. The potency of the core membership in serving as officers and committee members, in stewardship giving, justice advocacy, and creating community deserves recognition. In spite of their strength as a congregation, they have been taught to follow in the way of their cleric. A session member once shared her feeling that after Reverend Calvin left and even more so after Reverend Julian left, the congregation was in a slump. As Reverend Dr. Fergus started, bringing in new energy and ideas, she said, “We felt like a church again.”

The baseline survey took place four months before the transitional ministry ended. The new head of staff preached for and was voted in by the congregation in the middle of May when the endline questionnaire was live. The four notable and beloved pastors in table 10, are mentioned by name in both surveys. While some hoped the plans and preaching pattern of the transitional pastor would continue on, others immediately pinned

their hopes to the new clergy by name or position in a pre-arrival to-do list on the endline questionnaire.

One respondent wrote, “I have great hopes for the leadership and ministry of the new pastor;” and in a shorter version, “hopefully a new and different energy.” A main priority mentioned is church growth. Here are a few examples of the way they express this desire: “Hopefully the new minister will bring additional younger families into the church.” We “need more ways to reach out to young families”; and “have to attract the young folks.” “We need to prioritize the needs and desires of younger families.” And we need to “be more open to what the Millennial family might be looking for.” Expectation is high.

Many expressed concern about climate change and the condition of the earth. They used language ranging from interest in ecology or the hope of beginning more earth care practices to the person who stated this “is the end of life as we know it.” Some mentioned general financial concerns. One very direct example is this, “the budget is not sustainable.” Others are concerned about being able to maintain the facility and salaries for the staff.

On a more personal level, a few mentioned wrestling with the actuality of aging; one wrote about the spiritual and emotional struggle of “realizing I have more of my life behind me.” This matches the feeling a member of the research team had when looking at baseline/endline participant ages suggesting that TTC as a Body looks more like the “church triumphant.” When asked what changes might be expected in the next three to five years, one person wrote, “Many deaths of beloved members who make up our biggest cohort. I hope we see stronger management leadership through pastors and

stronger professional staff who can develop membership, and lead planning, lead resources development and engage our best selves.”

It is an old practice at TTC to place hope in the pastors and staff to produce something new while the congregation waits. As another respondent wrote, “In our stasis, we need young families and new energy.” Stasis is a medical term referring to the slowing of blood circulation. It can also be “a state of static balance or equilibrium: stagnation;” or “a state or period of stability during which little or no evolutionary change in lineage occurs.”¹⁵ At least for that respondent, behind or underlying the waiting, is a slowing heartbeat. Another wrote, “There is just a melancholy pervading this place.” One respondent developed that thought further:

Institutional Christianity like that at TTC, while well-served, is deeply meaningful to only a passing group of people. It’s locked in unresponsive theology, outdated identity and self-preserving focus. It no longer serves the spiritual longing of all but passing generations—becoming irrelevant, in danger of being a well-meaning, high quality, museum piece.

Another respondent shared some of the same concerns but with a different outcome:

The church used to reflect the culture, by leading it. Somehow, we got stuck in traditional garb and practices from the middle ages and early modern period and many people have trouble breaking out from today’s culture in our church. That said, I think we are a niche for people who want a progressive feel but are attracted to the stability and tradition. That’s a unique combination but I think it will work for another generation.

New Energy and Acceptance

¹⁵Merriam Webster online dictionary. Accessed 9:23 p.m., on September 17, 2020. merriam-webster.com.

Table 16. "I feel accepted at TTC."

	Baseline N=116		Endline N=102	
	n	%	n	%
Strongly Agree	69	59.31	56	55.45
Agree	29	24.83	32	31.68
Neither Agree or Disagree	11	9.31	10	9.90
Disagree	2	1.55	0	0.00
Strongly Disagree	5	5.00	3	2.97
Total	116	100.00	101	100.00

Table 17. "I believe anyone would feel accepted at TTC."

	Baseline N=116		Endline N=102	
	n	%	n	%
Strongly Agree	17	14.78	18	17.65
Agree	49	42.61	35	34.31
Neither Agree or Disagree	25	21.74	32	31.37
Disagree	22	19.13	15	14.71
Strongly Disagree	2	1.74	2	1.96
Total	115	100.00	102	100.00

As a measure of their openness to receive new life/members, the baseline and endline questionnaires asked participants if they felt accepted at TTC. It further asked if they felt any person would feel accepted. Eighty-five percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed they felt accepted in both instruments. The numbers lowered to fifty-one to fifty-six percent of respondents who agreed that anyone would feel accepted. The number of those who strongly agree dropped from sixty-nine to seventeen in the baseline and from fifty-six to eighteen in the endline. This is shown above in tables 16 and 17.

Longevity and stability, and architecture and wealth, can make entering this church building a daunting task. As one respondent wrote, "it has a fortress-like quality." Finding one's way through the social structure and entering into a well-established

community is yet another hurdle. In answer to these questions, they admit they know visitors find it challenging. When asked in the endline questionnaire what might make TTC a more hospitable community one woman answered, “Hopefully the new minister.” In an interesting piece of history, she added, “Dr. Irving and his wife drove my children away from the church. When I cried in church once, Dr Irving asked my husband not to bring me to church anymore.” Here is one person’s unresolved hurt from over fifty years ago.

One woman who joined the church more than a decade ago stated, “The church was not welcoming to me at all. I stayed because I liked the music and the service and in the first couple of years, that was the extent of my involvement.” She also shared a story of one of her contemporaries. A new member mentor assigned to her friend told her to do well and “make him proud” in her service as a new deacon. Expectation and judgment further limited the respondent’s engagement at the church for a number of years. She added that the welcome has improved since she joined.

A four-year member commented, “This church family seems rich with talent, loyalty and dedication, and yet we’re floundering in our old ways. . . . same committees, same educational offerings, same inattention to spiritual growth, same deference to male leadership. . . . We have a hard time thinking new thoughts.”

A further challenge in the church’s practices of welcome is a gap in generational concerns. As one Generation X member wrote:

I don’t imagine myself continuing church membership in general if it isn’t at Tradition Church but I am worried that it is “dying out.” I want to believe that when my kids are through with their youth/high school programming years, that I will want to make the drive to attend worship and other activities, but am not so sure as I once was that this will be the case.

Another wrote, “After our last child graduates, we may not be as regular.” Many current members do not realize that the stasis extends to current members. Even as they focus on wanting more families, they assume the families within already have what they need and will want to continue the current life patterns of the church as they age.

Out of curiosity and a prompting to consider change, the baseline and endline surveys offered ideas for new or expanded activities and asked participants to consider what more they would like to do or see at the church. The means from the baseline and endline questionnaires are shown below in table 18.

Music and learning continue to be important foci with concerts, music events, lectures, and discussion groups at the highest means. Having tenants in the building ranks lowest in both surveys. For this particular suggestion, 22.34% of endline participants agree with having tenants and a nearly equal number, 19.15% disagree; 52.13% were neutral.¹⁶ Having game nights was a suggestion last year’s three youth deacons made when asked how the church might care more effectively for families. In the overall numbers, neutrality often outweighed agreement or disagreement. The numbers for agreement outweigh disagreement but very little here ignites the imagination for more than half the group. It may also be part of the “do not attend” or “pick and choose” nature of the participants. It can also indicate that the attractional program pattern has broken down inside the church. The belief that more and younger members will assuage the melancholy belies their own engagement. Table 18 shows the means from responses to

¹⁶The baseline results for having tenants in the building showed 10.09% disagreed. The number who agreed doubled at 20.18% and with 61.47% neither agreed nor disagreed.

the Likert scale question from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree) from both baseline and endline questionnaires.

Table 18. "I would like to see more:"

	Baseline N=116	Endline N=102
	Mean	Mean
Concerts or music events	3.98	4.00
Sunday at 2 Lectures	3.79	3.95
Other lectures	3.90	3.88
Food Truck Sundays	3.49	3.65
Picnics with neighbors	3.56	3.48
Movie nights with neighbors	3.46	3.36
Tenants	3.16	2.99
In-house mission partners	3.53	3.46
Weekend retreats	3.33	3.28
Day retreats	3.55	3.54
Centering Prayer times	3.44	3.44
Game nights/Analog nights	3.22	3.20
Additional worship services	3.15	3.22
Potlucks	3.39	3.41
Breakfast before church	3.44	3.47
Dinners	3.45	3.47
Discussion Groups	3.76	3.73

Building a Dwelling Place: "Bearing Love"

It has already been noted that worship is a primary event at TTC; as one person wrote, "I am more than heartened to be swept away in worship." Table 19 shows current spiritual practices noted in the baseline and endline surveys; worship is at the top of the list at ninety-four percent participation. Forty-four to sixty-six percent also pray and find spiritual awareness in nature and music. These participants engage in all kinds of spiritual practices. Those that wrote in other practices included dance, creative writing, being a

Stephen Ministry recipient, Tai Chi, the 12 Step Program, peace and justice work, Al Anon, and being a Stephen Minister.

Table 19. Current spiritual practices. (Check all that apply.)

	Baseline N=116		Endline N=102	
	n	%	n	%
Worship	109	93.97	96	93.14
Prayer	66	56.03	60	58.82
Being in Nature	54	46.55	55	53.92
Music	44	37.93	49	48.04
Meditation	31	26.72	49	27.45
Reading Scripture	30	25.86	30	29.41
Small Group				
Discussion	28	24.14	24	23.53
Hospitality	26	22.41	29	28.43
Intercessory Prayer	23	19.83	17	16.67
Yoga	22	18.97	20	19.61
Bible Study	20	17.24	17	16.67
Dwelling in the World	16	13.79	26	25.49
Other ¹⁷	16	13.79	10	11.76
Centering Prayer	12	10.34	16	15.69
Journaling	11	12.93	15	14.71
Discernment	10	8.62	9	8.82
Dwelling in the Word	6	5.17	17	16.67

It is clear congregants feel they are practicing their faith. There are three long-running Bible studies whose participants are accurately represented by the numbers above. Dwelling in the Word was a planned intervention for the Advent and Lenten seasons. As noted, COVID-19 disrupted the Lenten season when the church closed and the group missed two Sundays before it came back online.

¹⁷Those that wrote in other practices included dance, creative writing, being a Stephen Ministry recipient, Tai Chi, the 12 Step Program, peace and justice work, Al Anon, and being a Stephen Minister.

In spite of holiday schedules and interruption, those who attended the Dwelling in the Word sessions engaged wholeheartedly. I observed a sense of anticipation from one week to the next during the Advent session. Most enjoyed connecting with one another and with the singular text. There was one exception among those who submitted written feedback; she expressed a preference for a lectionary Bible study because she enjoys engaging four texts each week. Of Dwelling in the Word she stated, “I ran out of energy” and “got frustrated.” However, another wrote that “it deepened spiritual practice.” One said “it calls people into deeper relationship with the text.” Another wrote “I experienced God in a living way.” By dwelling in one passage for four weeks, participants realized the biblical text can be “newly revealed,” is “full of multiple references,” “raises many interesting questions,” and “calls us into personal relationship.” Though the number of participants was small, the experience held depth and meaning.

The same held true for Dwelling in the World prayer walks. Many more had the intention of participating in this practice but life was reordered by COVID-19. There were seven actual participants. The original aim and instructions asked for four intentional prayer walks in one month’s time. Over twenty women picked up those instructions on one of the first two Sundays of March. The online instructions changed because the application used for reporting online walks was designed for one walk at a time. The online reporting form was on the church website; a copy of the form is in appendix N.

In the focus group they said that praying for neighbors created “more curiosity” about their neighbor’s lives and well-being. More than one stated that this created a greater awareness of their neighbors and led to a stronger sense of connection with them.

They all recognized that the practice required discipline and intent. One of them stated, “Intentionality grows on you.” Among the group, they concurred it was a “powerful practice.” As they walked, they said they felt sympathy, friendliness, and acceptance, though there were sometimes startled by pets. One said some of her own “deep memories” of neighborhood and family emerged as she walked. All the participants agreed that it was a privilege to pray in this manner.

The Dwelling practices created new space in hearts and minds. They created new potentials for the practitioners. In their stasis, the focus of respondents was on energy coming from new pastors, staff, and new members. In the Dwelling practices, energy came from God through the individual’s engagement. The participants want to continue with the prayer walks and requested that the reporting tool be added back on the website because it helps them feel connected to one another. They also expressed interest in meeting periodically to continue to share their stories.

Their Personal Hope

There were six questions asked of interviewees in the neighbor interviews. The research team thought it important that the congregants be asked the same questions. When asked, as individual congregants, what gave them hope, they answered, “God’s love and care.” “How resilient we are!” “Faith and belief in God and in the inherent good in people.” Here again is energy.

One person stated, “That there is a spirit in the world/universe that is Holy, and above the survival of the fittest and which wants to triumph. That there is a potential in humanity that is thrilling. That there is a Divine ground within which we have our being

. . . and we can know it.” Another wrote, “Hope is everywhere inside me through my ‘God presence,’ in others, in beauty, in nature, in acts of courage of our non-profits.”

The Dwelling practices have potential to build the foundations of *missio Dei*. There is a remodeling of behavior that led to greater energy and hope. They already have hope in “God’s goodness, grace, and mystery,” but it may be guarded behind the traditional practices of Reformed worship and their own stasis.

Physical as well as metaphorical remodeling was suggested. After watching the presentation on hospitality, one person wrote, “Because Tradition Church’s art and architecture is so much a part of who we are, it needs to be opened up and have a stronger ‘contemporary’ set of features blended in, not to destroy, but to add to it, complement it or bring a fresh vision of this new theology of openness and welcome to all.”

Re-Membering a Church: “Love x 42”

Between the baseline and endline when asked, “What might our neighbors teach us about the love of Christ?,” forty-two people indicated they believe neighbors can teach the church about love and acceptance: love times forty-two. Love multiplied is life, energy, and good news.

The data wind along a path through the challenges and benefits of longevity and stability as well as the detriments and advantages of memory. It demonstrates a congregational slowing or melancholy. It discloses corporate hopes for new energy to come from the outside and places future hopes on new pastors, staff, and possible new members. The data then suggest the possibility that neighbors can teach us love and give us the opportunity to love which touches on the love of God in which they place their hope. There is the possibility of a new vision: the stranger as a source of hope.

Neighbor Interviews: “I Pray, Does that Count?”

In interviews with neighbors, volunteers asked, “How long have you lived in your neighborhood? What, if anything, has changed? What drew you to the neighborhood? What keeps you awake at night (what worries you)? What gives you hope? If there is a God, who is God for you? And, What, if any, spiritual practices do you have? The age range of the interviewees was very close to the age range of the baseline/endline participants as show in table 5. The length of time in their homes was also similar. Like the congregants, they worry about the well-being of their children and the state of the world: Medicare, chemical sensitivity, nuclear war, power being misused, safety, financial stability, job stress, and missing out on life for work. They like congregants, find hope in their children and grandchildren, nature and “the age of the planet,” continuous steps toward justice or “generational progress toward peace,” and seeing acts of kindness.

Their list of attributes of God is included with the congregation’s list in appendix F; neighbors included “Honcho,” and “Amorphous Presence.” One person did state, “I have no concept of God. I am not a believer.” Most added to the attributes list and a few others are obviously giving it thought. One stated, “Personification is too simple, God as a guide is too simple.” Another said, “Jesus as God on Earth is not a program.” A third stated God, “is something you feel, something you can’t control but gives you hope.”

As to spiritual practices multiple folks named gratitude (4), nature (3), music (2), meditation (4), walking (2), and prayer (4). Other practices named singularly were concentrating on the breath, gardening, yoga, angels, ancestors, and rituals such as putting crystals out under the full moon. Not all constitute orthodoxy but many are

similar to the additions made by congregants on the baseline or endline instruments.

When asked about the relationship of Jesus' church to the secular world, one congregant wrote, "Jesus isn't real," and another said, "Jesus is relative in all places," demonstrating disbelief and ambiguity are inside the walls as well.

Neighborliness: "I Believe Jesus' Church Is without Borders"

There were four questions on the baseline (B) and endline (E) questionnaires with regard to neighborliness and hospitality. Questions B29/E27 and B30/E28 were, "What might neighbors teach us about the love of Christ?", and "What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the secular world?" Later in the surveys, question B45/E43 asked, "What would make TTC a more hospitable community?", and question F46/E44 was "What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the immediate neighborhood?"

In answer to the first question on what neighbors might teach us, one person simply made a suggestion, "We are a wealthy island in the midst of multiple populations. Learn from it all." For the most part, there were promptings for how the church might relate with neighbors and the secular world such as starting a docent program, having a plant sale in the parking lot, hosting outdoor concerts, and hiring more diversity in the staff.

In consideration of the church connecting with neighbors and the secular world or what it can teach the church, one person wrote, "we can't afford to be separate from it." Echoing a number of respondents, one person stated, "We are there as a resource if they want to be a part of the community." Another said, "It has to be a healthy one, where the secular does not look to the church as one with disdain." Yet another seemed to consider

Jesus' church to be an historical reference stating, "I don't know enough about Jesus' church. Meeting in homes and constant witnessing or a modern-day church?" On the question of what could make us more hospitable, one wrote "You are doing so much already," suggesting any new ideas are the responsibility of the clergy to put into action. One simply stated, "I don't want to know." These answers convey an otherness of the world outside the church, the pain of having been rejected or put down in the past, the idea that someone else will fix it, and one outright refusal to consider relationship at all.

Because the church has members throughout the metro area, the term "destination church" is used as a descriptor by some staff and congregants alike; as one person stated, "TTC is a destination church so it requires travel and planning to show up." When asking questions about neighbors, it represents numerous neighborhoods and suburbs. Many in this church have formed solid friendships among the membership through congregational activities. The questionnaires are interventions and these questions about neighbors, neighborhoods, and the secular community were intended to invite participants to consider neighbor relations as part of Christian discipleship and conversely to do Christian discipleship in the same way they relate to their neighbors at home.

Across this broad geography, came one person's awareness that the neighbor, secular or otherwise, shows "how strangers have been bearing the image of Christ." Some see, "That God is in the face of our neighbors," and that "God is working through everyone." These answers clearly lean into missional thinking. Another participant alluded to the use of the church and its practices in the community, suggesting a sharing of, "the role of compassion, forgiveness, and mindfulness of our space." As was true

throughout the questionnaires, there were many short and quick answers and then some longer, reflective thoughts like this:

The love of Christ can be found in all sorts of arenas, both religious and secular and certainly in religious groups different from our own. I love learning about how others practice their faith—and how the unchurched find meaning. They might not call it the love of Christ, but they still practice caring, neighborliness, and service.

Another wrote, “the Church is the community in which flawed people witness to the power of the Gospel and is called to discern where God is at work in the world and join in that mission.”

The spectrum of answers reported here demonstrate the congregation’s familiar tension between past, present, and future and between insiders and outsiders. Most are so accustomed to the expectation that strangers and neighbors must find their way into the building for engagement that they do not consider how they might use the building and property as a gathering place, or as one person suggested, “a community center.”

The data in table 20 below, suggest a strong majority who believe the building is an asset. Table 21 shows the strongly agree vote goes down by twenty percent with the suggestion that the building be used by the community.

Though the numbers are small in the disagree or strongly disagree categories, one of the research team circled that end of the spectrum with the comment, “This is unfortunate.” However, one respondent shared this, “The building is pretty fortress-like, more use of the building by outside groups [would] make sure we’re bringing new people into the building all the time.” Another stated, “I hope the building is used more for worship, music, and art.”

Table 20. "Our building is an asset to be used."

	Baseline N=116		Mean	Endline N=102		Mean
	n	%		n	%	
Strongly Agree	64	55.65	4.51	51	50.00	4.48
Agree	48	41.74		49	48.04	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2	1.74		2	1.96	
Disagree	0	0.00		0	0.00	
Strongly Disagree	1	0.87		0	0.00	
	115	100.00		102	100.00	

Table 21. "I would like to see our building be used by the community."

	Baseline N=116		Mean	Endline N=102		Mean
	n	%		n	%	
Strongly Agree	36	31.03	4.03	24	23.76	3.91
Agree	56	48.28		51	50.5	
Neither	19	16.38		20	19.8	
Disagree	2	1.72		5	4.95	
Strongly Disagree	3	2.59		1	0.99	
Total	116	100.00		101	100.00	

When asked about the attributes of neighborliness they responded with more enthusiasm. Baseline and endline participants were also asked what they think constitutes neighborliness. Empathy and forgiveness lead the list because those are Mister Rogers' descriptors discussed in chapter two. The others come from life experience. Table 22

below shows the baseline and endline the percent of people who strongly agreed or agreed with suggested aspects of neighborliness:

Table 22. "I think neighborliness is:"

	Baseline N=116 %		Endline N=102 %	
	Strongly Agree and Agree	Mean	Strongly Agree and Agree	Mean
Empathy	93.80	4.34	96.08	4.35
Forgiveness	87.50	4.15	83.17	4.08
Assistance	97.39	4.42	96.06	4.31
Social Interaction	97.36	4.43	97.03	4.32
Shared Meals	54.06	3.65	45.54	3.50
Children at Play	78.95	4.04	76.00	3.96
Food in Crisis, Death, Illness	88.49	4.19	77.45	4.01
Shoveling/Assistance	80.89	4.14	80.00	4.00
Neighborhood Watch	73.21	4.01	83.00	4.03

Sermons have taught that the Christian concept of neighbor is the recipient of outreach or assistance, “one of the least of these” (Matthew 25). The second concept of neighbor one who lives in the house next door while they are at home. Collectively, these congregant participants have a strong sense of interaction and caring for the person next door as shown in the data. This means, with *missio Dei*, there is a widespread potential for sharing the love of God with neighbors outside the walls of the church. Collectively, there is a broad opportunity to receive the love of God from neighbors as well.

Developing a sense of mutuality is key. In and around the church, one person suggested the congregation develop the intent and practices to bring “back and espouse the idea of neighborliness and community of the 1950s.” An intentional practice of receiving and

giving, which is essentially teaching one another the goodness and restoration of neighborliness, sounds missional.

God's Agency: "Giver of Hope, Presenter of Challenge"

God is "a mysterious inclination" or "a spirit of generosity and connectedness." When asked, "Who is God for you?," many answered with one or two words, the most frequently named were "Power," "Strength," "Force," and "Protector." Four used the recovery language of "Higher Power" and "Good Orderly Direction." There were twenty respondents who gave a doctrinal and Trinitarian answer such as, "Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer." Another stated, "Embodiment of truth, beauty and grace," One named God as "My link to those who have gone before—my hope for the future," with the important caveat, "But I strongly believe in science."

There were two questions on the baseline and endline questionnaires that used missional language to point toward God as a sending God or *missio Dei*: "I believe God is out ahead of us." and "I believe God has a preferred future for TTC." A third question stated, "I have great hope for the future of TTC." The responses to these questions are in tables 23, 24, and 25 below.

Table 23. "I believe God is out ahead of us."

	Baseline		Mean	Endline		Mean
	N=116			N=102		
	n	%		n	%	
Strongly Agree	31	27.19	3.81	33	32.35	3.87
Agree	43	37.71		33	32.35	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31	27.19		31	30.39	
Disagree	5	4.38		0	0.00	
Strongly Disagree	4	3.53		5	4.91	
Total	114	100.00		102	100.00	

Table 24. "I believe God has a preferred future for TTC."

	Baseline		Mean	Endline		Mean
	N=116			N=102		
	n	%		n	%	
Strongly Agree	16	14.29	3.38	9	8.92	3.34
Agree	26	23.21		34	33.66	
Neither	56	50.00		44	43.56	
Disagree	12	10.71		10	9.9	
Strongly Disagree	2	1.79		4	3.96	
Total	112	100.00		101	100.00	

Table 25. "I have great hope for the future of TTC."

	Baseline		Mean	Endline		Mean
	N=116			N=102		
	n	%		n	%	
Strongly Agree	35	30.17	4.04	30	29.41	4.04
Agree	59	50.86		54	52.94	
Neither	16	13.79		11	10.78	
Disagree	4	3.45		6	5.89	
Strongly Disagree	2	1.73		1	0.98	
Total	116	100.00		102	100.00	

In a conversation after the baseline, one participant stated she believes God is in the here and now and not in the future only and so she disagreed in the first instance. These questions may have been understood more clearly if all of the educational events took place in person. An in-person gathering offers the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary, answer questions, and repeat the message. The first two questions have new language. They intimate God is at work and the church is invited to discern the future with God. The third statement is, by comparison, grounded and more earthbound as it

does not mention God. When asked what our neighbors might teach us about the love of Christ, one said to “discern where God is at work in the world.” Another suggested it means, “to join the community where we are.”

Participants of The Tradition Church do attribute agency to God. As one person wrote, “God is the power of action and love put forth in human form. God is mystery and the beauty of nature.” God is, “unconditional love,” “the spiritual energy that is in each of us,” and “a deep source of acceptance.” Another added that the love of God “extends to all people.” As one person wrote, “We are all loved by God.” Another wrote, “God will lead us through.” Sounding missional, one participant wrote, “God nudges me to do the things outside my comfort zone, and outside of societal ‘norms’.” Though they have not fully caught the missional understanding of God is source of our mission and being, some of them have an inkling worth pursuing.

Growth–Welcome–Inclusivity–Hospitality

The transitional pastor focused on church growth throughout his two-year tenure. This approach placed emphasis on numbers, both present and absent, which may have produced hope but also promoted an underlying fear. Concern for growth appeared in many qualitative aspects of the research. In the majority, it referenced growth in numbers; in the minority, it referenced growth in faith and spiritual life.

Some responses to the educational presentations on the missional church and the theology of hospitality used the word “welcome.” “Inclusivity” also appeared in the baseline and endline answers. According to Merriam-Webster online, growth is “progressive development,” “increase,” and “expansion.” Welcome is about “courtesy,” “receiving,” “admitting,” and “greeting.” To be inclusive is to “be broad in orientation or

scope” and “inclusive of everyone.” Hospitality is to be hospitable which includes “generosity,” a “promising welcome,” and openness and receptivity.¹⁸ The varied language enriches the discussion. In the presentation on the theology of hospitality, I used the word “hospitality” fifteen times on seventeen slides. The content of the presentation is in appendix U.

The PowerPoint attempted to broaden the conversation from seeking new members to welcoming the stranger “as a person with gifts to give.”¹⁹ It presented hospitality as making space and as a requirement for Christians. In a written email response to the presentation, one person contributed insights on TTC’s culture and identity and her own struggle to be hospitable as a Christian:

I think many of us are on the margin, questioning what God is directing us to do. ... We are not an intimate church ... but have fostered many small, intimate groups. It’s overwhelming at times to connect with these groups. Thinking about how to invite and host new people is challenging. How can we make them comfortable in our setting? I think for many of us it is easier to go out to them at the shelter and food shelf ... making room for others in the household of God. At times I feel I am more excluding rather than including. A financial contribution but not an emotional and personal one. The crux of this issue is my discomfort discussing faith, spirituality, with people that I know superficially.

Growth

For a portion of the participants, growing the membership has become an obsessive thought, whether in thinking of stewardship and dollars or of people to fill the pews. Here is but one example, “We need to grow and be relevant or we will not

¹⁸Merriam-Webster online dictionary. Accessed 9/7/2020 at 12:49 p.m. merriam-webster.com.

¹⁹Herbert Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript. San Antonio, TX. (February, 2004): 38. The manuscript includes this note: “Readers are free to duplicate any or all of this material by permission of the author, Herbert Anderson, Ph.D., with appropriate acknowledgement of authorship.” https://www.lutheranservices.org/sites/default/files/images/pdfs/N4_HerbAndersonpaper.pdf, accessed 10/9/2020

survive.” As stated earlier in this chapter, qualitative endline answers added this preoccupation to the new pastor’s to-do list. Nametags, mingling, passing the peace, conversation, being more transparent, circulation, and marketing were among the actions suggested as means of being hospitable. Many of these are often discussed but not acted upon and, as one person wrote, “If we do more of the same, we will get more of the same.”

But in the quote above, we have a woman expressing desire to find *missio Dei* in a place that is not intimate on the whole. She says intimacy is available in small groups, the maintenance of which takes overwhelming time and energy. This pattern makes it difficult for strangers to become friends or for just anyone to feel a sense of belonging. It is easier to bring welcome and caring out to shelters and food shelves for those who would not feel comfortable in house. She says contributions of time and money are easier than speaking of faith. Yet, in her own honesty and vulnerability she demonstrates the power and potential of both.

Welcome

The online presentation on hospitality included a quote on the topic shared earlier in this paper from Kosuke Koyama, “Theology to be authentic must be constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.”²⁰ For one woman who watched the presentation online, Koyama’s idea of the need for the strangers to be present and stir things up was disconcerting. She expressed desire for stability and

²⁰Kosuke Koyama, “Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*.” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (1993): 283.

wondered what to do when the strangers do not respond to her welcome. She suggested further training on the topic. Still, when answering the final question, “Where is God in this?,” she wrote, “God is nudging TTC members to be more persistent in making space for everyone.”

The church has volunteers known as Welcomers to stand by doors and along hallways on Sunday mornings and for some special events. Using Koyama’s paradigm, the welcomers watch for and engage the stranger and any challenge or stirring they may bring while allowing the other congregants to feel stable. The woman above expresses her unease with the promised changes visitors will bring and the honest frustration of trying to form connection with strangers. One person wrote this hope on the endline: “Whoever you are, you are welcome.” Another added this, “I want to see, and actually have seen in the past few years more people connecting and greeting one another . . . I want people to feel comfortable everywhere in our church.” The unease of the first woman is important here because she listened and absorbed the challenge everyone faces when welcoming the stranger. The latter two writers sound genuine in their hope but the welcome of which they really speak is for more if not all members to join in the stirring and unease.

Inclusivity

The relationship between Jesus’ church and the secular community is, as one respondent wrote, “where the church has always lived.” When describing TTC, the words elitist, wealthy, privileged, and insular were used. Some genuinely hope for, “a more inclusive environment to open our space and outreach for friends in the community to

experience the purpose of sharing our church.” But as the research has shown, this is not the current culture.

At a focus group for the neighbor interviewers, they admitted their sadness that neighbors do not feel the church is worthwhile. Beyond that, however, they expected interviewees to say, “There is no God,” but no one did. They were surprised that neighbors easily and readily conversed about their spirituality and beliefs. They realized their neighbors pray. As they were conducting the interviews, they were very conscious about showing acceptance and the love of God without words and without evangelizing. They said they “really liked” these conversations for meaning and depth.

As they stepped out into the world as the primary actors or hosts of a particular interview process, some found themselves using more energy than expected to listen. A few were invited into a neighbor’s sacred space and heard their sacred stories. They felt “more connected,” and “greater admiration” for the other.

One interviewer said, “I saw God in the sense that my neighbor spoke God’s hope to me.’ The interviewee said, ‘I have hope in this world. People are getting better and wiser’.” The interviewer added, “Really, I didn’t feel that way. He spoke God’s hope to me.”

Hospitality

Everything we have said so far about the soul of ministry and the complexity of human life before God—about the virtues of soul that invite us to embrace vulnerability and ambiguity, taste humility and imagine what is possible—finds its expression in the church’s ministry of hospitality.²¹

²¹Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript, 38

Dr. Herb Anderson's work is included in chapter three in a discussion of spiritual maturity. The emphasis there was on the imperative to welcome the stranger. It comes back to mind in presenting these data on questions and responses to education presentations in the research because hospitality, according to Anderson, is an important part of the community itself.

The signs of hospitality in ministry and an hospitable community are deceptively simple. It is a context in which affirmation is unconditional and expectations are explicit. It is an environment in which there is freedom to differ and be different. It is a place that entertains ideas and dreams and welcomes gifts from unexpected people.²²

If the concerns, ideas, "need tos," and "shoulds," expressed throughout the data are an expression of fear for the future, are they not also expressions of their vulnerability? When answering a question about hospitality, one respondent said, "I believe God would want all of us to be hospitable to everyone." Another wrote, "Millennials see this as a no brainer. ... Either we open ourselves up or we wither waiting for them to go grey." In another creative choice of words one writer stated they hoped hospitality could be, "a physical response to the neighborhood. More ways to connect to Christ and to one another." In the question about what they hope to accomplish in ministry through their time at TTC, one respondent wrote, "I hope to gladden and support people around me." These statements reflect their best intent.

On the other side is their vulnerability born out of concern for the future and truths of their own history, identity, and culture; these are difficult to face. By doggedly following Reformation practices and tradition, "the Tower of Babel gets built all over

²²Anderson, Zion 12 Conference, lecture manuscript, 38.

again.” Best practices involve a sense of competition: “How do we compete and win?” Keeping up appearances skew the gospel message: we need “to be seen as caring.” Some responded as though the future does not really hold any hope: “So many more people were touched in positive ways before than they are now. Fix it. Go back and understand why it was successful before and be more like that.”

Relationships inside and outside of the church are complex: “It’s overwhelming at times to connect with these groups. Thinking about how to invite and host new people is challenging. How can we make them comfortable in our setting?” There is also a generation gap: “I want to believe that when my kids are through with their youth/high school programming years, that I will want to make the drive to attend worship and other activities, but am not so sure as I once was that this will be the case.”

Here is one last thought from a respondent who watched the presentation on hospitality that reflects the symbiosis of spiritual growth and church growth: “I was especially struck by how love and hospitality are inseparable—that regard for the stranger includes the bearing of love to the stranger. Such an important concept for anyone who wants our faith life to grow, to spread, and to nurture more people.”

Summary

At first glance, the baseline and endline results appeared to contain a lot of vocabulary. There are many two-, three-, and four-word replies that became lists of words, for example, to describe God, their worries, or their hopes. However, respondents dug in to engage more deeply at various places in the online instruments to uplift, critique, or consider questions that hit a nerve, brought back a memory, or inspired a future with hope. The transcripts from the focus groups offered depth and stories from

participants' own lives. And finally, the email responses from the two online educational presentations and the Dwelling in the Word feedback provided letter-like communications asking questions, describing reactions, demonstrating their wrestling with new ideas, and sharing their stories. The scope of information begins with words and moves into narratives, feelings, and beliefs. Participants clearly expressed a desire for new members, new leaders, and new energy. In doing so, they said a good deal about their own community and resistance to change. They expressed identity in terms of worship, music, and wealth. In the next chapter, the mix of expressions, questions, concerns, and hopes found here come into conversation with *missio Dei*, missional thinking, the *theologia crucis*, exclusion or embrace, bounded-openness, and Christian identity.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Several hundred people participated in the various research interventions; they were asked to consider the church in terms of change, neighborliness, and hospitality. The data demonstrated some expected outcomes such as the congregation's resistance or passivity toward change. They also revealed aspects of the participants' faith as well as their hopes. The Action Research interventions gave individuals new and meaningful experiences that provoked hope for deeper relationships.

Past, Present, and Future

As recorded in chapter three, Robert Putnam and David Campbell wrote about three kinds of change in their book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. In lifecycle change, people change but the whole society does not. With generational change, society changes but individuals may not. Period change is when people of all ages experience concurrent change. Putnam and Campbell state, "for some reason when a younger generation deviates substantially from its predecessors, then that aggregate social change may be quicker."¹ The Millennial generation has deviated markedly from its predecessors in many ways and certainly in its institutional engagement with including

¹Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 73.

religion. Both culture and church have been on track for a period change for several decades.

In chapter two, I stated the importance for an organization to come fully into the present as a precursor to moving into any kind of future. TTC managed to create its own sphere of practice and stability that transcended the evangelical movement and growing secularism of the 1990s and into the 2000s with the hope the Millennials would opt for religious life as they married or had children. Some research participants equated change with “dumbing down,” or “decline,” and a loss of position and influence.

The data reflected congregational concerns and hopes for more membership and particularly young adults and families. They expressed this in the passive voice and with a whiff of magical thinking: if we want it, it will come or someone will make it happen. Indeed, as the transitional pastor preached his last sermon, he likened his leadership with that of the Wizard of Oz. The new pastor arrived while the congregation was in a pandemic diaspora. Since the research concluded, additional tiers of alteration have grown within the church from the end of the transitional pastorate, response to COVID-19, my own time as acting head of staff, and several months into new leadership.

The labor of coming into the present is here. Part of this work is an invitation to this congregation to consider the agency of God with an encouragement for congregants to claim their own personal agency as people of faith. This chapter will bring the data into further conversation with the lenses of missional church, neighborliness, and hospitality.

Agency

Missio Dei

The most important activity at The Tradition Church is the weekly worship service. Though the pattern of Sunday worship is strongly held, attendance has been declining in the last decade. The data interpreted by Putnam and Campbell from the 2006 Faith Matters survey applies to this church as well; they stated, “. . . people born in each successive decade have attended church about one week fewer per year than people born a decade earlier.”² The congregation is both living out the changes in current culture and still, to a degree, denying them. There is great hope for the attendance and pledge numbers to rise through someone’s efforts so fears of extinction can be allayed.

Attendance and membership, though, do not automatically translate to a Christian faith deep enough to surrender to the *theologia crucis*; following Jesus to the cross is a hard sell. Baseline and endline respondents expressed their care for the hungry and those in need of shelter in very real ways, primarily using the language of social justice. Current members and friends of the congregation spend both time and money as well as heart for the well-being of neighbors and those in need.

However, as a group, they have the pattern of following habits of the past, one of which is to follow the pastor. Habit can mean routine or it can be understood as dependency as in addiction; in either case, it is a symptom of their stasis and they practice a routine rather than seek God’s will. Nineteen respondents claimed the practice of

²Putnam and Campbell, *American*, 75.

discernment; the missional church movement certainly invites expansion of this practice to leadership boards and beyond.

In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin wrote, “The conversion of the nation is, and can only be, the supernatural work of God.”³ Newbigin goes through several biblical stories about Jesus’ compassion and servanthood and then asks, “What does this say about the way in which the church is authorized to represent the kingdom of God in the life of society?”⁴ He dismisses the idea of “responding to the aspirations of the people,” or of operating the church in the “style of a commercial firm using modern techniques of promotion to attract members.”⁵ Rather, he states, the congregation should “always have its eyes fixed on God.”⁶ This congregation comes to worship God but then lives by the polity and structure of the modern church in deciding how to serve God.

There are individuals acting from a personal sense of *theologia crucis*, but the Body misses out on that witness and potential for spiritual growth. As a group, they equate tradition with clerical leadership and a routine of worship and good works. This congregation would grow in its faithfulness and spirit with the intent to learn the spiritual practice of discernment. This would be aided by the practices of Dwelling in the Word and Dwelling in the World.

³Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 225.

⁴Newbigin, 226.

⁵Newbigin, 226.

⁶Newbigin, 226.

Another Take on Tradition

According to Walter Brueggemann, “Tradition refers to both (a) the treasured lore of the community, which is stylized, treasured, and transmitted to the next generation, and (b) the process of transmission whereby one generation entrusts this treasure to the next generation.”⁷ The Tradition Church cherishes its style and lore and aches to pass it on to the next generations; it so loves the current form of worship, education, and mission, it has not been able to translate faith or practice in ways the next generations can claim it.

Brueggemann goes on to say that church culture must not eclipse the message which is the revelation of God. This is a disconnect for TTC; God is being revealed to many current members and they are afraid of losing what is meaningful to them. Brueggemann used the term traditioning to speak about the practice of transmitting the God story from one generation to another. Writes Brueggemann, “The process of traditioning must be done intentionally so that future generations may ‘set their hope in God.’ Negatively the failure of the traditioning process will produce a generation of children (or grandchildren) that forgets, and when forgetting, disobeys.”⁸ He continued:

The key insight of Israel in its transmitting process is that intentional transmission is indispensable for the maintenance of a self-conscious community of praise and obedience. Such a community cannot be maintained either by a flattened, authoritarian formulation that lacks contemporaneity or by a skeptical, dismissive questioning of tradition. This vibrant awareness, which evokes Israel’s best interpretive imagination, may indeed give pause to people who care about the future of the church as a community of praise and obedience. The church in the West—liberal and conservative—is deeply impinged upon by Enlightenment consciousness that resolved in an intentional way to overcome faith traditions. In

⁷Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 220.

⁸Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 221.

more liberal settings, the propensity is a near dismissal of tradition. In more conservative settings, the temptation is a flattened tradition that is taken as normative but without vitality. Neither approach will work in the long run to sustain a vibrant community of praise and obedience.⁹

The challenge the data present is that the congregation's primary practices come from worshipping God on Sunday and enacting a "pick and choose" mentality for any other engagement through the week. Obedience is not a word that is widely used in this time. For many of the programs and activities listed in the baseline and endline questionnaires, the majority answer was "do not attend." Again, from Brueggemann:

The traditioning process requires great intentionality. More than that, the process requires adults who themselves are engaged with and alive to the claims of the tradition that legitimate and authorize a peculiar way in the world. The traditioning partners, both the transmitters and the receivers, stand in the tradition of Moses, that great traditionalist, who declared: "Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us who are all of us here alive today" (Deut. 5:3).¹⁰

The data show there are people at TTC who intend to live the peculiar way of God in the world. Every congregation seems to have a core group of active members with concentric circles of engagement moving out from the center. The Dwelling in the World prayer practice taught intent. Moses' call, as well as Brueggemann's, is for individuals and congregants to act with great intent to seek and obey the will of God which includes traditioning.

Brueggemann wrote, "The tradition is presented in an environment of wonder, amazement, and gratitude that yields glad obedience."¹¹ In the previous chapter, a

⁹Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 222.

¹⁰Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 222.

¹¹Brueggemann, *Reverberations*, 222.

respondent compared The Tradition Church to Babel in his feedback to the online presentation on hospitality. He also lifted up the many opportunities both inside and outside the church to help the hungry and clothe the naked. He then added, “But we get a bonus; we get to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, for that is what we are about.”

As they have increasingly focused on grey hair and empty pews, they have lost track of the living water that flows amongst and around us. God is active in this congregation providing an environment of wonder and amazement. Tradition is in the congregation’s blood, traditioning should seem a natural step. Intent and obedience can lead to discernment of who God is and God’s mission for this church. This congregation is invited to seek connection with the presence of the sending God, with *missio Dei*. Further Action Research interventions that involve the practice of discernment and the introduction of traditioning would be helpful

Practices: Grassroots Change

Before the church was closed due to COVID-19, the research team and I had the goal of repeating the neighbor interview process during May, 2020. Instead, the state was under a shelter at home order until the middle of that month. The pattern of Action Research is for one cycle of interventions to lead to another. I hope we may yet repeat the interview process and move further into relationships with our neighbors. Those who participated in the interviews in January realized they had common faith practices and even common beliefs with neighbors who do not attend church. They also shared worries and mutual hopes. Of the process, one focus group participant stated she most valued the deepening of her conversations with neighbors. This is needed both inside and outside the congregation.

As a part of the research interventions, the two missional practices of Dwelling in the Word and Dwelling in the World gave participants new experiences for being church. As stated in the last chapter, Dwelling in the Word brought new insights to reading scripture; it gave them new skills for engaging with the Bible. Those who attended were very receptive to the experience and shared openly with and learned from one another. Also as reported in the last chapter, one person stated, “I experienced God in a living way.”

Dwelling in the Word is a practice that can help members and friends of this congregation find words for their beliefs. In the months since the research ended, one of the participants used Dwelling in the Word to begin each segment of a class on biblical and theological grounding for looking at health care in the state. Another person who learned the practice when it was used at deacon meetings in 2018-2019, contacted me for instructions and a refresher so she could use it as an opening for a retreat on fair housing.

Dwelling in the World offered participants what they referred to as a deeper connection with their neighbors. Those who participated in the focus group expressed gratitude for an opportunity to pray for their neighbors and felt it changed their relationships with them. It is a true engagement with neighbors via the mystery of God. Praying for others gave them a deeper connection with strangers.

Participating in a research project gave congregants license to talk to neighbors about spirituality and faith. Dwelling in the Word offered empowerment and energy to practitioners and Dwelling in the World raised their sense of caring and connection with neighbors. The practice refreshed their sense of being a neighbor and brought God into

the midst of those relationships in a subtle way. These practices continue to hold promise for this congregation's growth, welcome, inclusivity, and hospitality.

Mutuality

Liturgy: Narrative and Ritual

As stated above, and according to the baseline and endline data, the weekly worship service is the most highly valued aspect of congregational life at The Tradition Church. As one woman wrote, "I am more than heartened to be carried away in worship." From this animated and wholehearted statement, I would like to connect the dots between the great love of traditional worship, the impulse toward social justice, faith sharing among members, and the potentials of liturgy or the work of the people.

The statement above from a research participant calls to mind three inspiring statements shared in chapter three. The first is from Catherine LaCugna, the second from Serene Jones, and the third from Miroslav Volf. Not surprisingly, worship at The Tradition Church offers a weekly opportunity for an affirmation of faith using the Apostles' Creed as well as catechisms, confessions, and creeds both historical and modern. The congregation stands and recites the words with enthusiasm; in a unison formality they freely state their beliefs. LaCugna suggests, however, that speaking the words is only a fraction of formation:

Confessing faith is incomplete unless it becomes a form of life. Living faith in the God of Jesus Christ means being formed and transformed by the life of grace of God's economy: becoming persons fully in communion with all; becoming Christ

to one another; becoming by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is: love unbounded, glory uncontained.¹²

The sanctuary provides space for liturgy but then holds their words and their worship. One might say this congregation is both bounded and contained by its building and habits. For those in the sanctuary, all are welcome to be seated and take part; all are welcome to the bread and the cup of communion. But the data revealed a stasis. The “becoming of Christ to one another,” or the formation and transformation gets stalled by a lack, perhaps a lack of curiosity, imagination, or intent. It is also hampered by clericalism and the call to tend to one’s own growth and share one’s own faith beyond the sanctuary. LaCugna’s invitation brings to mind Jesus’ call to Lazarus when he was in the tomb: “Lazarus, come out” (John 11:43b)! And then he said to the mourners, “Unbind him and let him go” (John 11:44b). Worship as the foremost connection might best have practices and litanies of unbinding. The sending should remind all to live and continue to grow into “love unbounded, glory uncontained.”

Serene Jones concludes her article with the hope congregations can find their way to “bounded-openness.” To get to that place of openness, she reflected on some of the processes and change that have dismantled and brought new thinking to the church. Like those who advocate for missional practices, Jones suggested returning to God’s story and integrating one’s life with God’s story:

to have faith is to find oneself utterly and completely determined by this story; it involves letting the weight of one’s life fall into the hands of saving grace. It is to be determined by the beauty of their reality. . . . but neither doubt nor reason is

¹²Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1973), 377.

allowed to displace the primacy of place given to the revealed, radically gratuitous story of God's saving love.¹³

In speaking to Christians of all ages and with awareness of our generation gaps, Dr. Jones recommends "letting the weight of one's life fall into the hands of saving grace." This is both surrender and intent. The worship service then is connecting listeners to social justice through the prophets and the gospels, through God's story. Even more important, if liturgy is worship and liturgy is the work of the people, and the people's work is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the earth, and providing hospitality of body, mind, heart, and soul to neighbors and self, then these actions are also worship.

The worship service at TTC is an opportunity to pray and praise; for a large portion of the congregation it is also the only opportunity for teaching and discipleship training. I am reminded that Miroslav Volf wrote *Exclusion and Embrace* because he needed a theology of embrace for himself.¹⁴ At TTC, the congregants receive worship and give to mission as separate events. Here, Volf speaks to the deepest aspects of discipleship, the love that comes from sacrifice and the space it creates:

Note first the two dimensions of the passion of Christ: self-giving love that overcomes human enmity and the creation of space in himself to receive estranged humanity. This same giving of the self and receiving of the other are the two essential moments in the internal life of the Trinity; indeed, with the triune God of perfect love they are identical.¹⁵

¹³Serene Jones, "Bounded Openness: Postmodernism, Feminism, and the Church Today," *Interpretation* (January, 2001): 57.

¹⁴Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), ix.

¹⁵Volf, *Exclusion*, 128.

If congregants wish to renew their communal faith life, connect with Trinitarian energy and space, and share the tradition with the next generations, these scholarly voices suggest God is inviting each and all to claim the personal agency for faith formation and action. Each person must have the intent and obedience to integrate their story with Spirit, Salvation, and God. Each and all are invited into further mutuality with God and with one another. When stories are told and held in sacred space and the members find they, themselves, are welcome, then all are welcome. The stranger who currently lives behind the good-member façade will find a welcome so genuine that everyone will know and practice hospitality for the stranger.

For the last two years, the focus of hospitality has been primarily on getting more and younger members. The data invite the congregation to listen to and engage with young families already among the membership to share mutuality through the generations. The data also showed there is a range of beliefs about who God is and how to be church so practicing hospitality among members and friends is appropriate discipleship that precedes apostleship. If as members who intentionally integrate their story with God's story, they were to experience "listening one another into free speech"¹⁶ as offered in *Dwelling in the Word*, a deep and abiding community of love and acceptance would be growing within. The broader message is that liturgy, the work of the people, is not limited to worship; worship is not limited to an hour a week in the sanctuary.

¹⁶Pat Taylor Ellison and Patrick Keifert, *Dwelling in the Word: A Pocket Handbook* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, Incorporated, 2011), 13.

Hospitality

One of the two educational presentations was on the theology of hospitality and subtitled, “Making Room in the Household of God.” Since The Tradition Church still offers a silver service reception for funerals, I started with a quote from Henri Nouwen, who is concerned the word evokes tea parties and sweets but, in Christian practice, is much more than that. The PowerPoint presentation then included words from Serene Jones’ child-care worker who sees the church of today in rubble, followed by Miroslav Volf’s call to Christians to readjust our identities to make room for the stranger.¹⁷ I then turned to Kosuke Koyama who stated that the Christian mission is to extend hospitality to strangers for two important reasons. The first is Koyama’s assertion that theology is only true and reliable when it is “constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.”¹⁸ The second reason is, in Koyama’s own words, “The only way to stop the violence of genocide in our world is the *via eminentiae* of ‘extending hospitality to strangers’ as the Lamb of God did.”¹⁹ Hospitality is The Way of The Christ.

The research directed questions and lessons of hospitality in an outward way toward the neighbor and the stranger. Jennie Hornyak Wojciechowski and Robert Putnam

¹⁷Serene Jones, “Bounded Openness: Postmodernism, Feminism, and the Church Today” *Interpretation* (January, 2001): 49-50. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, ix. Miroslav Volf, “The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement” *Modern Theology* 14:3 (July 1998): 403-423.

¹⁸Kosuke Koyama. “Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*.” *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327, (1993): 283.

¹⁹Koyama, 286.

both report that neighborliness is in decline in the United States.²⁰ Our culture is now further stressed by the pandemic, the 2020 racial unrest, and the aftermath of the presidential election. The outward focus of hospitality is an important consideration for the church. For these reasons, the biblical lenses from chapter three lifted up the pattern of stranger to guest to friend. Yet before turning outward, I return to feedback provided by a research participant which was also shared in the last chapter:

I think many of us are on the margin, questioning what God is directing us to do. We are not an intimate church . . . but have fostered many small, intimate groups. It's overwhelming at times to connect with these groups. Thinking about how to invite and host new people is challenging. How can we make them comfortable in our setting? I think for many of us it is easier to go out to them at the shelter and food shelf . . . making room for others in the household of God. At times I feel I am more excluding rather than including. A financial contribution but not an emotional and personal one. The crux of this issue is my discomfort discussing faith, spirituality, with people that I know superficially.

This paragraph was startling in its awareness and honesty. It touches on some of what has been discussed above in consideration of agency and mutuality. She defined the lack of intimacy and places of closeness very well. However, the small groups to which she refers to as intimate were, for others, identified as “cliques.” At one level her comments speak to the difficulty of welcoming a stranger or person in need into the formality and grandeur of the building. At another level, it intimates the social life of the congregation is difficult to breach. As a congregation, they lack practices and tools for discussion on the meaning of faith. When she wrote of folk who are known superficially, it is not clear whether she is referring to a resident from the women’s shelter she visits

²⁰Jennie Hornyak Wojciechowski, “Where Has My Neighbor Gone? A Review Article,” *Word and World*, 37, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 153-60. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster), Kindle Edition.

monthly or fellow parishioners because, from the margins, it seems she is seeking hospitality for herself as well as for others.

Though she did not use this language, from that margin it seems she and others are seeking *missio Dei*. The data prompt the question of how congregants might more fully enter into God's story and the expanding powers of *perichoresis*.

Biblical Banquets and the Least of These

When three men appeared at Abraham's encampment, he rushed to find Sarah and servants to have them prepare food (Gen. 18:1-15). When the invited guests of a wealthy man declined to attend his banquet, he sent his servants out into the lesser parts of town to find ordinary, hungry folk to fill the tables (Luke 14:15-24).

At the level of mission outreach, rather than invite strangers into the building, The Tradition Church takes a to-go box out to the stranger. There are varying degrees of interaction with mission recipients depending on the particular program. The writer above, goes to a women's shelter on a monthly basis with crafts and snacks; the TTC volunteers spend several hours with the women and children talking and sharing an activity. It is not intended to be evangelism nor could it happen on the church premises for the safety and security of the women. It is exactly as it should be; it is as Matthew 25 commands: When did we see you in need of normalcy, conversation, crafts, and snacks?

However, underlying a welcome or lack of welcome, visitor and member comfort or lack of comfort, are aspects of their congregational identity which include privilege and wealth. From baseline and endline questions that asked about participants' initial connection with the church and hopes for their time spent among the congregation, the data showed the continued importance of worship, music, and preaching. In the data they

self-identified as well-educated, intellectual, and elite. These are the characteristics of helpers and allies; outwardly, they are problem solvers but have not had to identify with people in need. Hospitality, or in the language used by research participants, growth, welcome, and inclusivity, challenges years of self-assurance and exclusivity.

Miroslav Volf includes justice work as a part of his theology of embrace. However, as he stated, “There can be no justice without the will to embrace. . . . to agree on justice you need to make space in yourself for the perspective of the other, and in order to make space, you need to want to embrace the other.”²¹ The congregation becomes a temporary homeless shelter for one month of the year and many volunteer to be with our nightly guests in a posture of embrace. The stranger is pulled close for a short time. Volunteers go out and then return.

The data in conversation with God’s story point toward incongruences. Privilege, elitism, and exclusivity lead to discomfort in opening the building to strangers. For this congregation, biblical and theological hospitality and embrace are most comfortably done at a distance. This disconnects the mystery and wonder of worship from life. This does not bode well for the ability to let one’s life fall into God’s story nor for making room or embrace. Missional thinking invites integration of worship with feeding, housing, and justice ministries; it invites incongruence into conversation.

Identity

Missional thinking suggests reflection on location, building, and property as well as worship and congregational life. TTC is located in a residential neighborhood and, as

²¹Volf, *Exclusion*, 207.

was stated in the first chapter, about a quarter of the members live within a four-mile radius of the building. In addition to a beautiful Neo-Gothic structure, the congregation has a generous parking lot with a small park adjacent to it. The church's long taught and practiced mission ideology is to help the neighbor in need; the needy neighbors are at least a mile from the building and beyond. The nearest neighbors, like the congregants themselves, have financial resources as home-owners or renters in the community.

The question is, do neighbors have spiritual community or a spiritual home? The data showed that the congregation believes that the building is an asset to be used but with little enthusiasm for anything beyond worship and church programming. The building was designed for social programs that strengthened the congregation in the 1950s. These old social groups have faded out. Here, I recall again Serene Jones' child-care worker, Kate, who sees the church as a place in rubble and ruin. Kate invites rebuilding together with Generation X and Millennials and dancing among the broken pieces along with seekers and the spiritual but not religious in our midst. This is also reminiscent of Miroslav Volf who invites Christians to think of God as our social vision.²² This congregation's view of these potentials is hampered by stone, mortar, and old habits.

The data collected from the neighbor interviews came from many neighborhoods in the city as well as the near the church. Some indicated they had and no longer want church or religious community but that does not fully explore the potential for the

²²Serene Jones, "Bounded Openness: Postmodernism, Feminism, and the Church Today" *Interpretation* (January, 2001): 49-50. Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14:3, (July, 1998): 403-423.

building and property to provide space at TTC for relationship, sanctuary, and spiritual community. A number of the interviewees reported regular spiritual practices, including prayer. Some also stated they were active in local help, outreach, or volunteer organizations. Though they would not call it liturgy, it is something congregants and neighbors have in common.

In 2019, a local theater wanted to rent space for seasonal programs for children and youth but the building committee was opposed to allowing a non-Christian group to use the facility. The transitional pastor would only agree to it if prayer was mandatory at the start of each class. To date, clergy, staff, and lay leaders have not been able to see their way clear to make room for individuals, groups, or organizations who do not share a Christian identity.

In a commentary on Matthew 25, Douglas Hare makes an interesting comment about spiritual seekers. It is a good message for TTC folks who have expressed concern that the building should be used only by and be a home to those who already profess Jesus as Lord:

Because of this solidarity principle, the good deeds performed by pagans are not treated as atoning for their sins, nor as evidence that they imitate God, but as indicating a relationship with Jesus! Although they knew it not, the righteous pagans were serving him by helping those with whom he identified. Although their case is anomalous, they are in a sense limited “in Christ” . . . by means of this service. They are “anonymous” Christians.²³

It is possible to think of the neighborhood and city as populated by anonymous Christians, a concept that may help some TTC members to consider opening the doors. I

²³Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 291.

have brought up the idea of a spiritual ecosystem and the intentional creation of sacred or sanctuary space outside the building. It is a leap of faith in the making to consider opening to the community rather than focusing strictly on a member driven model of church. Consideration of future partnerships, tenants, and social or educational events is one of the objectives to be considered in the current strategic planning efforts. It would be an expansion of identity if they are more than property owners and become landlords or hosts to in-house mission and/or outdoor sanctuary.

Relationships between Christians and non-Christians are but one incongruence in the church's identity. While still a congregation with solid financial resources, the identity of wealth is bumping up against the reality of fewer pledge units, rising salaries, and higher building costs. The educational opportunities included in the research challenged their boundaries and definitions of who is needy; there are those who have need for food or shelter and others who need acceptance, belonging, and spiritual community. The church is a neighbor to a great many people who might know God in no other way but through the congregation's actions.

Dr. Linda Woodhead ignited a discussion herein on whether current mission practices of the church lead participants to experience "two-way love" in mission and justice work. She introduced the concept of "neighbor-love" which she defined as "self-sacrificing equal regard which is indifferent to the value of its object."²⁴ She further claimed her understanding that current mission practices were lacking and that two-way love or *eros* rather than *agape*, would lead Christians to greater self-sacrifice. Her great

²⁴Linda Woodhead, "Love and Justice," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 5, no. 1 (Apr 1992): 46.

concern is that the “subject of love remains unaffected by the object.”²⁵ She is looking for a conversion of the giver due to interaction, appreciation, or response from the receiver; in an unplanned reversal, it makes the gifting or caring conditional. The receiver becomes responsible for the transformation of the giver. Into the mix of *agape*, *pascho*, and *pathema* comes *metamorphoo*, or transformation, as it is known in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Woodhead is here because she wrote about her perception of the tepid nature of Christian mission, transformation, and identity. I now connect this with past tense verbs, passive voice, and stasis at TTC. The Tradition Church measures Christian identity according to membership rather than practice. However, *eros* alone pales in the presence of *agape*. While Brueggemann lifts up *eros* as God’s passion for God’s people he also states God has issued a fierce call to obedience that *agape* facilitates. As per Jones, God’s story of *agape* enlivens bounded-openness. God’s narrative guides Volf’s truth regarding the will to embrace as crucial of the pursuit of justice. Nothing less than *agape* will do. Woodhead may remind the reader of Sarah’s and Abraham’s laughter when hearing God’s promising message. Their ability to receive had limits as do ours. As Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

I worry about what happens when we build a house for God. I am speaking no longer of the temple in Jerusalem but of the house of worship on the corner, where people of faith meet to say their prayers, because saying them together reminds them of who they are better than saying them alone. This is good, and all good things cast shadows. Do we build God a house so that we can choose when to go see God? Do we build God’s house in lieu of having God stay at ours? Plus, what happens to the rest of the world when we build four-walls—even four

²⁵Woodhead, “Love,” 46.

gorgeous walls—cap them with a steepled roof, and designate that the House of God? What happens to the riverbanks, the mountaintops, the deserts, and the trees? What happens to the people who never show up in our houses of God?²⁶

It might be said that Taylor calls out the *eros* expressed through the pick and choose or attractional programming nature of congregational life. This congregation loves its worship services, pastors, and history. *Filio*, or long term friendships, abound. Yet growth and momentum are elusive. These forms of love, as expressions of faith, have limits whereas *agape* has the scope and scale of the Trinity. Identity is unique to a particular congregation. Yet, unlike Babel, congregational identity is called into being to be molded, shaped, and sent by *missio Dei*.

One Church and Many Churches

There are many aspects to congregational identity such as denomination, location, music, and biblical translation to name a few. Individuals and families select a congregation by their sense of fit or belonging. A church culture, whether intentionally formed or unconsciously lived out, has boundaries created by time, events, best practices, theology, and more. This research looked at an established mainline congregation in an urban context. However, the issues raised such as membership, speaking of and sharing faith, clericalism, working from an outdated pattern of congregational life, and awareness of change while fearing loss, are common experiences in congregations today.

I found that engaging in the missional movement is a hopeful, creative, practice-centered, and scripturally sound way forward. I shared a quote in chapter three, in which

²⁶Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), 9.

environmentalist Gus Speth lamented that the practice of good science could not overcome the spiritual and cultural problems of selfishness, greed, and apathy.²⁷ These and many other spiritual issues plague cities and nations. That Millennials are not in church does not preclude *missio Dei* from sending them to care for the earth in much the same way TTC feels that call. It is our mutual spiritual growth that is needed. As I turn to the research question a final time, it is with the awareness that the missional church practices used in this research addressed a number of congregational challenges relevant to any church: speaking of faith, deepening relationships with neighbors, and stepping out of old habits to try new practices.

Growth–Welcome–Inclusivity–Hospitality

Research Question

How might Action Research interventions utilizing missional practices of hospitality impact The Tradition Church and its relationship with neighbors?

The missional practices used in this research project brought participants into closer relationship with God as agent and sender. It also empowered their own agency as Christians. Two former practitioners of Dwelling in the Word have or will use the practice in gatherings with congregants as a starting point for discussions around the congregation's relationship with issues that affect both members and citizens of the city and region.

²⁷NC Interfaith Power and Light website. Accessed February 13, 2020 at 8:02 p.m. This website is a climate change advocacy ministry of the North Carolina Council of Churches. The full quote is: "I used to think that top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with thirty years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy. And to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."

As mentioned, the new pastor's priority was the start of a strategic planning process. The current work is in honing seven objectives that include a master financial plan and establishment of a master plan for the site to facilitate "a hospitable and welcoming community."²⁸ One Dwelling in the Word participant and lay leader is going to suggest the practice as a part of the strategic planning process. Still, more than one congregant has stated the expectation that this current planning process will lead to a lack of change just as they have in the past. Some will continue to choose stasis.

When I look through the lens of neighborliness, I see TTC located in the midst of hundreds of homes. This congregation are caretakers of a beautiful building, lawns, a community garden, and a small park. As discussed in chapter two, neighborliness is on the decline yet the data demonstrated that research participants, many of whom are long-term home owners, have formed relationships with neighbors as well as long friendships within the church. The missional lens invites these congregants to extend the kind of neighbor relationship and friendships they have at home and within the building with those who live beyond its walls.

The missional lens offered new practices that have taken hold among a small fraction of the TTC congregation. Rooms and Keifert suggest "Dwelling in the Word, Dwelling in the World, hospitality, corporate spiritual discernment, announcing the kingdom, and focus for missional action" as the "keystone habits" of missional practice.²⁹ Since the research concluded, there have been some grassroots efforts toward continuing

²⁸TTC bulletin, December 13, 2020.

²⁹Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* (Saint Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, Incorporated, 2014), 21.

in new practices with an eye toward hospitality. I believe it would be helpful for the lay leaders of the church to read and discuss Nigel Rooms and Patrick Keifert's book, *Forming the Missional Church*.

The breadth of opinion, anxiety, pain, general fear, and the specific fear of change expressed in the data indicate the church would also benefit from looking at the nine disciplines of a learning church from Dwight Zscheile's book *The Agile Church: Spirit Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age*. They are:

Cultivating spaces for conversation and practice; Addressing fear and shame; Engaging ambivalence and conflict; Interpreting the present in light of the past; Discovering open spaces; Being Present; Practicing your way forward; Translating; and Improvising.³⁰

The window on the lens of cultural change has been expanded by the coronavirus Covid-19 and the systemic racism exposed in the days and months after the death of George Floyd. The 2020 presidential election has also set new precedents and has challenged the American ethos. It is difficult to imagine that life will return to the same pace and patterns of previous years once the vaccine is distributed. It is possible even the most stalwart traditionalist might awaken to the difference between technical and adaptive change.

As waves of grief and hope carry congregants back into the sanctuary at some point in 2021, we have the opportunity to "be utterly and completely determined" by God's story.³¹ Practices and community will be essential to healing, well-being, and

³⁰Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Agile Church: Spirit Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2014), 87-111.

³¹Jones, "Bounded-Openness," 57.

moving forward. We have the opportunity to return to *missio Dei*: Source of living water, purpose, and calling.

If we can see our way clear to opening our doors to neighbors, it will show us we have as much to learn as we have to give. As evidenced by the questions asked in the neighbor interviews, I have an interest in spiritual life both in and beyond the church. I have noticed an effort to explain aspects of worship during services as an attempt to make visitors and the unchurched feel more welcome and comfortable yet, I question the effect it has on engaging the agency of God. Traditioning and faith formation mean participating in God's mystery as much as studying the word. The worship service engages mystery in a way that goes beyond words. If the congregation comes fully into the present and falls into to the Trinity's leading, God will overturn the stasis and overwhelm us with new life.

Miroslav Volf translated *perichoresis* as making room; this church has room in the pews and in the building that they hope to fill.³² Making room for new thoughts, practices, age groups, and change is their current challenge. Volf is clear in his thought and writing that the concept is not a formula to organize a church nor a plan for church growth, yet it can be a social vision. There is a hint of the breadth of God's vision, or as I have stated previously, God's horizon, in the data collected from this one congregation. They recorded the presence of both fear and faith. It is a time of choosing their intent. There is a will among them to withdraw inside a cathedral of doubt resting on an

³²Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity Is Our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14:3 (July, 1998): 409.

endowment, ferociously preserved, for the next generations. In this, they have to go against themselves and look to the Spirit for inner growth.

When the questionnaire went live, I was not sure of the congregation's faith; the research showed it was there but kept private. The data also noted hope and a good deal of love. They explained their reticence: even some of the most active and life-long members feel they are on the margins. There are old wounds, some from the very pastors who were and are setting the direction, practices, and mission. At times, pastors have filled the worship space rather than point to God—in this most important aspect of this congregation's life, making room for Trinity and letting every part of the service serve and listen for Mystery, is critical.

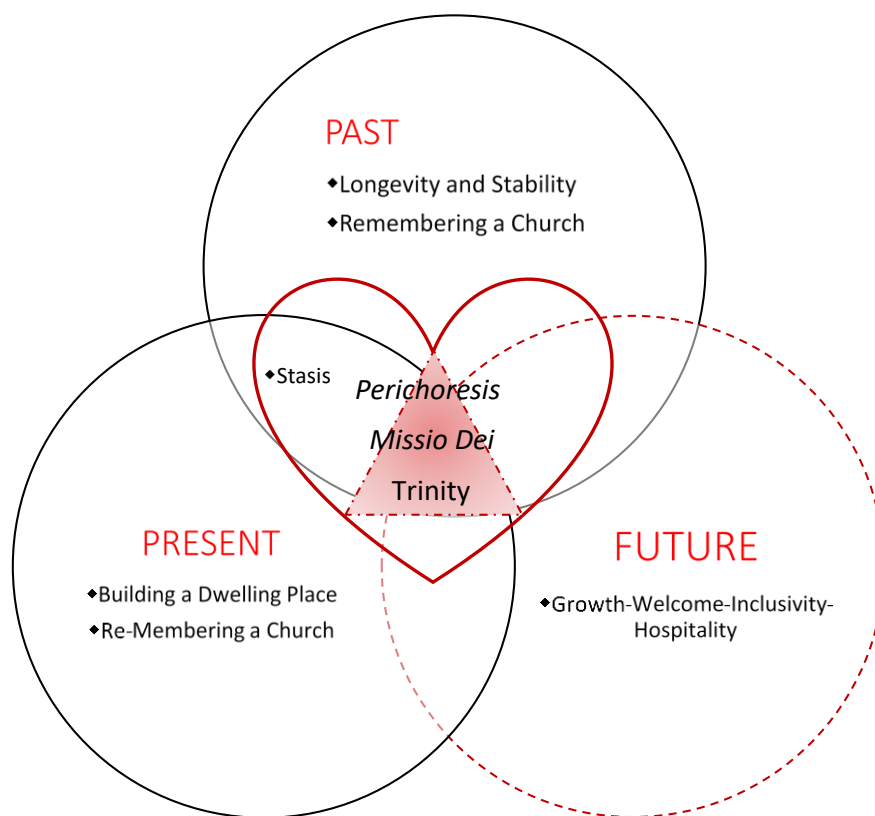


Figure 6. Theoretical Diagram 3

The surprise in the research results is the energy that emerged from within the congregation through the new Dwelling practices and neighbor interviews. This provided some final additions to the theoretical design, a recognition of God's presence at the center. The circles have a natural Trinitarian center giving way to a visual reminder of *perichoresis* in the midst of the congregation. The *perichoresis* along with *missio Dei* in the form of both triangle and heart will address the stasis within. If they can come to speak their faith to each other, with friends, and with strangers, as well as discerning God's call, they might well come to the practice of bounded-openness as exhibited by the, now, perforated line on boundary of the future. The potential is within as well as beyond the walls if they can shift their gaze from a proud and faithful history to what is possible with the Triune God. All of this is pictured in a final form of the theoretical diagram in figure 6 above.

The entry for July 6 in *The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living* by Thomas Keating brings together many facets included in this thesis. This was shared with the Centering Prayer group in the summer of 2020, as the research came to a close. I was reminded of it again as this paper comes to its end. It speaks to the vocabulary of love, to loving, and to compassion. It speaks to Christ and Spirit as the sources of vitality and life. It is Trinitarian. And most importantly, it states that we need practices, whether centering prayer, Dwelling in the Word, Dwelling in the World, addressing fear and shame, or hospitality, to make Christian service a way of life:

The first fruit of the Spirit is Charity or, in the Greek, *Agape*, which means self-giving love as opposed to self-seeking love. Most of us know love as desiring something or someone. This is the kind of love the Greeks called *Eros*, a powerful and necessary kind of love but one that is meant to grow into the self-giving love that the Gospel calls charity. Charity is not almsgiving. It is rather a participation in God's unconditional love. The growth of charity leads to self-surrender to God

and to the compassionate love of others. The quality of Christ's love is the source of its vitality; the continual tender and loving awareness of the presence of God is its reward. Where does this charity come from? It is being infused into us in the silent seedbed of contemplative prayer.³³

What we believe about the love of God matters. What we believe about salvation and transformation matter. The passion necessary is compassion, that is, to be with suffering or *The Way of theologia crucis*. Dwelling in the Word is an invitation to engage consistently and deeply with Love. Dwelling in the World is engaging with Love with and for neighbors. Hospitality is sharing Love with the whole household of God. The data and the lenses in this paper propose members and friends of The Tradition Church, or any church, accept Love's invitation to join in God's mission through the many facets of the work of the people. As previously quoted from Deuteronomy 30:20a, "Choose life so that you and your descendants might live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days."

³³Thomas Keating, *The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living: Excerpts from the Works of Father Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., Sacred Scripture, and Other Spiritual Writings* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), 187.

EPILOGUE

As a second career pastor, I entered ministry at the beginning of the new millennium. In the first decade and a half of church work, I cycled through congregational interim ministries, a clinical pastoral education residency, and four years as a spiritual care counselor at a treatment center. And then, in my first installed call, I started a Doctor of Ministry program at Luther Seminary. Studying the missional church concept and history along with its practices brought understanding to those first fifteen years, both in and out of the church. As an interim pastor, I helped each congregation streamline programs but worked with only partial missional concepts to tweak the program driven, attractional church mentality. With my current understanding of the missional church movement came meaning; the churches I served as an interim were healthier but we were not working with enough wisdom or truth to make forward plans with integrity.

Decades ago, the grandmothers and mothers of feminist theology wrote books and articles that made their way into my hands. They made room for me in the church of Jesus Christ. It led me to ministry and a second and more meaningful career. More recently another article came my way, this one by Miroslav Volf. Volf translated *perichoresis* as making room. I know this experience first-hand and therefore the perception rings true. His concept though is not just about room in the church, but room and calling from within the Trinity.

This Doctor of Ministry program put me back in touch with my love for theology. It taught me about technical versus adaptive change, political and social capital, and showed me the way to the balcony. Though I had plenty of doubts, this program made me a researcher and gave me the joy of getting church folks to try new things. I was a manager in my first career and this program alerted me to the difference between managing and leading. I was the acting head of staff for the short time between the transitional pastor's departure and the new pastor's arrival; it was also in the midst of the pandemic and through the riots following George Floyd's death. I believe our course work helped me to sort priorities, communication, and boundaries during that time. It made the experience richer. The missional church movement is grounded in current reality as well as the love and power of the Triune God; it offers practices that create space in the hearts and minds of practitioners and it is ultimately that space in which the *missio Dei* longs to speak to congregants and congregations.

Again, I am grateful to my cohort and to the faculty of Luther Seminary for a wealth of knowledge and experience. And thank you to my TTC research team as well. The research team began as my conversation team, a group formed to support me through classroom learning and the development of the research proposal. JF, a minister colleague, was on the original team that started by reading my first final paper. JF received another call and was replaced on the team by Jack. Their role has been to test the research instruments and on-going discernment through the research process. Their feedback on the end line data was very helpful and they also read chapters of the thesis along the way. I am most grateful for Clayton, Howie, Jack, Lola, Erin, and Alex for their companionship on this journey.

APPENDIX A

BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

You are invited to participate in this churchwide questionnaire for Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry research. Your online participation or return of this questionnaire is implied consent to participate. This is designed to understand involvement, beliefs, and hopes of The Tradition Church members and friends in a changing church and world. It will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to gather information on new practices and educational opportunities offered from November, 2019-May, 2020. 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. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, please ask. Contact Julia Carlson. My advisors are Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke.

Q1 Your Initials ____ Your birth date: __ / __ / ____ (xx/xx/xxxx)
(Your initials and birthdate are for computer analysis only and not for identification. All information will be confidential.)

Q2 I am:

18-22

23-39

40-54

55-70

71-85

86+

Q3 I am:

Single/Never Married

Married/Committed Relationship

Separated

Divorced

Widowed

Q4 My approximate household income is:

\$20,999 or less

\$21,000-50,999

\$51,000-74,999

\$75,000-99,999

\$100,000-150,000

\$151000 +

I prefer not to answer

Q5 I have been associated with TTC for:

0-1 years

2-5 years

6-15 years

16-25 years

26-40 years

41+ years

Q6 I attend worship:

Never

Less than once a year

Several times a year

About once a month

Nearly every week

Every week

Several times a week

Q7 I am an ordained (check all that apply)

Deacon

Elder

Trustee

None of the above

Q8 I am now **actively serving** as (Check all that apply)

Deacon

Elder

Trustee

Sunday School Teacher/Leader

Tweens Teacher/Leader

Youth Teacher/Leader

None of the above

Q9 My current spiritual practices are: (Check all that apply)

Worship

Centering Prayer

Reading Scripture

Bible Study
 Music
 Journaling
 Yoga
 Being in Nature
 Small Group Discussion
 Discernment
 Prayer
 Dwelling in the Word
 Dwelling in the World
 Hospitality
 Meditation
 Intercessory Prayer

Q10 I find TTC to be a place of:

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Worship
 Learning
 Dogma
 Community
 Justice Work
 Discipleship

Q11 I find TTC to be a place of:

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Healing
 Community
 Friendship
 Renewal
 Hospitality

Q12 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

The Motet Choir
 The Adult Handbell Choir
 Thanksgiving Eve Service
 The Tableaux
 Christmas Eve Services
 Ash Wednesday Service
 Maundy Thursday Services
 Good Friday Services
 Easter Services
 Blessing of the Animals
 Carillon Concerts

Q13 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Choir School Concerts
The Sunday Series
Chapel Concerts
The Community Sing
The Singers Concerts

Q14 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Rally Sunday
Mardi Gras/Chili Cook-off
Ice Cream Social
Lunch with Aaron
Get Acquainted Dinners
Faith and Fibers

Q15 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Adult Enrichment
Sunday Exchange
Feminist Theology
Bible Study
Intercessor's Guild
Centering Prayer
Sunday/Weekday Connection
Women's Breakfast Book Group
Women's Retreat
A Men's Breakfast Group

Q16 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Women's Advocates
National Night Out
Christmas Sponsor a Family
Habitat for Humanity
Hardhats
Mission Sewing

Q17 Our family takes part in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Story Time
Creative Expressions
K-5 Activities
Tween Activities

Youth Activities
 Family Camp
 Camp in the City

Q18 I feel accepted in the House of Hope community.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q19 I believe anyone would feel accepted in the House of Hope community

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q20 Who is God for you? _____

Q21 I believe God is out ahead of us.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q22 I believe God has preferred future for this congregation.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q23 I have great hope for the future of TTC.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q24 Our building is an asset to be used.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q25 I would like to see our building being used by the community.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q26 I would like to see TTC have more:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Concerts or Music Events
 Sunday Series
 Lectures
 Food Truck Sundays
 Picnics with Neighbors
 Movie Nights with Neighbors

Q27 I would like to see TTC have more:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

In-House Mission Partners
 Weekend Retreats
 Day Retreats
 Centering Prayer Times
 Additional Worship Services

Q28 I would like to see TTC have more:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
--

Game Nights/Analog Nights

Potlucks

Breakfast Before Church

Brunches

Dinners

Discussion Groups

Q29 What might our neighbors teach us about the love of Christ?

Q30 What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the secular community?

Q31 Would you describe change in our current culture as: (Select one)

Necessary

Optional?

Q32 Please say more about your answer. _____

Q33 What do you see changing in the next 3-5 years in Capital City?

Q34 What do you see changing in the next 3-5 years at TTC?

Q35 What keeps you awake at night? (What worries you?) _____

Q36 What gives you hope? _____

Q37 What neighborhood or city do you live in? _____

Q38 What is your zip code?

Q39 How long have you lived in your present home?

0-1 years

2-5 years

6-15 years

16-25 years

26-40 years

41+ years

Q40 How has your neighborhood changed? _____

Q41 I live in:

Single-family Home

Twin Home

Duplex

Condominium or Townhouse

Apartment

Senior Living

Other _____

Q42 What drew you to your neighborhood? (Check all that apply)

Grew up there or nearby

Close to work

Close to other family

Good schools

The right house

Diversity

Lower crime or safety

Aging, Health Needs

Other _____

Q43 I think neighborliness is :

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Empathy

Forgiveness

Assistance

Social interactions

Shared meals

Children playing

Bringing food when there is illness or death

Shoveling or snowblowing

Neighborhood Watch

Embracing the neighbor, stranger, or enemy

Q44 When I am ill or having surgery, I turn to: (Please rank these in order of priority.)

Neighbors

Work Colleagues

HOH

Spouse

Family

Friends

Transitional Care

Other _____

Q45 What would make The Tradition Church a more hospitable community?

Q46 What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the larger community?

Q47 Why did you say "yes" to The Tradition Church community?

Q48 What do you want to see from your time and ministry at TTC?

Q49 Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

DWELLING IN THE WORD PROCESS AND SCRIPTURE

Opening Prayer

Listen to Luke 1:46-55 (Advent) Listen to Philipians 2:1-11 (Lent)

Silence

Listen again. It's okay to make your own notes or to circle a word or phrase that gets your attention.

Find a person in the group you know least well (we call this person a "reasonably friendly-looking stranger").

Listen that person into free speech as he or she tells you what they heard in the passage. Listen that person into answering one of two questions:

- 1.)What captured your imagination? or
- 2.)What question would you like to ask a Biblical scholar?

Listen well, because your job will be to report to the rest of the group what your partner has said, not what you yourself said. Note-taking is OK.

Share with others at the table what your partner shared about the passage.

Come back together as a whole group to talk about what was shared at the table, engaging the following question:

"What might God might be up to in the passage for us today?"

Luke 1:46-55 Common English Bible (CEB) (Advent)

⁴⁶ Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord! ⁴⁷ In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. ⁴⁸ He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored ⁴⁹ because the mighty one

has done great things for me. Holy is his name. ⁵⁰ He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. ⁵² He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. ⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, ⁵⁵ just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham's descendants forever."

Philippians 2:1-11 Common English Bible (CEB) (Lent)

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, ² complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. ³ Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. ⁵ Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. ⁷ But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human being. When he found himself in the form of a human, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore, God highly honored him and gave

him a name above all names, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

APPENDIX C

DWELLING IN THE WORD FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Have you attended other Bible studies?

Was this different?

What did you like about it?

What do you think about reading the same scripture four/six weeks in a row?

Do you have any further thoughts or questions on Dwelling in the Word?

APPENDIX D

NEIGHBOR INTERVIEW IMPLIED CONSENT FORM AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name of Interviewer _____
Interviewee _____
Approximate age of Interviewee _____
Gender/Pronoun _____

Please read this to your interviewee:

You are invited to participate in this interview for Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry research. Your participation is implied consent to this research. The interview is designed around questions of spirituality and neighborliness in a changing world. It will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering but your responses will be used to gather information on new practices and educational opportunities offered from November, 2019-May, 2020. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or The Tradition Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, please ask. Contact Julia Carlson. My advisors are Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke

Questions:

How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

Follow-up: How has it changed?

What drew you to this neighborhood?

What keeps you awake at night? What worries you?

What gives you hope?

If there is a God, who is God for you?

What, if any, spiritual practices do you have?

APPENDIX E

NEIGHBORHOOD INTERVIEWER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Date:

Participants:

What surprised you?

What did you find in common?

What, if anything, seemed odd?

What spiritualities did they mention?

Was this someone you have spoken to before?

If so, did this have any effect on your relationship?/do you feel any differently about the person or relationship?

Where is God in this experience for you?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

Baseline	Endline	Neighbors
Acceptance	Calm	Ancestors
Advisor	Center	Angels
All-Knowing	Re-creator	Collective Unconscious
All-Present	Understanding	Creative Force
Being	Inspiration	Greater Presence
Care	Forgiveness	Higher Power
Comfort	Gracious	Honcho
Concept	Grace	Intrinsic Characteristics
Demander	Link	Nature
Energy	Hope	Personal Guide
Father	Direction	Spirit
Forgiver	Support	The Inexplicable
Foundation	Conscious	
Friend	Wonder	
Giver	Leader	
Guide	Consolation	
Healing	Energy	
helper	Refuge	
Hope	Teacher	
Ineffability	Strength	
Inheritance	Solace	
Light	Guidance	
Mentor	Renewal	
Merciful	Guide	
Mother-Father Presence	Foundation	
Protector	Father Figure	
Reality	Kind	
Reminder	Justice	
Rock	Beauty	
Ruler	Community	
Thought	Mystery	
Touchstone	Mentor	

Baseline	Endline	Neighbors
Tradition		
Truth		
Unconditional Love		
Wisdom		

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD: VOCABULARY AND STATEMENTS

Baseline and Endline: "Who is God for you?"

Power, strength, protection, Force, Almighty

My Personal Friend (30 replies)

Supreme, Omnipotent, Universe, Multiverse

Supreme Architect

Unifying Power in the World

Supreme Being

Good Orderly Direction, Higher Power

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer

Breath of Life

Guarantee of my salvation

"Vague, omniscient, not very hands on approach"

"Not a who"

"God is
everything"

"Embodiment of truth, beauty, and
grace"

"A mysterious inclination to goodness, truth and beauty "

"Spiritual energy that is in each one of
us"

"Still small voice of my conscience"

"Collective understanding of spirituality and humanity"

"A spirit of generosity and connectedness"

"Unseen but felt"

"Giver of Hope, Presenter of Challenge"

"Our best"

"Essence of who we are"

"My link to those who have gone before. My hope for the future"

"A presence I can commune with"

"The One beyond human description"

"Power of action and love in human form."

Neighbor Interviews: If there is a God, who is God for you?

"Power Greater than one's self"

"Something we can't fathom"

"Amorphous Presence in the universe"

"The beauty/awesomeness of nature"

"Christ is still

God"

APPENDIX G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry Research Project

You are invited to be in a research study of practices of neighborliness and hospitality at The Tradition Church. You volunteered for this research project by agreeing to interview a neighbor. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by me as a part of my Doctor of Ministry program in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary". My advisor is Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to try some new practices of hospitality at The Tradition Church.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Attend this training session. Interview one or two of your neighbors using the form and questions I have prepared. Please read the interviewee the statement at the top of the form regarding implied consent. It will be helpful if you can take a few notes during the conversation, with their permission in advance. If they prefer you do not take notes, make some notes for yourself as soon as possible after the conversation. Please return the form and all notes to me.

You will also be asked to attend a Focus Group with others who have done interviews to answer questions about the experience itself. The Focus Group will be taped. All materials both written and recorded will be kept confidential and stored in a locked drawer.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has risk: First: There is a risk that the interview could feel awkward or that the person may not want to answer a question or call off the interview. Simply report that and turn in the paper with your notes.

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research.

Indirect benefits to yourself/or the general public of participation are trying a new practice of hospitality and getting to know a neighbor better.

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 in my office; only my advisors, Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke and Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Any tape recordings will be not be used for educational purposes. They are used as a record of a conversation and will be stored in a locked drawer in Julia Carlson's office; only my advisor, Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and I will have access to the data.

Indicate one of the following:

a. Raw data will be destroyed by March 1, 2023. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Julia Carlson.
My advisor is Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson

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 _____

I consent to be audiotaped

Signature _____ Date _____

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

Signature _____ Date _____

Created 11/28/06

APPENDIX H

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM FOR INTERVIEWING A NEIGHBOR AND FOR
MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

Reverend Julia A Carlson
Doctor of Ministry
Confidentiality Agreement for Interviewing a Neighbor/Research Team
Member

I, _____, interviewer/research team member, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all conversation and documentation for my neighbor interview. Furthermore, I agree: 1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that participates; 2. To return notes to Julia Carlson and not make copies computerized files of the interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Julia Carlson; I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information.

Interviewer's

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX I

FEEDBACK FORM FOR CHANGING CULTURE, CHANGING CHURCH?

PRESENTATION

February 23, 2020

PowerPoint Presentation on Changing World, Changing Church
Post-Survey

You are invited to participate in this questionnaire for Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry research. Your return of this questionnaire is implied consent to participate. The survey is designed to gather your thoughts about presentation on the changing religious landscape. It will take about 5-7 minutes to complete this survey. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

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 Theological Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, please ask. Contact Julia Carlson. My advisors are Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke

Your Initials ____ Your birth date: __ /__ /____ (xx/xx/xxxx)
(Your initials and birthdate are for computer analysis only, not identification.)

After hearing about the changes in church and culture, please answer the following questions:

What did you learn?

What surprised you?

Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways?

What do you think this means for our future?

Where is God in this?

What further questions do you have?

APPENDIX J

INFORMED CONSENT FOR ELECTRONIC FEEDBACK FOR ONLINE PRESENTATIONS AND DWELLING IN THE WORD/WORLD

Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry Research Project

In April and May of this year, The Tradition Church congregants were invited to send feedback via email on the Dwelling in the Word practice or on one or both Zoom presentations on The Missional Church or the Theology of Hospitality. Thank you for your participation and comments. This document is an informed consent form for the use of your comments as descriptive data or a direct quote in my thesis.

This study is being conducted by me as a part of my Doctor of Ministry program in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary.

My advisors are Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke and Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to try some new practices of hospitality at The Tradition Church.

Procedures:

You have already sent feedback

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in this research.

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 in my office; only my advisors, Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke and Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson, and I will have access to the data and, if applicable, any tape or video recording. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Raw data will be destroyed by March 1, 2023. (Federal guidelines specify a minimum of 3 years for retention of data)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Julia Carlson. My advisor is Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson.

You can print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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

Signature _____ Date _____

Created 10/10/2020

APPENDIX K

FEEDBACK QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

Questions for feedback at the end of the presentations on the Missional Church and Theology of Hospitality:

- In this presentation on the theology of hospitality:
- What surprised you?
- Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways?
- What do you think this might mean for our future?
- Where is God in this?
- What further questions do you have?
- Send by email to
 - Or written answers to Julia Carlson at the church.
- Also see What Is God Up to in the Neighborhood? through 5/15/2020 on the website.

APPENDIX L

PRAYER WALK FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Date:

Participants:

Was this experience the same or different from taking a walk? If yes, in what way(s)?

What did you notice?

What did you feel?

Did you meet or speak to anyone? If yes, did you tell them you were on a prayer walk?

What happened? Or What was their reaction? Was there conversation?

Will you continue this practice?

Is there anything else you would like to say about this experience?

APPENDIX M

ORIGINAL DWELLING IN THE WORLD

PRAYER WALK INSTRUCTIONS AND RECORD SHEET

Instructions for Prayer Walkers:

At least once a week for the next four weeks, please walk through your/our neighborhood.

Suggestions:

Pray a blessing on each house and its inhabitants, by name if you know them.

Pray for those you see walking or driving by.

Use a scriptural mantra, either silently or spoken, as you walk. Something like:

May the Lord watch between us ...

The Lord bless and keep you ...

Peace to you ...

God bless your going out and your coming in ...

Blessed are you ...

It is up to you to establish a pattern of walking or to try different routes.

Please keep track of:

The following will be in the sheet four times:

Date of Walk _____

Length in time of walk in time/miles _____

Number of people encountered _____

Was there eye contact?

Verbal exchange?

Prayer requests given?

APPENDIX N

ONLINE COGNITO FORM FOR PRAYER WALKS

Prayer Walk

At least once a week for the next four weeks, please walk through your/our neighborhood! Submit this form for each walk you take.

Name required , First and Last are required.

Phone Number required ,

Date of Walk,

Email required ,

Length of walk in time/miles ,

Can be either or both

Number of people encountered,

Encounter exchange required ,

Eye Contact?

Verbal Exchange?

Prayer Request Given?

Journal Notes required ,

Submit

APPENDIX O

TABLES 1-5 ON PROGRAMATIC INVOLVEMENT

Table 26. Additional attendance tables

Table 26.1 Attendance: Education, Discussion, Practice

	Baseline N 116				
	Did not know	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Adult Enrichment	1	11	50	44	8
Sunday Exchange	13	73	14	5	2
Feminist Theology	10	71	26	3	2
Bible Study	4	79	9	9	7
Intercessor's Guild	12	76	3	10	5
Centering Prayer	5	90	9	2	2

Table 26.2 Attendance: Mission

	Baseline N 116				
	Did not know	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Women's Advocates	20	77	7	1	1
National Night Out	3	66	27	6	7
Xmas Sponsor a Family	3	32	37	28	11
Habitat for Humanity	3	86	14	3	3
Hard Hats	10	94	2	1	1
Mission Sewing	9	94	1	4	0
Faith and Fibers	17	84	1	2	3

Table 26.3 Attendance: Extra Worship

	Baseline N 116				
	Did not know	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Thanksgiving Eve	0	46	23	24	10
The Tableaux	1	28	27	23	25
Christmas Eve	0	13	25	41	33
Ash Wednesday	1	26	35	27	18
Maundy Thursday	1	28	34	30	17
Good Friday	1	37	34	20	14
Easter	0	6	7	49	51

Table 26.4. Attendance: Public Events

	Baseline N 116				
	Did not know about	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Blessing the Animals	6	59	19	6	7
Carillon Concerts	1	58	34	7	3
Choir School Concerts	4	46	33	15	10
Sunday Series	1	19	41	33	18
Chapel Concerts	4	42	47	6	8
Community Sing	11	51	26	13	5
Singers Concerts	11	46	36	9	7

Table 26.5. Attendance: Fellowship

	Baseline N 116				
	Did not know about	Do Not Attend	Occasionally	Regularly	Try Not to Miss
Rally Sunday	1	10	26	55	18
Mardi Gras	7	58	30	10	1
Ice Cream Social	3	17	44	34	10
Lunch w/ Aaron	29	51	11	8	7
Get Acquainted Dinner	14	49	28	9	10
Sunday/Weekday	8	59	23	7	11
Women's Breakfast	6	90	7	2	3
Women's Retreat	4	83	16	3	2
Men's Breakfast	5	81	7	3	6

APPENDIX P

FOCUSED CODES

Focused Codes

Attributes of God

Hope in each other

Practice living our faith

Love and acceptance

Sharing with intent

We are all one

Co-Exist, Common, United, Similar

Inclusivity

Openness

Justice Issues: age, race, sexism, heterosexism, economic disparities, ethnicity, education, climate change, politics

Justice, Outreach, Service, Peacemaking

Must, Should, Need to, Have to be, Has to

Church Growth

Worries

Hopes

Worship, Music and Preaching

Memories

Verbs

Past Tense/Present Tense

Passive versus active voice

Change brings more: crime, traffic, vandalism ...

Change brings more: diversity, businesses, homes, parks ...

Preservation

Uncertainty

Influence, but the right influence

From Neighbor Interviews: Concerned about justice, Enjoy music, Find God in nature, Speak of church, See us as ‘antiquated’ and as “having incredible depth, Matched TTC age groups, Missing the past, Shared worries, and Shared hopes.

APPENDIX Q

END LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

You are invited to participate in this churchwide questionnaire for Julia Carlson's Doctor of Ministry research. Your online participation or return of this questionnaire is implied consent to participate. This is designed to understand involvement, beliefs, and hopes of The Tradition Church members and friends in a changing church and world. It will take about 20-30 minutes to complete. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to gather information on new practices and educational opportunities offered from November, 2019-May, 2020. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the questionnaire.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary or The Tradition Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, please ask. Contact Julia Carlson. My advisors are Rev. Dr. Daniel Anderson and Rev. Dr. Alvin Luedke.

Q1 Your Initials ____ Your birth date: __ / __ / ____ (xx/xx/xxxx)
(Your initials and birthdate are for computer analysis only and not for identification. All information will be confidential.)

Q2 I am:

18-22

23-39

40-54

55-70

71-85

86+

Q3 I am:

Single/Never Married

Married/Committed Relationship
 Separated
 Divorced
 Widowed

Q4 My approximate household income is:

\$20,999 or less
 \$21,000-50,999
 \$51,000-74,999
 \$75,000-99,999
 \$100,000-150,000
 \$151000 +

I prefer not to answer

Q5 I have been associated with TTC for:

0-2 years
 2-5 years
 6-15 years
 16-25 years
 26-40 years
 41+ years

Q6 I attend worship:

Never
 Less than once a year
 Several times a year
 About once a month
 Nearly every week
 Every week
 Several times a week

Q7 I am an ordained (check all that apply)

Deacon
 Elder
 Trustee
 None of the above

Q8 I am now **actively serving** as (Check all that apply)

Deacon
 Elder
 Trustee
 Sunday School Teacher/Leader
 Tweens Teacher/Leader
 Youth Teacher/Leader
 None of the above

Q9 I find TTC to be a place of:

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Worship
 Learning
 Dogma
 Community
 Justice Work
 Discipleship

Q10 I find TTC to be a place of:

Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Healing
 Community
 Friendship
 Renewal
 Hospitality

Q11 My current spiritual practices are: (Check all that apply)

Worship
 Centering Prayer
 Reading Scripture
 Bible Study
 Music
 Journaling
 Yoga
 Being in Nature
 Small Group Discussion
 Prayer
 Dwelling in the Word
 Dwelling in the World
 Hospitality
 Meditation
 Intercessory Prayer
 Other ____

Q12 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

The Motet Choir
 The Adult Handbell Choir
 Thanksgiving Eve Service
 The Tableaux
 Christmas Eve Services
 Ash Wednesday Service
 Maundy Thursday Services

Good Friday Services
 Easter Services
 Blessing of the Animals
 Carillon Concerts

Q13 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Choir School Concerts
 The Sunday Series
 Chapel Concerts
 The Community Sing
 The Singers Concerts

Q14 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Rally Sunday
 Mardi Gras/Chili Cook-off
 Ice Cream Social
 Lunch with Aaron
 Get Acquainted Dinners
 Faith and Fibers

Q15 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Adult Enrichment
 Sunday Exchange
 Feminist Theology
 Bible Study
 Intercessor's Guild
 Centering Prayer
 Sunday/Weekday Connection
 Women's Breakfast Book Group
 Women's Retreat
 A Men's Breakfast Group

Q16 I attend or participate in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Women's Advocates
 National Night Out
 Christmas Sponsor a Family
 Habitat for Humanity
 Hardhats
 Mission Sewing

Q17 Our family takes part in:

Not Aware Of, Do Not Attend, Occasionally, Regularly, I Try Not to Miss

Story Time

K-5 Activities

Creative Expressions

Tween Activities

Youth Activities

Family Camp

Camp in the City

Q18 I feel accepted in the House of Hope community.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q19 I believe anyone would feel accepted in the House of Hope community

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q20 Who is God for you? _____

Q21 I believe God is out ahead of us.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q22 I believe God has preferred future for this congregation.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q23 I have great hope for the future of TTC.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q24 Our building is an asset to be used.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q25 I would like to see our building being used by the community.

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Q26 I would like to see TTC have more:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree

Concerts or Music Events

Sunday Series

Lectures

Food Truck Sundays

Picnics with Neighbors

Movie Nights with Neighbors

Tenants

In-House Mission Partners

Weekend Retreats

Day Retreats

Centering Prayer Times
 Game Nights/Analog Nights
 Additional Worship Services
 Potlucks
 Brunches
 Dinners
 Discussion Groups

Q27 What might our neighbors teach us about the love of Christ?

Q28 What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the secular community?

Q29 Would you describe change in our current culture as: (Select one)
 Necessary
 Optional?

Q30 Please say more about your answer. _____

Q31 What do you see changing in the next 3-5 years in Capital City?

Q32 What do you see changing in the next 3-5 years at TTC?

Q33 What keeps you awake at night? (What worries you?) _____

Q34 What gives you hope? _____

Q35 What neighborhood or city do you live in? _____

Q36 What is your zip code?

Q37 How long have you lived in your present home?

0-2 years

2-5 years

6-15 years

16-25 years

26-40 years

41+ years

Q38 How has your neighborhood changed? _____

Q39 I live in:

Single-family Home

Twin Home

Duplex

Condominium or Townhouse

Apartment

Senior Living

Other _____

Q40 What drew you to your neighborhood? (Check all that apply)

Grew up there or nearby

Close to work

Close to other family

Good schools

The right house

Diversity

Lower crime or safety

Aging, Health Needs

Other _____

Q41 I think neighborliness is:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree
--

Empathy

Forgiveness

Assistance

Social interactions

Shared meals

Children playing

Bringing food when there is illness or death

Shoveling or snowblowing

Neighborhood Watch

Embracing the neighbor, stranger, or enemy

Q42 When I am ill or need assistance, I most often turn to: (Please rank the following)

Neighbors

Work Colleagues

HOH

Spouse

Family

Friends

Transitional Care

Other _____

Q43 What would make The Tradition Church a more hospitable community?

Q44 What do you see as the relationship between Jesus' church and the larger community?

Q45 Why did you say "yes" to The Tradition Church community?

Q46 What do you want to see from your time and ministry at TTC?

Q47 From November, 2019 to May 2020, I participated in: (Check all that apply)

Baseline Questionnaire

Dwelling in the Word for Advent

Interviewing a Neighbor

Dwelling in the Word for Lent

Dwelling in the World Prayer Walks

Education on Cultural Change

Education Zoom on the Missional Church

Education Zoom on the Theology of Hospitality

May Check-in with Neighbor Interviewee

Q48 Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX R

REVEREND DR. DAVID HAHN'S CONFIGURATIONS OF THE
GOD-CHURCH-WORLD RELATIONSHIP

**Configurations of the
God-Church-World Relationship**

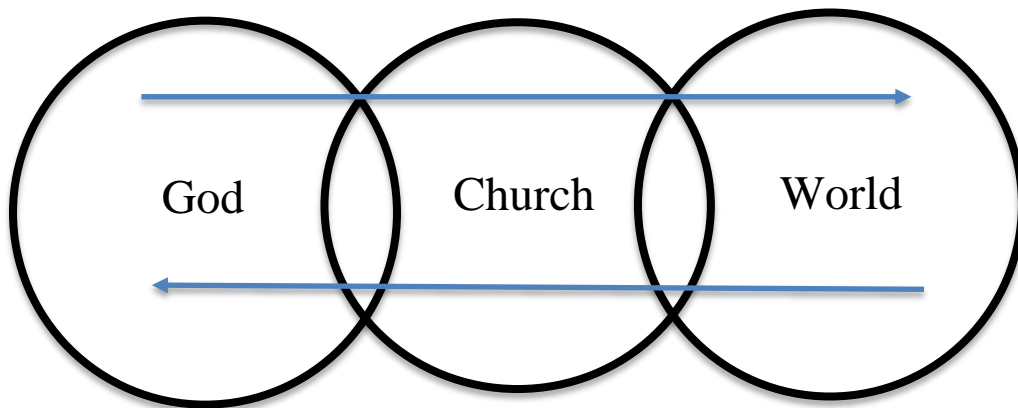


Figure 7. Single-Subject - Church/Ecclesio-centric

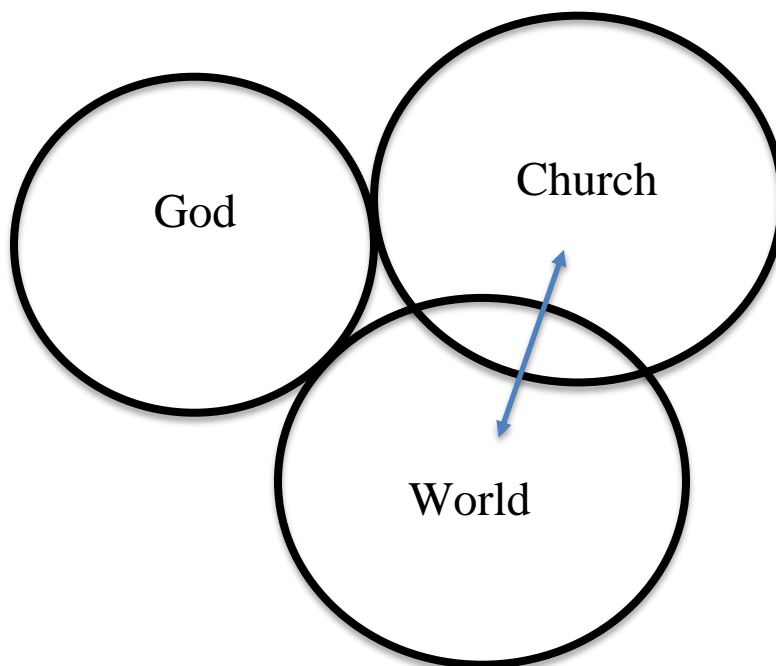


Figure 8. God is Secondary; i.e. Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism

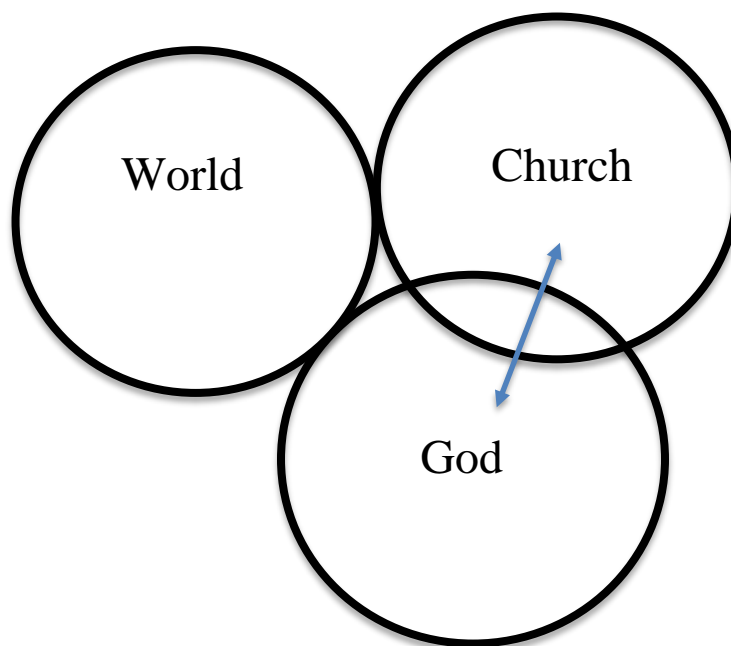


Figure 9. Private - Isolationist

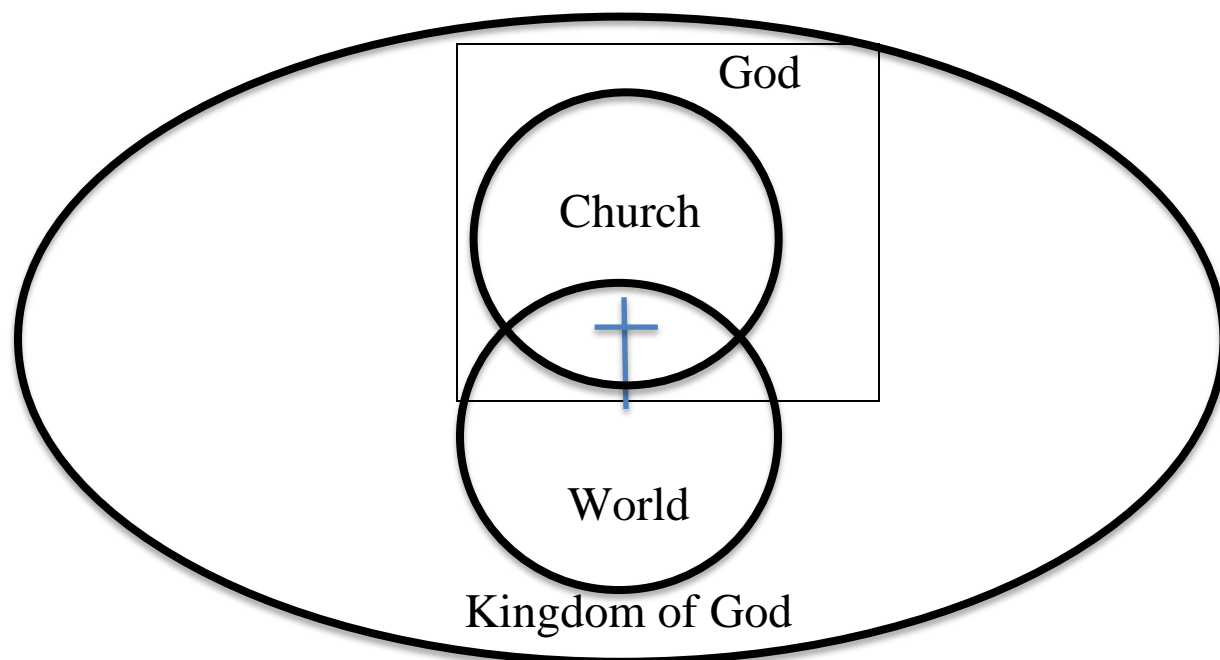


Figure 10. Missional Church - Public Evangelical

APPENDIX S

CHANGING CULTURE, CHANGING CHURCH POWERPOINT CONTENT

Changing World – Changing Church?

from Utopia is Scary by Nicholas Carr

What should we call this age we're living in?

There are so many choices: the digital age, the information age, the internet age, the computer age, the connected age, the Google age, the emoji age, the cloud age, the smartphone age, the data age, the Facebook age, the robot age, the posthuman age.

The more names we pin on it, the more vaporous it seems. If nothing else, it is an age geared to the talents of the brand manager.

I'll just call it Now.

Margaret J. Wheatley. *Who Do We Choose to Be?: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*. 103.

From *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam

- Glenn Valley, PA Bridge Club played regularly until the 1990's
- Sertoma Club, Little Rock, AK, weekly luncheons and lectures:
 - 1980 - 50 attendees a week to 7 in the 1990's
- NAACP active since 1918, 2500 down to a few hundred during the 90s
- VFW Post 2378, Berwyn, IL could not pay their taxes in 1999
- Charity League of Dallas held their last meeting 4/30/1999
- Tewksbury Memorial High School Band – only 4 new members
- “Kids today just aren't joiners.”

From Charles Taylor's work:

Secular 1

- New Separation of Church and State
- Politics became Public and Religion became Private
- “Public spaces emptied of God.”
- This began 400 years ago.

Secular 2

- Fewer people going to church.
- Realization that membership and discipleship are not the same thing.

Secular 3

- 62% Have a particular place of worship

- 50% Hobby, sports, arts, music, leisure
- 36% Sunday school or religious education
- 25% Small groups
- 14% Officer/Elder
- 55% Have invited a friend to visit.

From Robert Putnam and David Campbell: *Kinds of Change*

Lifecycle –

Generational –

Period –

“... for some reason when a younger generation deviates substantially from its predecessors, then that aggregate social change may be quicker ...” (*American Grace*, 73)

Questions from the Faith Matters Survey that measure religiosity.

- How frequently do you attend religious services?
- How frequently do you pray outside of religious services?
- How important is religion in your daily life?
- How important is your religion to your sense of who you are?
- Are you a strong believer in your religion?
- How strong is your belief in God?
- (*American Grace*, 18)

Changes in Culture:

“...people born in each successive decade have attended church about one week fewer per year than people born a decade earlier” (*American Grace* 75)

- “From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the relatively less observant baby boomers swarmed into adulthood in massive numbers, just as their much more observant grandparents departed the scene. In round numbers, about 25 percent of the arriving boomers were regular churchgoers, whereas 45 percent of those departing had been observant” (*American Grace*, 77).
- “Since this fact is not widely understood, it is worth reemphasizing – *the evangelical boom that began in the 1970’s was over by the early 1990’s, nearly two decades ago. In twenty-first century America, expansive evangelicalism is a feature of the past, not the present*” (*American Grace*, 105).

Changes in Religious Participation

Religious Participation

- Evangelical Protestant 30%
- Catholic 24%
- None 17%
- Mainline 14%
- Black Protestant 8%
- Other Faiths 3%
- Jewish 2%

- Mormon 2%
- Faith Matters 2006

Oldest Religious Groups in America, median age in parentheses

1. Presbyterian Church in America (59)
2. Presbyterian Church USA (59)
3. United Church of Christ (59)
4. Anglican Church (57)
5. United Methodist Church (57)
6. Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (56)
7. Episcopal Church (56)
8. ELCA (55)
9. Southern Baptist Convention (54)

Youngest Religious Groups in America, median age in parentheses

1. Hindu (33)
2. Muslim (33)
3. Atheist (34)
4. Agnostic (34)
5. “Nothing in particular” (38)
6. Buddhist (39)
7. Orthodox Christian (40)
8. Mormon (43)
9. Seventh-Day Adventist (45)

Millennials

- 23% unaffiliated (fastest growing, 2nd largest category)
- 2/3 of unaffiliated believe in God, but 88% don’t want to join religious organization
- Dramatic Shift:
 - Millennials less likely to believe in God, affiliate, or participate
 - Impact of family formation, divorce
 - Correlation of participation and “settling down”
 - Largest generation alive

Religious Pluralism

- 83% of Americans belong
- 40% attend services weekly
- 30% read scripture weekly
- 44% say grace before meals
- 80% are sure there is a God
- 65% are sure of heaven
- 52% believe in life after death
- 49% believe there is a hell

33% scripture is actual word of God

Religious Polarization

- 15% never attend services
- 17 % do not identify with any religion

- 20% not certain about a God
- 40% not sure about a heaven
- 48% not sure of life after death
- 62% very often feel God's love
- 39% feel God's judgment

- “Evolution has become a synonym for progress, but this is not the science. Evolution describes adaptations that make the organism more for its current environment. That environment can be improving or deteriorating. The survival of any species depends on its recognition of how the environment has changed and what it demands if the species is to survive. Adaptations are not necessarily improvements or progress; they are intelligent responses to what has changed.”
- (Margaret Wheatley, *Who Do We Choose to Be?* 61, n3)

What do you think God is up to at TTC?

What is God up to in the neighborhood?

APPENDIX T

THE MISSIONAL CHURCH POWERPOINT CONTENT

What is God Up to in the Neighborhood?

The Missional Church

Reformation

Protestors became Protestants

Right/Correct worship

Right/Correct doctrine

Right/Correct sacraments

Right (Not Corrupt) Christian life

- February Presentation in a Nutshell

Changing Culture – Changing Church!

- People are being formed outside the church by powerful rituals and myths:
 - The Mall
 - Sports
 - Habitat for Humanity
 - Ted Talks
 - Oprah
 - Yoga
 - Deepak Chopra

Some statistics from the Faith Matters Survey 2006:

- 83% of Americans belong
- 40% attend services weekly
- 30% read scripture weekly
- 44% say grace before meals
- 80% are sure there is a God
- 65% are sure of heaven
- 52% believe in life after death
- 49% believe there is a hell
- 33% scripture is actual word of God
- 15% never attend services
- 17 % do not identify with any religion
- 62% very often feel God's love
- 39% feel God's judgment
- (Faith Matters Survey 2006)

Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism:

- A God exists who created, orders the world
- God wants people to be good, nice, fair, as taught by Bible and most religions
- Central goal of life is to be happy, feel good about oneself
- God doesn't need to be involved except when needed to resolve a problem
- Good people go to heaven when they die
--Christian Smith, *Soul Searching*

Pattern of the last 30 years

- Functional rationalism - We have the technology; we can fix it.
- Management and control – With the right management, we can guarantee success.
- Ecclesiocentrism – If we can fix the church, all will be well.
- Clericalism – We are the ordained; we must have the answers.
- Alan Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church and Changing the World: The New Shape of the Church in our Time* (New York, Morehouse Publishing, 2015), chap 1, location 292, Kindle

What does it mean to be a Christian community in the culture today?

Missional Church Practices:

Missio Dei

Discernment

Neighborhood

“The church doesn't have a mission, God's mission has a church.”

- In this presentation on the missional church:
- What did you learn, what surprised you?
- Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways?
- What do you think this could mean for our future?
- Where is God in this?
- What further questions do you have?
- Send by email to
- Thank you for taking the time to give consideration to missional church disciplines and practices!
- Also see the Theology of Hospitality through 5/15/2020 the church website

APPENDIX U

THE THEOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY POWERPOINT CONTENT

Theology of hospitality

Making room in the household of God

- At first the world ‘hospitality’ might evoke the image of a soft sweet kindness, tea parties, bland conversations and a general atmosphere of coziness.
- *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, 66
- Words from Kate, a Millennial: “When I think of postmodernism, I think of deconstruction. Of things being dismantled. Of old things being taken apart. It’s like I live in a world where all the things my parents took for granted as being ‘true’ are now lying around in fragments, and our generation is dancing around in the midst of these pieces. As for the church, it’s clear to me that feminism and postmodernism both did a lot to help tear these things down and I am glad. Unlike your generation, I never believed old truths like only men can be priests, homosexuality is wrong, and women are naturally more nurturing than men. This is the part of postmodernism and feminism I really like; it’s kind of exhilarating; there is so much possibility. I have the freedom to be who I want to be.”
- There is a difference in the message when we hear voices from the margins. In recent decades, life and belief have been reshaped by new voices.
- Theology was primarily the guided by of Northern European men and their descendants for centuries.
- The (new, broader, challenging) understandings of God, Bible, gospel coming from South America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia are eye/mind-opening. Women from around the world of every ethnicity (and religion) have contributed to our understanding of God and the holy.
- Again, from Kate: “I feel like our generation is standing in the rubble of demolished houses hoping someone shows up to help us figure out how to build something beautiful and safe. ... we need someone to share with us the wisdom, the know-how, the basic rules of community – because we don’t know those anymore. ... The trick is that the church needs to show up on the site of the previous, demolished house and not spend all its time bemoaning the demolition but instead put its energy into helping us creatively build a new house.”

“To counter the practice of identity-based exclusion, I developed a theology of embrace.”
Exclusion and Embrace, xiv, by Miroslav Volf

- Hospitality is hearing God’s story more broadly.
- In an article from *The Christian Century*, writer Mark Oppenheimer interviewed Miroslav Volf about his life and work.

He described Volf as a “Pentecostal among evangelicals, a mainline Christian among evangelicals, and an evangelical in the mainline. Growing up, he was a Christian among communists.” The interviewer indicated that Volf experienced the hard exteriors of others as a Christian in a communist country and while doing his mandatory military service. Oppenheimer said, Volf “has the catholicity of a refugee. He’s reluctant to join any camp – military, ethnic, or intellectual.”

What is the benefit of making room?

- “Theology to be authentic must be constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.”
- Kosuki Koyama.
- Hospitality is to make space for others, physical space, emotional space, mental space ...
- “The will to give ourselves to others and ‘welcome’ them, to readjust our identities to make space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.”
- Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, xxiii.

Theology to be authentic must be constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.”

Kosuki Koyama.

- ... the key insight of Luther’s *theologia crucis* is that the true knowledge of God comes from the knowledge of the suffering of Jesus Christ. This happened concretely when Christ loved strangers and gave his life for them (Romans 5:6-8). The ‘form of Christ’ (Galatians 4:19) is the form of ‘extending hospitality to strangers.’ This form is the essence of the Christian gospel. It is the vision of ecumenism. It is that which inspires Christian mission. Mission is ‘extending hospitality to strangers.’
- Koyama, 285.
- ... a community marked by a grace that constantly opens it outward in two directions. On the one hand, the church is called to look beyond itself to the God who calls it into being and to offer praise for the grace that holds it. The church is constantly opening toward and being opened by God. On the other hand, the church knows that it has been called into being by God not simply for its own sake but for the purpose of serving the world, for the purpose of proclamation in word and deed. Church is thus a community that exists for the sake of the worldly other, be it friend or enemy. In both these ways then, the church is a community

of radical openness: it is a community whose very being rests in a play of difference.

- Jones, 58.
- “Everything we have said so far about the soul of ministry and the complexity of human life before God – about the virtues of soul that invite us to embrace vulnerability and ambiguity, taste humility and imagine what is possible – finds its expression in the church’s ministry of hospitality. The ministry of hospitality is about welcoming the stranger as someone with gifts to give.”
- Herbert Anderson. Zion 12 Lecture Series. “Rethinking the Care of Souls”
- “The only way to stop the violence of genocide in our world is the *via eminentiae* of ‘extending hospitality to strangers’ as the Lamb of God did.”
- Koyama, 286.

Request for Feedback

- In this presentation on the theology of hospitality:
- What surprised you?
- Is this relevant to TTC? If so, in what ways?
- What do you think this might mean for our future?
- Where is God in this?
- What further questions do you have?
- Send by email to Or written answers to
- Thank you for taking the time to give consideration to the theology of hospitality!
- Also see What Is God Up to in the Neighborhood? through 5/15/2020 on the
- Website.

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